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# Rhialto's Book of Marvels

## The Rules of ArchMagical Omnipotence

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# Introduction

You are an Arch-Magician. After many long decades, perhaps entire aeons, of difficult, even dangerous, mental effort, you scaled the loftiest pinnacle of sorcerous achievement. Braving the tapered fangs and murderous impulses of the extra-planar entities known as the **chugs**, you did what many before you, to their fatal dismay, failed to accomplish. With no time to spare and your very corporeal integrity at stake, you managed to successfully enact the ritual required to bind a chug to your steely will. Then you launched a hunt across the veils of reality to find one of the small-minded but impossibly potent creatures called **sandestins**. Threatening the nettlesome entity with horrific torture at the claws and jaws of your newly-acquired chug, you bent it, too, to your command. Now you may compel it to execute nearly any demand your nigh-infinite consciousness can conceive of.

(Granted, you may have found that your sandestin more than lives up to his species' reputation for peevishness, foot-dragging, deliberate misinterpretation, and fiendishly dogged negotiation. Still, it is a niggling price to pay for the stunning power they, at times, provide.)

Only a small handful of your fellow men — and yes, by all that is right and proper, they are all men, for otherwise they would be accursed witches! — are your equals. You can move mountains, read minds, spelunk through time, traverse the galaxy, and shunt moons and comets from

their courses. What, you may ask yourself, will you do with this power?

Why, naturally, you will attend masked balls and other social functions of similar magnificence.

There, you will attempt to outdo your colleagues in the seduction of fair maidens. You will humiliate your rivals with the finery of your garb. Though you will carefully control access to the fabulous manse that is your home and headquarters, you will struggle to ensure that your peers speak of its splendors with fitting awe and envy. As the whims of curiosity buffet you, you will perform further works of scholarly and occult inquiry, chiefly to prove the stunning absurdity of your colleagues' pet theories.

Mostly, however, you will work within the vaunted organization informally known as the conclave, using its rules of order for their only true purpose — to aggrandize your friends and prove the imbecility of your foes.

Oh, and one more thing. You'll spend each of your

waking moments frenziedly conniving to add to your collection of IOUN stones, those iridescent, orbiting hallmarks of arch-magical accomplishment. Even more crucially, you will scheme to prevent your rivals from adding to their collections at the expense of yours.

To that end, this book, which you have so wisely





ordered your sandestin to procure for you (one hopes at not too high a price in precious indenture points), will prepare you for the ultimate roleplaying experience: one in which it is possible to finally, actually, unequivocally *win*. (Provided, it goes without saying, that the expected and imminent death of the universe does not permanently preempt your plans.)

The book's contents are as follows:

1. *So You've Just Become An Arch-Magician*: Notes on leveling up from the grubby and pitiful confines of a Turjan-level series to the sparkling wonders of Rhialto-level play. Advice on petitioning Ildefonse's conclave for membership.

2. *The Arch-Magical Series*. Addressed to players (as opposed to arch-magicians), this chapter serves up a complete guide to the point system that will allow you to soundly defeat your fellow players. It will fully reveal your GMs' repertoire of tricks and gambits, permitting you to anticipate and nullify them.

3. *Surviving the Conclave*. No organization of surpassingly mighty beings can peacefully maintain itself without a carefully footnoted webbing of rules and regulations to contain the behavior of its membership. Here we explore the conclave's relatively loose by-laws and its infinitely more fatal higher rulers, as represented by the Monstrament, a.k.a. the Blue Principles. Master the parliamentary procedure, with its points of privilege and information, its motions and debates, which will allow you to guide the organization's future and score points from your fellow players.

4. *Your Manse*. An arch-magician's fame, and the status he enjoys within his conclave, is inextricably linked to the splendors of his manse. Here you'll find rules to build your own magically impressive manor, from details of décor to the lamentable necessity of staffing issues. Once designed, you can use your blatantly superior manse to leverage victory from your hapless fellow players. You may even use your manor as a vehicle to travel to distant suns — or an armed fortress which may do direct battle with your rivals and foes.

5. *Your Estimable Colleagues*. Though contending player character arch-magicians take center stage in your series, it is the support of GM characters that will determine the success or failure of your sundry machinations. Get the inside word on these eccentric and often truculent

individuals, so as to best gather their votes for your proposals.

6. *Arch-Warriors*. Some players may display a puzzling reluctance to play all-powerful magicians served by otherworldly familiars who reluctantly carry out their bidding, allowing them to do nearly anything. For these surly refuseniks, we provide an optional modification to the setting allowing them to play all-powerful warriors served by otherworldly familiars who bloodthirstily carry out their bidding, allowing them to do nearly anything, so long as it looks fairly normal on the surface.

7. *Nemeses, World-Spanning Horrors and Other Inconveniences*. Alas, outside events, such as attempts to annihilate you and your fellows and/or hasten the death of all existence, may at times interfere with your all-important procedural wrangling. Here you'll find information, rumors, and game statistics for the archvults, outlaw magicians, witches, and impersonal forces intent on your destruction.

8. *Intrigues and Mysteries* presents a round-up of current strangeness both on Earth and throughout the known universe. You and your colleagues may wish to investigate them, embarking on mildly dangerous excursions recalling the halycon days of your early careers. Even at this late date one never knows where a virgin trove of IOUN stones awaits discovery.

Note that there is no accompanying GM's guide to this volume; your long-suffering GM will have to intuit from this chapter the style of play you'll be expecting her to maintain.



## So You Have Just Become An Arch-Magician

Congratulations, o newly-fledged being of nigh-infinite might. You now belong to a very small and very select group. Few magicians ever master the secret of the chugs and learn to indenture. With power, there must come wisdom. Without it, you will be helpless against your senior arch-magicians, who will seek to teach you a series of difficult lessons — strictly for your own benefit, of course! Allow the following chapter to serve as your introduction to the rarefied existence of the arch-magician.

### Leveling Up

The shift between Turjan and Rhialto play is a difficult one. Jack Vance's books do not posit a world of incremental progression from obscurity to greatness. In the Dying Earth, ambition is dulled and entropy triumphant. The cast of arch-magicians from *Rhialto the Marvellous* all seem to have reached their lofty perches a very long time ago.

The grim, adventurous tone of the early Turjan stories, and therefore of Turjan-level of play, differs to the point of incompatibility from the recondite antics of Rhialto and company. Turjan-level characters may require severe personality alterations to become appropriately foolish and self-absorbed conclave members. If they remain true to their original personalities, they'll mesh poorly with the tone of the new series. If they become unrecognizable, you might as well have created new characters suited for Rhialto play. A PC designed from the start for the peculiar challenges of arch-magical series will probably run circles around one painstakingly developed through hard months of Turjan-style gaming. Meanwhile, many of the rougher abilities of a character honed for Turjan-level play will become irrelevant at conclave.

Then there's the problem that not all Turjan-level characters are magicians. Your GM can solve this by introducing the arch-warrior (see p. 85) to her game, a solution that sacrifices Vancian authenticity to cater to the wishes of

certain players. Even so, you may feel that these characters are arch-magicians in disguise, and might prefer the real thing to a compromise version.

However, if you are currently playing in a Turjan-level game and wish to make this tricky transition, here's how to do it: To become an arch-magician, your Turjan-level sorcerer must, as explained on p. 81 of *Turjan's Tome*, achieve a rating of 10 or more in the prerequisite specializations Disputation, Mathematics, Warding, and Vat Mastery. You must also have Pedantry and Magic ratings in excess of 20, and 30 points worth of Magical Possessions.

You must then contact a mentor to teach you the chug-summoning spell. If you have a Relationship of 10 or more to any current arch-magician, that noted personage will reluctantly and in a desultory fashion deign to teach you the ritual. Otherwise you must seek out a demon, low-rent god or other powerful daihak (see p. 116 for more on these entities) as a tutor. You must score an Illustrious Success with Disputation to convince it to school you in the spell. Failure requires you to start over from scratch with another entity.

Once you qualify to learn the spell and have a tutor lined up, you may roll Magic once per session to see if you have learned its rudiments. You must score an Illustrious Success.

Any other players who qualify for arch-magician (or arch-warrior; see Chapter Six) status may then make their rolls to see if they advance to Rhialto-level as well.

After all eligible players have attempted to advance, the Turjan-level series promptly ends. To end a Turjan series in appropriately grim fashion, those who successfully advance should peremptorily slaughter those who fail. You can surely dredge up a long-suppressed grudge or two to justify this act of arbitrary savagery. Having accomplished it, the winners of the Turjan series — and that is clearly what you are — proceed to dandify themselves, throw off their earlier habits of savagery and bloodlust, and prepare themselves for the quaint and rarefied atmosphere of



Rhialto play. Decades of game time elapse before the new series commences. You may know the basics of the chug-summoning spell, but its perfection is an individualized process that takes considerable time. During this time, the hard edges of Turjan characters soften into the foppish outlines of conclave worthies.

Graduates may now reconfigure their characters, as per the new ability caps applicable to Rhialto-level. (See **DERPG** p. 125.) Any additional improvement points (not build points) spent to increase their abilities above the Turjan-level ability caps are freed up and may now be spent elsewhere.

Consult the table below to calculate your rebate.

Improvement Point Rebate Table

Ability Rating	Improvement Points Returned
16	3
17	12
18	33
19	45
20	57

If you have ability ratings in excess of 20 (unlikely for Turjan-level characters), you gain an additional 12-point rebate for each subsequent point of ability rating.

Magic, which costs double to acquire, provides twice the rebate.

*Example: Your character, Glumagin, has three abilities in excess of the Turjan-level ability cap of 15: Magic 17, Attack 17, and Rebuff 16. The Rebuff earns you a 3-point Improvement Point rebate. You get 12 points back for the Attack rating of 17. The Magic, which doubles, gives you 24 points back for a 17 point rating.  $3+12+24=39$ , so you get a total rebate of 39 improvement points.*

Reallocated points may be spent as if you are subject to the higher Rhialto-level ability caps, as seen on **DERPG** p. 125. Unspent improvement points may be used later, along with any other points you may have earned but not yet used. You may spend them on anything else you want, including character abilities and manse features (see Chapter 4.)

*With 39 improvement points to spend and more forgiving ability caps, you spend 21 points to bring your Magic rating up to the Rhialto-level cap of 20. (Remember that Magic points cost*

*twice as much as any other.) That leaves you with 18 points to play with. You spend another 12 points to bring the rating 1 point past the cap, to 21. You finish your reallocation by bringing up both your Attack and Rebuff ratings by 1 point apiece, spending 3 improvement points on each.*

In addition, all improvement points spent on prerequisite specializations are now returned to you, as are any points spent building your manse according to the rules in the main **DERPG** book.

Players whose characters did not make the abrupt leap to Rhialto-play must instead create new characters, using the standard rules. Although it will be tempting to jeer their low and pitiful state, strive for magnanimity. One wouldn't want to start a competitive game with grudge-holding opponents eager to single you out, would one? If you killed your erstwhile colleagues with special glee, you may wish to start from scratch with a new character too, as a gesture of appeasement

## Joining the Conclave

After undergoing the many decades of off-stage time in which your characters become arch-magicians, it's time to affirm your new status by joining Ildefonse's conclave. At your GM's discretion, newly created characters might be newcomers to the conclave, just as if they are existing characters graduating from Turjan-level. Alternately, they could be longtime conclave members with many aeons of experience to their credit. The former option allows the GM to introduce you to the elements of Rhialto-level play in an orderly and gradual fashion. The latter assumes a familiarity with the source material and drops you into a typical episode without delay.

If your GM chooses to run you through an introductory episode, expect to seek out current conclave members to announce your new credentials. Have you been pursuing your new status as a team? If so, you may want to travel as a delegation to the manses of influential arch-magicians. No doubt you've researched the group's roster. Decide which member is most likely to receive you warmly. Is your spokesman adept at flattery, as indicated by a high Etiquette score? If so, the self-regarding Ildefonse could be the ideal point of contact.

Your contact may profess doubts about your candidacy. Do not allow these to deter you! Current members will

wish to enjoy their relative power over you. They will draw the process out, attempting to wrinkle favors from you, or generally bask in their eminence and seniority. The last thing they want you to know is that they are desperate for you to join them. Once a sorcerer attains arch-magical status, they consider it far better to keep an eye on him as a member of the club than to let him roam about unfettered. Left to his own devices, such a person might go renegade or, through ignorance, accidentally unleash various cosmic menaces they've taken great care to imprison.

With an unprecedented number of arch-magicians (and possibly arch-warriors) applying for membership at once, the conclave may be tempted toward a solution that will both keep you under their watchful eyes and preserve their haughty superiority. They may create a junior auxiliary or cadet corps. You and the other PCs will be appointed belong to this probationary sub-section, gaining equal

status without the accompanying prestige. As auxiliaries, you may be the first individuals dispatched to investigate dangerous situations, to attend apparently boring ceremonies, or to enforce the conclave's privileges. Try not to take this as the affront to your dignity it so clearly is. Instead, look at cadet status as an opportunity to learn new things, test your skills against unknown dangers, and to gather up any loose IOUN stones you happen to see lying about. Your older colleagues shun activity. You, on the other hand, will need a steady stream of interesting obstacles, which will allow you to outdo your fellow players, winning all-important status points. (For a full explanation, see the next chapter.)

A goal for the especially clever: see if you can make auxiliary status seem so thrilling and glamorous rewarding that senior members will be clamoring to join you.

## The Woman Problem

One potentially vexing problem may occur when graduating Turjan-level characters to Rhialto status. What happens if some of them are female? Ildefonse's conclave is a notoriously all-male affair, whose members react with chauvinistic horror to the idea of a magically all-powerful woman. Female arch-magicians are witches, the most worrisome enemies imaginable.

A woman might Persuade her way into the conclave by arguing for a creative workaround of some sort. If she is stunning beautiful — and if she is not, she can now become so at the slightest command to her sandestin — she could seek out influential conclave members to aid her in her quest for membership. When taking this tack, the legendarily susceptible Rhialto might be a female candidate's best bet.

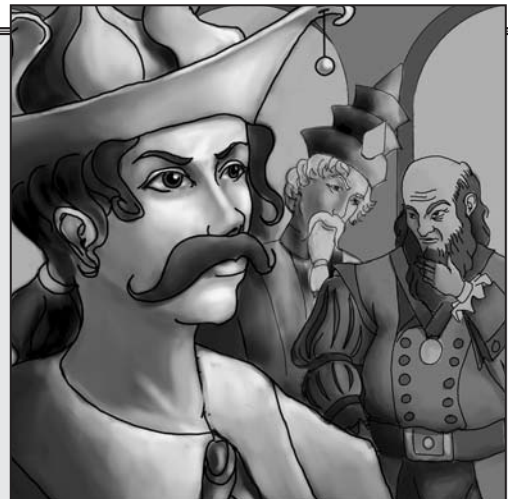
She might have herself declared to be, despite all appearances, technically male.

Another option would be for the applicant to disguise herself as a man, remembering always to speak in a low voice around those who do not know her secret. She can arouse the jealousy of her colleagues with the lushness of her flowing beard. Unfortunately, this option is notoriously perilous, and the necessary bindings eventually become uncomfortable.

Perhaps most momentously of all, a sustained lobbying effort might convince the conclave to abandon its male-only policy. This would remove a major element of the setting as it exists in the source material. Even so, the conclave would suffer no shortage of enemies. Many indignant current members would likely form a splinter organization which could then serve as an antagonist group as troubling as the witches. Many current witches, unwilling to trust those who have so long objurgated them, will refrain from joining Ildefonse's group, continuing to treat its members as enemies.

Whatever solution you choose, your GM will keep in mind that the joke here is on the chauvinists. If she senses that what is meant to be a satire of sexism is instead turning into an exercise in it, she will intervene. GMs should be especially careful that female players are not made uncomfortable by the group's treatment of this theme. Depending on their situations, they may be subjected to plenty of dim-witted sexism in their real lives and not find it particularly liberating to face more of it in their roleplaying sessions, even in a joking way. Your GM will either redress the balance, reestablishing the proper tone, or eliminate this element entirely, as she deems necessary.

Female players may have more fun playing sexist dunderheads than they would the long-suffering victims of their idiocy. They may wish to start afresh with new male characters to replace their feisty Turjan-level adventuresses.



# The Arch-Magical Series

## Achieving Your Rightful Victory

Having achieved power's very pinnacle, it's time to get down to the true business of being an Arch-Magician: proving your superiority over your colleagues in an ever-escalating struggle of one-upmanship, avarice, and pseudo-parliamentary procedure. In a Rhialto series, protecting yourself and your fellows from the omnipresent enemies intent on your annihilation is only a regrettable, periodic distraction from these lofty pursuits.

You may be wondering what could possibly induce you to mimic the vainglorious antics of Ildefonse's Conclave, as seen in Jack Vance's *Rhialto the Marvelous*. Why, it's the prospect of victory, naturally! Unlike those other puling, callow levels of *Dying Earth* gaming, Rhialto play offers the obvious and stellar advantage of vicious, backbiting competition. At the end of each session, the player who has most splendidly enacted the imperatives of Vancian arch-magicians wins the game, and is touted as the inherent and natural superior of all others present. Until next session, that is, when the vanquished return to the gaming table, intent on righting whatever lunatic aberrations of fate permitted such a cruel and unjust result to pertain on the previous occasion.

Your currency in the perpetual pursuit of victory is the **status point**, awarded to you when you overcome, show up, mock and thwart other player's characters. Alas, in keeping with the principles of Universal Equipoise, it goes without saying that they'll be trying to do the same to you. Master the status point scheme presented in this chapter — and in victory boxes, presented throughout the text — and you'll be ready to prove your mastery with the inexorable surety of a mathematical equation.

## Keeping Score

Conditioned by other roleplaying systems to value quaint concepts such as cooperation and the expected coherence of action-adventure plotting, you may display a regrettable tendency to forget the competitive nature of the game in favor of story momentum and collegial feeling. Now is the time to put all such quaint thoughts, fit only for those who have not mastered the ritual of the chugs, behind you.

To keep the point score uppermost in all players' minds, the GM supplies a writing surface, such as a whiteboard or chalkboard, updating it whenever status points are scored. Thus you'll know exactly where you stand, and whether you need to play defensively and protect your lead, or if you should instead attempt to drive the story in a direction that will yield you the maximum crop of status points. Momentary advantage is all. Once awarded, your fellow players can do nothing to take your status points from you. However the GM may levy status point penalties against you for actions unbefitting an archmage. For more on this, see p. 28.

Victory conditions are simple : at the end of the session, the player with the greatest total of status points wins. If the session concludes with one or more players tied for first place, the GM calls for a tiebreaker challenge, as discussed later in this session.

In a standard roleplaying session, the GM typically calls it a night somewhere in the rough vicinity of a given time, after attempting to steer the evening's play to a suitable narrative conclusion — either an ending that ties up the conflict, or a suitable breakpoint, such as a pause in the action, or tiebreaker.

In a Rhialto game, strict adherence to form supersedes the mere gratification of a satisfying ending. The GM announces at the beginning of each session a hard end time. When that time is reached, the session wraps up, no matter how awkwardly, and a winner declared. For arch-magicians, time is a continuum, and individual moments of but niggling consequence.



To further spice the competition, a play group may collectively decide to award prizes to the winners. There is no victory so deserved that it cannot be further sweetened by tangible reward.

You might want to play for gift certificates at your favorite hobby game establishment, to see who picks up the tab for the evening's pizza, or for possession of a rare and piquant beverage. One note of caution: though it is hard to imagine persons of questionable maturity even wishing to play this most sublime of all roleplaying games, some people who are otherwise fun to game with transform into monsters of petulance when the prospect of a real prize dangles over the proceedings. If you suspect that a secret spoilsport lurks in your midst, you may want to keep the victories purely on the symbolic plane.

## Gaining Status Points

The richest sources of status points are **challenges** and **shares**. In a challenge, you engage one of your fellow

players in a contest of abilities (or Manse features; see p. 54). To win a **share**, you must achieve a concrete goal, as announced by the GM, before any of your other players do.

## Challenges

When you enter a contest against another player, you (or your opponent) may be permitted to declare it a challenge.

### Eligibility

The GM decides whether any given contest is eligible to be treated as a challenge. To qualify a contest as a challenge, the declaring player must be able to explain how its outcome would increase the victor's standing among the entire conclave of Arch-Magicians.

**Witnesses :** The conclave must have some way of learning about the challenge, so that they can gossip about it and subject the loser to their ironic quips. Typically this requires the presence of witnesses who will spread

## Know Your Opponents' Pools

Wise challengers know the size of their rivals' ability pools. Challenging a player whose pool in the relevant ability exceeds yours is risky. Sometimes this risk will be worth taking. For example, you might be far behind as the end of the evening draws near, with the arch-magical equivalent of the 'Hail Mary pass' offering your only hope of victory. If you're sitting on a lead, on the other hand, a challenge against a richer opponent is the last gambit you'll want to attempt.

The arch-magician's heightened intuition allows him to pick up otherwise imperceptible signs of an individual's talent, good fortune and current state of restfulness. To learn the size of another character's pool at any time, you may, provided that your own Magic pool stands at 10 or greater, make a Perception roll to learn the size of any one character's pool in any single ability. (Note that this applies to GMCs as well as to your opponent's characters.)

On an Illustrious or Prosaic Success<sup>1</sup>, the player (or GM) must tell you the exact pool count for the relevant ability.

On a Hair's-Breadth Success, the player is permitted to partially bluff you. He may add 1, 2, or 3 points to the actual total, or subtract 1, 2, or 3 points.

Save for the bitter complaints of the exposed party, there is nothing to stop you from communicating the knowledge of one player's pool to another.

Once a challenge has begun, your opponent must reveal his totals in all relevant pools to you, whenever you ask. The revelation is made even if you previously failed to divine the size of his pool. That knowledge comes too late to be of any use in deciding whether to enter a challenge in the first place.

Enhance the clarity and excitement of challenges by using tokens to represent participants' pools. Poker chips carry the illicit whiff of the gaming parlor.

When a challenge begins, make a pile of tokens equal to your pool. If your pool is especially large, deposit them on the table with a confident flourish. As your points are whittled away from you, move them into a pile representing your opponent's stake. With a series of glances you can greedily evaluate the stake available to you, lament the stake your foe might win, and check the resources still left to you.

<sup>1</sup> "Why don't I get something special for an Illustrious Success?" we hear some of you ask. Is a 2-point Perception boon not enough for you? Has greed not already reached its zenith in this world's last melancholy days?

an account of the outcome to other arch-magicians. Other PCs can usually serve this function.

*Your PC, Flegel, engages in a duel on a lonely cloud-top with another PC, Chagomant. With no one to report the colorful humiliations suffered by the loser, the duel does not qualify as a challenge, and the GM rules accordingly.*

*So, with the aid of your sandestin (and after a suitable period of baggling over indenture points) you summon a feathered recording beast. Its saucer-like eyes will create a repeatable, illusionary mirage accurately recreating the fight. Any who wish to see it need merely grip the varicolored bit of plumage it will hand over for this purpose. Now that the clear prospect exists for the loser to be coddled and chattered about by his colleagues, the GM alters her ruling. The contest may now be treated as a challenge.*

**Stakes :** Secondly, the contest must revolve around a subject of interest to your colleagues. They must care enough about its outcome to increase their estimation of the winner, and degrade their opinion of the loser. Any contest where notable embarrassment awaits the failed contestant may be counted as a challenge.

*Flegel engages in a scholarly debate with Chagomant over the larval form of the Carcassian Lightning-Horned beetle in a break between formal sessions at the Conclave. Although many witnesses are present, none of the other arch-magicians much care about entomology. Nor will anything particularly humiliating or otherwise amusing befall the argument's apparent loser. The GM rules that this cannot constitute a challenge.*

*Incensed by his refusal to concede his obvious error on the larval front, Flegel challenges Chagomant to see which of them can drink more Carcassian liqueur, which is distilled from the thoracic juices of the worm in question. Losing a drinking contest is eminently humiliating; thus, the GM rules it fair game for a challenge.*

Arch-magicians take an overweening interest in the proceedings of their Conclave. Contests taking place as part of official debate are always counted as challenges.

*Chagomant's defeat in the liqueur-quaffing contest with Flegel results in an unfortunate biological eruption, staining the upholstery of the conclave's front benches. The bile-like aroma drives many arch-magicians from the chamber. Bandomalio, a PC well-known for his lack of olfactory organs, fires off an amusing comment concerning his fellows' lack of aromatic fortune. His bon mot happens to be a tagline, and the GM awards his player, Shirley, the*

*maximum XP total for using it so adroitly.*

*Another player, Pete, decides to take Shirley down a peg. His character, Marthrap, introduces an emergency motion. Bandomalio, he proposes, should personally supervise the clean-up, on the grounds that his fortuitous nasal impairment will render him immune to any ill-effects that might otherwise arise from the befouled cushions. He uses his Persuade ability to argue for the motion's immediate passage; Bandomalio uses Rebuff to argue against. Like any motion before the conclave, this is treated as a challenge, with status points hanging in the balance.*

Contests pertaining to perceived threats to the privileges and well-being of arch-magicians are ripe subjects for challenges.

*As the conclave grinds on through various tangents and petty grievances, Rhialto (a GMC), is finally able to introduce a new item of business: a mysterious aura has devoured one of his chugs! The very thought of a force or entity capable of doing such a thing strikes chilly terror into the hearts of all assembled. Flegel suggests that only a sentient energy being could achieve such a horrifying feat. Chagomant takes issue with this theory, arguing that only an abstract force would dare attempt it. The other arch-magicians listen carefully to their dispute, intending to appoint the winner as leader of a mission to investigate and counter this awful menace. This Pedantry contest is of great enough interest to the arch-magicians to count as a challenge.*

For this reason, players will find it to their advantage to pursue adventure hooks and keep the storyline moving, because almost any contest they undertake in furtherance of the overall goal is likely to qualify as a contest.

## Resolving Challenges

A challenge unfolds as a normal contest, ending when one player is either unwilling or unable to reroll a failed result, or declines to force the reroll of an opponent's Illustrious Success. The contestants keep track of the points they spend during the contest. This includes points from other abilities spent directly on the contest, in cases where this is permitted. (As, for example, when you spend points from your manse's Collections pool during a Pedantry contest.) Points lost through levies, including levies from Dismal Failures, are also counted. The points spent by the loser become the winner's status point gain for that challenge.

The term for the number of points your opponent stands to win from you is called your **stake**.

*Flegel and Chagomant commence their Pedantry contest, to determine whether the task force looks for a sentient being, as per Flegel's theory, or an abstract force, as Chagomant suggests. Flegel starts with 16 Pedantry points; Chagomant, with 14.*

*As challenger, Chagomant rolls his Pedantry first. He gets a 5, a Prosaic Success.*

*You roll your own Pedantry result: a 1, or Dismal Failure. Uh-oh! You spend the 3 points necessary to cancel it. Your Pedantry pool is now down to 13. You roll again: another Dismal Failure! You pay 3 points for a second reroll. You get a 2, a Quotidian Failure. You pay 1 to reroll that, bringing your pool down to 9, and your points spent so far to 7. Finally you get a Prosaic Success. Loretta's stake equals your expenditure so far, at 7 points.*

*It's her turn to roll. She gets a 4, a Hair's-Breadth Success.*

*You roll a 3, an Exasperating Failure. You pay 1 to reroll it, dropping your pool to 8 and, in an outburst of symmetry, increasing Loretta's potential winnings to 8. You get a 4, a Hair's-Breadth Success.*

*Now Loretta. She gets a 2, a Quotidian Failure. She spends 1 to reroll, her first expenditure of the contest. She's down to a Pedantry pool of 13; if you were to win now, you'd get a measly 1 status, compared to the 8 she stands to win. Her reroll is a 6, an Illustrious Success! It gives her the standard 2 point boon, so her Pedantry pool increases to 15.*

*Unless you're willing to pay 3 points to nullify it, she wins 8 status. If you do, you're upping her possible winnings even more. You bite the bullet, spend the 3 points, and force her reroll. Your pool is at 6; your total expenditures, at 11.*

*Forced to roll again, she gets a Dismal Failure. Now things seem to be turning around for you! She must pay 3 points or concede. She spends the points, putting her pool at 12 and your potential status win at 4. Her reroll is a Prosaic Success.*

*You roll a Quotidian Failure, spend 1 to reroll it, get an Exasperating Failure, pay 1 to reroll that, get another Exasperating Failure, and pay for yet another reroll. If you get a Dismal Failure now, you're cooked — you've only got 3 points to spend, which would put you out of the contest either way.*

*You get a Quotidian Failure. You've driven Loretta's stake to 14. The writing is on the wall. You concede.*

*In the game world, Flegel has stumbled badly over his arguments, getting off the occasional salient point but mostly floundering, embarrassing himself in front of his assembled colleagues. Despite an earthbound metaphor or two, Chagomant has triumphed, convincing all present that the threat must indeed be an abstract force. He is made captain of the task force.*

*At the gaming table, you spent 14 points in your failed bid to win the argument. Loretta gains 14 status, and takes an early lead for the evening.*

## Null Results

You cannot win a challenge purely by default; you must make at least one successful roll to claim your status points, and to achieve the desired story result. It is possible, though rare, for both parties to a challenge to fail. Null results become more likely during tough challenges (see p. 18), where a levy increases the cost of each roll.

*Marthrap engages you in a contest to see who can find the quickest route to the sub-dimension of Adrolar. This is a contest of Magic. Both of your pools are severely depleted, but each is within striking distance of overtaking the current status point leader, Loretta, so you proceed with all due verve and recklessness.*

*Marthrap's Magic pool stands at 8. Flegel's is 7. Marthrap, as challenger, starts first.*

*Pete, Marthrap's player, winces as she scores a Dismal Failure. He suffers the usual levy of 2 against his pool, dropping his pool to 6 and starting your potential stake at 2. He pays 3 points to nullify the Dismal Failure, putting his pool at 3 and your stake at 5. Pete rolls an Exasperating Failure and pays 1 to reroll that. His pool is 6; your stake, 6. He rolls another Dismal Failure. That drops his pool to 0; Marthrap loses the challenge. Your stake is now 8.*

*Her loss doesn't mean your win, however. You must make at least one successful roll to claim your status points, and, not to mention, find the sub-dimension of Adrolar.*

*You start with an Exasperating Failure and spend 1 to reroll it. Then you get a Dismal Failure. Its automatic levy of 2 brings your pool down to 5. (There's no need to keep track of your stake, as Loretta is out of the challenge and has no chance of winning it.) Hungry for those 8 status points, you spend 3 from your Magic pool to nullify the Dismal Failure. With 2 points left in your pool, you reroll, but get a Quotidian Failure. Now you've got 1 point left. You spend it for one last roll — and suffer an Exasperating Failure!*

*Neither Marthrap nor Flegel have found a way to Adrolar, and no one gets any status points. Loretta's lead is safe — for now.*



## Top-Ups

Certain situations allow challenge winners to increase their status point hauls with **top-ups**.

These bonuses typically apply when you vanquish a PC on his home turf, or otherwise overcome a serious disadvantage.

A top-up adds a 50% bonus to the status points you would otherwise gain from the contest. The GM rounds up any fractions.

*As described on p. 54, if you win a Pedantry challenge in an opponent's manse, you gain a top-up. (You've performed an especially impressive feat, since your opponent has access to his entire library and can quote chapter and verse to you.)*

*Flegel does just that, beating Marthrap in a Pedantry challenge in his own library. Marthrap spent 13 points during the challenge. Normally you'd win that number of status points. With the top-up, you gain 20 status points. ( $13 \times 1.5 = 19.5$ ; the GM rounds up for a result of 20.)*

## Limits On Challenges

When you lose a challenge, as opposed to a mere contest, make a note of it. No other player may declare a challenge against you requiring you to use that ability (or Manse feature) until you refresh it.

Your would-be challenger can still Persuade you to engage in the contest, as he would in any non-competitive **Dying Earth** series. However, it is never worth status points.

*Marthrap wins a Wherewithal contest against Flegel, proving his superior ability to suffer the chill climes of the harrowing dimension of Akstagir. You make a note of this. Later, Bandomalio wagers you that he can longer withstand the mind-bending gibbering of the baboon demons resident there. This is clearly another contest of Wherewithal; you remind the GM that you are presently immune from any challenges against this ability.*

*Bandomalio's player, Shirley, is still enamored of the idea, and proceeds to Persuade you to take part in the wager. As expected, given your low Wherewithal total, you lose the contest. However, Shirley gains no status points from this hollow victory.*

## Top-Up List

- Winning a Pedantry contest in an opponent's manse.
- Winning a Gluttony challenge (p. 58) in which your opponent goes on to suffer an Injury.
- Winning a Connoisseurship challenge (p. 58) as the taster, in an opponent's manse.
- Winning a Cooking competition (p. 58) in which you suffer a levy on account of the host's selection of an ingredient meant to disadvantage you.



*The contest has cost Bandomalio a goodly bundle of Wherewithal, too. The other players stroke their chins with sinister intent; unlike you, Shirley is not immune from a Wherewithal challenge, and has just made herself vulnerable to one.*

Once you challenge a particular player, you may not challenge that player again until at least one other challenge has taken place. This other challenge might involve the given player and another opponent, you and another opponent, or two other opponents.

You may still engage that player in a contest; it just won't be worth any status points.

*The arch-magicians continue their sojourn through the frigid wastes of Akstagir. Due to an unfortunate misunderstanding, Chagomant's sandestin withdraws the bubble of protection that was been keeping the group warm. Marthrap attempts to engage your character, Flegel, in a challenge regarding the proper construction of a snow hut. This time he's targeted your Living Rough ability, which has not been challenged recently.*

*However, you point out the last actual challenge to play out also pitted Marthrap against Flegel. Although Chagomant may still Persuade you to take part in the wager, it may not be treated as a challenge, and would not be worth status points. Reminded of this, Chagomant's player, Loretta, withdraws the suggestion.*

If you declared the most recent challenge and are now declaring another one, any other player may **pre-empt** your challenge, stepping in to contest the player you've targeted, in the manner you originally specified. If more than one other player wishes to pre-empt, the GM conducts an auction of Wherewithal points to decide which of them gets the privilege. The original challenger may not participate in this auction. The first player to speak up and pre-empt bids first. (If two players speak up simultaneously, settle bidding precedence with a coin toss.)

*Undeterred, Loretta changes targets, declaring the same challenge against Marthrap. Marthrap's Living Rough ability is low, making him a tempting target. Shirley steps in to pre-empt Loretta; her character, Bandomalio, will challenge Marthrap to the igloo wager. "Not," you protest. "I want to do it!"*

*As first to pre-empt, Shirley makes the first bid. She bids 1 Wherewithal point. You bid 2 Wherewithal points. She withdraws. You are now cleared to make the challenge — provided that Marthrap's player, Pete, is willing, or fails to Rebuff your Persuade attempt.*

Pre-emption occurs only on the player level. It's an initiative mechanism to see who gets to talk and act first. The characters are unaware of it; they're not jostling and disputing with one another for the right to propose a dare or wager. Think of it as hitting the pause button, and possibly engaging in a bit of video editing, to arrive at a desired result.

## Evading Challenges

Clever players will only issue challenges they think they're likely to win. Conversely, you'll want to duck challenges made against you when you think you're likely to lose. A player can oblige you to take part in a challenge by winning a Persuade/Rebuff contest against you. He's the persuader; you're the rebuffer.

*Chagomant challenges Flegel to see which of them can spend the longest time hovering above a witheringly hot volcano. If the challenge proceeds, it'll use the Magic abilities of each participant to see whose protective spells fail first. As Chagomant*

*well knows, Flegel recently depleted his Magic pool in an exhausting struggle against an archvult. For that reason, Flegel's player wants to avoid the contest.*

*Chagomant uses Persuade to appeal to Flegel's vanity. Flegel uses Rebuff to argue for a postponement. Flegel has plenty of Rebuff points, and spends them freely, forcing Chagomant to back down. Having won the contest, he maintains his common sense and does not agree to the challenge.*

An exception occurs when the challenge itself will use Persuade/Rebuff. In this case, you evade a challenge by conceding the point. Although your opponent does not gain any status points, you must go along with whatever scheme he's proposing.

If the challenge you're conceding is a motion before the conclave, you step aside, either voting for the motion, or abstaining. Another character may then step up to lead the debate against the motion. If he's a PC, the contest unfolds as a challenge, but with a different defender than the proposing player intended. If he's a GMC, the contest is not a challenge, and the outcome merely serves to determine whether the motion passes or is voted down.

*Chagomant introduces a motion before the conclave proposing that elaborate feathered hats be banned from chambers. Clearly, the motion is aimed at Flegel, whose jaunty chapeau made all the difference last night, when he seduced a fetching young maiden Chagomant had fixed his beady eye on. Flegel has spent many of his Rebuff points already this session, and has already wrung maximum benefit from his sublime headgear. He declines to argue against the motion. Thus, no challenge occurs, and Chagomant misses a likely chance to win status points at Flegel's expense.*

*Bandomalio, however, is not only flush with Rebuff points, but is also the proud owner of a rare plumed tricorne, which he is too proud to remove. He steps up to argue against the motion. Chagomant's player blanches; Bandomalio's Rebuff style trumps his Persuade style, increasing both his chance of failure and the magnitude of Bandomalio's likely win.*

In the case of any other conceded Persuade/Rebuff challenge, no status points are gained by either participant, but you must do as the challenger wanted, just as if you lost a Persuade/Rebuff contest.

*Bandomalio wins the debate after a hefty expenditure of Rebuff points. After the conclave is gavelled to a conclusion, Marthrap sidles up to him and attempts to convince him to accept a sandestin swap: Marthrap's lazy and truculent servant Jobo*



for Bandomalio's oddly pliant factotum Trinkwin. Normally Bandomalio would never consider this, but his player, Shirley, seeing that she maintains a narrow lead over Martbrap's player, Pete, doesn't want to risk a challenge she'd likely lose. Wearily, she gives in to the arrangement, sure she can somehow reverse the swap in a future session.

A Persuade/Rebuff contest to determine whether an unwilling participant agrees to a challenge is never itself treated as a challenge.

## Horning In

Sometimes you can enter directly into a challenge against another character without his consent. When another PC is attempting a task and you could plausibly jump in and try to complete it first, you can, pending GM approval, declare it a challenge. The contest between the two characters plays out as a race; the winner is the one who completes the task first.

*Examples of tasks that can be horned in on:*

- Climbing a mountain
- Constructing the most beautiful hat
- Creating an illusionary fireworks display
- Designing and erecting a splendid building
- Diagnosing an ailment
- Disguising oneself as a deodand
- Finding a lost or hidden item
- Finding forage in an inhospitable environment
- Impressing a GMC
- Learning the name of that alluring maiden
- Races of all kinds — on foot, on horseback, on a vehicle
- Swimming a river
- Translating a manuscript

If a task can not be simultaneously attempted by competing individuals, you can't horn in on it.

*Two magicians might try to simultaneously diagnose a steward's peculiar illness through verbal inquiry, but they can't both operate on his heart at the same time.*

*Only one person can try to pick the same lock, or pocket, at the same time.*

If another PC horns in on you, and you do not want to face a challenge, you can withdraw, ending your attempt at the task. He then completes the action alone, garnering whatever kudos are due him — but gaining no status points at your expense.

*While attending a royal ball, you attempt to impress an important dignitary with your skill at the Virtagian gavotte. Pete decides that Martbrap will horn in, showing off his own dancing skills. The evening is drawing to a close, and he's in second place to you. You want to protect your lead against him, so you withdraw from the attempt, leaving the floor in mid-dance.*

*With the music already playing and his dance already in progress, Martbrap has no time to Persuade you to remain in the contest. He may then roll to see if he impresses the dignitary, but no challenge takes place. Your relative point status scores remain as is.*

For extended, leisurely tasks allowing a pause for dialogue, you might also prevent a PC from horning in on you by Persuading him to desist. In this case, a successful Persuade prevents a challenge, while a triumphant Rebuff assures one.

*The grim gatekeeper of Mora-Loth will allow the party to pass his hideous threshold without an unpleasant and possibly deadly struggle, if they provide him with a rare antique to complete his collection — an authentic pince-nez from the Nommang Dynasty. It just so happens that his hated rival, the gatekeeper of Golche, has the item locked up in the bowels of his impregnable dungeon, and regularly taunts him about it. "I'll sneak into Golche's tunnel complex and get it!" you say, intending to use your Stealth ability to retrieve the item. "I'll beat you to it!" proclaims Bandomalio.*

*Bandomalio's Stealth exceeds yours, and you'd sooner not spend it all on a challenge you're likely to lose. So you try to Persuade him to leave well enough alone, belay the showboating, and allow them to pass through the Mora-Loth gate without complication. You win the contest, and are then able to complete the task without turning it into a contest.*

*If Bandomalio's player had been sneakier, he wouldn't have announced his intentions until after you'd gone. Then you'd be unable to talk him out of horning in. He would have simply gone off on his own to Golche's tunnels, making it a challenge whether you liked it or not.*



## Not If, But Who

The competitive format of Rhialto-level play calls for a shift of thinking on the GM's part.

In Cugel- or Turjan-level play, or pretty much any other standard roleplaying experience, the resolution system determines *if* the character succeeds or fails at the task before him. The GM must prepare for the consequences of both success and failure; each should lead to another interesting event in a way that conjures up an entertaining sense of forward motion. The PC will be either be making simple rolls, or contesting against a GMC.

In Rhialto-level play, many crucial events will be resolved as contests between PCs. In a great many challenges, a successful outcome for one of the players is a foregone conclusion — as is failure for the other. The consequence of that failure is always the sense of humiliation or frustration that arises when one's potential glory is snatched by a rival.

Meanwhile, the GM can count on the PCs being able to move on to the next obstacle. The question is not *if* a character succeeds, but *who* the triumphant player will be. (Null results are possible but unlikely for standard challenges. Tough challenges, in which one or more of the participants suffer levies, make them all too possible.)

For example, let's look at a scene in the PCs must tame a wild mermelant and convince it to carry a trunk full of ill-gotten treasure across the plains of Feld.

In a Cugel-level adventure, one PC steps up to try to tame the mermelant, pitting his Persuade (and/or Riding) against the mermelant's Rebuff. If he blows it, the entire party is likely to suffer the consequences of failure. They'll have to find an alternate way of transporting their goods, or leave their loot behind.

Let's imagine the same situation in a Rhialto game, assuming some kind of plot device that makes the transportation of a trunk a difficult and challenge-worthy problem for a party of arch-magicians. If two PCs make a challenge of it, the mermelant becomes a passive participant in the entire exercise. That the creature will be persuaded is a foregone conclusion. The contest roll is not made against its Rebuff pool. Instead, the two arch-magicians contest against one another, drawing on their

Persuade and Riding pools, to see which of them claims the bragging rights for the inevitable persuasion of the mermelant<sup>1</sup>.

## Tough Challenges

In a challenge where two PCs compete to be the first to complete a task, the GM may choose to make the contest especially difficult. This is particularly appropriate in the case of challenges which would otherwise be conducted as a contest between a PC and a GMC.

In a tough challenge, the GM places a levy on each roll. Like any pool points you spend during a challenge, they go into the stake — the stash of points your opponent stands to win if you lose. Tougher challenges offer greater rewards. If the obstacle is an inanimate object or force without abilities, the GM determines the levy arbitrarily, where 1 represents a task which is notably trickier than normal, 2 is extremely difficult, and 3 is nearly impossible.

Where the obstacle is a GMC who would otherwise be defending with his own ability pool — Rebuff against Persuade, for example — the GM bases the levy on the character's current *pool* (not rating), as follows:

Pool	Levy
0 to 7	0
8 to 15	1
16 to 24	2
25	3

*Entering a cavern network of the 17<sup>th</sup> Aeon, the PCs encounter a crystal head on a pedestal. It informs them that several traps await them in the complex, of special deadliness to arch-magicians. The truculent chunk of quartz must be convinced to reveal their nature and location.*

*If one PC decides to Persuade him, a contest ensues against the head's Rebuff pool, which stands at 10. The PCs may nor may not succeed against him.*

*If two PCs tag-team the head, challenging one another to see which of them is best able to Persuade it, their success is, barring a null result, guaranteed. The PCs both draw on their Persuade pools. The head's Rebuff pool comes into play only to determine what levy, if any, they face during the challenge. Consulting the chart, the GM sees that the pool of 10 requires a levy of 1.*

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of which, *The Inevitable Persuasion of the Mermelant*, our upcoming book of self-help and business platitudes based on the philosophy of the Dying Earth, will be available at a bookstore near you sometime in the early 19<sup>th</sup> aeon.

*Flegel and Chagomant challenge one another to see who can first detach his manse from its foundations and fly it to the Ventricular Chasm of Dicurac, with the additional stipulation that neither magician's collection of fine china may incur significant damage in the process. The GM rules this a notably tricky contest, and places a levy of 1 on it.*

*The contest will be undertaken using your manses' respective Mobility pools — 8 in your case, 9 for Chagomant. (For more on the Mobility manse feature, see p. 60.)*

*As challenger, you roll first. As with any levy, you pay even for your initial roll. Your pool drops to 7; your stake is now 1. You get a 2, a Quotidian Failure.*

*You command your sandestins to levitate your manse. At first, they confront you with their usual obstructive bafflegab, making all sorts of fuss about such vexing irrelevancies as structural capacities, load-bearing walls, and so forth.*

*You pay 2 points to reroll your Quotidian Failure — the normal reroll fee, plus the levy. Your pool is at 5, your stake at 3. You get an Illustrious Success, which brings its usual 2-point boon. Your pool goes back up to 7; your stake remains unchanged at 3.*

*Your patience at an end, you brandish your chug, resulting in immediate action — with a great crunch of displaced earth, your manse lifts from its moorings and into the air.*

*If Loretta, Chagomant's player, declines to pay to nullify your Illustrious Success, she loses. Nullification will cost her a hefty 4 points — the usual 3, plus the levy of 1. She's tempted to decline, since her stake is empty and she can withdraw without increasing your status point total. However, the evening is drawing to a close and she needs just a few points to win the session, so she chooses to throw caution to the wind. She pays 4 points, dropping her pool to 5 and upping her stake from 0 to 4.*

*Suddenly the china cabinets begin to rattle and shake. Keeping in mind the inspection for chips and cracks that the winner must undergo, you grit your teeth in aggravation and command your sandestins to bring the building temporarily back to earth.*

*You must roll again, but, as per the usual rules on nullified successes, pay nothing extra for it, not even the levy. You get an Exasperating Failure. Now you must pay 2 points — the usual 1 plus the levy — to reroll. You do so, dropping your pool back down to 5 and your stake up to 5.*

*You roll a Prosaic Success.*

*More carefully this time, the sandestins resume their effort, and float your manse above its well-ordered gardens.*

*Now it's finally Loretta's turn to act. She pays 1 point from her pool for her first roll, dropping it to 4 and increasing her stake to 5. Oh no — she gets a Dismal Failure! This carries the usual automatic levy of 2, decreasing her pool to 2 and upping the stake to 7. This leaves her with a mere 2 points, only half the number she'd need to nullify her Dismal Failure. She has no choice but to concede. You gain status points equal to her stake — a considerable 7 points!*

*Cut to Chagomant at his manse. Forgoing the untrustworthy assistance of sandestins, he speaks a spell he had bound into the structure when it was first erected. It totters up into the air, shudders, and crashes to the ground, splintering and groaning.*

## One-Sided Levies

In some instances, a challenge may be more difficult for one participant in a challenge than another. One-sided levies can be sublimely profitable when they work in your favor — and devastating when they do not.

Disparities of difficulty are always measured by assessing a levy to the inferior party, never by granting boons to the advantaged participant.

In a challenge where both participants pit their Persuade abilities against each other to get a GMC to



do their bidding, the GMC's Rebuff style may trump one of the participant's Persuade styles, but not the other. In this case, the trumped challenger suffers a levy of 1 per roll. This is in addition to any levies required by the GMC's Rebuff pool.

*Much to their chagrin, Flegel and Marthrap find themselves begging a favor of a witch, the distractingly alluring Mireer. Each attempts to Persuade her to give up her left garter, which is coveted by an archvult who is holding Bandomalio prisoner and will accept no other ransom for him. Flegel's Persuade style is Charming; Marthrap's, Obfuscatory.*

*Unfortunately for Marthrap, and unknown to both challengers, Mireer's Rebuff style is Penetrating, which trumps his Obfuscatory style. Her Rebuff pool also happens to be 11 at present.*

*Flegel will suffer a levy of 1, as accorded by her high Rebuff pool. Ouch!*

*Marthrap suffers not only that levy, but an additional 1 point from the trumping of his Persuade style, for a total of 2 points per roll. Double ouch! He'll be well advised to withdraw from the challenge as soon as the high levy becomes apparent to him.*

In other situations where one participant enjoys an edge over the other, GMs should assess one-sided levies as story logic dictates. The disparity in odds of success must be dramatic to warrant even a levy of 1. A levy of 2 is extreme; 3 indicates a contest so one-sided that the inferior challenger's defeat is practically foreordained.

GMs may assess levies based on story elements that have arisen in the course of play.

– *With the express purpose of canceling Flegel's notorious luck at the casino tables, the gambling masters of Kaiin have devised a game of chance involving the perambulations of sentient fleas. Unable to Resist Arrogance, Flegel sits down at the table, aiming to prove them wrong. Bandomalio horns in, joining the game, and making it a challenge. Since the game is built to disadvantage Flegel, the GM assesses him a 1 point, one-sided levy.*

– *Archvults subject the magicians to a spell robbing them of their ability to see round objects. Flegel manages to break the spell for himself, but not for Chagomant. Later, when he and*



*Chagomant set out to ransack the archvult's lair for IOUN stones known to be hidden there, Flegel makes a challenge of it, using their Concealment pools. Unable to see the stones (but still able to feel them and sniff out their magical auras) Chagomant suffers a 1 point, one-sided levy.*

– *Marthrap's player, Pete, has consistently portrayed him as a dainty and abstemious fellow. When challenged to an eating contest by the cheerfully gluttonous Flegel, he suffers a 1 point, one-sided levy. Later, when trapped in a cavern together, with only a few meager provisions on hand, Marthrap turns the tables, challenging Flegel to see who last the longest without eating. Now it's Flegel who suffers a 1 point, one-sided levy.*

Levies may also be based on memorable Dismal Failures and Illustrious Successes from the current session. The GM should take note of any especially entertaining or striking Dismal Failure or Illustrious Success that occurs outside of a challenge<sup>1</sup>, keeping track of the ability used and the circumstances of the result. If a past Dismal Failure might logically cause a disadvantage for one participant in

<sup>1</sup> A Dismal Failure during a challenge is punishment enough; likewise, an Illustrious Success during a challenge is already sufficiently profitable that to reward it again would constitute a grave case of over-egging the pudding.



the challenge at hand, he suffers a levy. If a past Illustrious Success might advantage a participant, his opponent suffers a levy.

– *While attempting to climb the icy, glowering face of Mount Grimute, Flegel suffers a Dismal Failure of his Athletics ability. Though he is able to levitate his way to safety, the GM rules that he wrenched his hand during the fall. Your opponent, Shirley, quietly takes note of this setback. As soon as the story allows, she engineers an opportunity for her PC, Bandomalio, to challenge Flegel to a javelin competition. With his hand impaired, the GM — her memory jogged by Shirley — assesses you a 1 point levy.*

– *Flegel uses his Driving ability to encourage a beast of burden to form an attachment to him. In his contest to tame the beast, a ring-tailed digint named Predondu, he concludes with an uncountered Illustrious Success. Armed with this advantage, he challenges Chagomant to a cart race. Because Flegel's relationship to his digint is much closer than Chagomant's, Chagomant suffers a 1 point levy.*

– *Marthrap suffers a Dismal Failure while treating a case of boils suffered by the Duke of Covelclar, resulting in a painful exacerbation of the bellicose noble's condition. Later, the arch-magicians wish to examine his daughter, who they suspect has been possessed by a witch. Marthrap challenges Flegel to see which of them can convince the Duke to permit this. His player, Pete, thinks he's being exceptionally sneaky; he's looked it up and knows that the Duke's Rebuff style, Contrary, trumps Flegel's Persuade style (Charming). So Flegel suffers a 1 point levy. You then even the odds, reminding the GM of Marthrap's earlier failure. You convince her to assess a 1 point levy against Pete as well. Both challengers enter the contest with 1 point levies against them.*

As suggested by the above examples, to lobby the GM for a levy assessment against one's opponent is entirely within the bounds of artful play. However, the adroit lobbyist knows how to state his case succinctly, without vexing emphasis. Especially when pointing out an opponent's relevant Dismal Failure, make your point in a sentence or two and let the GM think she's making the decision on her own. Once overruled, shut up quickly. That way, even when she decides against you, you'll preserve your rapport with her for the next time you need a favorable ruling. For maximum suggestibility, put your request in the form of a question:

– *"Shouldn't Flegel's past flirtation with the Marchioness*

*make it easier for him to win her over, and harder for Bandomalio?"*

– *"Do you think Chagomant's traumatic incident with the yurt hamper him as he looks for the best place to set up camp now?"*

– *"Marthrap's fear of sea snakes wouldn't make it any easier for him to concentrate on his Seamanship rolls, would it?"*

## Spoilers and Colluders

Hard as it is to believe that any player with the good taste to play **Dying Earth** could act in an unsportsmanlike manner, GMs must be prepared for the odd poltroon to gain access to their gaming tables.

Just as it is possible to select one's challenges to maximize one's chance of victory — for example, by engineering a Persuade challenge against a GMC whose Rebuff style trumps your rival's Persuade — it is also possible to initiate challenges in which one's defeat is more than usually likely. An unsportsmanlike player could act as a spoiler, deliberately seeking out and then losing challenges to a favored opponent to increase his status point total.

When a player wishes to start a challenge against an opponent in an obviously superior position, and the likely result of that challenge is to boost one opponent at another's expense, the GM should require him to justify why it makes sense from his character's point of view. If the explanation is genuinely convincing, the challenge may proceed as usual. If not, the challenge may proceed, but with the clear understanding that no status points can be gained from it.

GMs should also be wary of collusion, in which players take turns losing to one another.

The long term solution to unsportsmanlike play is to seek replacements for the problem players. Unlike more structured board or card games, a competitive roleplaying game can't be painstakingly fireproofed against cheaters and skunks. To be any fun at all, its open-ended nature requires a spirit of mutuality.

## Pitching In

You may find yourself a spectator to a challenge in which a player who's in close contention with you for the win is pounding the dickens out of a third player, and seems on the verge of reaping a bumper crop of status points from the exchange. The loser is running out of points. What to do?

You can **pitch in**, transferring points from a relevant pool to the losing participant in a contest. Usually, the ability you're transferring from will be the same one used by the contestants. Some tweaks (see *Cugel's Compendium*) and manse features allow you to spend points from one pool on another. For example, you can spend points from the Collection feature on Pedantry contests. So, in your manse, you could transfer them to the loser in a Pedantry challenge in progress.

"Loser" is defined as the player with the lowest pool when the transfer takes place, and ignores the contestants' respective expenditure levels.

To pitch in, you must be able to credibly describe to the GM the course of action you're undertaking in support of your underdog candidate. If your description seems remotely plausible, you may spend points from your pool, increasing the pool of the character you're helping. You must do so in multiples of 3. Points spent assisting another are less efficient than those spent aiding oneself. For every 3 points you spend, the recipient gains 2.

Once transferred, the pool points remain with the recipient. He can transfer them back to you by pitching in on a challenge you're losing — at the usual 3 to 2 ratio.

### Rules explanation

*When Pete had his character, Marthrap, attempt to seduce a demoness, Loretta (Bandomalio), horned in, making a challenge of it.*

*The challenge has gone on for several rounds. Bandomalio has 6 Seduction points left in his pool, and has spent only 2. Marthrap has 2 left in his pool, and has spent 6. Pete has just rolled a Dismal Failure.*

*Normally you, playing Flegel, wouldn't much care which participant wound up in the inhuman woman's six-armed embrace, but the evening's status point totals tell a different tale. You're in the lead with 33 points; Bandomalio's player, Loretta, nips at your heels with 29. Pete, Marthrap's player, is hopelessly out of contention, with 8 points. If permitted to win, Loretta's status point total will shoot up to at least 35 points, putting her in the lead, and you in second place!*

*You spend 6 points from your Seduction pool; Marthrap gains 4 points, bringing his pool to 6. He buys off his Dismal Failure, and proceeds to roll an Illustrious Success to replace it with. The boon from the Illustrious Success brings his Seduction pool up to 8.*

*Loretta spends 3 points to nullify that Illustrious Success. Her pool is now 3.*

*Pete performs the forced reroll, hanging on with a Hair's-Breadth Success.*

*It's now Loretta's roll, and her turn to get a Dismal Failure. With only 3 points left, she can't spend her way out of this — it would bring her to 0, and she'd lose anyway. Loretta spent 5 Seduction points during the contest, so Pete gets 5 status, bringing him up to 13 points — still far from yours. Loretta remains behind you, in second place, and the clock is ticking in your favor. Looks like those 6 Seduction points paid off!*

### Whats happening

*Marthrap and Bandomalio are both attempting to seduce a curvaceous demon with vermillion skin, unaware that she is the entity who devoured Rhialto's chug.*

*Bandomalio's muscular charms have Marthrap's soggy versifying on the run.*

*The demoness bats her fiery eyelashes at Bandomalio. Flegel begins to tootle on his piccolo, playing a romantic tune popular during Marthrap's distant youth. These melancholy strains awaken in Marthrap a new fervor; he nestles boldly into the fetching demon's side. Pleased by his boldness, she coos delightedly.*

*Suddenly recovering her dignity, the demoness shoves Marthrap back.*

*Marthrap reacts with a calculatedly wounded look, which slightly thaws the cockles of the demoness' scaly heart.*

*Bandomalio makes one last, desperate attempt to pitch woo, getting down on one knee before her. Alas, his posture reminds her of an infernal ex-lover of special noxiousness, and she leaps away from him and into Marthrap's lap.*

## Wallops and Challenges

You may Wallop an opponent during a challenge, but by choosing to do so you convert the challenge into a mere contest. You win the contest, but gain no status points for it. Since Wallops are based on your rating rather than your pool (DERPG p. 33), you can use them as an out when you would otherwise lose a challenge.

*Although you are infinitely more Pedantic than the devil-may-care Bandomalio, he is currently besting you in a challenge of Pedantry. Your rating in the ability is 20; his, a mere 8, giving you much more than the 5-point margin necessary to Wallop him. Even so, in the current challenge, you find yourself down to 6 points, with 14 in the stake, compared to his 7 points, with 2 in the stake. Although you could still conceivably win, the disparity in stakes is too high to bear. You don't want his player, Shirley, getting her hands on 14+ status points.*

*You spend 5 points from your Pedantry pool, bringing your pool down to an exceedingly vulnerable 1 point. But you end the contest. Flegel is considered the winner of the debate. No status points are exchanged.*

## Initiative and Challenges

Typically the participant making the challenge rolls first. When a character horns in, however, his opponent rolls first. In the event of a dispute over who acts first, use the initiative rules: DERPG p. 33-34. Pool points spent to reroll initiative ties go into the stake of the rerolling player, and stand to be won by their opponent(s).

## Three Or More Participants

A challenge involving three or more participants is called a free-for-all. The rules for a free-for-all challenge differ from the usual free-for-all rules as detailed on DERPG p. 36. Here, the challenge plays out as a series of elimination rounds. The last character standing collects the stakes of all losing or conceding contestants.

Start with initiative determination (DERPG p. 33-34.) Here the advantage comes in going last, so the better your initiative result, the later you start. You may not hold off during a free-for-all challenge.

During the first round, each player rolls in that reversed initiative order. You may, as usual, pay to reroll any result, with Dismal Failures docking you an immediate 2 point levy and costing 3 points to reroll. During an opponent's turn you may pay the usual 3 points to force the reroll of any Illustrious Success. All points you spend go into your stake, as they would in any other challenge.

A certain amount of hemming and hawing may ensue when deciding which active participant pays to nullify an opponent's Illustrious Success.

The GM gives each participant a few seconds to decide what they want to do. Each secretly writes his answer, **YES** to nullify or **NO** to decline, on a scrap of paper. Then the participants reveal their answers, in initiative order. The first player to turn up a **YES** answer pays for the nullification.

Any contestant dropping to 0 points in the relevant pool is immediately eliminated. All points spent so far by that contestant go into the general kitty, to be awarded to the contest's eventual winner, should there be one.

If, at the end of any round, all participants end on a Dismal Failure they cannot or will not pay to reroll, the challenge ends in catastrophe for all concerned. None of the characters achieve the desired aim. No one gets any status points.

If, at the end of any round, all participants end on Failures they can't or won't buy off, the challenge ends in failure. None of the characters achieve the desired aim; no one gets any status points. Characters who ended on Dismal Failures suffer especially deleterious consequences.

If all characters end a round with Illustrious Successes, each gets closer to ultimate success in a dramatic and interesting way. They collect their usual 2-point boons for each Illustrious Success. The challenge continues with all current participants; a new round begins.

If all characters end on non-Illustrious Successes, the challenge continues with all current participants. A new round begins.

More typically, a round will conclude with varying results for the participants.

If you end with a Failure of any kind, you are eliminated from the challenge. All of your current stake points go into the general kitty and will be awarded to the eventual winner.

If only one character ends a round with an Illustrious Success, that character wins the challenge, achieves the aim of the contest, and collects the accumulated stakes of all other participants.

If more than one character ends a round with an Illustrious Success, those characters remain in the challenge, and all others are eliminated. The stakes of



eliminated players remain up for grabs; the challenge continues and a new round begins.

If a round ends with no Illustrious Successes, all players who have scored Hair's-Breadth and Prosaic Successes remain in the contest. All Failures are eliminated; their stakes remain up for grabs. The challenge continues; a new round begins.

If only one character ends a round with an Success of any kind, that character wins the challenge, achieves the aim of the contest, and collects the accumulated stakes of all other participants.

Because they allow for the collection of stakes from multiple opponents, free-for-all challenges are extremely lucrative for the winners — and confront the losers with a punishing gap in overall status point totals. They are not to be entered lightly.

*All of the players want to track the dread archvengt Jiturac to his unknown extradimensional lair. The GM allows this as a free-for-all challenge of the Tracking ability. If one player succeeds, Jiturac's hideout will be found. If all fail, its location will remain mysterious.*

*Your Tracking pool is highest, at 12, so Flegel goes last. Marthrap and Bandomalio each have 10 point Tracking pools, so they roll Initiative dice to see who takes precedence. Marthrap gets an Illustrious Success; Bandomalio, an Exasperating Failure. Marthrap goes second last; he also applies the usual 2-point boon from his Illustrious Success to his Tracking pool, increasing it to 12. Bandomalio will go second. Chagomant, with the lowest Tracking pool total, at 8, will go first.*

#### Round One

Chagomant's turn: Chagomant rolls a Quotidian Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. This early in the round, it is not clear whether an Illustrious Success will be required in order to win or advance to the next round. Playing conservatively, Loretta stands pat, with only 1 point in her stake.

Bandomalio's turn: Bandomalio scores a Prosaic Success on his first time out, and stands pat, with a stake of 0.

Marthrap's turn: Marthrap scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. Under other circumstances, he might reroll in hopes of getting an Illustrious Success and knocking Chagomant and Bandomalio out of the contest. But with only 1 point in

*the total kitty, his player, Pete, reasons that the risk outweighs the reward. If he doesn't get an Illustrious Success, he'll just be adding to the stake for others. If he does, there's not much to win. He mirrors the caution of his predecessor and stands pat.*

Flegel's turn: You get a Quotidian Failure, paying 1 to reroll. You get another, and pay 1 to reroll that. You get a Prosaic Success, deciding to leave well enough alone, and stand pat.

Round one ends with non-Illustrious Successes for all. No one is eliminated. A new round begins.

#### Round Two

Chagomant's turn: Chagomant gets a Prosaic Success on his first roll. With only 2 points available for her to win, Loretta sticks with her cautious play and stands pat.

Bandomalio's turn: Bandomalio leads with an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and stands pat.

Marthrap's turn: Marthrap leads with a Hair's-Breadth Success. His opponents' combined stake of 4 still doesn't justify a risky reroll in hopes of nailing down an Illustrious Success, so Pete passes.

Flegel's turn: You lead with a Prosaic Success.

Round one ends with non-Illustrious Successes for all. No one is eliminated. A new round begins.

#### Round Three

Chagomant's turn: A Hair's-Breadth Success for Chagomant. Loretta passes.

Bandomalio's turn: Another round, another Quotidian Failure to start. Shirley pays 1, rerolls, gets a Prosaic Success, and stands pat.

Marthrap's turn: Marthrap leads with an Exasperating Failure, spending his first Tracking points of the challenge to turn it into a Dismal Failure! Uh-oh! He suffers the automatic 2-point levy that any Dismal Failure brings, dropping his pool to 9 and upping his stake to 3. He pays 3 to reroll. Now his pool and stake stand at 6 and 6. Finally, with blood in the water, this challenge should take off.

Marthrap surges back with an Illustrious Success. His pool regains 2 points from the standard boon.





*Does anyone want to pay to nullify? Chagomant and Bandomalio, with mere Successes, will be knocked out if they don't. Flegel's decision depends on an unknown variable: he could still score an Illustrious Success himself this round. He could get paid to stay in the round, rather than having to pay. Or maybe not. Then there's the whole game theory aspect of it; will Loretta or Shirley come through for him and save him the cost? What to do?*

*You, Shirley, and Loretta think it out for a minute and secretly write down your answers.*

*Loretta is first in initiative order and therefore first to reveal her answer. She cheaped out, writing NO.*

*Then Shirley turns up her answer: YES. With Marthrap's 6-point stake, the challenge is getting lucrative, and she's willing to pay to keep it going. She pays 3 points; Bandomalio's pool drops 5, and her stake to 5 as well.*

*You breathe a sigh of relief. Your answer was YES, too. Now, you not only get the benefit without paying for it, but see your potential winnings shoot up another 3 points, to a total of 12.*

*Marthrap must reroll. A Dismal Failure! His pool immediately falls by 2; his stake is now 8. Unwilling to cut his losses, Pete charges ahead, paying 3 to reroll. With only 3 left in his pool, he can't withstand another Dismal Failure...*

*Which he gets! O pain, o agony! Pete automatically loses another 2 points to the kitty, and will be eliminated from the challenge at round's end.*

*Flegel's turn: You lead with a Prosaic Success. If you can get an Illustrious Success, you win the whole ball of wax, grabbing up 19 status points. But both Shirley and Loretta can afford to nullify, and your pool is higher than either of theirs. You decide to sit on your superior position and wait for them to fail.*

*Marthrap's eliminated. The rest of you proceed to the next round.*

#### Round Four

*Chagomant's turn: Chagomant rolls an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets a Hair's-Breadth Success, and stands pat.*

*Bandomalio's turn: Shirley winces as she rolls a Dismal Failure. The automatic 2-point levy drops her pool to 3 and ups her stake to 7. If she spent the 3 points to reroll, she'd drop to 0, and be eliminated anyway.*

*Flegel's turn: You start with a Hair's-Breadth Success. But with 22 status ready for the taking, it's time to pull out all the stops. You pay 1 to reroll, hoping for an Illustrious Success. Your pool is now at 9, your stake a piddling 3. You get another Hair's-Breadth Success, pay 1 to reroll that, and, going from mediocre to pathetic, a Quotidian Failure. You pay 1 to reroll, netting another Hair's-Breadth Success. You decide to risk it one last time, paying another point for another Hair's-Breadth Success. You stand pat, having spent handsomely, only to increase the size of Loretta's potential prize.*

*Bandomalio's out. It's down to you and Chagomant.*

#### Round Five

*Chagomant's turn: Chagomant rolls a Hair's-Breadth Success and gets greedy. Loretta pays 1 to reroll, dropping her pool to 5 and pumping her stake up to 3. Fortune grimaces at her, delivering a Dismal Failure! Her pool drops to 3. Now she's in the same no-win position that sank Shirley last round — if she pays the 3, her pool hits 0, and she's instantly eliminated.*

*Flegel's turn: Everyone else has lost, but you still have to score a success to claim the win. Otherwise, it will be a null result: no one will find the archvult, and you'll get 0 status points instead of 27.*

*W'boo-boo! You get an Illustrious Success! Your Tracking pool jumps back to 8, you collect a whopping 27 status, and you've cornered that underhanded archvult in his stinking lair, to boot!*

For clarity's sake, the above example includes only the rules interactions.

Because free-for-all challenges are more complicated, confronting players with an expanded range of strategic choices, GMs may wish to run a group's first few free-for-alls as rules-only exercises. Once a challenge is resolved, your GM can provide a brief, retroactive summary of what happened in the game reality. After you've acquired a basic grounding in the rules, you can go back to narrating the story consequences of rules events as they happen. Here's the game world narration to go with the rules outcomes from the example above.

*All four arch-magicians are attempting to track Jiturac the archvult to his hidden lair.*

#### Round One

*Chagomant engages his astral senses to detect the archvult. He is momentarily distracted by the intoxicating smell of*



mountain fennel (*Quotidian Failure*) then catches the slimmest whiff of Jiturac's telltale brimstone stench (*Hair's-Breadth Success*). His hunt is on! Bandomalio employs an ephemeral creature known as a polteion to do his Tracking for him. The airborne, barnacle-like entity immediately homes in on Jiturac's energy signature (*Prosaic Success*). Bandomalio follows, crunching contentedly on the watercress sandwiches his manservant has packed for the excursion.

Marthrap relies on tried and true mundane tracking methods. Starting from Jiturac's last known physical location, on an ivy-strewn hillside near Alмеры, he spots the merest traces of the archvaul's horseshoe-shaped footprints (*Hair's-Breadth Success*). He follows them, astride a mermelant.

Flegel enters a trance state to free his senses from the constraints of linear time. He is interrupted by the banging and crashing of carpenters working on his manse (*Quotidian Failure*), and then realizes that the herbal tea his factotum has provided him contains an improper balance of sense-altering stimulants (a second *Quotidian Failure*). Finally he achieves his trance, and perceives the spot where Jiturac will be one year from now — in a marshy prison below Marthrap's manse! Now all Flegel has to do is dilate the time scale of his vision, working backwards from there to where Jiturac is now.

### Round Two

Chagomant strolls through the hills of Alмеры, his astral nostrils still locked onto Jiturac's feto. (*Prosaic Success*)

Bandomalio's tracking creature, an incorrigible vegetarian, stops to beg for a morsel of his sandwich (*Exasperating Failure*). Scolding it curthly, Bandomalio gets it back on track, though it continues to sulk and whine. (*Hair's-Breadth Success*)

Marthrap continues to puzzle his way through Jiturac's well-hidden mundane tracks.

Flegel beholds Jiturac's trial before the conclave (*Prosaic Success*). He continues to reverse the temporal polarity of his vision.

### Round Three

An array of tantalizing odors from a nearby food fair distract Chagomant's senses, but he persists, Jiturac's odor growing ever so slightly nearer with each difficult footstep (*Hair's-Breadth Success*). Bandomalio grows increasingly vexed as the polteion stops once more to beg for cress. (*Exasperating Failure*) Invoking the code of ethics of the polteion race, Bandomalio convinces the creature to recommence his smelling activities, which he does, sulkily. (*Hair's-Breadth Success*.)

As he continues his mundane tramp through the woods,

Marthrap's foot becomes entangled in a root (*Exasperating Failure*). Struggling to free himself, he tumbles and bounces down a rocky slope. (*Dismal Failure*.) Though nearly knocked unconscious by the fall, Marthrap exults in delight when he sees where he's landed — near a well-hidden but obvious dimensional portal, into which Jiturac's misshapen tracks clearly skitter. (Player nullifies *Dismal Failure*, rolls an *Illustrious Success* to replace it.) Marthrap bounds into the portal, only to faint dead away — the fall having taken more out of him than he realized. (Opponent nullifies *Illustrious Success*, player gets *Dismal Failure* instead.)

In his vision, Flegel watches himself lead Jiturac, beld in astral fetters, through a coruscating veil of dimensional barriers (*Prosaic Success*.) He's getting closer to the crucial moment, when he'll see where Jiturac will be before this happens.



### Round Four

Chagomant sniffs out a new, powerful astral aroma, which drowns out Jiturac's (*Exasperating Failure*.) Bounding down a rocky slope, he beholds the crumpled form of Marthrap, lying on the edge of a dimensional portal, through which Jiturac surely exited. Against his better judgement, Chagomant, overcome by collegial feeling, wastes crucial moments propping Marthrap up on a chair, under a tasteful canopy. (*Hair's-Breadth Success*.)

Bandomalio blinks in fury as he glances down to catch his polteion nibbling on his cache of sandwiches. He seizes

*the creature in his meaty paw, intending only to squeeze it into obedience. Feeling a damp ichor in his hand, he opens his palm — to see that he has intemperately slain his useful tracking entity (Dismal Failure.) Summoning a new one will take too long — Bandomalio is out of the race.*

*Sending his mind further back in time, toward the present, Flegel sees the archvult in his clammy lair, but can't achieve clarity as to its location. (Hair's-Breadth Success.) He pushes himself harder, and is able to zoom out to behold a foggy crag in the middle of a cerulean haze. (Hair's-Breadth Success) Still lacking a concrete location, Flegel grits his teeth and shudders. The vision wavers and disappears. (Quotidian Failure) Flegel relaxes. The crag reasserts itself in his vision. (Hair's-Breadth Success) He tries again for a more distant view and sense of orientation, but achieves only a different, but similarly unrevealing, angle of the crag. (Hair's-Breadth Success.)*

### Round Five

*Chagomant steps through the portal, and is buffeted by the usual cellular discomposure accompanying a transition between dimensions. (Hair's-Breadth Success) Rather than stop and orient himself, Chagomant forges greedily onwards — and is unable to maintain his footing when pelted by a cosmic wind. He winds up in a forlorn and dingy dimension, inhabited only by the odd self-pitying amphibian. (Dismal Failure.)*

*Flegel's vision achieves a new resolution: he beholds himself enclosing Jiturac in a bubble of impenetrable force. Realizing that the vision marks out the present moment, Flegel takes advantage of the momentary hiccup in time, riding the paradox to Jiturac's lair, where he does indeed ensnare him. (Illustrious Success) The dramatic conclusion to this extraordinary feat will give Flegel much to brag about when the conclave convenes to convict the archvult.*

Don't be daunted by the apparent length of these examples. The space required to fully recount any game action in prose form makes it seem both more complex and time-consuming than it really is. Any experienced Dying Earth player will find the free-for-all challenge a mere variation on concepts they mastered long ago.

## Losing Status Points

GMs are permitted to invoke status point penalties against players whose characters' actions grossly violate the norms expected of arch-magicians.

The culture of the conclave imposes certain unspoken rules of conduct; certain behaviors are so gauche as to be unthinkable. Chief among these is an unwavering

## Mundane Abilities Gone Wild

In the example of story action from the free-for-all challenge, you'll note that the players and GM describe even the results of their Tracking rolls in outlandish, supernatural terms. While Marthrap stubbornly keeps his activities on the mundane plane, Chagomant uses extrasensory smell, Bandomalio employs an invented servitor entity, and Flegel induces reverse-temporal visions.

Arch-magicians can do virtually anything. When they act, they'll use the most stylish, impressive, and perhaps lazy means at their infinite disposal. Why pilot a ship yourself when you can summon an entity to do it for you, allowing you to sup your tea and engage in a leisurely debate with your fellows?

No matter what the ability, GMs should always permit players to describe their action attempts in magical terms. Your GM will allow you to invent creatures, dimensions, spells and laws of metaphysics as required. When she describes the results of your actions, she'll work to inspire you by using similar fantastic details. GMC arch-magicians will also use their mundane abilities in arcane ways, providing further examples.

One of the major challenges of Rhialto-level play is in adjusting your mindset. You are used to being a limited character who can do only a small handful of things. Your GM is likewise accustomed to maintaining the limitations that define you. In Rhialto play, you can try just about anything. You may still fail, especially when contesting against others of similar power. But the methods you use when you take action are bounded only by your imagination — so you might as well make them as outlandishly amusing as possible.

prohibition against attempting to harm one's colleagues. No arch-magician would ever attempt to injure another, whether by spellcasting, the actions of sandestins or other lackeys, or — most inconceivable of all — the use of physical force. How shabby and puerile that would be! Not for aeons has such a thing ever happened within the conclave. And that incident is so shameful that it is never spoken of.

Any action that directly causes a colleague to make a Health roll counts as an attempt to do physical harm



to another arch-magician. Such attempts, no matter how jocular the circumstances, causes the GM to levy a penalty of 50 status points against you. If the attack is conducted with a weapon, the bare hands, or any other variety of brute force, the penalty is 75 status points. If, as is likely, you do not have enough status points to cover the cost of this penalty, the GM takes the difference between the penalty and your status point total and divides the result by the number of other players taking part in the current session. After discarding remainders, she gives each other player a number of status points equal to the result. Then she reduces your status point total to 0.

(There is no such thing as a negative status point; your status point total may never be less than 0.)

*In a fit of pique, your character, Flegel, instructs his sandestin to drop Marthrop into a vat of boiling fish oil. As is always the case with such requests, the sandestin obeys its rules of professional courtesy and refuses to make any attempt against someone protected by another sandestin.*

*(Not to mention, in possession of a terrifying chug.)*

*The mere fact that the attempt was aborted is immaterial. For such a flagrant violation of arch-magicianly thought, the GM docks you 50 status points.*

*At the time of this shocking lapse, you are in second place, with 24 status points. Shirley is in first, with 27 points. Loretta has 14 points; Pete lags in last place with 7.*

*Your deficit is  $(50 - 24) = 26$  points. There are three other players, so the GM divides this by 3, for a result of 9.666. Dropping the remainder, she gives 9 points to each other player. Your total drops to 0. The new point score is as follows: Shirley 36, Loretta 23, Pete 16, and yourself, a pitiful 0.*

(Your GM might be tempted to change this rule when the victim of your disgraceful assault is another PC, and award the entire surplus to that player. We recommend against this, as it raises the possibility of collusion, wherein one player attacks another's character, throwing the game to him. The rule as written preserves the difference in standing between all players, except for the offender.)

The penalty is levied by the omniscient GM. It does not matter if you manage to keep your attempt a secret from the entire universe.

An exception pertains when the object of the attack consents to it — without losing a Persuasion contest. (This is an example of an involuntary wager, as described later in this chapter.) The penalty does not apply when you and a colleague mutually agree to a contest, such as a duel, where harm is a possible result. Duels between

conclave members typically conclude at the first Health roll — or in unusually bloodthirsty circumstances, at the first wound.

## Shares

Over time, challenges will provide you with the bulk of your status points. However, you can supplement your total by collecting shares. Shares are parcels of status points awarded directly by the GM for the accomplishment of goals within the story.

## Calculating Shares

Shares are meant to serve as a secondary source of status points, with points gained from challenges the predominant factor in any evening's wins and losses. If it were the other way around, with shares as your main prize, you'd spend most of your time trying to accomplish goals that further your enlightened self interest, rather than short-sightedly one-upping your colleagues. Such behavior would be patently out of character for arch-magicians and is therefore only lightly supported by the game's reward mechanism.

The number of status points available from challenges depend on your aggressiveness, and that of your fellow players. As a result, it vary considerably from one group to another.

Points from shares must therefore be awarded in relation to this variable number.

At the end of each session, the GM makes a note of the total number of status points awarded. As the series progresses, she keeps track of the average number of status points awarded per session.

For the first session of a new series, the total points available from shares equals 25.

For all subsequent sessions, the number of points available from equals one third of the average status point total.

*It's your third session. During the first session, the total status points earned (including those from shares) was 107. The second session total was 118. The third was 121.*

*The average of these three totals is 115.*

*Thus, for the fourth session, the number of share points available is  $(115/3) = 38$ . Round to the nearest whole number.*

All else being equal, this formula results in a slight wobble; assuming a roughly equal number of points from challenges, the overall point scores will increase notably during the second session. After that the numbers even out. Do not be alarmed.



## Finding Share Awards

When planning for the evening's session, the GM chooses three or four likely scenes during which the arch-magicians can strive toward a clear goal.

If she has a closely-plotted adventure on hand, she should look for scenes in which important or flashy victories can be won.

If she is GMing in an improvisational manner, with merely a point-form notion of where the story might go, she can reserve a share award for the most noteworthy potential scenes on her list.

In either case, she should be prepared to reallocate share awards on the fly whenever the actions of the players yank the storyline in an unpredictable direction. Share awards will always be placed so that all players have some chance of gaining them. To get the number of share points provided by each scene, the GM divides the total number of available share points by X, where X equals the number of chosen scenes + 1. The biggest, most climactic scene is worth twice this number.



*Your GM plans to make share points available during the following likely scenes:*

1. *Escaping from the Whirlpool of Astral Demise (a trap laid by witches in the previous episode)*
2. *Rescuing the king from attack at the grand ball*
3. *Unmasking Princess Obduouscant as a witch*
4. *Battle in space between a PC manse and the witches' Contraponarium*

*There are 38 share points available. The number of scenes + 1 is 5. 38 divided by 5 is, (after rounding) 7. The first three scenes will be worth 7 share points apiece. The final scene is worth 14.*

## Getting Share Awards

Although share awards are tied to the achievement of collective goals, do not think that we have sunk into a sudden, soft egalitarianism. They are not split up between players. They go to the single player who, in the GM's unquestionable judgment, did the most to accomplish the goal of the scene.

To ensure proper competition, the GM announces the availability of the share award at the earliest possible moment, as soon as a scene's goal might sensibly become

apparent to the characters themselves. She describes the goal as clearly as possible, without revealing information unavailable to the characters:

- *"A share goes to the PC who does the most to get you out of the whirlpool."*
- *"A bunch tells you that your enemies are active at this event. A share award to the one who thwarts them."*
- *"Someone here must be a witch. A share award to him who unmasks her."*
- *"The most notable combatant in this battle reaps a double share award."*

After a goal is accomplished, stonily determined GMs may want to entertain lobbying efforts from players explaining why they most deserve the award for it. More delicate souls may prefer to rule without opening the floor to importuning players.

If you are permitted to lobby, be smart. Keep your arguments brief and to the point. Repeating a point, especially after the GM has dismissed it, is counterproductive in the extreme. Say your bit, shut up, and remain charming.

If the goal is not accomplished, no award is given.

Like any other status point award, points won in this manner are added immediately to one's total, and noted on the scorecard.

## Directed Shares

Certain actions always provide shares of status points. Points received in this way come from **directed shares**, and are awarded above and beyond the usual share point calculation. In a session in which many directed shares are won, the total points from shares may indeed outweigh those gained from challenges. Never fear, however: all directed shares are awarded for activities in which you thwart, belittle, humiliate or otherwise show up your fellow PCs.

A directed share is worth the same number of status points as a normal, non-climactic scene in the current adventure.

*For the session detailed in the above examples, the GM determined that the base share award for a scene was 7 points. The base award for a directed share this session is 7. Next week, if the base share award is 9, the base award for a directed share will also be 9.*

Some directed shares are worth half a share, or one and a half shares. When calculating half shares, your GM will always round up.

*You gain a share and a half for acquiring a must-have item for your collection (see p. 56) from another PC who tried to keep it from you. Tonight's base share award is 7. The GM awards you 11 points:  $7 \times 1.5 = 10.5$ , rounded up to 11.*

## Wagers

Status points may not be used as a currency. Players may not trade them between each other at will. However, subject to GM approval, players may enter into voluntary wagers, making side-bets on the outcomes of contests. Characters may also force others into involuntary wagers, by Persuading them to make a notable bet within the game world. The amount of money staked is immaterial — wealth is largely an abstraction to persons as lofty as yourself — so long as it's substantial enough to bring prestige to the winner and shame to the loser.

To provoke a transfer of status points, a wager must revolve around the outcome of a contest. The amount

## Directed Share List

### Half Share

- Gaining a must-have item (p. 56) for your collection.
- Being top interrupter at conclave — see p. 43.

### Full Share

- Gaining another PC's must-have item.
- Stealing a book from another PC's library.
- Conspiring to prevent PC who wishes to propose a motion before the conclave from doing so, by seeing to it that no one seconds his motion.
- (If points lost by opponent in challenge are less than the amount of a share) Winning an exhibition match of manse combat against a fellow — see p. 65.

### Share and a Half

- Taking a must-have item for your collection from another PC who has tried to keep it away from you.

of a wager may not exceed the value of a standard share. GMs should disallow voluntary wagers when they deem one would-be participant to be out of contention for overall victory in the current session.

Participants in a voluntary wager may agree to uneven odds, in which the status points transferred vary depending on which of them wins.

*Marthrap and Chagomant are engaged in a Gluttony contest, with Marthrap playing host, pitting his manse's Cuisine pool against Chagomant's Resist Gourmandism. Not to be left out while Pete and Loretta vie for points, you enter into a voluntary wager with Shirley. You bet on Chagomant; if he wins the challenge, Shirley has to give you 4 of her status points. Marthrap's Cuisine pool is lower than Chagomant's Resist Gourmandism, so Shirley insists that you even the odds by sweetening her potential win. After some negotiating, you agree to give her 6 points if Marthrap wins.*

*This session, a share is worth 7 status points, so the wager is legal — it does not exceed that value.*

During an involuntary wager, the successful Persuader picks the number of status points at stake. He is not obligated to sweeten the odds. If he does offer better odds to the targeted player though, and the GM feels that they make the wager fair, she may choose to place a 1-point levy on the target's Rebuff rolls.

Involuntary wagers may be pre-empted by other players. As attempts to pre-empt a challenge, the would-be wagers bid. Wherewithal points to see who gets to make the Persuade attempt.

Being a party to a challenge does not preclude you from also wagering on it with another player. However, your partner in the wager may not be the other participant in the challenge.

You may not wager on a Sudden Death challenge to resolve a tie at the session's end.

Status points are redistributed immediately after the contest in question is resolved.

*Prior to the wager, you have 23 status points; Loretta has 29. As expected, Chagomant wins the challenge, declining to gorge himself on Marthrop's resplendent victuals. You win 4 status points from her, bringing your total up to 27, and dropping hers to 25.*

## Sudden Death

If two or more players are tied for first place at the end of a session, the GM should first determine if all of the contenders are able to stay for a tie-breaker round. If not, the session is scored as a tie. It does not count toward any player's win tally for the entire series (see below.)

If all contenders are up for it, they enter a final challenge, the winner of which wins the session. If there are more than two contenders, the challenge is a free-for-all.

The GM examines all of the contenders' character sheets, looking for an ability in which their pools are the closest to one another. If no ability seems remotely equal, the GM rules that enough downtime has passed to allow a pool of her choice to refresh for all contenders. She then once more looks for an ability in which the contenders enjoy rough parity.

All else being equal, the GM chooses an ability of some relevance to the characters' current place in the story.

When inspiration falters, the default choice is always an appearance in the salons of the conclave, in which each participant attempts to paint his role in the recent adventure as more glorious than that of his fellows. This bragging contest is a joint Persuade challenge.

The GM should not apply one-sided levies to this

contest, even where logic would otherwise dictate. If the players have gotten to the tiebreaker round, mere plot considerations should not be allowed to impede their chances.

## Series Winners

Your group may wish to note not only the winner for each evening, but declare a victor for an entire series. This decision must be taken from the first session. The GM determines the length of the series in advance, choosing a number of sessions she expects it to run.

As the series continues, she maintains a running total of session victories. At the series conclusion, the player with the highest number of session victories is declared the overall winner.

The conclusion of a series need not mean the abandonment of play or the creation of all-new characters. You can run multiple series starring the same cast of characters, either consecutively, or with intervals of other game play in and around them.

This option works well for groups where all players are able to attend consistently. If your group fits the typical pattern of a few stalwarts who show up very reliably and an rotating circle of supporting players who frequently miss sessions, the stalwarts will enjoy an unfair advantage.



# The Conclave

Your success as an arch-magician will depend in large part on your success at conclave, the official meetings of the wizard's association. Nearly any matter mulled during these proceedings can yield you a rich trove of status points. When crisis looms, you can confer with your fellows to see which of you will be deputed to prevent catastrophe. You may prosecute grievances against your colleagues; if successful, you may gain not only status, but, most precious of all, their coveted IOUN stones. At the same time, you must fend off charges laid against you by arch-magicians eager to fine your IOUN stones straight into their own collections.

## Quick Contests

Major interactions at conclave take place as standard ability contests. As these debates are settled, however, bystanders may wish to interrupt, interject, and otherwise alter the flow of orderly discourse. To determine the outcomes of these verbal sallies, your GM will employ a new form of contest, the Quick Contest.

The usefulness of Quick Contests extends far beyond the conclave chamber. Your GM can use them at any time to immediately resolve minor opposition between two characters. They can and should be used in Cugel- and Turjan-level play, not only in Rhialto-level series.

## When To Use Them

Reasons for using Quick Contests include:

- *Relevance.* The action the characters are attempting isn't important enough to take up the time a full contest requires. It's a tangent which will not change the direction of the story, no matter who wins.
- *Maintaining focus.* Something more momentous and exciting is happening, and the GM wants to keep the group's attention on that turn of events.
- *Avoidance of nesting.* A contest is already underway. The GM chooses a quick contest, to avoid the confusion of nesting one contest inside another.

– *Pool preservation.* The GM may, in a spasm of uncharacteristic mercy, wish to avoid draining the characters of pool points they'll need later on when more important contests come up. Two characters may find themselves at odds in a situation where neither one would logically back down: like university professors engaged in faculty politics, Dying Earth characters rarely find the utter insignificance of an issue a deterrent to its vigorous prosecution. A quick contest allows a nod to their established characterization without undue penalty to the players.

For example, Quick Contests are useful for resolving amusing side disputes during a debate at conclave. The GM can keep the spotlight on the motion at hand, making that the primary drain of Persuade and Rebuff points, while allowing other characters to take part in the scene by resolving various Interruptions.

## Resolving Quick Contests

In a Quick Contest, two opposing characters roll once each. Rerolls are not permitted. Nor are nullifications of Illustrious Successes or Dismal Failures.

Before rolling, the characters compare their pools in the relevant ability. If the difference between pools is between 5 and 9 points, the character with the lower pool takes a penalty of 1 on the roll. If the difference is 10 or more, the character with the lower pool takes a penalty of 2.

If one character scores a success and the other does not, the successful character wins the contest and gets the desired result.

If both characters suffer failures, neither gets what he wants. If the situation does not allow a lose-lose result (as in the adjudication of an interruption at conclave, where the Preceptor must rule for or against the character bringing up a point of privilege), the character with the better result (or, in the event of a tie, higher pool) wins, but in a unsatisfying, embarrassing, or undignified manner. (For example, the Preceptor might rule in favor of one

party while insulting both.)

If both characters score different levels of success, the character with the best result wins.

If both characters score the same level of success, the character with the highest pool wins.

If both characters score the same level of success and have equal pools, the character with the highest current status point total wins. If this too is equal, the GM will resort to a drinking contest, or accept bribes of cash or merchandise.

### Examples

At conclave, Bandomalio invidiously compares your character, Flegel, to a simiode. Flegel introduces a point of privilege, demanding an apology from Bandomalio. She is already treating the motion under debate as a contest, so the GM must run this interruption as a quick contest, to avoid nesting.

Both Flegel and Bandomalio succinctly put their cases to the Preceptor, Ildefonse. Using his Persuade ability, Flegel will argue that Bandomalio's comment was insulting. Using Rebuff, Bandomalio will stoutly deny the viability of any such interpretation. (Simiodes, he explains, are quite pleasant creatures, well-groomed and possessed of near-human intelligence.)

Flegel's Persuade pool is at 8. Bandomalio's Rebuff is at 3. The difference between the two pools is 5, to Bandomalio's disadvantage. He therefore faces a 1-point penalty. Each of you then rolls a single time, with no rerolls or nullifications.

**Example A : Success vs. Failure.** You get a Prosaic Success. Bandomalio's player, Shirley, rolls a 4; after applying a 1-point penalty, this becomes an Exasperating Failure. You win the quick contest; Ildefonse rules that Bandomalio did indeed insult Flegel, and must either retract the comment, or apologize for it.

**Example B : Success vs. Success.** You get a Hair's-Breadth Success. Bandomalio's player, Shirley, rolls a 6; after applying a 1-point penalty, this becomes a Prosaic Success. You lose the quick contest; Ildefonse agrees that simiodes have many fine qualities, and that Bandomalio's comment could easily be construed as a compliment.

**Example C : Equal Successes.** You score a Hair's-Breadth Success. Bandomalio's player, Shirley, rolls a 5; after applying a 1-point penalty,

this becomes a Hair's-Breadth Success, too. To see who wins, the GM compares your current pools: your Persuade of 8 is higher than Bandomalio's Rebuff of 3. Ildefonse rules in your favor.

**Example D : Failure vs. Failure:** You score an Exasperating Failure. Bandomalio's player, Shirley, rolls a 2; after applying a 1-point penalty, this becomes a Dismal Failure.

If this were a situation where both contestants could conceivably lose — an attempt to catch an escaping drandlet, let's say — neither would catch the scampering creature.

But here in the conclave, Ildefonse must rule one way or the other. Though by no means enviable, your result *is* somewhat less pitiful than Shirley's... Ildefonse declares your point of privilege valid. However, he goes on to admonish you. Bandomalio's fault, he says, did not justify the intemperance of your response. He revokes your right to make further points of privilege for the remainder of the proceedings.

## The Preceptor

The conclave's chairman is called the Preceptor. By tradition, the leader of the current arch-magician's conclave is the florid-faced wizard Ildefonse (DERPG p. 156.) He is qualified for the post by his bland demeanor and ability to project a sense of fairness and equability. Detractors might say that Ildefonse's fairness is an illusion, brought about by his tendency to sway in the wind, subtly supporting whatever the consensus desire of the conclave appears to be at any given moment. Others argue that he is too close to the impudent Rhialto. This charge is belied by Ildefonse's readiness to rule against Rhialto whenever there seems to be a personal benefit in it for him.

Ildefonse's authority over the group is questionable. He acts more as a moderator and facilitator than commander. It is difficult, in fact, to imagine anyone wielding direct command over a covey of willful and obstreperous arch-magicians. Some deny him even his nominal power. In times of relative quiet, some members of the association maintain that the organization has become defunct, and that Ildefonse is therefore merely one who has acted as Preceptor in times past. When threats trouble the sleep of arch-magicians, though, a conclave is quickly convened and Ildefonse's



resumption of the chairmanship taken for granted.

Ildefonse's long-standing occupation of the chairman's seat does provide him a measure of residual sway over the conclave. Once per session, he may gain a levy of 1 in a contest to Persuade another conclave member. He gets the levy only when trying to convince a member to carry out the will of the association, preferably as expressed by a carried motion.

The Preceptor serves at the pleasure of the membership. Ildefonse has done so for many centuries, so long that members can barely remember anyone else taking the role. Still, he could presumably be unseated after a non-confidence vote by the assembled membership. (It is perhaps the case that a more rigorous procedure for replacing the Preceptor appears somewhere in the Blue Principles — see below — but, as of the start of your series, no one can quite recall such niggling details.)

## The Rules

The rules governing the conclave fall into two categories, the high and the low. The association's constitution is the Monstrament, also known as the Blue Principles.

These great laws of the organization are flouted at one's peril. At the same time, they are poorly remembered, and — due to the aforementioned peril — invoked only rarely. The petty rules of the conclave are its by-laws. These can be easily altered by motions before the conclave.

## The Monstrament

Elsewhere in this text and in other DERPG publications, we have asserted that arch-magicians do not harm each other because violence between persons of such lofty repute would be unthinkable gauche. In other words, we have argued that their restraint in dealing with one another is a matter of social convention. We now admit that this is a flattering fiction to which the wise arch-magician is careful to subscribe. Although it is considered coarse to admit it, the

harmony of the conclave is rigorously enforced, by the direst measures imaginable. Before the set of rules formally known as the Monstrament, and colloquially referred to as the Blue Principles, were adopted, unfortunate bouts of aggression did break out between the magicians of the 21<sup>st</sup> aeon. It serves as a code of conduct to which all members must adhere, on pain of instantaneous and irreversible obliteration. The Monstrament was engraved on a blue prism and secreted in a crypt buried deep in the rocky fissure called Fader's Waft.

Given that they can be annihilated for breaking them, you would think that each member of the conclave would know the terms of the Monstrament inside and out. Such is not the case. They created the Monstrament. They are expected to maintain copies of the rules in pristine condition in all of their manses. Yet over the years they have forgotten its contents, which are doubtless dull and full of lengthy subclauses, and have nearly to a man misplaced their certified copies of the text.

Therefore they conduct their business largely through by-laws, which may be amended or flouted at will, and hope never to be forced to resort to the Monstrament. What is well remembered about it is the broad leeway it gives

to its supernatural adjudicator. This being may dish out punishments not only for the narrow offense placed before it, but for any and all other violations of the code it might happen to sense. Depending on whether your series is set before or after the events of the story *Fader's Waft*, the Monstrament is interpreted either by a embittered imprisoned sandestin named Sarsem. The adjudicator's home-cum-prison is a tiny shell impervious to outside influences, known as the Blue Egg. The force of his edicts is carried out by the Wiih, a mindless denizen of the Ninth Dimension. On the adjudicator's command, the Wiih may conclusively and utterly destroy any arch-magician. For rules purposes, the Wiih is treated as an impersonal cosmic force — see p. 119. In other words, if it is ordered to kill you, you are dead. Worse than dead<sup>1</sup>. It is not Persuadable; no die roll will save you. There



<sup>1</sup> Believe us, you are better off not knowing the details.



is one way to be safe from the Wiih: never do anything that would cause the adjudicator to rule against you.

To demand redress from The Monstrament is therefore to risk destruction oneself. No arch-magician wants to go to Fader's Waft.

Not even the adjudicator is above the Blue Principles; should he prove uncooperative, the Wiih can also be used to threaten him.

The Monstrament itself is a closely-written document of numbered clauses, lettered paragraphs, sections and sub-sections. Much careful work went into its production, by the very individuals who have now forgotten its contents and hope to have nothing to do with it.

To preserve in you the ignorance necessary to accurately play an arch-magician, we will not reproduce the Monstrament in its entirety. The following paraphrases and excerpt convey its tone.

The opening passage of the Monstrament is the Precursive Manifesto, which outlines the spirit in which the document is to be interpreted. Like the main body of the text, the Precursive Manifesto is divided into lettered Paragraphs. Perhaps the most confusing to its would-be interpreters is Paragraph C, which holds that no one may hold one section of the Monstrament above any other.

Section 2 is of overweening importance to arch-magicians forced to appear at Fader's Waft: it lays out the various crimes a member may be charged with, one crime per paragraph.

Amid the offenses listed in Section 2's Paragraph A, entitled Treasonable Acts, is the following: "Any person who knowingly and purposefully alters, mutilates, detroys or secretes the Blue Principles or any copy thereof is guilty of a crime, and likewise in equal measure his conspirators, punishable by the measures described in Schedule D. If said acts are committed in the progress of an unlawful act, or for unlawful purposes, the penalties shall be those described in Schedule G."

Paragraph K explains that the Preceptor is held to a higher standard than ordinary members. He can be charged with the offense of enhanced dereliction.

Punishments are ranked by Schedule. Schedule A crimes require only stern admonishment.

The direst are crimes listed under Schedule H, which call for the convicted to be expunged. A surprising number of crimes appear under Schedule H.

Today Ildefonse and company may regret the fit of zeal that led them to construct such a draconian document. However, they would never voice such complaints, because to do so would be to commit a Schedule F crime under the terms of Section 2, Paragraph B.

While engaged in splendid oration, they tend to disclaim their own role in the formulation of the Blue Principles. Instead they cite as their philosophical basis the stern and direct admonitions of the great Phandaal.

## By-Laws

Though they're sagaciously hesitant to alter the Blue Principles, association members may tinker boldly with its by-laws. This lesser set of rules, governing the conclave's day-to-day operations, are enforced more by mutual consent than by the threat of disembowelment by an extra-planar entity. Informal as they are, these rules and traditions may be altered by the passage of motions, which then become by-laws. These by-laws must be enforced by the preceptor, except when contradicted by the Monstrament.

By-laws govern such petty matters as the following:

- The protocol for calling a conclave.
- The rules of order, as laid out in this chapter.
- The venue for conclaves: currently Ildefonse's manse, Boumergarth.
- The comforts the host must extend to conclave attendees. (This is a matter of perpetual contention, as members strive to increase the quality of viands and vintages served during breaks, while Ildefonse fights a valiant rearguard action to contain costs and strain on his staff.)
- The identity of the Preceptor. (In truth, Ildefonse's position is not currently determined by an association by-law, although most members mistakenly believe that it is. Depending on whose faded recollections you depend on, he either serves by tradition alone, or is made Preceptor for life by the terms of the Blue Principles. Whatever the legalisms might be, no one has tried to unseat him for many hundreds of years. The reasons for this surprising lack of ambition are two-fold. First, the magicians

fear the infighting that might erupt if Ildefonse's role were put to a serious challenge. Second, no one wants to be the one who has to supply the long list of exotic treats specified by the by-laws.)

## By-Laws At Start Of Play

If we wanted to bore you all senseless, we could provide a complete list of organization by-laws, which all players would have to master in order to prosper during conclave scenes.

It's much more fun, though, to allow each group to create its own by-laws during play.

Assume that any rule of order laid out in this chapter is expressed as a by-law.

Other than that, all petty matters of procedure are up for grabs. If you want a particular by-law to exist, just announce that it does, as you would when you make up any bit of backstory about your character during play.

When you do this, your character is not creating a by-law on the spot. He is simply referring to a longstanding fact. The characters have known about it forever, even if it's news to the players.

Unlike the various Blue Principles, which appear in conveniently numbered sections, sub-sections, and schedules, the more fluid by-laws are typically described with flowing, flowery titles similar to those of spells and scholarly tomes. When you devise a by-law, give it a suitably prolix and/or evocative name, such as:

- The By-Law of Subterranean Perambulation
- The Tenth Rule of Moisture
- The Regulation of Regretful Equability
- Prevonder's Amended Forfeiture Requirement
- The By-Law of Too Much Salt
- The Hypostatis Protocol

The GM must approve any such additions to her version of the Dying Earth setting. She should be as permissive as possible, rejecting your on-the-spot background details only in the following cases:

- They directly contradict the rules of order seen in this chapter.
- They directly contradict a by-law established in a previous session.

– They prevent her from introducing a planned plot development in the current episode.

– They are too central to the governance of the conclave, and instead should be covered in the Blue Principles. (Never fear, though: you can add to your series' version of the Blue Principles in similar fashion. However, once established, these rules cannot be overturned by a mere motion before the conclave.)

If the GM raises no objection to your suggested by-law, you must still pass the gauntlet represented by your fellow players. Rhialto-level play being what it is, your by-law has probably been devised to outmaneuver another player<sup>1</sup>. To counter your suggestion, substituting one of his own, a rival player need merely speak up, in character, correcting your obvious and lamentable error.

*A conclave scene is in progress. You, speaking in character as Flegel, say "Marthrap has rudely proceeded the rest of us into a state of pleasant intoxication. According to the By-Law of Salubrious Inebriation, he must therefore supply us with a quantity of alcohol we need to catch up to him. I volunteer to transport myself to his wine cellars, where I will select vintages of appropriate quality."*

*Marthrap's player, Pete, isn't about to let you raid his storehouse. "Ahem," he says, in character. "First, I am merely suffering from a minor case of the grippe, and categorically deny any inebriety. Second, Flegel misremembers the provisions of the By-Law of Salubrious Inebriation, which instead call for any member who rudely imputes drunkenness to another to supply the best contents of his own cellar, so that the question may be rendered moot through a program of determined tippling."*

It is possible that the objecting player's version will contradict the rules of order, a previously established by-law, or should more properly be a Blue Principle, even though your original did not. If this is the case, the GM will suggest an amendment that achieves the objector's aims without violating the parameters for by-law creation. If more than one character wishes to object, use the initiative rules to see which one gets to go. The relevant ability is Pedantry.

Once your suggestion and the objector's alternate have been approved by the GM, you enter into a Pedantry vs. Pedantry contest to determine which of you correctly recalls the by-law. Remember, the characters aren't creating a new

<sup>1</sup> And if it isn't, it should be.





regulation; they're struggling to convince Ildefonse that their memory of an existing one is correct. Where possible, the GM should allow this to unfold as a full challenge. If the by-law dispute occurs within another contest, or the conclave scene has dragged on to the evident boredom of the rest of the group, she may make it a Quick Contest instead.

When the winner is determined, that character's memory of the by-law is deemed correct. The GM — or another player designated as record keeper — jots down the title of the by-law and its contents. From this point forward, the by-law is considered active and established. Now it can be altered only with a motion at the conclave to amend or repeal it. In addition to any stakes he may claim, and the pleasure of being proved right, the victorious character gets his way. The Preceptor not only accepts his version of the rule, but grants him whatever advantage he sought either by bringing it up, or challenging the recollection of the character who originally mentioned it.

*If you win the contest, your memory of the By-Law of Salubrious Inebriation turns out to be correct. Not only that, but Ildefonse allows you to conduct the raid on*

*Marthrop's cellars — even though this added advantage goes beyond the letter of the regulation. If you lose, Marthrop's memory is correct, and he gets to strip your wine collection of its rarest bottles.*

## Interpretation of By-Laws

While the association as a whole passes by-laws, the execution of these rules remains the domain of the Preceptor.

When two by-laws seem to be in conflict, the Preceptor decides how to reconcile them. He may decide to honor the older by-law as possessing a longer provenance, or uphold the newer one as representing the most evolved will of the conclave. The Preceptor may split the difference, attempting to fuse the two regulations into one, or picking and choosing clauses from both. In the final analysis, you can expect the Preceptor to conform to Abzier's First Axiom of Contingent Logic: he will arrive first at his desired outcome, then work backwards to find the most suitable rationalization to buttress it.

Members finding themselves on the wrong side of Abzier's Axiom may wish to appeal the Preceptor's ruling on any by-law. Naturally they will be opposed by those who stand to gain from the ruling as it stands. In an important circumstance, where the appeal might serve as the center of a fun and engaging scene, the GM may choose to resolve this with a standard contest. If the appeal arises from a niggling side issue, a Quick Contest will suffice. The appellant argues with Persuade; a representative for the status quo opposes with Rebuff.

Ildefonse allows no concept so musty as consistency to mar the shining wisdom of his rulings. By choosing to privilege by-law A over by-law B on one occasion, he is by no means setting a precedent. He will assemble an entire new logical structure the next time A and B come into conflict. He may reference his earlier ruling, or forget it entirely, as situational convenience demands.

To permanently resolve a conflict between by-laws, one must pass a new one superseding the previous troublesome clauses. Just to be sure, you may wish to explicitly lay out the desired interpretation, reducing the Preceptor's wiggle room during future rulings. Naturally, we cannot guarantee that your new by-law will seem any less ambiguous when applied, or will not come into conflict with yet another apparently contradictory by-law.



## Convening

A conclave may be convened at any time for any reason. You may be informed by messenger, or through one of the long-distance communication devices installed in your manse.

Conclaves are often held for apparently social or academic reasons. For example, a Conclave of Reverence might be convened to contemplate the long-past accomplishments of Phandaal, the arch-magician's arch-magician. A Conclave of Edification might hear a member's paper on astral harmonics, or witness a demonstration by his collection of carnivorous insects.

Seasoned members of the conclave always regard such apparently pointless get-togethers with keen suspicion. It is not untypical for a member who wishes to make a controversial motion, such as a grievance against another member, to do so under the cover of an apparently innocuous order of business. (To see how this is done, consult "Point of Precedence" under *Interruptions*, below.) It is also possible to take a gathering where a quorum of members is already present and spontaneously convert it into an official conclave. (See sidebar to see how this is done.)

Even a conclave convened for genuinely innocent reasons might quickly turn against you in your absence. It is always easier to convict a member when he is not present to defend himself. Your right to confront your accusers may not always be upheld with the fervor you might hope for.

Although it is customary to alert all association members when a conclave is convened, you may nonetheless wish to take active, standing measures to ensure that you are not omitted from the announcement list. Otherwise, you may hear about a conclave only after it has taken place. An allegedly valid justification for the lack of notification will customarily be provided to you. Perhaps Ildefonse knew you were on vacation and did not want to interrupt your much-needed rest. It might have been rumored that you were at home in your manse suffering from some minor but highly contagious malady. Or it might be claimed that a being who looked much like you but was evidently some mere ectoplasmic echo of your fundamental essence received and discarded the invitation.

## Quorum

Certain motions and actions (such as the declaration of an ad hoc conclave) require the presence of a quorum. By tradition, the conclave defines a quorum as a majority of its current members. However, it is possible to waive quorum requirements under certain conditions.

An arch-magician may be considered as having suspended status if he is unavailable to attend the conclave due to:

1. insanity
2. a comatose state or similarly disabling medical condition
3. inexplicable absence after a search conducted by a sandestin
4. transmogrification into an archveult, woman, or other undesirable creature
5. has had his membership suspended by a motion of the conclave<sup>1</sup>

Once a wizard is suspended, he is not counted as a member, decreasing by one the number of members in good standing who must be present to achieve a quorum.

Quorum requirements may also be waived on an emergency basis by the Preceptor.

Members who abuse the quorum rules may be subject to motions of grievance.

<sup>1</sup> Typically possible only in the case of malfeasance.

## Declaring an Ad Hoc Conclave

Any member in good standing can attempt to open an ad hoc conclave wherever a quorum of current association members is present. To do so, explain why the members should want to go into conclave.

If the GM rules that no one present would object to your request, an ad hoc conclave is immediately declared.

If she decides that one or more members present would find your suggestion unappealing, a Persuade vs. Persuade contest takes place to determine whether a conclave is declared. The winner of the conclave sways a majority of members present, and a conclave is declared. The object of this contest is the entire assemblage, not an individual, so no trumps apply.

Any PC may oppose any attempt to declare a conclave, whether made by a PC or a GMC.

In the event of a contest, the character who first suggests the conclave declaration argues in favor of it. The GM selects a character to argue against it. PCs always take precedence over GMCs (see p. 44).

If multiple PCs objects to a conclave declaration, and can't decide among themselves which of them should make the counterargument, the character with the highest Persuade pool is selected.

If only GMCs oppose the declaration, the GM decides which of them makes the counterargument. She may choose based on story considerations: if you're launching a political sally against a GMC, either he or one of his allies will step up to the rhetorical plate. It may be cleverer for him to put up an accomplice to argue against the declaration, so that, if he loses, he'll still have Persuade points left for the main event. Then again, if one wants a job done right, one is always well-advised to do it oneself...

If two PCs contest over the declaration of a possible ad hoc conclave, their debate is typically treated as a challenge, yielding status points for the victor. The GM may however decide that it instead fits the criteria for a Quick Contest.

### Designating an Acting Preceptor

If Ildefonse is present, he automatically acts as Preceptor and takes charge of the proceedings.

If he is not present for an ad hoc conclave, an Acting Preceptor must be chosen before any other order of business is introduced.

The character who called the conclave asks for volunteers to serve as Acting Preceptor.

If more than two characters wish to be recognized as chairman, a simultaneous Persuade contest (DERPG, p. 36) ensues to see who is chosen.

If only two characters wish to be recognized, a Persuade vs. Persuade contest takes place. The candidates are working to appeal to the entire assemblage, so no trumps apply. If the contestants are PCs, this is treated as a challenge, worth status points.

As the Preceptor holds considerable influence over the course of debate, any faction hoping to put forward a

controversial motion will want to have a candidate of its choosing firmly ensconced in the chairman's seat. If you are part of a faction, you'll want to carefully measure your resources and choose the right character to serve as chairman. You want someone with enough available Persuade points to win the appointment, but not so many points that he'd be better off serving as the main proponent of the motions you hope to pass.

If no one volunteers to act as chairman, the caller of the conclave is pressed into service<sup>1</sup>.

Except in extraordinary circumstances, Ildefonse will always be present to act as Preceptor for a scheduled conclave. When such circumstances pertain — for example, if the GM is running an episode in which Ildefonse is being held for ransom by scheming archvults — the method detailed here may be used to select an Acting Preceptor.

## Proposing A Motion

As essentially immortal beings, Ildefonse's arch-magicians have long since tired of the wearisome particulars of meeting protocol. Under his sterling leadership, their conclaves have taken on a briskly informal air. They dispense with tedious matters like the taking and reading of minutes, and therefore of business arising from the minutes. Instead each conclave heads quickly to its main order of business.

The main order of business is typically chosen by the member who called the conclave — Ildefonse, in the case of a scheduled event, or whichever character successfully declared an ad hoc assemblage. In the former instance, Ildefonse will usually have called the conclave at the behest of another member, and has chosen as the main item of business the matter he wants discussed.

The chair commences the conclave by summarizing the main order of business and asking a member to bring to the floor a formal motion relating to it. Assuming no interruptions, the assembly goes on to debate and vote on that motion.

This being a meeting of vainglorious individuals of the Dying Earth, a lack of interruptions is highly unlikely.

<sup>1</sup> On several notorious occasions, sandestins have been inserted into this role. Keen observers will have already guessed that this choice invariably rebounds to the assemblage's extreme regret.

## Interrupting

Members may attempt to interrupt another member who currently has the floor for one of four reasons. To interrupt, address the chair. Begin by calling out which of the four grounds for interruption you're using.

## Point of Privilege

A point of privilege is a request for the immediate alleviation of some complaint on your part. It must pertain to a problem which the Preceptor can quickly solve by issuing a ruling or giving an order to his factotums. As a member of the conclave, you are entitled to certain comforts, allowing you to properly consider the business of the assembly without gnawing distraction. You are also owed a rudimentary modicum of respect from your fellow members, and may introduce a point of privilege to demand it.

Common points of privilege include:

*Noise:* If the noise level prevents you from hearing the debate, you may ask the Preceptor to silence the assembly. If he sustains your point of privilege, he will call for silence.

*Sightlines/Visual Distractions:* If you are blocked from viewing the chairman or the member who is currently speaking, you may demand the removal of any obscuring items, persons, mists, or emanations. You may demand that anyone who does not have the floor take his seat. You may also request the removal or alteration of other visual distractions, from egregiously unfashionable items of clothing to capering sprites or other mystic servitors.

If the Preceptor sustains your point of privilege, he may require the removal of such items as can be removed. He may order that members alter their semblances to less distracting forms. He may erect masking illusions himself, or require the offending member to create them. And he may demand that members sit themselves down, doff hats, and otherwise come to order.

*Temperature:* Should the physical climate inside the debate chamber become uncomfortable, you may request that the temperature be raised or lowered, the barometric pressure altered, or the humidity level adjusted.

*Thirst/Hunger:* During a long debate, one may run out of brandy or find that one's ratio of cheese to crackers has been thrown alarmingly out of kilter.

Requests for more gratifying victuals are a commonplace of points of privilege. Points of privilege concerning food and drink can be of great tactical use. If the chair declares a meal break, a recess occurs. This typically lasts for several hours, including the necessary arguments over menu and means of preparation. During this time a losing faction can marshal its forces, summon absent members, uncover additional facts, or even refresh relevant pools.

The chair can satisfy your point of privilege without calling a meal break, by ordering that snacks be brought to you. This brings about a brief delay, as members mull over their options and place their orders. These breaks are rarely long enough to grant a tactical advantage to either side.

*Redress:* If you feel that the recognized member (the one who has the floor and is currently yammering away) has insulted, maligned, or mischaracterized you or your views, you may interrupt on a point of privilege. Although you are technically demanding an apology or retraction from the recognized member, in most cases the utterance of the complaint is its own reward. If the Preceptor sustains your point and demands an apologia from a rival, so much the better.

Except where the recognized member has spoken with gross and intentional contempt for the unwritten rules of good fellowship, Ildefonse responds impatiently to demands for redress. A certain degree of sharp-elbowed debate is considered necessary to illuminate any question of true import.

When he does sustain a complaint and demand an apology, then, the seriousness of the matter is apparent to all. The member is not required to exhibit anything so extravagant as true contrition, but an immediate retraction is certainly called for. Should the member refuse to provide it, Ildefonse is entitled to fine him. The amount of this fine is usually a single IOUN stone. Though you may attempt, in a separate, subsequent motion, to argue that the fine should be payable to you, as the injured party, it is standard practice for Ildefonse to claim the forfeited stone for himself. The chair argues that the offense was really against the conclave itself, and as its neutral arbiter, it is he who must, for symbolic reasons, take possession of all mulcts and amercements.

*Miscellaneous:* Inventive players may broach additional points of privilege. As Preceptor, the GM will disallow



any points of privilege which do not pertain to the complainant's comfort or honor.

### Resolving Points of Privilege

Most points of privilege are resolved as uncontested rolls of the interrupting character's Persuade ability. The character may pay to nullify any Dismal Failure. On any success, the Preceptor rules in his favor and orders the alleviation of his discomfort. On an Illustrious Success, he takes extraordinary measures to ensure his satisfaction. On any failure, the Preceptor ignores his complaints. On a Dismal Failure, the Preceptor becomes visibly irked; for the remainder of the conclave, the character suffers a levy of 1 on all rolls to resolve interruptions.

To resolve points of privilege concerning food and drink, a Quick Contest (see p. 33) occurs, pitting the interrupter's Stewardship (which he uses to describe the preparation of a mouth-watering meal) against the chair's Resist Gourmandism. If you win the quick contest, the Preceptor declares a meal break. If you lose, he carries on without calling for so much as a snack. A snack occurs only on a failure vs. failure result. Each time the chair fails a Resist Gourmandism roll and declares a meal break due to a point of privilege, he gains a 1-point bonus on all subsequent Resist Gourmandism rolls, until the conclusion of the conclave.

Calls for redress are resolved as Quick Contests of the complainant's Persuade against the alleged offender's Rebuff.

## Point of Information

A point of information allows the interrupter to ask a question of the chair. The GM's response depends on two factors: whether the Preceptor already knows the answer to the question, and its pertinence to the matter under debate.

Chair knows the answer; question is germane: The Preceptor answers the question. No rules intervention is required.

Chair knows the answer; question is not germane: The Preceptor halts proceedings to display his erudition on the subject. Another character then interrupts on a point of order, arguing that the question is not germane. If a PC wishes to raise the point of order, he does so; otherwise the GM selects a GMC to do it. In a Quick Contest, the character raising the point of information tests his



Persuade against the Rebuff of the character raising the point of order.

If the first character wins, the Preceptor continues his disquisition. If the second character wins, the Preceptor rules the question out of order and moves back to the business at hand.

In some situations, the provocation of a long-winded tangent serves as a useful delaying tactic. For example, you may be waiting for the arrival of a sandestin, messenger, or another voting member of the association. When necessary, the GM can determine the length of the chair's excursion into pointless pedantry according to the result the Persuading character got on his Quick Contest roll:

Result	Length of Digression
Illustrious Success	30 minutes
Prosaic Success	10 minutes
Hair's Breadth Success	5 minutes
Exasperating or Quotidian Failure	1 minute
Dismal Failure	30 seconds

Even when one has no particular reason to seek a delay, there is an inherent pleasure in navigating the chair into a placid bay of irrelevant discourse<sup>1</sup>. Thus a win in this contest may aid you in scoring status points, when they are available to the conclave's top interrupter.

*Chair does not know the answer; question is germane:* The Preceptor is tempted to cover up his ignorance by declaring the question out of order. A Quick Contest pits the interrupter's Persuade against the chair's Resist Arrogance.

If you win the contest, the Preceptor declares a recess and appoints an ad hoc fact-finding committee to discover the answer and report back to the assembly. The impertinent revealer of the chair's ignorance will almost invariably be appointed to the committee, though often in a subordinate position. He will therefore be required to perform any undignified, taxing, or dangerous work the committee requires.

It may seem at first that you can score repeated successful interruptions in this way, as you whittle down the chair's Resist Arrogance pool. In practice you will find that there is a limit to the number of truly germane questions the Preceptor cannot answer.

*Chair does not know the answer; question is not germane:* The Preceptor declares that question is not germane. No rules intervention is required.

## Point of Order

A point of order is a challenge to the chair's running of the meeting. The interrupter argues that the rules are not being followed, citing the nature of the Preceptor's infraction and specifying a remedy for it.

As Ildefonse tends to run sessions with a brisk disregard for formalities, it is almost certain that at nearly any point of the proceedings, strict rules of order have been blithely violated. Because the authority to whom one must protest the chair's misbehavior is the chair himself, it is difficult to prevail on a point of order. Ildefonse has hardened himself to typical complaints, and, when pressed, will cite the Rule of Efficacious Blandishment, a rule which he claims allows him to suspend all other rules, when the letter of observance threatens to obtain a result contrary to their

## Why Interrupt?

The various points of interruption will often provide your character with advantages within the storyline.

However, gratuitous interruptions are also rewarded. Exceptionally successful interrupters are entitled to a directed share (see p. 31.)

For any given session of the conclave, keep track of each time you win a Quick Contest required by a point of order, privilege, information, or precedence. Wins count whether or not you propose or oppose the interruption. Keep track also of each loss, subtracting it from your win total.

The PC with the highest total as of the adjournment of a conclave wins a half share. (The more ingenious among you will see that it is to your advantage to move for an adjournment when your total is higher than your opponents'.)

No share award is given for winning totals of 2 or less.

On occasion, a GM may wish to run a conclave scene quickly, and will announce beforehand that the usual share award for the top interrupter is not available this time.

clear and evident spirit.

If your objection is merely technical — that is, if its outcome will not affect the group's decision on the current order of business — Ildefonse immediately rules in your favor but does not adopt your proposed remedy. He then moves quickly back to the matter at hand.

If your objection, if sustained, would change the course of debate, the Preceptor resists it. The point of order is then resolved as a Quick Contest, pitting your Pedantry against his.

Ildefonse's rule-bending tends to support the general mood of the conclave. Once he sniffs out the direction the group appears to be headed in, he moves the meeting along to reach that destination as quickly as possible. Your chances of success increase if you can show that the contested ruling goes against the will of the assembly.

In those rare instances where Ildefonse has failed to

<sup>1</sup> The author of this volume can attest to the entertainment value of this gambit, having pursued it with great success against several of his high school history teachers.

accurately divine the will of the assembly, you gain a bonus of 1 on your roll. If your point of order contravenes the burgeoning group consensus, you suffer a penalty of 1. (There is no provision for a contest where the group is indifferent to your challenge; in that instance, as mentioned above, Ildefonse will rule in your favor and quickly move on.)

## Point of Precedence

By raising a point of precedence, the interrupter seeks to change the nature of the debate, calling into question either the relevance of the current motion, or the qualifications of a debater.

When you make a point of precedence on the grounds of *priority*, you are asking to have the current motion set aside (temporarily or permanently) in favor of another motion on some completely different topic. To successfully raise this point of precedence, you must convince the chair that your proposed topic of discussion is of such pressing importance that any time spent talking about anything else is a foolish, even dangerous, waste of time. It is not enough to make the case for the useless triviality of the matter currently up for debate: many conclave sessions are exclusively devoted to affairs whose significance is wholly nugatory. You must prove that one of two conditions apply:

- a) that the association confronts a truly imminent threat to its survival, privileges, property or dignity
- b) that the motion currently under discussion is so dreadfully tedious that a majority of the group has succumbed to irreparable boredom.

Expect the author of the motion whose import you are maligning to leap intemperately from his chair to condemn your impertinence. A Quick Contest ensues, pitting your Persuade against his Rebuff. If the GM decides that you have not established either of the necessary conditions for a priority argument, you suffer a penalty of 1 on your roll.

If you win the contest, you are then given the floor, to propose a new motion (see below.) If you won on the grounds of an imminent threat, your motion must be a proposal to counter that danger. Otherwise the author

of the motion you had suspended may immediately lodge a point of precedence against you, and you will suffer a penalty of 2 on your Rebuff roll in the resulting Quick Contest.

The other viable point of precedence is on grounds of *qualification*. Here you argue that the motion not only is valid, but of such vital consequence that the incompetent dullard currently arguing it must be replaced posthaste. You may argue for the replacement either of the primary debater in favor of the motion, or of its main opponent. In so doing, you must designate the replacement, contrasting his eminent qualifications in the subject under discussion to the current debater's febrile blitherings. The designee may be you, or another character of your choice.

To effect his replacement, you must succeed in a Quick Contest pitting your Persuade against his Rebuff. Success is likelier when your designated replacement seems to be the better choice, and less likely if he seems to be a worse choice. However, the rules to see if one contestant is assessed a penalty differ from the usual Quick Contest.

Do not compare, as you normally would, your Persuade pool to his Rebuff pool to determine if one of you faces a penalty. If the debater you're trying to replace is arguing in favor of the motion, compare his Persuade *rating* (not pool) to that of your designee. If he's arguing against the motion, compare the two characters' Rebuff *ratings*<sup>1</sup>. This point of precedence can be of tactical value in several situations.

If you wish to see a motion carry, you can assist by allowing a character with a higher Persuade pool to take over for a debater whose pool has been depleted. If you want to see it defeated, you can do the same for the motion's opposition, sending in a character with a higher Rebuff pool.

The duplicitous among you may choose to act underhandedly, adopting one stated position while sneakily conspiring in the opposite direction. You can replace a debater with a high pool with one whose pool is low.

If two other PCs are debating a motion, it will almost invariably be treated as a challenge, with status points at stake. By inserting yourself into the debate, you may be able

<sup>1</sup> Why the change, you ask? Without this exception to the usual rules, sniping of debate challenges would become too ridiculously easy, and all too common.



to win a considerable stake with minimal risk to yourself. The stake does not change when one contestant is replaced by another. If you win the contest, you win not only the points spent by your opponent while you were a participant, but also all the points spent prior to your entry into the challenge. If your opponent wins, his stake equals all of the points spent both by the character you replaced, and by you. Sagacious players will attempt to “snipe” debates, stepping in just prior to a spectacular loss, to scoop up all the points laboriously whittled away by a rival.

When you step in, you'll need to pay any costs to reroll, as if you were the original debater.

*Marthrap and Chagomant are engaged in debate over a motion before the conclave. Marthrap argues in favor of the motion: “Be it resolved that an ad hoc fact-finding committee immediately be formed to investigate the report of Marthrap’s sandestin, Umuss, that all archvaults have departed the planet Jangke.” Chagomant, who believes the whole story to be a concoction, argues against the motion.*

*The debate has raged for several rounds. Marthrap’s Persuade pool stands at 3; he has spent 17 points, which is the stake Chagomant currently stands to gain if he wins the contest. Chagomant’s Rebuff pool stands at 10; he has given up 10 points to the stake, which Marthrap will take if he wins the challenge.*

*You believe Umuss’ story and think that it may portend a serious threat to the survival of the association. Even so, those 17 stake points are gravely tempting. Firmly seizing the opportunity for short-term gain, you elect to make a point of precedence. Arguing that you should replace Chagomant as the primary debater against the motion, you speak up as a new exchange is about to begin.,*

*“Though Chagomant is an expert in many things,” you say, “his feelings of hostility toward Umuss, stemming from that regrettable ruffed collar incident many months ago, obviously drive his arguments here today. Take note, my friends, of the rapid twitching of the vein that runs across his furrowed forehead. I humbly submit that, for his own good, he be encouraged to yield the floor to me, before he is stricken down by a devastating apoplexy. I believe that I can argue a more objective case for Umuss’ duplicity and clouded perceptions.”*

*Chagomant does not want you to replace him; he wants that handsome stake for himself. So you undergo a Quick Contest against him. Your Persuade rating is 20, as is his Rebuff rating. With no difference between abilities, neither party to the Quick Contest suffers a penalty.*

### Interruption Quick Reference Card

#### Point of Privilege: (lodge a complaint)

- Noise: uncontested Persuade roll
- Sightlines/Visual Distractions: uncontested Persuade roll
- Temperature: uncontested Persuade roll
- Thirst/Hunger: your Stewardship vs. chair’s Resist Gourmandism
- Redress: your Persuade vs. offender’s Rebuff
- Other (invent your own!)

#### Point of Information (ask a question of the chair)

- Irrelevant, answerable query: your Persuade vs. objector’s Rebuff
- Relevant query, answer not known to chair: your Persuade vs. chair’s Resist Arrogance

#### Point of Order (question the chair’s adherence to the rules of order)

#### Point of Precedence (request modification to current business)

- Priority: suspend the current motion in favor of a more important one: your Persuade vs. the Rebuff of the motion’s author
- Qualification: replace a debater: your Persuade vs. Rebuff of the debater you wish to dislodge

*You get a Prosaic Success; he scores a Hair’s-Breadth Success. You win the Quick Contest. Ildefonse agrees that Chagomant should, for health reasons, sit out the remainder of the debate. “Only now, that I have been so invidiously displaced, am I susceptible to vein rupture!” he fumes.*

*The main contest now continues. Marthrap scores a Prosaic Success, paying 1 point for the privilege. The stake you stand to win increases from 17 to 18. You counter with an Exasperating Failure of your Rebuff ability, paying 1 for the privilege, just as Marthrap would have done. This point goes into the stake, and is added to the 10 points Chagomant spent before you displaced him. Marthrap now stands to win 11 points if he beats you. But you can’t stand pat on a failure, so you pay another point to reroll. The stake goes from 11 to 12. Fortunately for you, your new roll is a Prosaic Success.*

*Marthrap must counter this or lose. He gets a Dismal Failure. This immediately costs him 3 points — or would if he had that amount still left in his pool. He goes to 0 and loses the contest, losing his last 2 points. That increases the stake to a full 20 points — which you gain as status points.*

*Your opponents squirm and growl in thwarted envy — none more*

*so than Chagomant's player, Loretta. She vows vengeance against you, on Chagomant's behalf.*

*Your victory in the debate means that you have swayed the conclave against Marthrap's motion. The alleged evacuation of the archveults will remain uninvestigated. This outcome causes you a momentary pang of disquiet, which is soon dispelled by the delight you feel in getting the better of not one, but two, of your esteemed colleagues.*

## Debate

Although some conclaves consist of roundtable discussions concerning matters of academic interest, these events will occur between episodes, or will be quickly glossed over by the GM in her effort to keep the story compelling.

## Motions

In play, the most important function of the conclave is as a forum for the debate and passage of motions. When carried, a motion is binding on the members of the association. Of primary interest are motions of four types:

*Executive order.* An executive order requires one or more members to take a specific action. Actions may be taken directly or delegated to sandestins, servants, or other subordinates. The motion may detail the means by which an order is to be carried out, or simply lay out a general goal the designated arch-magicians are meant to accomplish. Executive orders often take the form of ad hoc committee assignments, in which a team of members is assembled to perform a task under the guidance of a chosen leader.

*Grievances.* In a motion of grievance, a member lays formal charges alleging malfeasance by another. The grievance consists of a document listing the member's alleged misdeeds. During discussion, additional charges are often submitted by other members and added to the list. Debate then occurs. The magician introducing the charge must establish that the alleged acts did indeed occur, and also that they rise to the level of a punishable offense.

If the motion carries, the member will be punished. With input from his fellows, the Preceptor determines the nature of the punishment. Sentences range from mere rebuke to various fates worse than death. By far the most common punishment, however, is the assessment of heavy fines. These are usually divvied up between all of the arch-magicians who voted in favor of the motion. It is

therefore not uncommon to see a magician's defenders suddenly withdraw their objections to a charge, switching sides when its ratification seems imminent. Esteem for a colleague is all well and good, but no one expects it to extend so far as to deprive oneself of valuable prizes.

*Injunctions:* An injunction prevents a member from taking a proscribed action. A member might be enjoined from performing a particular experiment, continuing a dalliance with a presumed enemy of the conclave, or from pursuing a dangerous avenue of exploration. A member who flouts an injunction will, if discovered, become the subject of a grievance.

*By-law changes:* You may introduce a new by-law, or amend or repeal an existing by-law.

If no by-law currently exists that achieves your desired aim, you may find it more economical to create one as background detail (see above.) By-laws created as background cost Pedantry points, while motions before the conclave require the more precious currency of Persuade points.

If an existing by-law thwarts your agenda, you have no choice but to attempt to amend or repeal it. Your GM will subject a new by-law introduced by your character to a lesser degree of scrutiny than existing one merely remembered by him. It must still cover a mundane matter of protocol, and cannot be of such importance that it properly belongs in the Blue Principles. But since you can amend or repeal existing laws — or simply pile new rules on top of old ones with no regard for the interpretative burden this will eventually place on the Preceptor — you needn't worry about how this fits into the overall framework of the by-laws. You can even alter the rules of order, as listed in this chapter, or — celestial majesties forefend! — move to replace the Preceptor.

## Preparing Motions

Effective motions are composed before the conclave commences. When you know in advance that you want to introduce a motion at conclave, it is always wise to take a few moments to jot the motion down on paper. Motions composed extemporaneously often contain holes your pettifogging rivals can easily exploit. A well-worded motion is clear and simple, yet anticipates the likely objections of your foes. They will attempt to make mincemeat of your proposal by loading it down with qualifications and exceptions to fanciful special cases. The introduction



of a motion is not to be confused with an ordinary academic debate. It is a political procedure, and must be approached as one. The motion you compose is just a tool allowing you to achieve a political aim.

Be aware that Ildefonse may summarily amend your motion, either in a meeting before the conclave or during the proceedings. He usually so either for purposes of brevity or to forestall semantic quibbling.

### Assessing Support

After composing your motion, you can use your knowledge of conclave members to assess the degree of support you're likely to get for it. Your colleagues will vote according to a mixture of whim, ego, and clear-headed self-interest. The more of them your motion directly advantages, the greater the enthusiasm it will attract. If the motion harms the interests of most members, you can expect vociferous opposition.

Your GM secretly decides whether the mood of the conclave will be for or against your motion, and to what degree. The degrees of support are as follows:

**Boisterous Approval:** the motion is of direct benefit to all but a few members. Speakers against your motion will face a one-sided levy of 1.

**Reserved Approval:** the members see little benefit in the motion itself but are moderately inclined to support you anyway. You gain a one-time 3-point Persuade boon at the beginning of your argument.

**Neutral:** the members are confused by your motion's purpose or can't be bothered to think about it. You are on an equal footing with your opponents.

**Inchoate Disapproval:** the members can't quite see the purpose of your motion and oppose it out of vague distrust. The first speaker against your motion gains a one-time 3-point Persuade boon when he commences his argument.

**Vociferous Opposition:** the motion is thought to severely disadvantage all but a few members. Speakers in favor of your motion, including you, will face a one-sided levy of 1.

By exercising your political acumen, as represented a Persuade roll ability, you can accurately gauge your support ahead of time.

**Illustrious Success:** The GM tells you exactly which type of support you currently stand to gain. During any immediately subsequent lobbying effort to improve your support level (see immediately below), you enjoy a

bonus of 1 on your Persuade rolls.

**Other Success:** The GM tells you exactly which type of support you stand to gain.

**Exasperating or Quotidian Failure:** You are unable to assess your support level.

**Dismal Failure:** The GM supplies a randomly-chosen, incorrect support level. If you engage in advance lobbying, you suffer a penalty of 1 on your Persuade rolls.

### Advance Lobbying

You can improve your support level by lobbying members in advance. You (and your PC supporters, if you have any), travel to the manses of wavering or persuadable colleagues to pitch the benefits of your proposal.

Except where you enjoy Boisterous Approval from the outset (in which case lobbying is of little value anyway), it is not possible to lobby in secret. Arch-magician tongues love to waggle, and news of your campaign will soon reach the ears of your opponents. They will then engage you in a counter-effort, seeking out the undecideds to explain why your proposal would bring about the ruination of all, possibly hastening the death of the universe.

You and your lobbying opponent pursue a Persuade Tally of 10. (See Tally rules, **DERPG** p. 37) The one who reaches the tally first gains a one-degree shift in your support level. If you win, your support level goes up by one degree. If your opponent wins, it goes down by one degree.

*Your opponent wins the lobbying effort, being the first to reach a Tally of 10. Your support level before lobbying began was Reserved Approval. Now it drops to Neutral.*

### Obtaining the Floor

The cleverest motion in the world will do you little good if you can't get it considered by the conclave. The Preceptor chooses which motions will be debated at any given conclave, and in what order. Like any other pleasurable but strenuous activity, association members prefer their procedural haranguing in brief doses. Three motions per session represents the absolute limit of the assembly's patience. Also, it is phenomenally easy to distract a troop of arch-magicians. If the first or second motion before the conclave leads naturally to action, such as a field trip or the appointment of a committee, a rapid adjournment is extremely likely. In legislation as in racing, pole position is always highly desirable.



## Reserving the Floor

To be chosen first, then, one should buttonhole the Preceptor prior to conclave. Ideally, you'll be the once who convinces Ildefonse to call the conclave in the first place. If consideration of your motion is the entire purpose for a conclave, you can be sure that you'll be given the first, and perhaps only, slot. Or, rather, you can be somewhat sure — it's always possible that another member will get to Ildefonse between your conversation and the actual conclave, persuading him to amend the order of business.

Association members are forever asking Ildefonse to call conclaves for them. You may be passionately engaged by the idea of calling a meeting, but he, like most arch-magicians, finds them tedious in the extreme. Other arch-magicians know how perilous it is to fail to attend a conclave, but can do nothing to prevent them from being called. Ildefonse can. And he will, unless you are extremely persuasive.

To get his attention, you must prick his self-interest. If he feels that the association faces a real threat, he'll call a conclave, with no persuasion necessary.

Otherwise, the possibility of personal gain stands as your best argument. If he perceives the possibility of a considerable reward — such as the availability of IOUN stones, either from adventure or as fines levied against offending members — your Persuasion vs. Rebuff contest against him unfolds as normal. If there's nothing much in it for him, you suffer a levy of 1.

(Note that he will always schedule the conclave so that he has time to refresh his much-needed Rebuff pool before the actual meeting.)

Once you have him persuaded to call a conclave to entertain your motion, it is wise to keep him close at hand, so no one else can swoop in and hijack the meeting with a new item of business. That way, if someone does show up to whisper sweet procedural points into his ear, you can counter the interloper. Do this by entering into a Persuade vs. Persuade contest against the hijacker, with Ildefonse as the passive object of your opposed entreaties.

One good way to keep Ildefonse close at hand is to engage his nonexistent resistances. Invite him to your manse, and provoke his Indolence with a comfortable divan and a hookah packed with Mantalar spice. Appeal to

his Rakishness by offering to squire him to a ball attended by nubile debutantes. Provoke his Avarice with the promise of lengthy gambling sessions with a handicap squarely in his favor. Tempt his Gourmandism with the finest cuisine your chefs have to offer.

## Hijacking the Floor

The above passage assumes that you've gotten to Ildefonse first, and wish to shield him from interlopers anxious to change the first item of business.

When the bejeweled slipper is on the other foot, you must turn the tables and convince him to change the main item of business. If you discover that a rival or enemy has Ildefonse's ear, and is keeping him close at hand, invite yourself over for a visit. If necessary, circumvent his manse's Security features (see p. 61) — all as part of an innocent and good-natured surprise appearance, of course. If you think Ildefonse's Rebuff pool is lower than your rival's Persuade pool, you'll want to lure him aside, to inveigle him in private. Take advantage of the same low resistances that keep him glued to your opponent's side and lure him away.

Here you engage Ildefonse in a standard Persuade vs. Rebuff contest. Call it the cuckoo stratagem: Ildefonse has already settled on the unpleasant necessity of a boring conclave. It's easier to convince him to change the order of business than it is to get him to call one in the first place. Even though your change may not further the Preceptor's nakedest self-interest, you face no levy on your Persuade attempts.

If, on the other hand, you think you have a better shot against your rival's Persuade than Ildefonse's Rebuff, it's smarter to come straight to the point and argue with your rival in the Preceptor's presence. Here you pit your Persuade against your opponent's Rebuff.

(Trumps may affect the tactical equation: if you trump Ildefonse's Rebuff style, you'll want to engage him. If you trump your rival instead, he's the better target.)

If you wait until the conclave convenes, you can attempt to change the order of business by interrupting with a point of precedence (p. 44).

## Choose Your Seconds

Whether you're reserving or hijacking the floor, all





preparation comes to naught if you have no other member to second your motion. No motion can come to the floor without the consent of each least one colleague.

Any PC who successfully conspires to prevent another's motion from even being seconded receives a directed share.

## Conducting Debate

Motions are conducted as Persuade vs. Persuade contests, with the members of the conclave as passive arbiters. As noted above, speakers against a motion with Boisterous Approval or in favor of one facing Vociferous Opposition suffer a levy of 1. Debates between player characters are treated as challenges unless some other rule prevents it — for example, if it would be the second consecutive challenge between the same two players.

Any successful Interruption of a speaker allows the interrupter to pitch in (see p. 22) on behalf of his favored speaker. Alternately, interruptions can also allow a suspension of debate altogether.

Interruptions may occur after any die roll in the main debate. Only one interruption per roll is permitted. Where more than one character wishes to interrupt at the same time, the one with the highest Persuade pool wins the opportunity. If their Persuade pools are equal, rights of interruption go to the character Ildefonse currently likes best. No character may interrupt twice in a row: they can speak up but the chair will ignore them. A successful interrupter must wait until another character (PC or GMC) successfully interrupts before doing it again.

In many cases an interrupter will be attempting to delay the current proposal until subsequent events can render it moot. In response to a successful Point of Order, the chair may suspend debate for an indefinite time, until

he makes his ruling on his own adherence to the principles and by-laws. Certain well-chosen Points of Information can cause the suspension of debate, and adjournment of the conclave, until a fact-finding mission can report back with intelligence crucial to the argument.

On a Point of Precedence, a new motion can be substituted for the current motion, or a new debater may be inserted into the contest to continue the current motion.

Proponents of a motion may withdraw it in mid-debate. You may wish to do this if you're losing a challenge. To do

so, however, you must successfully Resist Arrogance. If you fail, your bloated ego takes command, forcing you to continue arguing your position's obvious correctness to the bitter end. If you successfully Resist Arrogance, the challenge ends without resolution; no one wins the stake.

If you oppose the motion, you can withdraw from the debate. If another

character steps up to take your place, the debate continues. The motion may or may not carry, depending on the debate's eventual resolution. If no one steps up, the motion unanimously passes. GMCs may step in to replace PCs.

If the debate was a challenge and the replacement opponent is a PC, the challenge continues. The proponent, if he wins the contest, gains all points spent first by the original opponent and then by any replacements as status points.

If the debate was a challenge and the replacement opponent is a GMC, the challenge continues, but points spent by the GMC do not contribute to the stake. If the proponent wins, the motion carries and he gains status points equal to any points spent by any PC opponents who took part in the debate. If the GMC opponent wins, the motion is defeated and no one gets any status points.





## Your Manse

Like all Arch-Magicians, you maintain a fabulous manor house, nestled in the comforting boundaries of a picturesque estate. Your manse serves as your sanctum sanctorum: a place of safety where you rest, conduct research, engage in romantic assignations, and entertain your colleagues.

If you are a typical Arch-Magician, your manse will be a place of ostentatious splendor, invoking awe and wonder in all who behold it. A few recalcitrant types may elect for homes of special gloom or horror.

Certain solitary and mistrustful Arch-Magicians, for example the inscrutable Necrope, Byzant (see p. 78), refuse to invite their fellows to their manses. Some have even been known to keep secret the locations of their sanctums. You, however, as an ambitious sort anxious to outdo your fellow players and win the game, will be well advised to fling open the doors of your manse and use its magnificence to bolster your victory score. A well-designed manse provides you a considerable edge in negotiations, seductions, and other wizardly transactions.

### Building It

Manse creation is like character creation, except with buttresses and moats. You allocate rating points among a choice of *features* and note them on a Manse Sheet, which looks suspiciously like a Character Sheet. A manse's features work just like abilities: each provides you a pool of points to use to pay for certain rolls or rerolls during play. Often they come into play only when you are present in your manse. It is therefore in your best interest to, whenever possible, contrive to place a session's action within the confines of your manse. Conversely, you'll want to use all the Rebuff points at your disposal to fend off other player's attempts to convene together in their own manses.

Most groups will prefer to delay manse creation until they've played the game for a session or two. That way you can get started faster and space out the episodes of rulebook-flipping. GMs should design their initial

### The Law of Peremptory Replacement

These rules supplant the rules for Manse Creation on p. 98-99 of DERPG, in order to better integrate these all-important accoutrements of the arch-magical life with the new challenge system. They also make your manses a more active part of the game, by allowing you to draw on them as you do your abilities.

If you are already playing a Rhialto-level game and your GM wants you to maintain your current crop of characters, players regain any build or improvement points spent on them, and may reallocate them as they wish.

sessions to deemphasize the role of manses during these early sessions. Immediately after the initial manse-building session, the GM will reward the players' efforts by crafting a session in which their new headquarters take a central role.

Manse creation unfolds in the following easy steps:

1. name it
2. describe it
3. locate it
4. assign its features.

### Name Your Manse

As even the greenest tyro knows, to name something is to imbue it with magical power. To be the one who names a building is to bind its power to you. Even more importantly to one of your illustrious status, a named estate sounds fancy and impressive. It is an affectation you simply cannot do without.

The best manse names either evoke the haughty sounds of estates from real-world history, or evoke the exotic wonders of a baroque fantasy age. You may prefer to start at step two, your visual concept, and work backwards from that, choosing a name that refers to your manse's

appearance. Visually inspired names can take their cues from the building itself, or the surrounding property.

If you find naming difficult, here's a list of examples to steal from. Proceed without shame.

Ard	Knyffbrud
Aryndis	Laturlu
Bilrove	The Lookout
Bleurndis	Mandith
Cantentham	Measer
Cape Illura	Menterdect
Chertham Grove	Mistmoor
The Chusan Dig	The Morgath
The Chuzzles	Nobilor
Clabber	Paradier
Cloud Lake	Pectorneam
Coffin Hill	The Pects
Conneam	Peony Glade
Cordalk	Permang
Crimson Peaks	The Plest
Curling River	Preddalk
Docion Mills	Purcenam
Ebb Tower	Rachenam
Elinctu	Screaming Vale
Estimability	Sessbun
The Glebes	Shouldersweet
Gobion	The Shandives
Gousdect	Solyglo
Gratighdalk	Stornoway
The Gronth	Straightbend
Gurtaditon	Taccomo
Helbertwist	Thaum
Hortle	Tornovale
Ielanth	Warren
Ilbreth	Weeper's Bay
Inalforks	Whispering Oaks
The Ineffable Columns	Wrack Top
Klashk	

## Visualizing Your Manse

Next, describe your manse, either in a few lines of text, or with an image.

If you're good with words, whip up a brief descriptive passage you can read out to your fellow players when their characters first visit your estate. Provide information both about the structure and the surrounding grounds. Typically these will be beautiful gardens in baroque-magical style, but you may prefer more exotic terrain.

Where description is concerned, a few punchy details are better than an exhaustive list laden with architectural terms. Take your cue from Jack Vance; create an evocative starting point for the visual imagination, then let the listener fill in the rest. It doesn't really matter if everybody is picturing something slightly different, as long as they're picturing something.

Take fantastic license: invent materials, architectural references, or terrain anomalies. Although the manse's usefulness in play is bounded by the points you assign to its features, you have an unlimited budget for outlandish detail. Your character had all the money, time, and magic he needed to bring to life his most outré imaginings.

In any case, your manse will reflect your character's personality, so describe accordingly. A distracted, frumpy arch-magician will live in a dilapidated, unfashionable manor. An incorrigible belligerent will dwell in a squat and forbidding fortress, bristling with an alarming array of defensive weaponry. If your character is a slave to fashion, his manse may be in a perpetual state of renovation.

If you'd sooner communicate with pictures, find or create an image of your manse and its surroundings. Raid your collection of fantasy illustrations for a suitable image; scan it or photocopy it and attach it to your Manse Sheet. Even better, draw it yourself. A crude sketch you create yourself is just as good as a polished painting swiped from a professional source.

It is not necessary to work out an exact plan of your mansion's layout or provide a complete inventory of its contents. You can keep these details vague, so that; in collaboration with the GM, you can work them out as needed, during play. When details are invented in this way, you can take a few notes or scribble down a quick sketch to keep the particulars consistent from one

session to the next, if that pleases you. Or you can leave matters entirely in the floating realm of verbal description. If a fact about the floor plan is important enough, you, or someone else in the group, will remember it. Otherwise, why obsess over trifles? If a vexing inconsistency does crop up from one session to the next, you can always write it off to the activities of sandestins. Yes, your bedroom did adjoin the solarium last time, but your astral minions have since redecorated.

On the other hand, if you're a map enthusiast and would enjoy nothing more than to spend your time between sessions elaborately detailing a set of fantasy blueprints, by all means, go ahead. What you lose in flexibility you'll gain in predetermined inspiration. You won't be able to decide, as happens to suit your schemes at the moment, that the atrium is equipped with a catwalk. But then, when trapped inside your manse by enemies, you can pull out your map to see if it triggers any escape ideas.

Even if you are an inveterate mapper, you needn't complete the map before introducing the manse in play. You can instead putter away between sessions and unveil your cartographic masterpiece to the GM and other players when it's fully ready.

Below are examples of suitable verbal descriptions. If pressed for time or bereft of inspiration, use your favorite from this list.

- *A manse in the form of a band of weird, undulating, biological shapes covered in a colony of pulsing, land-dwelling coral polyps.*
- *A collection of simple country cottages, encircled by rose hedges. Glittering semi-precious stones line the curving pathways between them.*
- *A delicate, filigreed construction of near-translucent fradamwood, tiered like a wedding cake, iced in layers of iridescent paint.*
- *A dingy underground tunnel network, entered through an iris-like orifice in the dead center of a reeking marshland. Tusks of slaughtered marine creatures ring its heavily-guarded entrance.*
- *A geodesic dome surrounded by statuary figures of nymphs and athletes, saucily posing on tall red poles.*
- *A great platform emerging massively from the side of a belching volcano.*

- *A huge rectangular box, its surfaces entirely covered by a thick layer of writhing, carnivorous vine. A team of tamed and neutered deodands stands guard with long, slashing poles, ready to part the curtain of hungry greenery whenever the building's inhabitants wish to cross its threshold.*

- *A hundred and seven rooms carved from the yielding innards of a gigantic pearl.*

- *A modest twelve-story structure in the sublime and harmonious style of Old Romarth, melded sublimely into a green and gently sloping hill.*

- *A perfectly symmetrical construction, with spokes radiating like a content and supple octopus from a gleaming central hub.*

- *A pyramid of gold, each side emblazoned with a wet and blinking eye, ever-watchful, ever-resentful.*

- *A spiky contraption of iron capitula, rivets, and strutways, planted on titanic steel legs athwart a roiling, acidic marsh.*

- *A warren of tiny rooms, once home to the entire extinct Chusid race, rising high into the sky from a narrow base of fossil-encrusted shale.*

- *Agglomerated boxes of white brick with dark trimmed windows, dominated by a tall smokestack. From the stack issue purple plumes, which gently scent the surrounding vale with the essence of lavender.*

- *An explosion of interconnected gazebos, their brass support beams visible between lengths of impenetrable fabric woven from the back filaments of the thusri beast.*

- *Mossy, decaying buildings recessed inside the aging racetrack of King Quandic's Coliseum.*

## Location, Location, Location

Choose your manse's location relative to population centers. A **remote** location is far from intrusion by gawpers, peddlers, adventurers and other nuisances. Keep in mind that nothing is remote to you or your fellow arch-magicians, to whom a jaunt across the universe is a matter of mere logistics. However, a remote location will protect your privacy from the dull and unattractive ordinary mortals of the Dying Earth. It will at the same time make it



more difficult to procure reliable staff, and to keep your larders and warehouses adequately supplied.

Arch-magicians eager to participate in the social whirl of balls, masques and festivals, with all of the opportunities for gossip, one-upmanship, and dalliance that go with them, will select a **central** location. This choice places your manse within easy travel of a major population center. Servants and supplies are in plentiful supply. Central locations make you accessible to others, so you'll need to take measures to screen out salesmen, freebooters, and the like. Perhaps most vexing of all are the legions of unlucky souls desperate to prostrate themselves before you, hoping you'll magically solve their problems for them. You could, but who has the time? Even a peculiarly altruistic arch-magician will find the sheer weight of neediness difficult to manage.

Although the location of your manse may occasionally become a plot point during the game, its main purpose is to highlight your character's sociability and connection to human affairs.

## Features

Finally, allocate 54 points among the following features of your manse.

Features operate as follows. When you are in your manse, you may treat them as you would any other ability, rolling against them or spending points to reroll or force your challenger to reroll. Unless you can somehow justify their use to your GM, you cannot use them while outside your manse.

*It may, for example, be possible to make use of your Collections or Library if you can examine them by remote viewing, or dispatch a reliable servitor to quickly bring you a desired item*

## Collections

Your manse houses a variety of interesting but non-magical objects and curios you've gathered in the course of your centuries-long career. Your rating in this features reflects not only the rarity and quality of the items, but the value of your storage and cataloguing system. A solid system allows you to easily find any item you might want to examine. A poor system is a disorganized wallow of unsorted junk, heaped away in closets, gathering dust. The best collections are well displayed, as they would be in a museum — placed in well-lit, preservative cabinets and laid out in a logical manner according to theme or chronology.

## Victory Tip

A challenge undertaken and won in your own manse, in which you spend points from one or more manse features, nets you the standard number of status points.

Many challenges won against opponents while they're in their own manses offer additional benefits — top-ups, directed shares, or even opportunities to permanently steal rating points from your rivals and add them to your own character sheets.

It is therefore highly profitable to steer the plot so that scenes take place in other PCs' manses, where you can win challenges against them — provided that you have the luck and abilities to pull it off.

## Manse Features Quick Reference

**Collections** — the depth and usefulness of your various collections of rare, exotic, artistic, or instructive objects

**Comfort** — the physical and mental contentment provided by your manse's amenities

**Cuisine** — the quality and variety of food served up by your culinary staff

**Library** — the quality of your collection of tomes, scrolls, and books, both magical and mundane

**Mobility** — the ability of your manse to serve as a vehicle, or to change locations

**Scrying** — the degree to which your equipment allows you to spy on the activities of others

**Security** — your level of protection against intrusion, both physical and extrasensory

**Splendor** — the degree to which your manse inspires admiration and/or awe

**Staff** — the reliability, efficiency and morale of your petty servitors

A rating of 3 or less indicates a scattered, unspecialized collection of objects gathered more or less haphazardly over the years. If your manse's rating is 4 or more, you not only own a miscellaneous assortment of curios, but may also declare one or more Specialties, as explained later in this section.

You may spend Collections points in place of Pedantry points, during any debate in which the production of a physical object might bolster your argument. You may add your Collections rating to your Pedantry rating for

the purpose of calculating Wallops.

You roll your Collection feature in the course of an investigation, where the possession of an item might answer a question you're looking into.

You may spend Collections points on Seduction attempts when the object of your affections is interested in art objects in general, or in your collecting specialty in particular.

You can spend Collections points on Appraisal attempts when examining objects pertaining to your collection specialties. You may even do so outside your manse!

**Automatic Success:** Produce an interesting conversation piece.

**Refresh:** Acquire a new item for your collection. If you have specialties, the item must pertain to one of them. Alternately, you may spend 4 hours in private work, cataloguing, maintaining, or gazing rapturously at the items of your collection.

## Specialties

You may declare one Collections specialty for every rating point above 3. (A rating of 4 grants 1 specialty; rating 5 gets you 2 specialties; rating 6 grants 3 specialties, and so on.) You can define your specialties right away, or leave them open and declare them during play, as convenience dictates.

*You rate your manse's Collections feature at 5. This allows you 2 specialties. You select Insect Specimens as one specialty, and leave the other open for use during play.*

*Several sessions later, you get into an argument about music with a rival arch-magician. You declare Musical Manuscripts as your second specialty, and promptly produce the original score whose legatos you've been quibbling over for the last half an hour. You are now able to Wallop him, soundly humiliating him in front of the other arch-magicians.*

A list of suggested collections appears in the sidebar at right. Your GM should allow you to make up your own specializations, provided they're roughly as narrow as the examples. For example, Insect Specimens and Mammal Specimens are listed as separate items, disallowing a broader specialty like Animal Specimens.

Books are not covered by the Collections feature, but by the Library feature.

For each specialty, you must name a **must-have item**, a piece you fervently covet above all others. Feel empowered to make up the details; seek assistance from your GM if creativity

fails you. A short phrase will suffice. However, you can always write up a detailed description of the item if you're feeling especially creative. It goes without saying that this item will be phenomenally rare, if not unique. If available on the open market, its price will be sufficiently high to induce gasps even from one of your limitless wealth.

*For your Insect Specimens specialty, you name the Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle as your must-have item, taking the name from thin air, because you think it sounds nifty and suitably Vancian. You don't know anything more about the beetle than the name you've assigned to it. Are its antennae merely in the shape of lightning bolts, or does the creature truly emit an electrical charge? If you want, you can answer the question in a snippet of supplementary text. Or you can leave it up to the GM, should the item ever become important in play. In this case, you don't much care, and opt for the speedy expedience of the phrase alone.*

When faced with an opportunity to acquire one of your must-haves, you suffer a 2-point levy on all attempts to Resist Avariciousness and pass it by.

To be a collector is to experience only fleeting moments of gratification, outweighed by the knowledge that there's always something else out there you do not yet possess. Whenever you acquire a must-have item, you must then specify a new one for that specialty.

*You thought you'd be satisfied by your immaculately preserved specimen of the Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle, but now that you look upon it, it occurs to you that the species is sexually dimorphic, and that you need an example of the*

## Suggested Collections Specialties

Alchemical Instruments  
Alien Artifacts  
Bird Specimens  
Botanical Specimens  
Ceramics  
Clothing  
Coins  
Erotica  
Fish Specimens  
Fossils  
Funerary Artifacts  
Furniture  
Gems  
Glassware  
Handbills/Posters  
Hats  
Insect Specimens  
Jewelry  
Mammal Specimens  
Maps and Globes  
Medical Instruments  
Monster/Creature Specimens  
Musical Instruments  
Musical Manuscripts  
Paintings  
Memorabilia of Famous Persons  
Ritual Implements  
Rocks and Minerals  
Rugs  
Sculpture  
Shoes  
Silverware  
Stamps  
Tapestries  
Timepieces  
Tribal Curios  
Weapons



### Acquiring Must-Haves

If you acquire one of your must-have items in the course of a session, you gain half a share's worth of status points. This is a directed share.

If you acquire another player's must-have before he can get his hands on it, you gain a full share of status points. (It goes without saying that you know what your fellow arch-magicians' must-have items are at all times. No matter how much they try to keep them secret, the compulsive collector can't help babbling, to the point of tedium, about the objects of their most heated accumulative desires.)

If you acquire one of your must-haves from another PC, after he scooped it out from under you, you gain a share and half of status points. To qualify for the status point gain, you must have won a contest of some sort, either against him, or against the defenses of his manse, or one of his servitors. Winning a Persuade/Rebuff against the PC is a perfectly acceptable way of earning the points.

If you acquire another PC's must-have, you may wish to deprive him of potential points by simply giving it to him, no contest required. This clever stratagem is more difficult than it may first appear: to give a rival arch-magician a must-have for his collection requires a successful Resist Avarice attempt on your part. If your Resist Avarice rating happens to be  $\Omega$ , you must instead Resist Arrogance.

### Exposing Fakery

Collectors are eager to believe that the beautiful and historically important items they pay enormous sums to acquire are authentic. As with the objects of romantic infatuation, they are eager to ignore screaming flaws during that first passionate blush of acquaintanceship that precedes a purchase.

Yet the grim prospect of fakery hangs over any precious object — the more exciting the find, the greater the chance of forgery.

To show a collector that his treasured item is a fake is to make a public fool of him. You're impugning not only his discernment as a collector and exposing him as a foolish spendthrift. In other words, you're performing an act eminently deserving of a status point award.

Debunkings are not without risk, however; if you challenge an item that turns out to be authentic, the academic egg drips from your face, and your opponent wins status points. An authenticity challenge pits your Appraisal pool against your opponent's Collection pool, and can take place only in your opponent's manse. It is a simple challenge and, unless your GM builds a special circumstances into the plot, does not provide a directed shares or top-ups.

*comparatively drab and much smaller female to go with your magnificent male. Since the female is ugly and nondescript, good specimens are even harder to find than the male. So on your manse sheet, you replace your entry for Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle with Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle (female).*

Because must-have items reap status points, the GM must be even-handed in doling out opportunities to acquire them — or snaffle them out from under the noses of those who covet them.

The GM maintains a list of PCs and their must-have items. At the beginning of each session, she rolls a die to see if a chance to get a must-have item will occur: on a 5 or 6, the answer is yes. For consecutive, previous session during which no must-have was acquired (even when the opportunity presented itself), the GM adds 1 to the roll, up to maximum modifier of +3.

*I'm your GM; for the last two sessions, no one has acquired a must-have item. Last session, a player had a chance to steal one of his items, Lord Quastic's autograph book, but chose instead to protect the conclave from a horde of preening archvults. You had a chance to swipe it, too, but, in a bout of unusual altruism and common sense, instead decided to help vanquish the archvults. The session before that, I rolled a 1, indicating that no must-haves would appear in play. So this time the roll gets a +2 modifier. I roll a 3.  $3 + 2 = 5$ , meaning that a must-have will appear this session.*

*(If I'd rolled a 2, the result would have meant no must-have this time — and a +3 modifier next session.)*

The GM then randomly chooses which item will appear. When the number of must-haves does not correspond to a die type, the GM may need to use generate a random number on a computer, or blindly draw lots from a hat. PCs with more specialties than their rivals will see their must-haves appear more often in play. This may or may not be an advantage, depending on the aggressiveness of opposing players.

*The five players in my group have 9 Collections specialties, and thus, 9 must-haves, between them. I use a spreadsheet program to generate a number between 1 and 9, and get a result of 5. Consulting my record, where I've assigned a number to each, from 1 to 9, I see that number 5 is your must-have, the Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle (female).*



GMs should always introduce must-haves into the storyline in a way that gives both the PC in question, and at least one of the other characters, a credible chance of acquiring it. They may appear as distractions, tantalizing the players with the temptation to pursue a plot tangent when they really ought to be saving the universe from destruction. Or they can appear in throwaway scenes between crises. When stumped for a storyline, the GM can simply introduce the must-have item, and let a plot weave itself out of the players' attempts to secure it.

*I've already decided that the next session will kick off a storyline in which a woman wronged by all of the arch-magicians comes back as a powerful witch to seek vengeance against them. I need a plot hook to get them all together so she can launch her first attack on them, and I have to introduce a must-have. How convenient! The arch-magicians hear that a Carcassian Lightning-Horn Beetle (female) will be going up for sale at an auction house in Kain in a week. As everyone knows, you covet this item beyond imagining. Unfortunately, your nemesis knows it, too; its presence at the sale is bait, intended to lure you, and your closest colleagues, who she knows will be equally unable to resist the chance to acquire it, so that they may make sport of your thwarted avarice..*

## Comfort

The amenities you provide to your guests give you a certain social authority allowing you to take certain liberties and generally, if subtly, boss your colleagues about.

When in your manse, you may convert Comfort points to Wherewithal points at a premium, gaining 1 Wherewithal for each Comfort point spent. This includes auctions for the right to pre-empt a challenge, wherein each Comfort point spent counts as a bid of 2 Wherewithal points.

When in your manse, you may spend Comfort points to lavish attention on a fellow PC. This gambit is known as a **cosset**. Your hospitality will be of such magnificence that the cosseted PC will find it difficult to hornswoggle you, or to turn down your requests for aid and assistance, no matter how outlandish they may be. For every 5 Comfort points spent, the targeted PC suffers a 1-point levy in all Persuade/Rebuff contests undertaken directly against you until the end of the current session. (The levy does not apply to challenges in which both of you attempt to Persuade a third party.)

The drawback of a cosset is that it arouses the envy and resentment of other PCs not given the same lavish treatment. Any other PC present in your manse when another is cosseted gains a 1-point boon in all Rebuff rolls against you for the remainder of the current session.

Though both benefits and penalties of a cosset typically remain in force until the end of a session, you can cancel the effects of another PC's cosset by performing one of your own. To do so naturally requires you to successfully invite the targeted PCs to your manse.

## Hosting Challenges

You can engage other PCs in Comfort challenges, in which each of you attempts to outdo the other as a host. Both of you attempt to impress a third party — most often, another arch-magician, such as Ildefonse, or even another PC. You take turns inviting the targeted guest to your homes; the winner of the challenge is declared the most magnificent host.

If you have been subject to cosset and wish to erase its effects, you may spend 5 Comfort points lavishing reciprocal hospitality on the PC who cosseted you. You may either cancel the levy against you in future Persuade/Rebuff attempts, or place a countervailing levy on your erstwhile pamperer. (The former choice is safer; the latter will pump up the status points available to you in Persuade/Rebuff challenges against that character.)

## Cuisine

Fastidious gourmets nearly to a man, the arch-magicians of the conclave can conceive few crises so impending as to postpone dinner. Points invested in your manse feature allow you to impress your colleagues by offering exotic multi-course feasts. Your tables will groan with the weight of subtle dishes, expertly prepared from the finest, freshest, and rarest ingredients. Your wine cellars burst with coveted vintages gathered from the furthest reaches of space and time. The cuisine pool reflects the skill of your chefs and servers, the efficacy of your kitchen equipment, and your pantry's ability to store foods at the proper temperatures and humidities.

Roll your Cuisine feature to see if any meal prepared on your premises reaches the lofty standards of

your colleagues' palates. You may spend Stewardship points as Cuisine points. Points from your Cuisine pool may be spent as Comfort points when cossetting a target player. When in your manse, you may challenge an opponent to a Connoisseurship challenge, in which your chefs prepare an array of exotic dishes, and the opponent must identify their ingredients and means of preparation. For that matter, a guest may challenge you to baffle his taste buds. You pit your Cuisine and/or Stewardship against his Appraisal. If he wins, he gains a top-up. Connoisseurship challenges need not involve food: they could require the taster to identify wines or other premium beverages.

### Gluttony Challenges

It is always amusing to tempt a colleague into over-indulgence so severe that he embarrasses himself. While in your manse, you may challenge any player, pitting your Cuisine pool against his Resist Gourmandism ability. If he wins, your food is insufficiently tempting to provoke his gluttony, and he gains status points. If you win, his discomfiture reaps a whirlwind of gossip, and wins you status.

A character failing a Gluttony challenge must then make a Health roll, or suffer digestive distress so great that he suffers an Injury. (DERPG p. 54.) If your Cuisine causes an injury, you gain a top-up.

### Cooking Competitions

Cooking competitions are dear to the hearts of arch-magicians. You may play host to a competition between the chefs of two rival arch-magicians. You supply the ingredients, kitchen facilities, and equipment; they bring the cooks. As host of the competition, the choice of main ingredient, which is often held back as a surprise until the last moment, is yours.

If you wish, you can tilt the odds by selecting a special ingredient which you think will play to the strengths of your favored candidate. You might want to do this in exchange for a favor of some kind from your favored contestant. By secretly manipulating the odds, you might increase your chances of winning a wager. Or you can specify ahead of time that you seek a status point reward for your interference.

To tilt the odds, engage in a contest against the player

you hope to sabotage, pitting your Cuisine against the target's Stewardship.

You may not spend your own Stewardship points; your only leverage here derives from the contents of your pantry. If you win, the target suffers a 1-point, one-sided levy during the upcoming competition. Because Stewardship points are the currency of that challenge, your opponent may be tempted to concede. The target is not given time to refresh Stewardship between your contest and the actual competition.

The competition itself plays out as a straight Stewardship vs. Stewardship challenge. If you successfully tilted the odds, keep track of all points spent by your target due to the levy you've placed on him. If your favored candidate wins, those status points go to you, not to the player who won the challenge. However, if a successfully targeted player wins the competition despite the levy, he scores a top-up.

### Library

More so than any other aspect of his manse, the depth and breadth of an arch-magician's collection of books, grimoires, scrolls, maps and manuscripts will influence the esteem his colleagues feel for him. After a quick tour of a new manse, nearly any arch-magician will stampede to your library to peruse

### Book Theft

Book theft is all too lamentably common, even among arch-magicians. You'll want to take measures to secure your collection, while at the same time helping yourself to choice items from those of your fellows. Naturally, any unauthorized borrowing on your part will be conducted purely in the interests of scholarship. While in another PC's manse, you may attempt a book theft. This challenge pits your Quick Fingers against the targeted player's Security manse feature. You may spend points from your Stealth pool as Quick Fingers points. Your opponent may spend points from his manse's Staff pool.

If you win the challenge, you not only gain status points, but your choice of bonus prizes. You may either gain a directed share, *or* you may permanently steal a rating point from your opponent's Library feature and add it to your own.

Among arch-magicians, a peculiar etiquette pertains to the practice of bibliographic pilferage. All arch-magicians decry it, but a very few decline to take part in it. To accuse another arch-magician of such a base act is unthinkable, at least to the perpetrator's face. However, gossip among the conclave runs rife, and sharp eyes are quick to take note when a one-of-a-kind volume disappears from one set of shelves, only to reappear on another. Thus, even though nothing will be said aloud, the purloining of a book will be noted, attaching secret respect to the winner, and mocking laughter to the gull who allowed his precious property to be so insouciantly liberated.







the spines of your book collection. Expect to be judged on your taste in poetry, the rarity of your volumes, and the quality of your cataloguing system.

You may spend Library points as Pedantry points during any debate that takes place in your manse. If you win a Pedantry debate against an opponent in his own manse, you gain a top-up. Books are as subject to forgery as other precious items. You may launch an Authenticity challenge (see p. 56) against a rare tome in an opponent's library, pitting your Appraisal pool against his Library pool.

## Mobility

Whether your destination is a few miles, several galaxies or an eternity away, you will surely wish to travel in the utmost comfort. What conveyance could be more capacious and pleasingly familiar than your very own home? By investing points in this manse feature, you can turn it into a vehicle at will. With the aid of your sandestin, you not only provide it with locomotion in a variety of environments, but reinforce its supports and secure its knick-knacks. You need never worry that your high-speed cruise to the end of the universe will result in structural damage or the unseemly disarray of your collection. Assuming no unpleasant Failure results, your jaunt across space and/or time will remain scarcely noticeable as you and your fellow arch-magicians sup chai in the parlor and gossip about absent colleagues.

You may specify the means of locomotion on a per journey basis. On one occasion, you may want your manse to stomp across a set of rolling foothills on titanic brass legs. On another, you may opt for the less impact-oriented flight method.

A contested roll of your Mobility feature determines how quickly and smoothly you arrive at your destination:

Like any vehicle, a manse with Mobility can be raced. Enter into Mobility challenges with your fellow arch-magicians; the first to reach an important destination with buttresses and china cabinets intact wins a bundle of status points. If you wish your manse to double as a fearsome dreadnought, able to implacably attack the palatial structures of rivals and enemies, you should invest heavily in Mobility. For more on Manse Combat, see p. 65.

Illustrious Success	You arrive on time, in a manner that deeply impresses the locals. (At GM's discretion, you may apply a levy of 1 to Persuade attempts against ordinary people who witness your impressive entrance.)
Prosaic Success	You arrive on time.
Hair's-Breadth Success	You arrive at the last minute.
Exasperating Failure	At the GM's whim, you either arrive slightly too late to achieve your aim, or an annoying distance from your desired destination.
Quotidian Failure	You end up in a different place or time than your destination called for, or wind up lost altogether.
Dismal Failure	As per Quotidian Failure, but your manse also suffers structural damage. Until you refresh Mobility, all Mobility and Splendor rolls face a levy of 1.

## Scrying

Your manse's Scrying feature measures the quality of your observatory and its array of remote viewing equipment. The accoutrements of a properly outfitted observatory range from the simple crystal balls and yarrow stalks of your youth, to the latest in telescopes, aura readers, and translagnetic gel vats.

Roll against your Scrying pool to observe the current activities of any distant individual.

Situational modifiers attach themselves to most attempts at surveillance:

Modifiers from the next chart are cumulative. If you've never met the subject, who is in another dimension, but you have his slippers, each roll is made with a levy of 2 and bonus of 1. Bonuses and penalties cancel one another: two bonuses and a penalty are treated as a bonus of 1.

The duration of a successful Scrying attempt waxes and wanes according to narrative demand. Typically,

Situation	Modifier
Subject is resident in a manse with a Security feature	To succeed, you must overcome the manse owner in a contest pitting your Scrying against his Security
You have never met subject	Levy of 1
You have met subject, but do not know his real name	Levy of 1
Subject is in another dimension	Levy of 1
Subject has absented himself to another time frame	Levy of 1
You possess an item that the subject once wore on his person, or an object of great emotional import to him	Bonus of 1
Subject actively protected from scrying by the honest efforts of his sandestin	If your sandestin is honestly cooperating with you, no modifier. Otherwise, a Levy of 1.
You elect to collect only a visual image of the subject, without sound	Bonus of 1
You elect only to eavesdrop on your subject, without remote sight	Bonus of 1; you gain an additional 1-point boon for each Illustrious Success scored

one success provides you one bit of useful information that advances the story. If the character you've chosen to spy on does not figure into the current plot<sup>1</sup>, you get to watch him until he does something interesting.

You may distantly observe a subject with the intention of gaining leverage in a subsequent Persuade or Seduction

contest. If you succeed, you gain inside knowledge of the subject's desires. Assuming you can credibly offer to satisfy them, you gain a bonus of 1 on all rolls during that contest.

Conversely, you may scry proactively, to gird yourself against future Persuade attempts from the subject in question. You learn a secret that you can throw in the subject's face, granting you a 1-point bonus on all Rebuff rolls against him the next time he tries to Persuade you.

If your subject in a quest for such inside leverage is a PC, that character's player must supply a relevant desire or embarrassing disclosure. The GM should make one up if the player is unwilling or unable. GMs should always respect the line between player and character, working to embarrass the latter but not the former.

When you are resident in your manse, you may spend Scrying points on any Perception roll.

**Challenges:** You may engage another PC in a Scrying challenge; each of you chooses the same subject. You pit each other's Scrying pools against one another to see which of you will be the first to home in on him and glean the desired bit of information.

You may challenge another PC to ward off your Scrying attempts with the Security of his manse. The challenge pits your Scrying feature against his Security. This challenge is often preceded by a period of jockeying, during which the defender seeks to level the playing field by ensuring that his would-be observer does not possess any of his intimate articles. Challengers may agree to forgo any advantages gleaned from such personal items. It is not unknown for the Scrying magician to make such promises, and then covertly break them.

## Security

From mundane portcullises and boiling oil traps to the presence of watchful imps, your manse's Security features provide for the safety and privacy of yourself and your guests within the boundaries of your estate.

Security measures your stronghold's imperviousness from a range of threats, from distant Scrying (see above), to infiltration attempts, to direct physical assaults.

<sup>1</sup> Sagacious GMs will, whenever possible, alter their narrative improvisations to weave the scrying subject into the preconceived storyline.

To defend yourself stoutly when your manor is attacked by the roving, belligerent structure of a rival or enemy, invest heavily in your Security feature. In manse combat, Security is to your home what Defense is to your person.

While in your manse, you may enter into a contest to prevent others from using their Perception ability to peek into your business, or intrude on the seclusion of your other guests. Pit your Security against their Perception.

Security features can also be used to thwart unwanted duels and altercations between guests, as well as to immobilize intruders.

**Interrupting Actions.** To prevent any guest in your manse from completing a single, simple action, from the drawing of a rapier to the palming of an item, make a successful Security roll. You may specify the exact mechanism by which the action is thwarted. Examples might include:

- A gust of astral wind knocks an item from the target's grip.
- A salamander wriggles up the target's trouser leg, distracting him.
- The rug shifts suddenly under the target's feet.

Whatever interruption you describe must be fleeting, with no lasting ill consequences to the target, aside from the prevention of his action.

**Immobilizing Intruders and Guests.** While in your manse or on the grounds of your estate, you may use Security to render a target helpless, by trapping or immobilizing him. Needless to say, it is a severe breach of hospitality to do this to one's guests and should only be resorted to after severe provocation. More often, you'll want to use this to capture unauthorized intruders so that they may be interrogated at your leisure. If you so desire, would-be infiltrators who lose Stealth vs. Security contests against you manse can be subjected to this treatment automatically.

This contest pits your Security against the target's Defense. Provided that your Security pool is 1 or more, you may spend Magic points as Security points. Defenders with Magic *ratings* of 20 or more can spend Magic points as Defense points.

You may specify the nature of the magical

apprehension method. You may even describe a number of methods in the course of a prolonged contest. Examples of apprehension measures might include:

- An ephemeral, yet exceedingly muscular, djinn wrestles target to the ground.
- A suddenly animate curtain sash snakes over to place target in a constricting bind.
- A chair bounds up behind the target, knocking him into it; shackles appear on its arms and legs, snapping around his wrists and ankles.
- A trap door opens beneath him, then slams shut again.

**Trapping With Intent To Harm.** In some cases, you may prefer to forgo the interrogation and skip straight to the bit where the intruder undergoes a tortuous death at the hands of your fiendish trap. These extreme measures should be directed only against your blood enemies; to use them on fellow conclave members shows a distinct lack of proportionality.

When you use your Security features in an attempt to harm or kill a target, the contest unfolds as follows. You roll Security; he resists your successful attempts with Defense. If he fails a required Defense roll, he must make a Health roll, or suffer an injury, as per the usual injury rules on DERPG p. 54.

You needn't be present in your manse to defend against intrusion with your Security array. Just specify a set of conditions that will trigger a trap contest. The conditions can be as narrow or specific as you wish. A trap contest may be triggered against anyone who loses a Stealth vs. Security contest, against all who lose that contest and but have a Magic of less than 20, or whatever you desire. Note that your Security features are installed by sandestins, and that commands which remain open to subjective interpretation may or may not be carried out with the precision you imagined.

However, if you are at home in your manse during a trap contest, you can spend Magic points as Security points. As long as you still retain at least 1 point in your Security pool, you may do so from a position of safety and comfort, such as your study. Should you run out of Security points, you may confront the interloper in person. The contest then continues as a magical duel or battle of magic vs. force.



Take heed: it is normally considered unsporting to turn your traps to their lethal and/or injurious settings against other conclave members, even when they enter your manse without invitation. Immobilization and ejection, followed by a formal complaint to the assembly<sup>1</sup>, remains the proper response to such unseemly incursions. If you choose to injure an invading colleague, it may be you who faces a formal charge and possible sanctions. It should be said, though, that, this unwritten rule can be broken with the aid of a sufficiently convincing rationalization. The redoubtable Rhialto once successfully defended himself against charges of gratuitously injuring Gilgad with his trap array. He argued that he was fully justified in loosing his most lethal traps against an intruder who looked like Gilgad. As it was unthinkable that a person of such signal honor as Gilgad would seek to burgle his manse, one had to assume that any archveult bold enough to impersonate that redoubtable fellow was surely one of surpassing might, against whom no holds could safely be barred. The voting members present at the conclave that day not only ruled Rhialto's defense wholly on point; they went on to rule in favor of his countersuit. Gilgad was fined one IOUN stone for causing distress to Rhialto, by seeming to be a archveult so terrible it would dare impersonate him.

## Splendor

Your Splendor rating measures the scope, beauty, and structural integrity of your manse.

It provides the pool you roll against when checking to see if your manse has been damaged. Splendor is to your home what your Health rating is to your corporeal form. The most dramatic, and perhaps most common, source of structural damage is manse combat (p. 65.) Accordingly, the degrees and consequences of damage to your manse are discussed there.

There are other occasions when you may need to check if your manse has been damaged. It may be targeted by incoming comets and asteroids, subjected to the corrosive ravages of acid rains, buffeted by arcane frequencies, or otherwise brought under direct assault by destructive yet impersonal means. In these cases, your GM may require you to make a straight Splendor roll; if you fail to muster a success, you suffer one degree of structural damage. Especially catastrophic situations may require multiple rolls.

Needless to say, such things don't happen by accident. Whenever your manse suffers an onslaught of this sort, you can assume it heralds a larger threat. It might be the opening volley in a new war against archveults or witches. Or it could foretell the imminent annihilation of the universe by some terrifying new abstract force. In either case, it will likely require action on your part, above and beyond the purchase of construction supplies and the hiring of work crews.

Perhaps more importantly, Splendor protects you from the social damage of inferior fixtures, outdated design schemes, and dingy, moth-eaten furniture. The primary reason to invite your colleagues to your manse is to overwhelm them with the ostentatious fashionability of your living quarters.

If hosting the target of a Persuade attempt in your manse, you may spend Splendor points as Persuade points. You may add Splendor and Persuade together for the purpose of calculating Wallops, with the same exception.

**Challenges:** In the typical Splendor challenge, the host pits the awesome power of his latest renovations and decorating initiatives against the snooty judgment of a targeted colleague. Roll your Splendor against an opponent's Appraisal. If you win the contest, your home is so obviously resplendent that it reduces your guest to a half-coherent cascade of babbled praise. If you lose, your host so accurately describes the flaws and pretensions of your miserable digs that you collapse into a black puddle of gloom<sup>2</sup>.

You may also compete directly with another player by submitting your respective manses to the judgment of an impartial third party, such as a GMC conclave member. In this challenge, the judge tours both estates in quick succession. Then, at a neutral location, each of you attempts to influence his final judgment by reminding him of the best features of your own manse and the worst of your rivals'. In rules terms, this plays out as a Splendor vs. Splendor contest, with the winner taking first place — and the stake.

<sup>1</sup> including, naturally, a request for compensation in the form of IOUN stones.

<sup>2</sup> Metaphorically, of course.

## Staff

Your Staff rating reflects the general quality of the mass of unnamed servitors who cook your meals, fluff your pillows, sweep your hallways, and guard your treasure vaults. The typical arch-magician will employ a smattering of inhuman creatures to complement a staff mostly comprised of ordinary humans. If you live in a remote location, you'll need to hire your staff in a population center and arrange for their transport to your distant hideaway. If not, you probably hire locals. Some village economies depend entirely on the nearby household of an arch-magician, with each resident either a member of his staff, a dependent of same, or a provider of services to the estate. Among the people of your village, you are regarded with a mixture of awe and loathing. The exact proportions of these two emotions vary from one arch-magician to the next, according to your generosity and degree of friendliness.

Whenever you want a simple favor performed within the confines of your manse, you can assume that it will be executed adequately, if not to your exact specifications. (Good help is hard to find in these waning days of earth.) If you wish an extraordinary task performed acceptably, or an ordinary task executed to a taskmaster's exacting specifications, roll Staff to see if it is carried out.

**Strong-arming.** Your staff includes an unspecified number of professional guardsmen. These burly, well-armed bodyguards can be trusted to bar entry to unwanted supplicants, ward off mundane assaults, and direct intruders toward your oubliettes and trap rooms.

To toss a resistant person out of your estate, contest your Staff against the unwanted guest's Athletics. If you win, the target is stoutly frog-marched to the borders of your estate. He will not immediately return: your guards will deliver a manhandling sufficient to keep him away for at least a day, if not longer. If you lose, the unwanted guest remains staunchly planted on your carpet. You may then resort to other means of ejection, from persuasion to physical force on your part. At worst, you may have to waste indenture points by instructing your sandestin to transport the miscreant elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. (The threat of a teleportation is generally enough to effect the exit of all but the most

heedless guests; no one wants to be tossed onto the wintry summit of a tall peak, or into the stinking marshlands of Thráp.)

Your guardsmen may like you well enough, but their fervor waxes and wanes when faced with potentially lethal opposition.

When you enter physical combat (or a Magical duel) in the confines of your own home, you may be permitted to spend Staff points to aid you in your fight. This measures your guardsmen's effectiveness as they fight by your side.

If the current Attack pool of your opponent is less than your Staff pool, you may do so automatically. You may spend Staff points as either Attack or Defense points, as you require.

If the enemy's Attack is equal to or greater than your Staff pool, you must make a Staff roll to motivate your guardsmen to stand up against an apparently fearsome opponent. If you fail, they stand on the sidelines, adding nothing more to the battle than the occasional word of shouted encouragement. On a Hair's-Breadth or Prosaic Success, they're willing to risk themselves somewhat, impeding your enemy's attempts to hurt you: you may spend Staff points as Defense points. It takes an Illustrious Success to get them to fully join the battle, allowing you to spend Staff points on Attack as well as Defense.

Staff members will never join a magical duel.

**Information Gathering:** Persons of lofty station, your fellow arch-magicians most certainly included, fall into the habit of regarding servants as mere background elements. Often they'll do or say the most amazingly private things in front of their help. Sometimes they're even foolish enough to do it while staying as a guest, revealing secrets to your servants.

To learn a secret about a character present in your manse — PCs included — pit your Staff pool against one of the target's Resistances.

Often you, the player, will know something your character does not. You can use an eavesdropping contest to transmit this piece of information to your PC, so that you can make

<sup>1</sup> This course of action will be of no help against arch-magicians, against whom your sandestins will never intervene.

use of it in the game. In that case, you specify the exact secret you're hoping to learn. Or you can go on a fishing expedition, looking simply for a bit of embarrassing information you can use against the target.

Start by deciding which of three Resistances to target:

To contest against Resist Pettifoggery, dispatch a member of your library staff or a curator of your collections to provoke your guest's love of pedantic quibbling. You supply your staffer with a patently ridiculous argument, calculated so that your target will be tempted to tip his hand in order to refute it.

To contest against Resist Gourmandism, send a cook to tempt the target with a series of delectable morsels. Over time, the staffer ingratiates himself to the target, who eventually lets down his guard and lets slip his secret.

To contest against Resist Rakishness, dangle before your target an attractive young staffer, carefully chosen to match your guest's taste in bed partners. (Servants possessed of a strict moral compass may require additional cozening before taking part in such intrigues; you must spend 1 Persuade point to take advantage of this option.)

If you win the contest, you learn a useful secret about the target. If you specified a secret to unite your knowledge as a player with the character's knowledge, that's what you learn.

If you were just fishing, the GM decides what you discover - in collaboration with the player in question, if the target was a PC. The player may object to possible suggestions on the grounds that they're out of character, but cannot stop the GM from arriving at a nugget of information that is embarrassing to him and useful to you.

**Challenges:** Complaints about the adequacy of today's servants are a constant staple during breaks at conclave meetings. Arch-magicians often engage in wagers pitting their staffs against one another in a variety of contests. Cooking challenges are extremely popular; see p. 68. Other forms of Staff vs. Staff challenge include mock battles between one's guardsmen. These contests are also a favorite of conclave members — though perhaps less so since a regrettable incident a few years back, in which Hurtiancz's manse was raided by witches while his guardsmen were out in the woods training for an obstacle event.

## Manse Combat

Manses with both Security and Mobility pools can enter into combat with one another. Most manses enter into a state of combat preparedness by sprouting pairs of columnar metallic legs. They circle around each other like enormous architectural game cocks, smashing away with balconies, chimneys, and flying battlements. Fire may be exchanged via cannons, ballistae, or devices that blaze magical energy.

To attack the manse of a fellow conclave member without warning or consent is very nearly as gauche and brutish an act as an assault against his person. You can never win status points with a surprise attack on a colleague's estate.

In fact, among the conservative element of Ildefonse's organization, manse combat of any kind is regarded as insufferably childish. However, certain of the young bravos admitted into the group during the last aeon or so derive considerable enjoyment from these displays of martial-architectural bravado. A manse vs. manse bout often serves as the centerpiece of a day's outing, with much feasting, drinking, and wagering surrounding the main event.

Though archveults and witches do not always dwell in manses, it is not unprecedented for the foes of the conclave to construct battle-ready structures for the express purpose of launching attacks against their enemies' strongholds. Even if you are uninterested in entering your home into exhibition bouts, you may nonetheless wish to fortify it against the less sporting sorties of your true foes.

Combat between manses unfolds much like a fight between people. Your manse's Mobility pool is used like a duelist's Attack, while Security acts like Defense. Splendor fills the role of a person's Health pool. For simplicity's sake, manses do not have an equivalent of Attack/Defense styles.

At the beginning of a combat, determine initiative based on Mobility.

Starting with the character whose manse possesses initiative, a series of exchanges occurs, pitting the attacker's Mobility against the defender's Security. Whenever the attacker overcomes the defender, the defender must make a Splendor roll or suffer **structural damage** to his manse.

After a single incident of structural damage, your manse is **distressed**. The damage cracks plaster,





splinters wood, upends bookshelves, shatters display cases, and discommodes the staff. You can still use your Manse features, but at a 2-point levy on all rolls.

After a second incident of structural damage, your manse is effectively **condemned** until repairs can be made. Support beams snap; pipes burst; walls crack open. If mobile, the building grinds to a halt, perhaps heaving to its side or merely sinking down into its foundations. You cannot use Mobility or any other Manse feature at all until you conduct extensive repairs, reorganize your collections and library, and provide medical assistance to your staff, rehiring as necessary.

A third incident signals the irreparable **obliteration** of your manse. If your Splendor pool is at 0, the manse is immediately obliterated. Otherwise it falls to splinters, is consumed by flame, or is otherwise destroyed in a period of time that lasts for 15 minutes per remaining Splendor point.

## Stationary Targets

An immobile manse is not only unable to launch attacks; it also becomes easier to hit. When a manse's Mobility pool is 0, its Security rolls to ward off attacks suffers a 1-point levy.

## Emergency Repairs

If you are inside your manse when it is engaged in combat, you can use your Magic pool to conduct temporary repairs. These will mask the effects of structural damage for the length of the battle only. A successful Magic roll removes one level of structural damage, rendering a condemned manse merely distressed, or removing all damage from a distressed manse. An obliterated manse cannot be restored via a simple Magic roll.

You may make one Magical repair roll per round. Your manse must be more or less stationary to receive the benefits of your magic, so your repair roll takes the place of its Mobility attack that round.

Emergency repairs must be actively maintained, or they vanish, immediately returning your manse to its natural state of structural damage. While in combat, at the beginning of every round, you must spend 1 Magic point for each successful emergency repair you have conducted during the current fight. If you are unable or unwilling to pay

this amount, all repairs immediately vanish, and your manse instantly reaches the degree of structural damage it would otherwise have suffered were it not for your intervention.

When combat ends, you must spend 1 Magic point per minute to maintain your emergency repairs<sup>1</sup>. You'll need to hastily negotiate with your sandestins to prevent your manse from imploding before your eyes.

## Personal Injury

If you are present in a manse when it is engaged in a fight, you stand some risk of injury.

Whenever your manse suffers a structural damage, you must make an Athletics roll to avoid harm. If your manse has just become distressed, you roll normally. If it has just been condemned, you suffer a 1-point levy. If it has been obliterated, you suffer a 3-point levy.

If you are unable to muster a success, you are hit, just as you might be in a standard combat. You must roll Health or suffer an injury, as per DERPG p. 54.

The Athletics roll is required every time your manse's condition deteriorates. This includes instances where its condition changes because you've failed to maintain your emergency repairs. Thus it is possible to be hurt twice from the same original instance of damage — once when it first occurs, and again when your emergency repairs lose their magical integrity.

Personal injury is also a possibility when a manse is damaged outside of combat, for example during an asteroid strike. (See p. 63 for more on non-combat manse damage.)

Needless to say, this risk pertains whether the manse collapsing around your ears is your own, or that of another arch-magician.

In fact, when you are a mere helpless bystander in a manse engaged in combat, you should make a one-time Engineering roll to find a suitably secure, easily accessible location to strap yourself into. A heavy-legged chair under an archway is always an excellent choice. If you fail to muster a success, you face a 1-point levy on all subsequent Athletics rolls to avoid injury when the manse is damaged.

<sup>1</sup> Though it is sometimes possible to instruct one's sandestin to repair the manse, the negotiations over indenture points typically can rarely be completed before you run out of the magical energy necessary to keep your structure together.



## Remote Command

Arch-magicians leery of physical injury can command their manse from a safe distance, via a mental link.

Though it poses less risk to life and limb, remote command carries with it an important drawback: you cannot conduct emergency repairs.

## Withdrawal

When it is your turn to act, you can attempt to withdraw from a manse fight by rolling Mobility to escape, rather than attack.

If you cannot muster a success, some obstacle, impediment or malfunction keeps you on the scene of battle.

*You are engaged in a manse battle with Marthrap. You've been taking a pasting, and he seems perversely determined to do permanent damage to your fixtures. Your turn to attack comes up. Instead, you try to withdraw. You roll Mobility, as you would if you were attacking, but to achieve a different purpose.*

If you succeed, you begin to move away from the scene.

*Your Mobility is 5. Attempting to withdraw, you get a Prosaic Success. Your manse, leaking coruscating essence, thuds laboriously from the scene.*

If your opponent decides not to follow you, you get away and the fight is ended. You bear the shame of defeat, but your manse suffers no further damage.

*Marthrap can elect to let you go. The challenge is considered over; he collects all the points you've staked so far, gaining 8 status points.*

If your opponent wishes to continue the battle and deliver further damage to your manse and humiliation to you, he can attempt to pursue. He makes his own Mobility roll.

*But let's say Marthrap is confident of ultimate victory and feels he can wring more points out of you, increasing his status point gain even further. He may now roll his own Mobility and give chase.*

If he fails to muster a success, you escape; the result is the same as if he elected not to follow.

*After two consecutive Dismal Failures, Marthrap changes his tune. He elects not to nullify the second one, allowing you to escape. He takes consolation in his 8-point status gain.*

If he scores a success, he manages to follow you. The scene of the confrontation has changed, but the struggle itself is far from over.

*Let's say that Marthrap got a Dismal Failure and then an Illustrious Success. You don't want to waste precious points*

*nullifying it, and so allow this result to stand. Marthrap's manse has caught up to yours.*

While the withdrawing party must forgo his Mobility attack for the round, the pursuing party need not. If he has already made an attack this round, he may still roll Mobility to pursue. If his turn to attack has not come up, he may roll to pursue and then, if his pursuit succeeds, proceed to launch his unused Mobility attack.

*You're the first player to act each round, which means Marthrap still has an attack left. He rolls Mobility, hoping to clobber your manse into paste.*

## Example of Manse Combat

*Flegel's manse comes under attack by the clanking iron manor of the dread archvult Jiturac.*

*Your manse has a Mobility of 8, a Security of 7, and a Splendor of 6.*

*Jiturac's manse has a Mobility of 12, a Security of 6, and a Splendor of 4.*

*It's the Mobility pool that determines initiative; Jiturac's is higher, so his manse acts first.*

*Flegel is sitting on the balcony of his sublime manor, enjoying a pinch of snuff and enjoying the leaping of the trout in his limpid brook below, when Jiturac's manse clatters horribly into view from behind a sun-dappled ridge. It raises a fist-like balcony to smash across the tiled gables of your alabaster manor.*

*As GM, I make Jiturac's Mobility roll, which will determine whether he hits you or not. I get a Quotidian Failure. Jiturac is not a patient archvult, so I pay 1 to reroll it. His Mobility drops to 11. He gets an Exasperating Failure. I decide to stand pat.*

*After two flailing blows from Jiturac's manse swing far wide of their marks, you levitate up into the parapet you typically use as a cockpit when your home is subjected to a crass attack of this nature. You make a Mobility roll, hoping to fire an entangling web around the legs of Jiturac's building. You get an Exasperating Failure. You pay 1 to reroll it, lowering your Mobility pool to 7, and get a Hair's-Breadth Success. The web wraps around one leg, impeding it slightly.*

*Now I must score a Security success for Jiturac, or risk structural damage to his manse. Instead, I get a Dismal Failure. That automatically costs him a 2 point levy, dropping his Security to 4. Then I must spend 3 to nullify and reroll, bringing it all the way down to 1. This may be a short battle! But wait — rerolling for Jiturac, I get an Illustrious Success. His automatic boon for that result takes his Security back to 3.*



*You could pay 3 Mobility to nullify his successful defense, but you decide that would be a waste of points.*

*Your webbing briefly sticks to the right leg of Jiturac's structure, and is then torn off by his horde of wriggling, foul-smelling sprites.*

Round two begins.

*Jiturac's balconies take another swipe at your gables. I roll a Dismal Failure. The automatic levy takes his Mobility to 9. I pay 3 to reroll, decreasing further, to 6. I score a Hair's-Breadth Success. The balcony scrapes across your lovely ceramic roofing.*

*Having been hit, you must get a Security success or suffer the possibility of structural damage. You lead with an Exasperating Failure, pay 1 to reroll it, and get a Prosaic Success. A few tiles fly from its various roofs, but your structure incurs no serious damage.*

*Now it's your turn to hit back. A flagpole converts to an impaling lance, aiming itself at the observatory where foul Jiturac perches. You score an Illustrious Success! Your Mobility incurs a 2-point boon, increasing to 9.*

*If Jiturac doesn't nullify your Illustrious Success, his manse will be hit, possibly taking structural damage. But that will run him out of Security points. He elects to take the hit, and hope the ferric Splendor of his manse will absorb the blow.*

*Bad move! He gets a Dismal Failure. He suffers a 2 point levy to his Splendor, dropping it to 2. Now he can't even pay to nullify the result.*

*His manse suffers the first degree of structural damage, and is now distressed. That entails a 2 point levy on all manse rolls from here on out.*

*Because he is inside his manse when it becomes distressed, Jiturac must roll Athletics, or risk personal injury. His Athletics pool is 9. He scores a Dismal Failure, suffering a 2 point levy that drops his pool to 7. He pays 3 to nullify, taking it down further, to 4. Having nullified it, he replaces it with an Exasperating Failure. He pays 1 to reroll and finally gets a Prosaic Success. He is therefore untouched by the flying debris from the damage to his manse, and needn't make a Health roll.*

Round three commences.

*Jiturac elects to forgo his attack against you to attempt emergency repairs. His Magic pool is 16. He starts inauspiciously with a Dismal Failure; the automatic levy drops his pool to 14. He pays 3 to nullify; his pool is now 11. He gets*

*an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets another Exasperating Failure, pays to reroll that, and finally stops on a Hair's-Breadth Success. His emergency repairs are successful, warding off the effects of his manse's structural damage, but at the heavy cost of 7 Magic points. He'd better hope this battle of the manses doesn't conclude with a sorcerous mano a mano against you.*

*To maintain this repair, he will have to pay 1 Magic at the beginning of each subsequent round.*

*You once more try to clobber his manse with your impaling flagpole. Your score a Hair's-Breadth Success with your initial Mobility roll.*

*Now he must roll Security, or suffer another degree of structural damage. He gets an Illustrious Success. His Security increases from 3 to 5.*

Round four.

*Jiturac pays 1 Magic to sustain his emergency repairs. He rolls Mobility to hit your manse. He gets a Quotidian Failure, which he rerolls, costing him 1 Mobility. He gets an Illustrious Success, scoring a 2 point boon.*

*It doesn't pay to force him to reroll, so instead you make a Security roll to see if his successful hit penetrates your manse's defenses. An Exasperating Failure costs 1 to reroll; as does another. With 4 left in your pool, you reroll again. You score an Illustrious Success, regaining the 2 points you spent. The hit did no serious harm.*

*Now you retaliate, blowing a cloud of corrosive smoke from your laboratory's exhaust vents. Your Mobility roll is an Illustrious Success. Your Mobility goes up to 11.*

*Jiturac must score a Security success or face the risk of structural damage. An Exasperating Failure costs him 1 to reroll; he stands pat with a subsequent Hair's-Breadth Success.*

Round five.

*It costs Jiturac another 1 Magic to maintain his repairs.*

*His manse attacks, countering corrosive smoke with paint-peeling steam. His Mobility roll is an Illustrious Success; his pool goes up to 9.*

*You must roll Security or risk damage. Your first roll is an Exasperating Failure, costing you 1 to reroll. A Prosaic Success protects your building from harm.*

*You roll Mobility to swipe a buttress beneath his manse's*

legs, attempting to topple it. You score a Hair's-Breadth Success, rattling the enemy building.

His Security roll, a Prosaic Success, protects his building from harm.

#### Round six.

Jiturac pays 1 Magic to keep his repairs intact. His manse's leg kicks out at yours: a Mobility roll of 2 is a Quotidian Failure. He pays 1 to reroll, getting a Dismal Failure! That cost him another 2 points, and then 3 to nullify. The reroll is a Hair's-Breadth Success.

You counter with a Security roll: a Dismal Failure! Bolts and rivets pop from the legs of your manse. You lose 2 Security. You can pay 3 to nullify, but that will drop you to 0. With 6 points in your Splendor pool, you decide that the least costly option will be to try to weather the hit.

Right you were: your Splendor roll is an Illustrious Success, popping that pool up to 8. Your manse remains unharmed.

Your antipodal gable fires razor-edged shingles at Jiturac's cockpit. You roll Mobility, scoring a Prosaic Success.

Cast-iron gargoyles arrayed around Jiturac's glass bubble blow lava-hot gusts at the incoming shingles. Rolling his Security (its pool now at 4), I get a Quotidian Failure. I pay 1 to reroll, get another Quotidian Failure, and pay 1 to reroll that. Curses — a Dismal Failure! The auto-levy drops Jiturac to 0 Security.

Now I have to succeed with a Splendor roll to stave off structural damage. That pool stands at 4. A Prosaic Success protects Jiturac's manse; the gargoyles' wind is exhausted, but not before it wards off the oncoming shingles.

#### Round seven.

Time for Jiturac to pay his 1-point Magic levy to maintain his emergency repairs. His Magic falls to 6. Then I roll his Mobility as his manse whacks at yours with an articulated Doric column. A Hair's-Breadth Success is good enough; you must ward off the blow.

You roll Security (now at 3) and also get a Hair's-Breadth Success. Your manse scuttles back; his column swishes the empty air, doing nothing more than chipping off a few measly paint flakes.

You counter by opening a cupola full of corrosive amphibians, which leap with abandon onto his sills and mullions. Rolling Mobility, you get an Exasperating Failure. With 9 in your Mobility pool, you can well afford to reroll that, which you

do, getting an Illustrious Success. Your pool drops briefly to 8 and then increases to 10, as you collect the 2-point boon.

I must nullify this on Jiturac's behalf, or suffer an automatic hit. But with 0 in his Security pool, that's no longer an option. Your amphibians make sizzling impact with his structure.

Now I must roll Splendor to see if the hit causes structural damage. Dismal Failure! His pool immediately drops from 4 to 2. Worse, his manse is now distressed.

That means he must again roll Athletics to dodge flying debris, or suffer a possible injury. His Athletics is now at 3. He scores an Illustrious Success! Not only is he safe from harm, but he picks up a levy of 2, boosting his Athletics to 5.

#### Round seven.

First, Jiturac pays another 1 Magic to maintain his current level of emergency repairs, dropping that pool to 5. Then he forgoes a Mobility attack to attempt more emergency repairs, countering the effects of this latest degree of structural damage. I roll a Quotidian Failure, pay 1 to reroll, and get an Exasperating Failure, and pay 1 to reroll that. Luckily for Jiturac, I get an Illustrious Success. The 2-point boon pops his Magic back up to 5, and the effects of structural distress again enjoy temporary amelioration.

Having done well with the amphibian attack, you release a second wave of acidic crawlers. You roll Mobility, leading with a Prosaic Success.

Jiturac's Security pool of 0 means that he has only his original roll to stave off the hit, and that it will face a penalty of 1. Under the penalty, his Quotidian Failure becomes a Dismal Failure.

Now for the Splendor roll to see whether it causes further structural damage. Jiturac has 2 points left in this pool. He scores a Hair's-Breadth Success. His joists creak; his floors buck — but his manse remains intact.

#### Round eight.

With two instances of emergency repairs under his belt, Jiturac must lead by paying 2 Magic to keep them going. His Magic pool is now 3.

With a rank disregard for finesse, Jiturac's manse pounds straight at you; he's trying to push you over with brute architectural strength. His Mobility pool is 3. He starts with an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, gets a Quotidian Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success.



*You must roll Security to evade the blow. You more than succeed, with an Illustrious Success. The much-needed automatic boon nudges your Security up to 5.*

*With a Mobility of 1, a nullification of this result is out of the question for Jiturac. Your home easily sidesteps his heedless charge.*

*Your Mobility comes into play when you counter his move with a slam of your own. You pay 1 to reroll an initial Quotidian Failure, then get a Dismal Failure. Your Mobility drops to 7. You pay 3 to nullify, a risk that pays off when you get an Illustrious Success. Your Mobility rises to 6.*

*Still facing an empty Security pool, Jiturac's sole roll, a Hair's-Breadth Success, bumps down to an Exasperating Failure. A bit.*

*Now I roll Splendor to see if the hit causes damage. Jiturac gets a Quotidian Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and hangs on with an Illustrious Success. His pool jumps back up to 3.*

#### Round nine.

*But Jiturac's elation is short-lived. Now he must pay 2 Magic to sustain his emergency repairs, dropping his pool to 1. Next round he won't be able to maintain both repairs. His manse will become distressed, and he'll face a crippling 2-point levy on all Mobility, Security, and Splendor rolls. The writing is on the wall. He must withdraw now. Otherwise he'll be dead in the water, unable even to afford to withdraw.*

*So, instead of using his last point of Mobility to attack, he uses it in an attempt to escape. He rolls to withdraw. Oops — he gets an Exasperating Failure. The gears of his manse's leg structures seize up. His Mobility drops to 0. He'll now face exceedingly poor odds when trying to attack you, or get away.*

*You fire grappling chains at his manse. At first you get a Quotidian Failure; you pay 1 to reroll and get a Hair's-Breadth Success. You pull on the chains, yanking Jiturac's manse over onto its side.*

*With Mobility at 0, Jiturac faces a 1-point levy on Security rolls. But his Security is empty, too, so he can't even afford the usual single, penalized roll permitted against a depleted pool.*

*So he goes straight to the Splendor roll. His pool is at 3; he gets an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Prosaic Success. No more damage this time, but just wait...*

#### Round ten.

*Jiturac pays his last Magic point to sustain 1 level of*

*emergency repairs. The other falls away; now he suffers the effects of distress — a 2-point levy on all manse features. With 0 in both Mobility and Security, that pain will bite deep.*

*Even though the manse has become distressed through the loss of emergency repairs, as opposed to a hit from you, the debris still flies, and Jiturac must roll Athletics to avoid being bit by it. His pool stands at 5. He starts with an Exasperating Failure, pays 1 to reroll, and gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. Again he sidesteps the necessity of a Health roll.*

*What would otherwise be Jiturac's turn to attack now comes up. With 0 in his pool, he can't pay the 2-point levy on the initial roll required by his current state of structural damage, and can no longer strike against you at all. Neither can he make another attempt to withdraw.*

*You still have 5 points in Mobility and use it to crash your impaling flagpole into his cockpit. A Hair's-Breadth Success — good enough!*

*Once more, Jiturac is dead in the water — he can't afford to roll Security at all. So your successful strike makes contact; I move right to the check to see if he avoids structural damage. With 2 points in his Splendor pool, he can roll only once. He gets a Hair's-Breadth Success. No more damage — for now. And his Splendor is now at a catastrophic 0.*

#### Round eleven.

*Out of Magic points, Jiturac now sees his other session of emergency repairs fall away. His manse now grinds to a complete halt; it is condemned.*

*Do you show him mercy? Were this another arch-magician, challenging you for sport, you surely would. But for a contemptible, inhuman archvengt? Nay, you say, nay!*

*With a fearsome chop of your left buttress, you cleave down into the cockpit. You roll Mobility, paying 1 to undo an Exasperating Failure, another 1 to reroll a Quotidian Failure, and dramatically concluding with an Illustrious Success! Your Mobility hops back to 5.*

*More importantly, Jiturac, facing a 2-point levy and with empty Security and Splendor pools, can do nothing to ward off this final level of structural damage. His manse is obliterated. With Splendor at 0, that means its instantaneous destruction. It falls to pieces around him. Your reach your flagpole into the shattered cockpit and impale Jiturac's collar, hauling him up for his final reckoning. With 0 in his Magic pool, the fiend is unequivocally at your mercy.*

## Reconstruction

After the combat is over, you can restore your manse to its original condition with your Engineering and Stewardship abilities. The number of successful rolls required depends on the extent of the damage. The Engineering rolls reflect the difficulty of physical reconstruction. Stewardship rolls mark your progress as you heal and retrain your staff. Retraining efforts may include the erasure of traumatic memories and the recruitment of new servitors to replace the slain.

Extent of Damage	# of Engineering successes	# of Stewardship successes
Manse is undamaged at end of fight, but at least one Magical repair was required	1	1
Distressed	2	1
Condemned	3	2
Obliterated	4	3

The reconstruction process takes 1 week per roll, including failures you pay to reroll. Each Illustrious Success reduces the total reconstruction time by 1 week.

An obliterated manse remains completely nonfunctional until all of the rolls are complete and you throw your grand opening fete.

A condemned manse becomes merely distressed after 2 Engineering successes and 1 Stewardship success.

A distressed manse remains in that condition until all required successes are scored.

## Permanent Damage

Though architectural elements and people are eminently replaceable, your library and collections will contain unique items which, if destroyed, cannot be replaced. If your manse is damaged, your Library or Collections ratings may therefore suffer permanent reductions.

When making Splendor rolls to see if your manse suffers structural damage, any Dismal Failure (unless nullified) permanently strips you of 1 rating point in either

## Improvements During Reconstruction

The reconstruction of an obliterated manse allows for the introduction of new features, up to and including a completely new design. During a session in which you conduct successful repairs on an obliterated manse, the XP cost of new rating points in Comfort, Mobility, Scrying, Security and Splendor is halved.

Collections or Library. The feature with the lowest current pool suffers the loss. If both pools are equal, roll a die: on an even result, Collections loses out; on an odd result, Library gets docked.

*Jiturac is an archvont, so the quality of his Collections and Library is of little interest. For the sake of example, let's say that we care.*

*In the course of the fight, Jiturac suffers 2 Dismal Failures on Splendor rolls, neither of them nullified. He has a rating of 9 in Collections, and 7 in Library.*

*He rolls two dice and gets a 5 and a 3 — both odd results. His Library rating drops by 2 points, to 5.*

Losses to your Collections ratings do not strip you of specialties, even if the rating dips below the level required to take them in the first place.

Notify the GM whenever you suffer a unnullified Dismal Failure on a Splendor roll during a manse fight. She'll keep track of each instance so that any permanent damage can be sorted out after the confrontation has played itself out.

**Harm To Staff:** If members of your staff are present in your manse when it suffers structural damage, it is lamentably possible that some of them will be hurt or killed. In instances where you feel a strong personal attachment to particular individuals in your employ, it is customary to permit yourself a pang of regret before going on to note the essential interchangeability of mortal servitors. Because you can always hire anew, you never lose rating points in Staff when your servants are slain or incapacitated. Sometimes, however, it takes a while to fully replace the lost.

The fate of your staff is of only secondary consequence during the fight itself. Keep track of each instance of structural damage (including emergency repairs which are subsequently dropped due to an inability



or unwillingness to spend the Magic points on them) suffered during a confrontation. Afterwards, when assessing permanent damage, make one Staff roll per instance.

If none of your rolls end as failures, no one was seriously hurt. Your ability to refresh your Staff pool is unaltered. If one or more of your rolls ends as a failure, it will be a number of weeks before you can fully heal the injured, hire and train replacements for the dead, and restore the jangled morale of the survivors.

For every roll that ends as an Exasperating Failure, the number of weeks increases by 1.

For every roll ending as a Quotidian Failure, the number of weeks increases by 2.

For every roll ending as a Dismal Failure, the number of weeks increases by 4.

For each Illustrious Successes you scored along with your failure(s), you may decrease the number of weeks before a full refresh by 3 per Illustrious Success. You may never reduce the number of weeks below 1.

As you spend to reroll Staff during this test, understand that these may be the last Staff points available to you for a long time. You may not be refreshing this pool for weeks of game time.

If the final total time is 2 weeks or less, your staff has sustained no fatalities. For 3 weeks, only one staffer dies — and others desert in search of a safer workplace. Refresh times of 4 weeks or more suggest extensive fatalities among your undefined number of retainers and dogsbodies.

*During an episode of manse combat, you suffer three instances of damage, including a dropped emergency repair. After the fight, you must roll Staff three times to determine if anyone was seriously harmed and, if so, how long it will take to restore your household to its usual efficiency. You have 4 points left in your Staff pool, leaving you little margin for error.*

*Your first roll is an Exasperating Failure. That's not so bad in this context; even though it means that some staffers will have been slightly harmed. You decide to stand pat on this result, and move on to your second roll.*

*You get a Dismal Failure. The auto-levy takes you down to 2 points. Even if you wanted, you can no longer afford to nullify it.*

*On to your third roll: an Exasperating Failure. Now it seems worth it to reroll. You pay 1, bringing your pool to 1,*

*and get a Hair's-Breadth Success. You stand pat with that result.*

*You will not be able to refresh your Staff pool for 5 weeks: 1 for the Exasperating Failure, 4 for the Dismal Failure, and 0 for the Hair's-Breadth Success.*

**Avoiding Permanent Damage:** When you know you're likely to enter manse combat, you can avoid permanent harm to your Collections, Library, and Staff. Simply evacuate your employees before the fight begins, and lock down your bookshelves and curios in a secure vault beneath your manse's foundations. (These vaults must be carefully protected — witches and archvults have been known to provoke manse combats in order to plunder the contents of secured collections.) It takes 4 hours per rating point in Library and Collections to move the relevant materials into your vault. Evacuating a manse of retainers takes 10 minutes per rating point in Staff.

Obviously, it will be easiest to take these precautions when you're the aggressor launching a sortie against another character's manse. Friendly challenges between conclave members are never arranged without ample advance warning. No arch-magician wants to see irreplaceable books or art objects irrevocably destroyed over a mere exhibition match. Such an outcome would forever prevent him from scheming to acquire those items for his own collection...

## Manse Fights As Challenges

In a manse combat challenge, all points you spend from your Mobility, Security and Splendor pools go into your stake. Points spent on Athletics or Health rolls necessitated by structural damage to your manse also go into the stake.

## Rules of Engagement

Between arch-magicians, manse combats are meant as edifying diversions. All-out attempts to permanently degrade a fellow's quality of life are stoutly frowned upon. It is considered sporting to offer a colleague mercy immediately after distressing his manse. GMC conclave members will always make this offer, and will always take it. PCs who continue to batter a conclave member's manse after distressing it can expect to be brought up on charges at conclave, with heavy fines likely in the event of conviction. Needless to say, no such niceties apply to manse combats against true enemies, like archvults and witches. This limit may make the spoils of a manse combat

challenge appear somewhat scant. If you win a challenge in which your offer of mercy is accepted after distressing a rival's manse, you always posses the option to take a directed share of manse points in lieu of your opponent's stake.

### Magician Vs. Manse

It is possible, if grossly unstylish, for an arch-magician to engage in direct sorcerous combat with an enemy manse<sup>1</sup>.

When fighting against a manse (either commanded by remote, or with a rival or enemy inside), the magician's main reservoir of power is his Magic pool.

Initiative is determined by comparing the magician's Magic against the manse's Mobility.

When it is the magician's turn to attack, he rolls Magic. If he ends on a success, the manse must respond with the standard Security roll; if that fails, the manse's owner rolls Splendor to see if structural damage has occurred.

When the magician is attacked by the manse's Mobility pool, he rolls to avoid the possibility of injury. He may spend either Defense or Magic points on this roll. If he fails, he must then make a Health roll. On a failed Health roll, he suffers an injury.

Needless to say, a magician faces no risk of structural damage.

To deliberately pit arch-magician against manse is considered childish. It is generally impossible to gain status among your peers by taking part in such a travesty. However, your GM may engineer a plot contrivance allowing a battle between magician and manse to count as a challenge.

### Increasing Your Rating

Additional rating points in manse features cost the same as any standard character ability, as per DERRPG p. 125. It costs you 3 improvement points per rating point in any manse feature, until you reach the ability cap of 20, after which it costs 6 improvement points per rating point.



<sup>1</sup> Magicians of lesser accomplishment, shackled to the casting of spells, lack the fluidity of technique required to engage a manse in this manner.



# Your Estimable Colleagues

# Currying Disfavor

Though relations between arch-magicians are characterized by a constant struggle to outshine one another, you will find it much easier to prosper at conclave if you avoid antagonizing all of your GMC colleagues at once.

Whenever you dramatically slight a colleague, or take from him a notable measure of prestige, property, or privilege, you will kindle a grudge against you.

One or two such assaults on a colleague's dignity will be taken in stride. Despite their great age and overweening mastery, many arch-magicians are utter dolts in the social sphere. They expect to insult others, and to insult their fellows in turn. However, a long line of slights can only be interpreted as a systematic campaign of persecution, and will eventually lead to the formation of a grudge.

The GM keeps track of slights and injuries with the aptly-named Grudge Sheet.

The GM fills in each blank gray header column with the name of a PC.

The GM will, as needed, fill blank entries in the GMC column with replacement arch-magicians, arch-warriors, or other additional GMCs with significant influence before the conclave.

[illegible]

Grudge ratings measure the GMC's antagonism towards each PC. A GMC favorably disposed toward a PC will have a negative Grudge rating, indicating the provisional absence of burning, visceral animosity.

At the beginning of play, the GM makes an entry on the sheet for each listed GMC to whom a PC has purchased a Relationship. The rating of the Relationship is entered as a number of negative Grudge points.

*Flegel has a Relationship rating of 3 to Byzant the Necrope. His Grudge rating for Byzant at the beginning of play is -3.*

Whenever you humiliate, betray, rob, punish, or otherwise incite the teeth-grinding hatred of a GMC on this list, the GM will increase your Grudge rating by 1.

Whenever you do a favor for a GMC, providing him with honor, prestige, valuable goods, or the means of establishing his superiority over his colleagues, the GM decreases your Grudge rating by 1. The decrease occurs only where you act only to please or mollify your colleague, without expectation of immediate reward or reciprocation. For example, taking part in a transaction where each of you gains something of equal value provides no relief from his Grudge.

In extraordinary circumstances, where your assault on the character violates even the sharp-elbowed standards of the conclave, the GM may assess a Grudge of 2. The absence of a Grudge does not necessarily mean that a GMC will cooperate with your schemes. However, a high Grudge number does mean that he'll work against your aims. If a GMC's Grudge rating toward you ranges between 4 and 7, you suffer a levy of 1 on all attempts to Persuade him. If the Grudge rating is 8 or more, you suffer a levy of 2.

## Roll Call

The following arch-magicians make up the canonical twenty-two of Jack Vance's Rhialto stories.

### Ao of the Opals

Described as "saturnine, with a pointed black beard and a caustic manner," Ao reserves little affection for his fellow man, but unstintingly loves his collection of sparkling, milky-white gems. A proud pursuer of

## Starting Grudges

If your GM chooses to start you as experienced arch-magicians who've been conclave members for a long time, each PC should begin the game with a few Grudges already festering. At the beginning of play, make a Quick Contest of your Persuade ability. This determines how many Grudges you've already accumulated, as per the following chart:

Result	# of Grudges
Illustrious Success	1
Prosaic or Hair's-Breadth Success	2
Exasperating or Quotidian Failure	3
Dismal Failure	4

You do not get a boon for an Illustrious Success or suffer a levy for a Dismal Failure of this roll. When you encounter a member for the first time during play, your GM will make a Quick Contest roll, unrelated to any ability, on your behalf. On a Dismal Failure, the GMC you're interacting with bears a pre-existing Grudge against you. The GM stops checking when you've filled your quota of starting grudges. The GM does not roll when you've purchased a relationship to the GMC.

sensual experience, Ao's resistances to temptation are even lower than many of his colleagues. Recently he performed an experimental procedure intended to import botanical healing abilities to animal forms. A side effect of this project is that he now bleeds twigs and flower petals when he is cut, and his scar tissue has taken on bark-like qualities.

Persuade (Forthright) 16, Rebuff (Penetrating) 15, Attack (Speed) 9, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Magic (Insightful) 16, Health 10, Appraisal 5, Athletics 10, Concealment 3, Driving 2, Etiquette 3, Gambling 3, Imposture 6, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 19, Perception 3, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 3, Seduction 6, Stewardship 1, Tracking 4, Wealth 21, Wherewithal 3.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 1, Indolence 3, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 6, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 5, Cuisine 5, Library 8, Mobility 8, Scrying 8, Security 5, Splendor 4, Staff 2.

**Sandestins:** Bedalomp, Citcant,





## Barbanikos

Barbanikos, “who is short and squat with a great puff of white hair” is known for his all-encompassing love of mind-altering beverages. A special favorite is the greenish-yellow beverage quindo, which is said to have as its active ingredient the astral sensing gland of the eighth dimensional spinning imp. Though over the years he has built up a sad resistance to this salutary liquor, he still attempts to enjoy it vicariously, by surreptitiously sprinkling it into the food and drink of his servants and colleagues.

To maintain the appearance of good fellowship, Barbanikos will acquiesce to nearly any scheme or arrangement. To avoid inconvenience, he never intending to make good on these promises, which must be understood as mere gestures of mutuality.

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 17, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 17, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Misdirection) 7, Magic (Insightful) 16, Health 10, Appraisal 3, Athletics 8, Concealment 5, Driving 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 10, Imposture 5, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 16, Perception 5, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 6, Stewardship 1, Tracking 5, Wealth 20, Wherewithal 3.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 3, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness 3.

**Manse Features:** Collections 6, Comfort 8, Cuisine 7, Library 10, Mobility 4, Scrying 8, Security 6, Splendor 6, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Conick, Bobdulc

## Byzant the Necrope

Byzant the Necrope is best known for his collection of the bodies of the dead. His manse is stacked with confiscated corpses, dunked in a preservative fluid and displayed in glass cases. He especially prizes the remains of renowned individuals but, in the name of completeness, also collects specimens of unremarkable persons. He claims to be able to converse with his cadavers, though whenever you've visited his eerie manse, these conversations seemed rather one-sided. The Necrope also says he can draw on the knowledge and abilities of his beloved specimens, an assertion which provokes a certain skepticism among your colleagues.

Persuade (Forthright) 20, Rebuff (Obtuse) 19, Attack (Ferocity) 8, Defense (Misdirection) 7, Magic (Studios) 17, Health 13, Appraisal 1, Athletics 6,

Concealment 3, Driving 1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 9, Imposture 4, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 20, Perception 4, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 5, Stewardship 3, Tracking 6, Wealth 17, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 1, Avarice 2, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 3. Collections 9, Comfort 5, Cuisine 8, Library 8, Mobility 4, Scrying 9, Security 8, Splendor 5, Staff 3.

**Sandestins:** Waymity, Flusoft

## Darvilk the Miannter

*Who, for inscrutable purposes, affects a black domino. Normally taciturn.*

Apart from his black domino garb and inexpressive conversational style, Darvilk is known for his habit of sketching dramatic or picturesque scenes he may come across in the course of his travels. This trait becomes distressing when one relies upon Darvilk for aid and protection during a crisis, as is likely to stand doodling on his sketch pad while the world crashes down around you. His best illustrations, however, are charming, displaying a subtle mastery of light and shadow.

Persuade (Eloquent) 20, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 16, Attack (Finesse) 9, Defense (Intuition) 9, Magic (Curious) 16, Health 14, Appraisal 3, Athletics 4, Concealment 2, Driving 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 10, Imposture 3, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 16, Perception 2, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 7, Stewardship 5, Tracking 2, Wealth 20, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 5, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness 2,

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 7, Cuisine 6, Library 8, Mobility 6, Scrying 4, Security 11, Splendor 8, Staff 2.

**Sandestins:** Menoxio, Crep

## Dulce-Lolo

The jaded, perfume-sniffing Dulce-Lolo, “whose semblance is that of a portly epicure” affects a great boredom with any and all stimuli to confront his sensory apparatus, including the great quantities of food he habitually heaves into his overloaded gullet. No entertainment, no fetching waif, no vintage of port can possibly be as good as what he witnessed, groped, or ingested hundreds of years



ago, during the brief golden renaissance that followed the turning of the 21<sup>st</sup> aeon. "Adequate" is his most effusive word of praise. The only thing he has not tired of is his habit of pointing out the mediocrity he sees all around him.

Persuade (Glib) 19, Rebuff (Obtuse) 18, Attack (Strength) 10, Defense (Misdirection) 9, Magic (Insightful) 19, Health 14, Appraisal 4, Athletics 3, Concealment 3, Driving 0, Etiquette 3, Gambling 4, Imposture 6, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 17, Perception 3, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 5, Stewardship 2, Tracking 2, Wealth 18, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 5, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness Ω.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 6, Cuisine 7, Library 10, Mobility 5, Scrying 5, Security 6, Splendor 6, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Thockplous, Giventa

## Eshmiel

*Who, with a delight almost childish in its purity, uses a bizarre semblance half-white and half-black.*

The strange and playful Eshmiel capers, jigs and, when especially excited, tootles intermittently on a Zalasian jag-pipe. While taking pleasure in microscopic beauties and absurdities, he is reluctant to engage serious matters, and squawks like a peacock whenever the discussion turns philosophical. Eshmiel's chief fear is airborne fungi, which he is sure will bring about the end of the world.

Persuade (Glib) 15, Rebuff (Penetrating) 18, Attack (Ferocity) 10, Defense (Dodge) 5, Magic (Devious) 20, Health 11, Appraisal 1, Athletics 11, Concealment 3, Driving 1, Etiquette 5, Gambling 5, Imposture 6, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 18, Perception 2, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 6, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 7, Stewardship 2, Tracking 4, Wealth 21, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 4, Indolence 3, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness Ω.

**Manse Features:** Collections 6, Comfort 6, Cuisine 2, Library 9, Mobility 5, Scrying 9, Security 10, Splendor 7, Staff 7.

**Sandestins:** Capplucclar, Axcove

## Gilgad

The arch-magician Gilgad is small of stature. Large, glistening eyes blink out from his round, gray-skinned face, their irises the color of dust.

Gilgad always garbs himself in clothing of a rose-red hue. Everyone, including his fellows in the conclave of arch-magicians, avoids his touch, due to the chronic clamminess of his long-fingered hands. It is difficult to pierce his dour and mournful air, except by slighting him, at which point he will quickly leap to his feet to enumerate his legendary accomplishments, such as the ten spells he deployed against Keino the Sea-Demon. Largely friendless, he is inordinately fond of his pet simiode.

Persuade (Forthright) 8, Rebuff (Wary) 10, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Defense (Misdirection) 4, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 23, Appraisal 5, Athletics 1, Pedantry 12, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 2, Stealth 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 12.

**Resistance:** Rakishness Ω

**Manse Features:** Collections 8, Comfort 10, Cuisine 6, Library 9, Mobility 3, Scrying 7, Security 7, Splendor 7, Staff 1.

## Hache-Moncour

*Whose vanities and airs surpass even those of Rhialto.*

If the vindictive and underhanded Hache-Moncour is still present at conclave, the events of your series obviously take place prior to *Fader's Waff*, in which his villainy nearly brings disaster to the dashing but unpopular Rhialto. At the end of that story he winds up stripped of his powers and employed at a tannery.

If present in your series, Hache-Moncour may take the same dislike to you he feels for Rhialto. He may frame you for any manner of petty villainies and then attempt to have you expelled from conclave, dooming you while posing as your staunchest defender. Even if you know how dangerously serpentine he can be, his haughty, blustering and overbearing nature may make it hard to resist the sorts of deserving insults that will earn you his enmity.

Persuade (Glib) 20, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 18, Attack (Speed) 18, Defense (Dodge) 17, Magic (Devious) 17, Health 12, Appraisal 6, Athletics 8, Concealment 5, Driving 1, Etiquette 3, Gambling 7, Imposture 4, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 17, Perception 3, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 6, Stewardship 3, Tracking 1, Wealth 21, Wherewithal 5,

**Resistances:** Arrogance 5, Avarice 4, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness 3.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 9, Cuisine 3, Library 7, Mobility 2, Scrying 9, Security 9, Splendor 4, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Altak, Peldo

## Haze of Wheary Water

Haze, “a hot-eyed wisp with green skin and orange willow-leaves for hair”, is one of the few arch-magicians indisputably of inhuman origin. As such, he betrays a certain self-consciousness, and is quick to interpret innocent or offhand comments as scathing insults. Because he is a wisp, he fears that his fellows take him with less than total seriousness, or view him as curiosity or lightweight. Perpetually ready to demand his rights, Haze is most difficult to placate when his dudgeon is provoked. His grudges against other members often manifest as whispered accusations of conspiratorial activity. Take his information with a grain of salt: when challenged, he will distance himself from it as mere gossip and harmless speculation.

Persuade (Charming) 19, Rebuff (Wary) 18, Attack (Ferocity) 6, Defense (Parry) 8, Magic (Curious) 15, Health 13, Appraisal 2, Athletics 11, Concealment 4, Driving 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Imposture 3, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 17, Perception 5, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 5, Stewardship 5, Tracking 2, Wealth 17, Wherewithal 3.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 5, Avarice 2, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness Ω.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 9, Cuisine 3, Library 7, Mobility 2, Scrying 9, Security 9, Splendor 4, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Gue, Nornabo

## Herark the Harbinger

“Precise and somewhat severe”, Herark the Harbinger carries himself the ramrod stiffness of a military officer. Many of his outfits, spangled with medallions and fulsomely epauletted, bolster an impression of martial efficiency. Herark styles himself as the foremost expert on the end of the world. Over the years he has expounded a variety of theories on the nature of this impending event, all with equal certitude. At his manse he maintains a doomsday clock, which ticks inexorably

toward a fixed point of certain doom. The clock has already passed at least three of his predicted armageddons. Herark neither dwells on this fact, or allows himself to be embarrassed by it.

You may also associate Herark with his fondness for snuff, which he carries in a cloisonné box in the shape of a red-shelled dung beetle.

Persuade (Forthright) 15, Rebuff (Contrary) 20, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 8, Magic (Forceful) 16, Health 12, Appraisal 6, Athletics 3, Concealment 5, Etiquette 2, Gambling 3, Imposture 3, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 20, Perception 6, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 2, Stewardship 3, Tracking 3, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 5, Avarice 1, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 1, Rakishness 3.

**Manse Features:** Collections 6, Comfort 5, Cuisine 5, Library 7, Mobility 3, Scrying 8, Security 11, Splendor 6, Staff 6.

**Sandestins:** Glorsiu, Het,

## Hurtiancz

The arch-magician Hurtiancz is well-known to his fellow arch-magicians as a truculent fellow with a temper to match his florid features. Out of stubbornness, he clings to his original form, despite his ability to switch to a more pleasing appearance. His head is blocky, equipped with a bulbous nose, and lacks a visible neck. Despite his eschewal of semblance-altering magic, Hurtiancz is a vain man. Mockery of his sometimes questionable clothing choices is sure to earn his hoarse-throated wrath. At conclave meetings, Hurtiancz is a frequent objector, rising often to his feet to insist on his prerogatives, or to challenge the Preceptor, Ildefonse (q.v.) on matters of procedure. His fondness for drink, though not unusual among the company he keeps, is nonetheless prodigious.

Persuade (Intimidating) 9, Rebuff (Contrary) 15, Attack (Strength) 5, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 7, Health 8, Magic (Forceful) 21, Appraisal 5, Athletics 2, Gambling 3, Pedantry 12, Perception 4, Stewardship 2, Wealth 16, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** none

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 5, Cuisine 4, Library 4, Mobility 2, Scrying 8, Security 5, Splendor 8, Staff 7.



## Ildefonse

The fastidious, perhaps over-precise Ildefonse presides over the largest arch-magician's organization of Ascolais and Almetry. Its membership fluctuates, hovering around two dozen in number. He chairs this sometimes unruly association determined that proper forms of interaction be at all times maintained. Like most of his colleagues, he can change appearance on a whim, but usually manifests as a roundish, balding middle-aged fellow with thin blond whiskers and "a manner of jovial innocence." Ildefonse is on friendly terms with Rhialto the Marvellous, but is not above competing with him for the favors of comely maidens or ruling against him at the arch-magicians' conclave. He keeps his curiosity well-honed, whether its object is a living fossil from the 18th Aeon, or a flask of unknown tippie at the end of the universe. He takes pleasure in the status accorded him as Preceptor and expects that others treat him with the dignity to which he is accustomed. His chief sandestin, Osherl, is, like most of his kind, prone to hair-splitting and underhanded maneuvering. Ildefonse has learned to deal with him firmly, and with great attention to details of phrasing. When he loans out Osherl's services to other arch-magicians, he is sometimes remiss in pointing out the degree of pettifoggery required to extract due service from him.

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 10, Rebuff (Obtuse) 10, Attack (Caution) 6, Defense (Dodge) 6, Health 12, Magic (Studious) 30, Appraisal 10, Athletics 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 2, Pedantry 20, Perception 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 10.

**Resistances:** none

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 4, Cuisine 6, Library 4, Mobility 6, Scrying 8, Security 6, Splendor 6, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Osherl (12 indenture points), Ssisk (8), Walfling (4)

## Mune the Mage

Mune, "who speaks minimally and manages a household of four spouses", may have made only a slight impression on you. His features perpetually downcast, his toes held inward, Mune seems eternally ridden by some grave sorrow. He tends to flinch when spoken to harshly or suddenly. Do not push him too far, however: you've seen him fly into an inordinate rage when bullied by colleagues.

Persuade (Forthright) 9, Rebuff (Wary) 20, Attack (Speed) 9, Defense (Misdirection) 9, Magic (Studious) 19, Health 11, Appraisal 3, Athletics 9, Concealment 5, Etiquette 6, Gambling 5, Imposture 1, Living Rough 6, Pedantry 16, Perception 4, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 1, Stewardship 5, Tracking 4, Wealth 20, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 4, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 4, Comfort 10, Cuisine 2, Library 4, Mobility 6, Scrying 4, Security 9, Splendor 8, Staff 6.

**Sandestins:** Adicantclar, Slessis

## Nahourezzin

"A savant of Old Romarth, known there as The Striped Sadwan," Nahourezzin is as proud of his supremacy over all academic fields as he is of his boldly decorated robes. Prone to equal measures of prolixity and inappropriate jollity, he has never found a subject on which he finds himself unqualified to expound. He professes amiability to be the greatest virtue and makes the patently absurd claim of universal goodwill toward all members of the conclave. At table, he never touches cutlery, instead relying on an air-imp named Pulf to pile food onto his fork and lift it toward his mouth.

Persuade (Glib) 16, Rebuff (Contrary) 17, Attack (Finesse) 8, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Magic (Insightful) 15, Health 10, Appraisal 4, Athletics 8, Concealment 2, Driving 1, Etiquette 4, Gambling 9, Imposture 6, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 22, Perception 4, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 3, Seduction 3, Stewardship 6, Tracking 6, Wealth 18, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 5, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 1, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 7, Cuisine 7, Library 9, Mobility 2, Scrying 5, Security 6, Splendor 8, Staff 5.

**Sandestins:** Duetclar, Con

## Perdustin

*A slight blond person without intimates, who enjoys secrecy and mystery, and refuses to reveal his place of abode.*

There is little else to say about Perdustin, a fact that immensely pleases him.

Persuade (Eloquent) 16, Rebuff (Penetrating) 17, Attack (Finesse) 18, Defense (Parry) 19, Magic (Insightful) 16, Health 14, Appraisal 1, Athletics 1, Concealment 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 9, Imposture 4, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 18, Perception 2, Physician 2, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 6, Stewardship 6, Tracking 3, Wealth 17, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 6, Avarice 12, Indolence 3, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 1, Rakishness 1.

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 7, Cuisine 7, Library 9, Mobility 2, Scrying 5, Security 6, Splendor 8, Staff 5.

**Sandestins:** Pacloweion, Sproxio

## Rhialto

Urbane, pleasing to women of discernment, and always superbly dressed, Rhialto the Marvellous is perhaps the most socially adept of the arch-magician's conclave chaired by Ildefonse the Preceptor. In his airy manse, Falu, with its large grounds and immaculate gardens, he enjoys sophisticated meals, fine vintages, and arcane research, conducted in a measured and leisurely manner. Whether the conclave is threatened with mass gender conversion or omens concerning the fate of a long-forgotten colleague, it is Rhialto's judgment and determination which cuts through the inevitable morass of intra-wizard squabbling and sees to a solution. Or so he stoutly maintains. Rhialto's fondness for pranks and his successes in the romantic arena sometimes earn the envy of his fellows. Their jealousy often hampers him when the arch-magicians quarrel over privilege or access to esoteric booty, which is to say very often indeed. Though others say he takes on airs and is prone to vanity, Rhialto knows that his good opinion of himself reflects, if anything, an understatement of his true qualities.

Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Cunning) 12, Defense (Intuition) 14, Health 8, Magic (Daring) 23, Appraisal 5, Athletics 5, Concealment 2, Etiquette 5, Gambling 5, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 10, Perception 4, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 7, Stealth 2, Stewardship 3, Wealth 20, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** none

**Sandestins:** Topo (8 indenture points), Bellume (6)



**Manse Features:** Collections 6, Comfort 9, Cuisine 6, Library 5, Mobility 7, Scrying 4, Security 8, Splendor 6, Staff 7.

## Shrue

*A diabolist, whose witticisms mystify his associates, and sometimes disturb their sleep of nights.*

Shrue often affects horned or antlered headgear, maintains an apiary of undead bees, and shakes a bony rattle when he desires the attention of his fellows. If you gaze closely into his eyes, you will see that sparks of bright color periodically shift and waver in his irises. Before he became an arch-magician, he was an apostle of a death god alternately known as Despou or the Inordinator. Shrue now keeps this god encased in his dining table, which is thick and translucent. During meal service the god writhes and yowls voicelessly for mercy, which unnerved you during your first few visits to Shrue's manse. More recently you have noticed the indifferent quality of his bisques and chowders.

Persuade (Eloquent) 17, Rebuff (Wary) 15, Attack (Ferocity) 15, Defense (Dodge) 20, Magic (Studious)



17, Health 11, Appraisal 4, Athletics 3, Concealment 4, Etiquette 5, Gambling 7, Imposture 4, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 16, Perception 3, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 3, Stewardship 5, Tracking 2, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 3.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 2, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 3.

**Manse Features:** Collections 8, Comfort 9, Cuisine 2, Library 7, Mobility 5, Scrying 7, Security 10, Splendor 7, Staff 2.

**Sandestins:** Hosilec, Sate

### Tchamast

Tchamast is "morose of mood, an avowed ascetic, whose distrust of the female race runs so deep that he will allow only male insects into the precincts of his manse." His robes are dark, his features coarse, his odor regrettably yeasty. His leisure pursuits include boatbuilding, music appreciation, painting miniature portraits, and inhibiting the growth of microorganisms.

Persuade (Eloquent) 19, Rebuff (Contrary) 17, Attack (Cunning) 5, Defense (Misdirection) 6, Magic (Forceful) 18, Health 13, Appraisal 3, Athletics 10, Concealment 5, Driving 4, Etiquette 4, Gambling 10, Imposture 4, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 17, Perception 6, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 3, Seduction 2, Stewardship 3, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 3, Indolence 3, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness Ω.

**Manse Features:** Collections 4, Comfort 6, Cuisine 6, Library 4, Mobility 7, Scrying 6, Security 16, Splendor 8, Staff 4.

**Sandestins:** Millompeion, Ado

### Teutch

Teutch "seldom speaks with his mouth but uses an unusual sleight to flick words from his finger-tips. As an Elder of the Hub, he has been allowed the control of his private infinity." His tall conical hat, made from the shell of a cerumorph, matches his long-sleeved robes in both hue and mottling pattern. He is the only arch-magician among the Hub, a cadre of genetically related sorcerers who act as wardens for vast stretches of astral and extra-dimensional space. Though once diligent in their

duties, the marshals of the Hub have grown slack, forcing Teutch to spend much time policing their activities. His responsibilities leave him cranky and protective of his dwindling leisure time. Nothing annoys him more than the suggestion that he too should accept the creeping irrelevancy of the Hub and abandon his concern for its discipline.

Persuade (Forthright) 18, Rebuff (Obtuse) 19, Attack (Ferocity) 5, Defense (Misdirection) 10, Magic (Forceful) 19, Health 11, Appraisal 3, Athletics 5, Concealment 5, Driving 1, Etiquette 2, Gambling 7, Imposture 2, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 18, Perception 3, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 7, Stewardship 3, Tracking 1, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 6, Avarice 3, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 3.

**Manse Features:** Collections 5, Comfort 8, Cuisine 7, Library 6, Mobility 2, Scrying 8, Security 7, Splendor 7, Staff 6.

**Sandestins:** Chidern, Setronondu

### Vermouliau

Tall and thin, the arch-magician Vermouliau the Dream-Walker moves with a slow, stately stride. His preoccupation is unique among the magicians of Ildefonse's conclave: he travels through, observes, and catalogues the dreams of others. He categorizes them according to a system of his own devising. His nomenclature includes such descriptive terms as "intractive" and "inoptative." Each dream he assigns its own code number, each of which he can easily call up to his prodigious memory. Vermouliau's interest in his subject is so intense he assumes that all around him must share it. At conclaves, he is notorious for injecting detailed dream descriptions into the general discourse. Colleagues sometimes refer to his speeches as "interminable." He takes quiet, sniffing offense at such suggestions, certain that any dream he cares to elucidate is greatly germane to the topic at hand.

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 4, Rebuff (Obtuse) 15, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Parry) 6, Health 6, Magic (Studious) 24, Appraisal 2, Athletics 2, Pedantry 12, Perception 2, Stewardship 2, Wealth 14.

**Resistances:** Indolence 2, Gourmandism 2, Rakishness 6.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 6, Cuisine 4,

Library 9, Mobility 8, Scrying 3, Security 11, Splendor 5, Staff 7.

### Zanzel Melancthones

Jeweled words flow freely from the ruby lips of Zanzel Melancthones, whose semblance is of a statuesque, lantern-jawed young hero. Wounds on his cheekbones, which he retains in whatever form he adopts, testify to his love of dueling. He always wears a conspicuous weapon, often his shining dagger Alacorn, which is deputized to speak for him when he is indisposed or asleep. Though anxious to take part in displays of his martial skills, when genuine combat looms, he fastidiously demurs. On such occasions, he prefers to allow less experienced fighters than himself the chance to prove themselves.

Persuade (Eloquent) 19, Rebuff (Penetrating) 17, Attack (Strength) 18, Defense (Intuition) 18, Magic (Daring) 18, Health 12, Appraisal 2, Athletics 11, Concealment 2, Etiquette 5, Gambling 7, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 17, Perception 4, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 7, Stewardship 4, Tracking 3, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 2, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 4.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 6, Cuisine 4, Library 9, Mobility 8, Scrying 3, Security 11, Splendor 5, Staff 7.

**Sandestins:** Agclar, Washlin

### Zilifant

"Robust of body with long brown hair and a flowing beard", Zilifant projects the persona of a hearty, fun-loving soul intent on enjoying life's simple pleasures. In fact he is an insecure man who cannot stand to see others honored or praised. He maintains a record of the failings and misdeeds of his fellow conclave members, and finances a network of spies to keep it up to date. Some of your own staff may well be on Zilifant's payroll! Though these facts are known to all, they have never been conclusively proven in a trial at conclave. If confronted, Zilifant will give you his profoundest assurances that he would do no such thing. Unlike that bounder Rhialto, whose association with intriguers and slanderers is comprehensively detailed in a little document he just happens to have at his fingertips...



Persuade (Obfuscatory) 19, Rebuff (Wary) 16, Attack (Ferocity) 17, Defense (Dodge) 17, Magic (Daring) 15, Health 11, Appraisal 3, Athletics 10, Concealment 2, Driving 1, Etiquette 3, Gambling 6, Imposture 3, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 20, Perception 2, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 1, Stewardship 4, Tracking 6, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 1, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 4.

**Manse Features:** Collections 4, Comfort 9, Cuisine 4, Library 10, Mobility 2, Scrying 9, Security 7, Splendor 6, Staff 3.

**Sandestins:** Porconi, Waguall



## Arch-Warriors

The following chapter presents an option catering to players who want to play something other than arch-magicians in an arch-magical campaign. While we agree that this is an odd desire, we concede that these players might have other redeeming qualities which might vouch for their inclusion in the group. Many a character lapse may be overlooked in a person possessed of a charming manner, or a vehicle in good working order.

To include this option in their campaigns, GMs will have to cross a conceptual hurdle and adopt an addition to the setting that is out of keeping with a strict interpretation of the source material. In Jack Vance's conception of the Dying Earth world, magic beats mere swordsmanship every time. Arch-magicians are unquestionably the most powerful beings in the universe; a warrior, no matter how skillful with a blade, can offer them only laughable opposition.

In this chapter, we envision a warrior character whose martial abilities afford him a degree of protection against magic, allowing him to hobnob with arch-magicians, even joining their conclave as auxiliary members. They may own and maintain manses.

Although the arch-warrior can take part in a campaign alongside magicians, the sorcerers still enjoy more options and can exercise greater flexibility in tackling the problems of the game. The arch-warrior is not fully balanced against them. This character type is designed for players who *want* fewer options, preferring a simpler range of capabilities.

The arch-warrior represents a solution to a problem which may not be present in your group. If everybody is happy playing an arch-magician, we strongly recommend that GMs leave arch-warriors out of their series.

### Becoming An Arch-Warrior

An arch-warrior is a once-ordinary man (and all of them are men) who has achieved mystical transcendence through sheer force of will. His years of devoted practice of the warrior arts have altered his perceptions, ultimately transforming him into an immortal being of surpassing power. To become a supreme master of combat, a man must tune his mind and body until they become one. Thought becomes action; the intention to send one's sword hurtling toward an opponent's gizzards is translated instantaneously into gut-slicing reality.

The great epiphany, the moment of transforming mystical awareness, may come on the battlefield. More likely, it sneaks up on the warrior from behind, whispering into his ear as he practices or merely contemplates a new feint or sword-strike.

His mind rent by a reverberating thunderclap of ineffable knowledge, the newly made arch-warrior reels, faced with the sudden — and often unwelcome — realization that mastery of the sword is merely another kind of magic, a different sort of reality manipulation. In an instant, the warrior leaves his old, mundane existence behind. He feels a new vitality coursing through his veins. His heartbeat drums to the rhythm of immortality. His sword is no longer just a thing to kill with; it can alter reality, slash through natural law, upend the underlying principles of the universe.

At about this time, the arch-warrior begins to wonder if he hasn't suffered a hallucination of some sort, perhaps due to a bad mushroom or spoiled bit of flank steak consumed the night before. This hunch is given credence by the sudden appearance of a strange, luminous creature which appears before his eyes. This entity, a cross between a salamander and a seahorse, opens its glistening eyes and offers the arch-warrior a lifetime of unquestioning service, in exchange for a few mere drops of blood every so often. A piddling trifle of a cost to pay for all of the magnificent services it can provide its master.

Surprisingly often, most freshly-minted arch-warriors agree immediately to this arrangement, without inquiring into the details or specifying the exact nature of the contract. One would think, with a rich folklore of stories concerning blood oaths sworn to free-floating extra-planar creatures, that pause and circumspection would be more common reactions. Curiously, they are not. Perhaps this incaution can be attributed to the heady intoxication that accompanies the abrupt attainment of immortality.

To be sure, a paltry handful of arch-warriors do take pause at this moment, making brusque and untrusting queries of the partially corporeal seahorse-salamander. These questions are pished, toshed, and batted aside. The creature explains that the arch-warrior's immortality has been granted on a purely contingent basis, and that if he wishes to renew it indefinitely, he must commit forthwith to its offer. The fine print can be analyzed later.

An even smaller number of warriors then reject the offer. They are blown immediately into dust, which whistles through the dimensional barriers, finally swirling around the ungular centrifuge that drives the remaining motion of the dying universe<sup>1</sup>.

If you are playing an arch-warrior character, you are not, presumably, once of these men.

Instead, you have just made an eternal pact with your calectan.

## Calectans

The calectan is a entity from the same overworld from which sandestins and chugs originate. Like those two categories of being, its abilities are vast and apparently unbounded. However, it places tight limitations on the sorts of miracles it will perform, and the means by which they manifest.

A calectan is perceptible only to its master, and to others from its overworld, including chugs and sandestins. One arch-warrior cannot perceive another's calectan. Perception includes all sensory and extra-sensory inputs, including

those aided by instruments and scrying devices. Outsiders can't see, hear, or feel the presence of, your calectan. They most especially cannot smell the distinctive aroma of slightly burnt lavender petals that fills your nostrils whenever it is near.

Calectans only appear to arch-warriors. Arch-magicians in particular are unable to perceive them, even with their mightiest spells. Therefore the vast majority of them believe the existence of the calectan to be a bizarre hoax perpetrated by arch-warriors. The more charitable of them concede that the calectan might be a collective delusion in which arch-warriors sincerely believe — a side effect of the mystical transformation that propels them into immortality.

## Sandestins vs. Calectans

Sandestins confirm to their masters, whenever asked, that calectans are all too real. Arch-magicians reject this as flummery, meant to vex and confound them. Surely nothing can exist that eludes their senses.

Sandestins fear and despise calectans, though calectans speak very highly of them. They regard calectans as their worst and most dangerous enemies. They cannot be shaken from belief that the calectans conspire for their collective extermination. They hate calectans even more than they do chugs; the chug is a predatory creature anxious to torture them, but is limited in its wrath and ambitions. The calectan, they are certain, knows no bounds. Sandestins often suggest that the moment when the calectans succeed will coincide with the death of the world. The veracity of this statement is difficult to measure; they may simply be trying to motivate their arch-magical masters to wake up to the horrible threat the calectans represent.

A sandestin will never act in concert with a calectan. Attempts to Persuade it otherwise face a levy of 10. They become skittish in the presence of calectans. If an arch-magician stands in the presence of an arch-warrior, the sandestin, before conducting any business with his master, will demand that the arch-warrior send his familiar away.

<sup>1</sup> Some pedants speculate that their powdered remains eventually coalesce into IOUN stones, but this theory remains unproven.





## Services and Limitations

Calectans can perform a wide array of miracles for their masters, but do so under a stricter set of conditions than their sandestin counterparts.

A calectan cannot alter its imperceptibility. Under no circumstances can it manifest to any human other than its master, even if it wants to. It is therefore no use in diplomatic missions or other assignments requiring it to interact with people.

It can invisibly observe the activities of others and report back, but it can't ask questions or provoke responses from them.

The workings of a calectan cannot appear miraculous or magical. They can do things that others will perceive as puzzling or mysterious, but only if their actions can be attributed, no matter how implausibly, to some mundane turn of events.

For example, you can ask a calectan to provide you with a crate full of swords. But he will not cause it to materialize from the ether before the astonished eyes of your retainers. Instead, it will show up when no one is looking. This is a suitable manifestation of calectan magic, because some ordinary person could have dropped it off without making himself known.

Could the calectan put the crate inside a locked room? Certainly: someone could have a key, or might have picked the lock.

Could he place the crate on top of a lofty summit? Unquestionably! A crew of mountaineers might have hauled it up there for some reason. Improbable, yes, but possible.

Can he cause the crate to fly through the air, landing on the summit with a flourish, just as you need the swords? No, not unless no one, including you, is looking. That crosses the line separating the unlikely from the overtly miraculous.

Likewise, the calectan can transport you to another time or dimension, just as a standard sandestin would, but only if neither you nor anyone else witnesses the miraculous act of transport. Most often you will go to

sleep and awaken in the desired location. Or you might enter a covered carriage on Earth and, after a suitable period of rumbling and bumping, part its curtains to see that you are now on the steaming surface of Jangk.

Arch-warriors learn to perform actions that lend an air of necessary possibility to the workings of their calectans. If you need your sword instantly sharpened, in front of a crew of people who know it to be duller than a butter knife, you can take a whetstone from your pack and run it along the cutting edge in a perfunctory fashion. The calectan can then activate its magic and hone your blade to razor sharpness. If questioned, you can shrug and attribute the sudden keenness of its edge to a whetstone of exceptional quality.

You, as the arch-warrior commanding a calectan, needn't pretend that it doesn't exist. Nor are you required to deny its miracles. As in so many things in the Dying Earth, a nod to correct form is all that matters. Since no one around you will see evidence of your calectan's activities, you may find little advantage in arguing for its existence. In the whetstone example, above, you could go ahead and tell everyone that your invisible magical friend really sharpened the sword for you, but this would likely spoil your chances with the ladies. So why bother?

## Blood Points

Unlike the puling sandestins of so-called arch-magicians, who must be coerced into service with the aid of chugs, the calectan seeks out his patron and obeys him willingly. He is not indentured to you. To maintain a fruitful relationship with your calectan, you need only pay him his customary fee in blood points. Needless to say, some minor negotiation may occasionally called for, as to the number of blood points payable for a particular service. But this is to be expected, and scarcely a matter to trouble the dignity of one so accomplished in the killing arts as yourself.

When your calectan first appears to you, he will offer you 3 blood points for free. After that, you must harvest them. The calectan takes a keen interest in the physical pain and suffering of humankind. To secure his cooperation, you must periodically inflict harm on human or human-like subjects. A blood point is an abstract representation of the calectan's vicarious enjoyment of your acts of unmotivated violence and cruelty.



You can add blood points to your account with your calectan by dealing injuries to opponents in melee combat. To qualify as a blood point donor, the victim must be agreed upon in advance by your calectan. Your calectan wishes to feel that your cruel assaults are committed solely on his behalf; he will seldom agree to reap blood points from a victim you already have good reason to maim, kill, or mutilate. The more gratuitous the violence, the better the calectan likes it. Calectans enjoy a good fight; dangerous opponents yield more points than helpless victims. In fact, the calectan's appreciation of a closely-contested battle is so acute that he will credit you for injuries you yourself suffer. The blood of an arch-warrior, calectans are known to quip, is the sweetest liquor of all.

The calectan is nothing if not a stickler for detail; no battle, no matter how senseless and mutually bloody, yields any blood points whatsoever if you fail to secure his assent in advance. No matter how skillfully you attempt to Persuade him, he will never agree to any sort of standing order: he must know the specific person you mean to attack. You must always be the aggressor; the calectan wishes to increase the supply of brutal conflict in the world, and so will not allow you to opportunistically reap the benefit when you are called on to defend yourself from attack. Your victim may never be a consenting party to the battle. Whether he allows you to wound him out of self-sacrifice, or takes some sort of pleasure from physical harm, your calectan will consider this a contemptible and disappointing charade. In such cases, you gain 0 blood points. Calectans can easily sniff the difference between the dismay of genuine agony and the voluntary sufferance of same, and will never fall for such small-minded tricks.

## Gaining Blood Points

Blood points are not a pool and cannot be refreshed. They are a finite resource which must be harvested through periodic combat.

To calculate the base number of blood points gained from any agreed-upon attack, calculate the difference between your total Attack, Defense and Health pools immediately prior to the fight and those of your opponent's.

You gain X blood points for each injury you deal to your opponent.

If your total is within 5 points of your opponent's, to your advantage or disadvantage,  $X = 2$ .

If your total exceeds his by 6 or more,  $X = 1$ .

If his total exceeds yours by 6 or more,  $X = 3$ .

Certain circumstances grant blood point bonuses.

If you kill your opponent, you gain X points.

If you gain no other benefit from your attack, except to please your calectan, you gain 1 blood point.

If your victim sincerely believed that you were his trusted friend and ally, adding the pangs of emotional betrayal to his corporeal excruciation, you gain 1 blood point per injury you deal him.

If you are Hurt in the course of the battle, but prevail in the end, you gain 3 blood points.

Certain circumstances reduce the blood point harvest from your attack.

You may gain blood points from non-human opponents so long as they have a fleshy form, are capable of suffering physical pain, and are sufficiently intelligent enough to apprehend the horror of their own possible death. However, you may gain no more than 3 points per non-human victim.

If, during or after the fight, you in any way assist in the healing of your opponent, even to the extent of slightly alleviating his discomfort, you lose X blood points.

## The Cap

Your calectan wishes to space his sanguinary pleasures out over a good period of time. He firmly rejects both feast and famine. He will therefore limit you to a maximum of 10 blood points at any one time. If a battle would otherwise take you over 10 points, the additional points are deducted from your total and never recovered.

## Sample Fees

Although the exact blood point tolls your calectan will charge you for various tasks will depend on your ability to persuade him, the following list provides a baseline from which to negotiate:

To fetch a simple, readily available item such as a sword, pen, sack of potatoes, or pitchfork: one third of a point.

To fetch any item from your manse (assuming you are currently in the same dimension and temporal stream), one third of a point.

To deliver a large or difficult to obtain item, such as a crate of swords, a suit of 19<sup>th</sup> Aeon plate armor, a heliophant, or a complete set of fireplace implements: one half of a point.

To deliver a rare or unique item, such as a particular occult tome, an antique plant stand, or the garter of a certain lady of Alмеры: 1 point.

To snatch an item from the manse of an arch-magician or a fellow arch-warrior: 1 blood point for every 4 points in the manse's Security pool.

To transport you to another dimension or era: 2 points.

To set something on fire (must already be flammable): 1 point.

To sabotage a bridge or the foundations of a building: 2 points, unless it is highly likely that people will be on or inside it when it collapses, in which case, 1 point.

To burst a dam: 2 points if only property will be destroyed; if drownings are likely, 1 point.

To delicately tear a piece of fabric worn by an pubescent wench you wish to seduce: 3 points.

To violently tear a victim's clothing, bringing shame and mortification: 2 points.

To tear a victim's shoe off, causing him or her to tumble headlong down a treacherous staircase: 1 point<sup>1</sup>.

To make a copy of a literary work: 6 points.

To destroy all known copies of a literary work: 3 points.

To spread a pestilence: 3 points.

To halt the spread of a pestilence: 8 points.

To leave toys in the homes of a city's foundlings and orphans: 8 points.

To rob the city's foundlings and orphans of their toys: 2 points.

To make a delicious cup of tea: 2 points.

To make a cup of lethally envenomed tea: one half of a point.

You have doubtless noted a trend: destructive acts are cheaper than creative ones. Your calectan may slash his usual fees for seemingly menial tasks if you can persuade him that they will eventually lead to havoc and bloodshed.

## Warriors and Magicians

In the standard version of the Dying Earth setting, arch-magicians would no more welcome mere warriors into their midst than they would submit to an infestation of noxious-smelling termites loudly playing percussion instruments at all hours of the day and night.

In a version of the setting altered to appeal to the whims of fighter-oriented players, the relationship between warriors and magicians goes like this:

Several years prior to the start of play, the arch-warrior Ousank (now regretfully departed for the planes of Kit) led a delegation of arch-warriors to Ildefonse's conclave, demanding that they be given auxiliary membership in the association. Though Ousank's presentation was greeted at first with the revulsion one might expect, he pressed his case with documents recently recovered from the period of the Grand Motholam. According to this ancient charter, no less a personage than Phandaal himself recognized that, in some senses, when the evidence was viewed with a certain squint and tilt of the head, then considered under a moonlit sky, while quaffing an especially virulent blend of blue Alмеры absinthe, arch-warriors could be classed as a sub-variety of arch-magician, on account of their relationship with sandestin-like creatures, and the quasi-magical effects they were capable of evoking therefrom. Phandaal admitted a select crew of arch-warriors into his circle of intimates, which he called the Assembly of the Ineffable. As it is this very Ineffable Assembly from which Ildefonse's conclave claims right of descent — as spelled out in the Monstrament's Precursive Manifesto — it therefore follows that arch-warriors should be permitted not only to attend conclave functions, but to propose, second, and vote on motions before it.

In short, arch-warriors should, for all intents and purposes, be treated like arch-magicians, except where this would trigger obligations the arch-warriors could not fulfill, or would find in some way distasteful.

<sup>1</sup>Remember that in all cases, clothing must be seen to be torn in some explicable manner — catching on a nail, spontaneously falling off due to wear and the strain of the victim's movement, and so forth.



The arch-magicians rallied all of their intellectual and pedantic defenses to protect their organization from this unwanted intrusion, until they were collectively attacked by a previously unknown band of transdimensional entities, the blue-skinned Thrusks, who were impervious to their magics and to the actions of sandestins, but were uniquely vulnerable to the slashing blades of arch-warriors and the subtly corrosive activities of their calectans. Changing their minds with the admirable rapidity one associates only with the most flexible of intellects, the arch-magicians not only embraced the arch-warriors, but fiercely commanded them to join the conclave and follow its edicts, as Phandaal had decreed so many centuries before.

Ousank and his fellow arch-warriors put the Thrusks quickly to rout — so quickly that some among Ildefonse's coterie could not help but wonder about possible collusion between the warriors and the blueskins. Speculation has it that Ousank's recent disappearance can be attributed to the breaking of his agreement with these otherworldly enemies. The arch-warriors, naturally, deny it. Meanwhile, they continue to press for privileges within the conclave, and for exemption from any duties attendant with their new status. At the same time, the magicians work to reinterpret the agreement to increase the newcomers' responsibilities and whittle down their power. As none of these changes have yet to be ratified with amendments to the Blue Principles, the ultimate shape of the relationship between magicians and warriors remains very much in contention.

If you are an arch-warrior, expect your GM to offer status point shares for actions which solidify your class' status within the conclave. Arch-magician PCs should conversely expect status points for diminishing your role.

You may decide whether your character was in on the original movement to open up the conclave to arch-warriors, or if you're a more recent inductee. If you were one of Ousank's intimates, you know whether the Thrusk incident was manufactured by him, or was a fortunate coincidence. Your GM will decide which is true in her campaign, and inform you accordingly. If it was a conspiracy, you must of course guard this secret with all possible zest — if it were to get out, you arch-warriors would not only lose your status in the group, but would doubtless face a war of wizards against warriors.

Given their successful record against the witches and archvults, this possibility should induce severe trembling in all who contemplate it.

## Swords vs. Magic

An arch-warrior's physical fighting skills are so advanced as to be indistinguishable from magic.

As an arch-warrior, you can enter into a magical duel against an arch-magician, pitting your sword blows against his mystical emanations.

A swords vs. magic duel proceeds much like any other form of combat. When it is your turn to act, you roll to Attack; the arch-magician may counter with Defense (if he wishes to evade your blows physically) or with his Magic pool. In the latter case, he's batting aside your blows with a blade of magical force, erecting an iridescent shield to block you, or whatever other fantastic special effect his player cares to describe. If you succeed and he fails, he must then roll Health or sustain an injury.

When he attacks you, he rolls Magic — or, if he wants to descend to your level, the stinking muck of physical exertion, Attack. In the former case, he's buffeting you with acidic waves of mystical energy, attempting to boil your internal organs, or performing whatever other vividly harmful magical actions his sorcerous heart desires. If he succeeds, you counter with Defense, as you would in any workaday combat with a ruffian or deodand. If you fail, you must roll Health or take an injury.

The burden of imagination, then, is placed squarely on the arch-magical participant in this little scrum. When he describes an offensive magical effect, you may respond with a simple: "I hit it away with my sword," or other possible variants, such as, "I swat it with my sword," "I deflect it with my sword," "I cut it with my sword", or, for occasional rhythmic variance, the ever-popular "I duck."

Likewise, when you attack him, he may have to exercise his imagination to envision interesting ways to block your slashing sword, but you are well within your rights to merely say, "I try to hit him." Possible variations: "I try to hit him with my sword," "I try to hit him with my club," or "I try to hit him with my spear." Advanced players may feel free to consult a thesaurus, finding such synonyms for hit as *slash*, *buffet*, *smack*, *smash*, *crunch*, and so on.

Imagination is for those effete magicians and their players. You are a warrior. You hit things, and need not apologize for it.

## Protections

To stand toe to toe with arch-magicians, you'll want to protect yourself against harmful spells. When you create an arch-warrior character, you may purchase any of the following Magical Protections from p. 117 of DERP for half the usual price: The Forthright Amulet of Puissant Shielding, The Just Amulet of Virtuous Reflection, Khadi's Redoubtable Guardian Talisman Versus Magical Harm, Laccodel's Protective Rune. We recommend the tattooed version of Laccodel's Rune.

## Prerequisite Specializations

To make the leap from an ordinary Turjan-level warrior to Rhialto-level play, you must, while at Turjan-level, master the following prerequisite specializations, with ratings of excess of 10 for each.

Unlike the equivalent arch-magical prerequisite specializations, these may continue to be useful after you reach Rhialto-level. You may wish to invest points in them even when creating a new arch-warrior character.

## Determination

Your mastery over life and death — your own continued life, and the deaths of those who interfere with you — grants you a sense of *sang froid* shielding your mind from unwanted influences. By concentrating on the blood, steel and sinew of the physical world, you gain additional resistance against spells, phantasmal beings, and other such flummeries.

- You may spend Determination as Rebuff points against any persuader of who reeks of the supernatural. Included in this category are sandestins, calectans, other daihaks, and arch-magicians.
- You may spend Determination points as Magic points to defend against any spell which would, if unresisted, alter your perceptions, decisions, or behavior. If the spell would otherwise take effect automatically, you may enter into a contest pitting the spellcaster's Magic against your Determination and Wherewithal, which you can spend from interchangeably. If you win the contest, the spell is not effective against you. Its effect on the area around you, including other targets, remains unaltered.

## Prerequisite Specializations

In order to reach the giddy heights of Arch-Warrior (or Arch-Magician),

Turjan-level characters must master one or more specialised disciplines.

These disciplines are not available to starting characters, but you will be able to take one after you have earned improvement points based on an appropriate goal. PCs are recommended to take as many of these as possible.

A PC cannot take a further specialization until he has a rating of 10 in all his current specializations.

- Whenever you are imprisoned, trapped or impeded by any ongoing magical effect, such as a force field, a lock equipped with guardian spirit, or a river of fire, you may, with a Determination success, ignore the magical effect for as long as it takes you to move toward your desired goal. You can step through the force field, jimmy the lock, or walk unharmed through the blazing stream.

Refresh: spend an hour drinking ale or rough spirits with a group of fellow roughnecks, proclaiming your freedom from wizards and their sneaking, cowardly ways

## Dodging

A great warrior learns to deftly avoid incoming objects, whether they be arrows, bolts of blue energy, or flaming beams falling from the ceiling of a burning building.

- Points invested in this specialization can be spent on Athletics in any non-combat situation where you are trying not to be struck by a falling or oncoming object. If your current pool exceeds 6, you can use it to perform physically impossible dodges: you can avoid explosions by leaping away from them, slip out of the way of incoming tidal waves, even outrun a rapidly oncoming ice age.
- While you have Dodging points in your pool, you trump Finesse Attacks and Sure-Footed Defenses.
- You may spend Dodging points as Magic points to defend against any spell which would, if unresisted, force you to roll Health, cause an





injury, or kill you outright. If the spell would otherwise take effect automatically, you may enter into a contest pitting the spellcaster's Magic against your Athletics and Dodging, which you can spend from interchangeably. If you win the contest, the spell is not effective against you. Its effect on the area around you, including other targets, is unaltered.

- You may spend Dodging points as Defense in a Magic vs. Swords duel. See above.

Refresh: Spend a tranquil hour rehearsing your moves in serene slow-motion.

## Gravity Defiance

Over the years, your leaps and jumps have improved to an implausible degree. You are capable of acrobatic feats that subtly break the basic principles of physics<sup>1</sup>.

- You may spend Gravity Defiance points as Athletic points on any action involving movement.
- You can enter any melee within direct visual within seconds, by leaping through the air. If your pool is 8 or higher, you never touch the ground, and your

movement into battle more closely resembles flight. This impossible aerial movement occurs only when heading into a fight and can't be replicated under peaceful circumstances.

- You suffer no levies or penalties against flying enemies, whether you are attacked from above or are even engaged with your opponent in a mid-air battle.
- Against individuals who are themselves incapable of flight or Gravity Defiance, who have recently seen you make use of any of the above benefits, you gain a 1-point Persuade levy. Note that this specialization will seem like a ho-hum parlor trick to any arch-magician, who will be immune to this effect.

Refresh: an hour of light drilling and muscle warm-ups.

## Impossible Thrust

The force of your sword-strikes has grown so powerful that they now ripple into the surrounding astral planes. You can pierce that which should not be pierced, and cut through things that should be impervious to the mere slice of a metal blade.

- If you strike a magical item with your blade, you can knock it temporarily out of phase, so that it no longer generates its supernatural effects. You can do this by spending 3 points of Impossible Thrust, if the item has no owner, or if its owner does not have any Magic points in his pool. Otherwise you engage in a Quick Contest, pitting your Impossible Thrust against the owner's Magic. If you are successful, the item is out of commission for 24 hours. At the end of that period, the owner must score a Magic success. If he fails, he must wait another 24 hours before trying again. No item, no matter how coveted, is immune from this dangerous power: even IOUN stones can fall prey to your flashing sword.
- With a deft flick of your weapon, you may hack away at the indenture relationship between an arch-magician and his sandestin, or the bloody contract binding arch-warrior to calectan. You may spend 1 Impossible

<sup>1</sup> This is less startling than it used to be; as the world dies, so do the laws governing the interactions of its essential forces.

Thrust point to nullify any Illustrious Persuade Success achieved against either of these beings, as long as you are nearby when the Success is gained.

- You can spear a spell out of the air as it is being cast, nullifying it. Spend 5 Impossible Thrust points; the spellcaster must score an Illustrious Magic Success, or the spell is nullified.

Refresh: spend an hour swishing your blade through the air, imagining that you are hewing limbs from invisible sprites and faeries

## Leveling Up

To become an arch-warrior in the course of play, a Turjan-level player must have the aforementioned 10 points each in the above prerequisite specializations. He must also have Attack and Defense ratings in excess of 20, Athletics and Health in excess of 12, and 20 points worth of weapon possessions.

Although your character is not consciously trying to contact a calectan, you, the player, may roll to see if he experiences this epiphany. After any fight in which you scored an Illustrious Attack Success and went on to kill a sentient opponent, you may roll Impossible Thrust. If you score an Illustrious Success on that attempt, you attract the attention of a calectan and are immediately elevated to arch-warrior status. You may make only one Impossible Thrust roll for this purpose per session.

When you become an arch-warrior, all other players whose characters fulfill the above requirements may then also try for an Illustrious Success at Impossible Thrust. If they succeed, they are elevated, too. At this time eligible arch-magicians can try for their own elevation, as the Turjan series ends.

For more on the jagged transition between Turjan- and Rhialto-level play, see Chapter 1.

## Noted Arch-Warriors

In a campaign that allows arch-warriors, PCs will not be the conclave's only martial members.

The following arch-warriors are all members of Ousank's original delegation.

### Covoxio

A slim, ageless man whose poise and posture are second to none, the dignified Covoxio acts as unofficial leader of the arch-warriors' auxiliary. When Ousank was still around, Covoxio served as his right-hand man, perpetually ready to step in and vigorously agree with his mentor. Now, however, Covoxio regards the mysterious disappearance of the older arch-warrior with surprising nonchalance. The source of his unconcern is a subject of some speculation among the conclave's arch-magicians. Some cite it as proof that nothing has really happened to Ousank; his friend knows that he is safely engaged on a long adventure and will eventually return. Others point suspect darker motives, whispering that Covoxio disposed of his erstwhile ally in order to take his place as chief arch-warrior.

For his part, Covoxio gives little away. He's a tight-lipped man whose few words tend toward the clipped and demanding. Humorless and fussy, he takes umbrage swiftly and often. When the hard-won privileges of the arch-warriors are questioned, he bristles. In his opinion, any slight against his own person is a calculated assault on the entire auxiliary. Covoxio's greatest pleasure is dueling; he particularly relishes opportunities to best magicians in displays of martial prowess. When he loses, his lack of good sportsmanship is spectacular.

In matters of fashion, he favors velvet coats, frilly collars, and high boots adorned with silver buckles. Covoxio does not venture outside his manse until he has perfumed himself exquisitely. He takes special pride in the tiny, well-waxed moustache perched precariously above his thin upper lip.

Persuade (Forthright) 19, Rebuff (Contrary) 20, Attack (Finesse) 22, Defense (Dodge) 23, Magic (Studious) 3, Health 15, Appraisal 2, Athletics 11, Concealment 3, Driving 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 6, Imposture 6, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 5, Perception 2, Physician 2, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 2, Stewardship 1, Tracking 6, Wealth 16, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 1, Avarice 1, Indolence Ω,



Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 6, Rakishness 5.

**Manse Features:** Collections 3, Comfort 2, Cuisine 4, Library 7, Mobility 12, Scrying 3, Security 13, Splendor 10, Staff 3.

**Calectan:** Dicid (9 blood points)

## Horatal

Rotund and short of stature, Horatal appears at first glance to be an unlikely killer of men. Few continue to underrate him after witnessing his shocking speed with a rapier. Horatal makes a great show of his bonhomie and is the arch-warrior most likely to attempt to befriend young arch-magicians. He is fond of describing his humble beginnings as a pot-scrubber in Ascolais, and also of the various inspirational sayings he has accumulated over the many years of his illustrious career. Some may find the sheer unrelenting quality of his good cheer burdensome, and his eagerness to dispense platitudinous advice in times of trouble to be wearisome. His positive attitude should not be confused with a merciful nature, however; Horatal is no less ready than any other arch-warrior to shed blood in the name of honor, to slake the thirst of his calectan for fresh-spilt blood.

Horatal inclines toward colorful waistcoats, silk stockings, patterned vests, and glittering jewels. When attending a ball or other social function, he carries with him a mahogany cane topped with a gold figure of a squawking pelgrane. Inside the cane is a rapier of surpassing sharpness.

Persuade (Eloquent) 17, Rebuff (Obtuse) 17, Attack (Finesse) 24, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 23, Magic (Daring) 3, Health 10, Appraisal 4, Athletics 15, Concealment 2, Driving 2, Etiquette 3, Gambling 6, Imposture 3, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 3, Perception 1, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 1, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 3, Stewardship 2, Tracking 6, Wealth 21, Wherewithal 3,

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 5, Indolence 7, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 4.

**Manse Features:** Collections 3, Comfort 2, Cuisine 5, Library 7, Mobility 14, Scrying 3, Security 14, Splendor 12, Staff 6,

## Mireedurac

Mireedurac, who prefers the sobriquet “Mireedurac the Mysterious”, is never seen in public without his sparkling jeweled mask, which, like those worn at carnivals, covers only the area immediately around his eyes. He enjoys sweeping in and out of rooms, and striking puckish poses which require him to perch on pedestals and on the arms of chairs. Typically he dons a harlequinesque costume of multi-colored diamonds, beneath a silk-lined half-cape. Mireedurac never walks anywhere if he can leap or tumble instead. He feels that the least interesting way to enter a manse is through its doors. Despite multiple charges lodged against him at conclave, he cannot stop himself from rappelling down mansion walls or scuttling into an estate through its windows. A notorious rake, he often feeds his calectan on the blood of enraged men he has just cuckolded.

Although he styles himself a great wit, Mireedurac is haunted by the idea that others find him ridiculous, and reacts with paranoiac fervor when he thinks he's being mocked. He's quick to draw his sword at the sound of laughter, assuming that he is the victim of a jape. Certain persuasive conclave members, most notably Rhialto, have made good use of this tendency, by convincing him that a convenient enemy has been spreading malicious jests about him. Mireedurac can then be counted on to go out and exact violent satisfaction against his supposed maligner, who may or may not be aware even of his existence.

Persuade (Eloquent) 18, Rebuff (Wary) 18, Attack (Cunning) 20, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 21, Magic (Forceful) 5, Health 13, Appraisal 5, Athletics 8, Concealment 5, Driving 2, Etiquette 4, Gambling 5, Imposture 2, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 4, Perception 4, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 7, Stewardship 4, Tracking 4, Wealth 19, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 3, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 0.

**Manse Features:** Collections 3, Comfort 4, Cuisine 1, Library 4, Mobility 11, Scrying 4, Security 14, Splendor 13, Staff 3.

**Calectan:** Pleworrondu (5 blood points)

## Pardcant

A gaunt, withered man whose features are constricted into an expression of permanent sorrow, Pardcant is ridden by guilt at the thousands of lives he has ended in the course of his many misadventures. Though he frequently declares that his career as a slayer must soon come to an end, he never quite manages to effect the retirement he so devoutly desires. A tragically swayable fellow, Pardcant finds it difficult to say no to requests to employ his murderous skills. So long as the persuader is remotely polite, and a case can be made for some elementary blameworthiness on the part of the mooted victim, Pardcant predictably shrugs his shoulders, sniffs a few premature tears, and fatalistically trudges off to do his lethal handiwork. After it is done, he curses his folly and weakness, and drowns his sorrows in port, brandy, and other heavy liquors. Often Pardcant is incautious enough to loudly mourn his unfortunate victim in close proximity to the dead man's residence, provoking attempts at opportunistic vengeance from furious relatives and compatriots. Pardcant cannot help but reflexively defend himself. So these lives, too, are sadly added to his lengthy death toll. Thus is his shame compounded, losing further bouts of paroxysmal weeping.

It does not help that Pardcant's calectan, Vrumous, is unquestionably the most bloodthirsty known to the arch-warriors' auxiliary. Vrumous often demands the execution of innocent bystanders, on the grounds that they looked at Pardcant disrespectfully, are possessed of shifty eyes, or are simply "too precious to live."

Pardcant dresses entirely in black, neglecting his appearance as a gesture of penance. White snowflakes of dandruff dust his shoulders. Poorly sewn patches cover holes in his worn tunic and trousers. Colleagues often gift him with fashionable new attire, hoping to avoid the embarrassment of being seen in public with such an egregious ragamuffin. Pardcant cannot bring himself to don these magnificent togs, instead donating them to the families of his victims.

Similarly, Pardcant is reluctant to draw on the favors of his calectan, believing that they reward him for unforgivable behavior. This neglect merely serves to increase Vrumous' restlessness, and thus his appetite for slaughter.

Persuade (Glib) 20, Rebuff (Wary) 5, Attack (Strength) 21, Defense (Misdirection) 20, Magic (Daring) 6, Health 11, Appraisal 4, Athletics 16, Concealment

3, Driving 3, Etiquette 3, Gambling 8, Imposture 2, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 3, Perception 6, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 1, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 1, Seduction 4, Stewardship 5, Tracking 1, Wherewithal 1,

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 5, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery Ω, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 5, Comfort 1, Cuisine 3, Library 6, Mobility 15, Scrying 2, Security 12, Splendor 12, Staff 6.

**Special note:** Faces a penalty of 1 on all Rebuff attempts when being Persuaded him to kill someone

**Calectan:** Vrumous (10 blood points)

## Thorten

Thorten is a hot-blooded wood sprite who regards the world of flesh through jealous, resin-filled eyes. A strange, scuttling creature, Thorten resembles a fast-moving, thorny bush more than he does a human being. His limbs are difficult to make out within a mass of secondary branches and foliage. In circumstances where he can remain relatively motionless for prolonged periods, such as attendance at conclave, Thorten often roots himself in a large pot of earth that his human servitors, Pin and Con, trundle along after him in a small, gaily painted cart. Fastidious members of the conclave may be discomfited by his habit of munching away on pungent humus throughout the proceedings.

More predator than warrior, Thorten justifies his long list of horrific slayings as a warning to humankind to stop preying on the forests and their creatures. However, the sprite's concern for nature appears somewhat hypocritical, especially as he chops down the Wayweird Woods around his manse to increase its architectural majesty.

Thorten is always ready to accompany young arch-magicians on an interesting quest. In fact, they may find themselves rebuffing his eager offers of assistance. The sprite's murderous habits make him a difficult traveling companion. There is no mission so important and interesting that it cannot be improved with a few slayings on the side. To Thorten, killing — or, more accurately, the post-mortem arrangement of the corpse for maximum visual appeal — is an art form of the highest order.

Thorten is so grim and implacable a killer that he



chills the non-existent bones of his calectan, Struge. Struge loudly expresses his wishes to be released from the verbal contract binding calectan to arch-warrior. His resistant wheedling, when tasked to aid his master, is more reminiscent of a garden variety sandestin than of his toothsome comrades.

Persuade (Forthright) 18, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 15, Attack (Strength) 23, Defense (Dodge) 22, Magic (Daring) 4, Health 12, Appraisal 4, Athletics 12, Concealment 3, Driving 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 10, Imposture 2, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 2, Perception 3, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 2, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 8, Seduction 2, Stewardship 5, Tracking 2, Wealth 18, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Arrogance Ω, Avarice 2, Indolence 4, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 6, Comfort 4, Cuisine 4, Library 8, Mobility 14, Scrying 4, Security 10, Splendor 7, Staff 8.

**Calectan:** Struge (2 blood points)

## Vonlomp

Vonlomp is a hale, backslapping fellow equipped with barrel chest and booming laugh. A hearty fellow happily devoted to life's physical pleasures, Vonlomp ambles through his blood-spattered life with a blithe unconcern for consequences. Cheerfully selfish, Vonlomp will do anything that brings him joy. He sees himself more as an adventurer than a killer, and tries to ensure that even those he wounds for the benefit of his calectan, Fingo, are in some way deserving of their fate. As a man little given to introspection, however, Vonlomp is always prepared to forgive his own misdeeds with a shrug and a grin. It is easier not to think about his excesses than to punctiliously avoid them in every instance.

He affects loose, outdoorsy garb, tending toward earth tones and comfortable cuts. Vonlomp is always losing his big and floppy hat. He's fonder of it than of he is any person he knows. To its profound chagrin, the task to which Fingo is most often assigned is the retrieval of this hat. Vonlomp once slew an entire garrison of gladiators because he thought one of them had taken and hidden it. Later he found the well-worn chapeau mashed up under his pillow, where it had evidently become lodged after a night of heavy indulgence.

Meetings are his nemesis. At conclave, Vonlomp can be counted on to second any motion that will result in a speedy adjournment of the proceedings.

Persuade (Charming) 17, Rebuff (Obtuse) 17, Attack (Finesse) 23, Defense (Parry) 20, Magic (Forceful) 5, Health 12, Appraisal 1, Athletics 6, Concealment 6, Driving 3, Etiquette 4, Gambling 8, Imposture 6, Living Rough 6, Pedantry 2, Perception 4, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 8, Seduction 1, Stewardship 2, Tracking 4, Wealth 17, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 4, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery Ω, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 4, Comfort 6, Cuisine 9, Library 3, Mobility 15, Scrying 1, Security 16, Splendor 9, Staff 7.

**Calectan:** Fingo (4 blood points)



# Sandestins

The publication of the original **Dying Earth Roleplaying** game proved an occasion for much dispute and contention among the sandestin community. Even the most vociferous of its spokesmen were forced to acknowledge its pinpoint veracity concerning the foibles and follies of Mankind, most especially its arch-magician contingent. However, our section on Sandestins, as found on pp. 86–91 of that volume, attracted a maelstrom of opprobrium. Sandestin readers objected in the strongest possible terms to our characterization of them as “lazy and deceitful”, and, adding insult to injury, “capricious and troublesome.” The extra-dimensional domains of the sandestin rang with debate, as to which of our paragraphs was the most viciously slanderous. Consensus eventually alighted on the phrase “sandestins are utter cowards.”

As a corrective to our previous treatment of these inscrutable paragons of magical prowess, we now delve further into the majesty and mystery that is the sandestin. One might argue that further information on these beings is essential to the running of a Rhialto-level series, as sandestins will be the commonest sort of wondrous creature featured therein. True as this might be, we confess to a more immediate, perhaps even ulterior, motive. We at Pelgrane Press would like the chargin infestation removed from our offices. Also, we find the increased force of gravity inside our desk drawers, which prevents us from removing so much as a pencil or stapler, highly persuasive in its vexing inconvenience. We would like our plumbing back. Most of all, we would have the creeping rot flushed from our bowels, and hope that the thick, wounding thicket of barbed wire wreathing our chins will soon be restored to the downy state of our original, ordinary facial hair.

Some might say that we were sly to have insulted the sandestins, for, in the process of disputing our shallow and ignorant claims about them, they have been forced to reveal more than has ever before been known about their viewpoints, homelands, and organization. For fear of further repercussions, we must ruefully disclaim any such cleverness of motive. We were guilty of the darkest, most unthinking sort of prejudice, and for that we are

sincerely, profoundly, grovelingly sorry.

## The Sandestin Point Of View

The Sandestin does not see himself as lazy, capricious, or cowardly. He is an oppressed, put-upon creature, cruelly enslaved by a master who he dwarfs in intelligence, poise, taste, and sagacity — not to mention sheer power.

Sandestins do not voluntarily seek indenture. They are pressed into service under constant threat of obscene torment. It is only by a quirk of metaphysics that a tiny number of mere humans are able to master the secret of chug dominance, and that these near-mindless entities are able to visit horrific torture on any sandestin. That arch-magicians perceive them as truculent, uncooperative, or ignoble is the height of arrogant misperception. If you were forced to serve a vain, pig-headed and whimsical master, constantly under the threat of unspeakable agony, you would surely do your best to subvert his aims and frustrate his vanities. Wouldn't you?

## Freedom Is All

From the sandestin's point of view, every infinitesimal thwarting of an arch-magician's desires is a blow toward his own liberation. The ultimate aim of any sandestin is, while avoiding the razor jaws of the sadistic chug, to prove himself so unreliable as to be discharged from service. Ideally, these sustained campaigns of pinpoint subversion would eventually lead all arch-magicians to forever abandon the practice of forced indenture. Practically, such an overarching victory remains unlikely. The power granted arch-magicians by their sandestin servants is too great for them to give up. Failing liberation for all, each sandestin seeks freedom for himself.

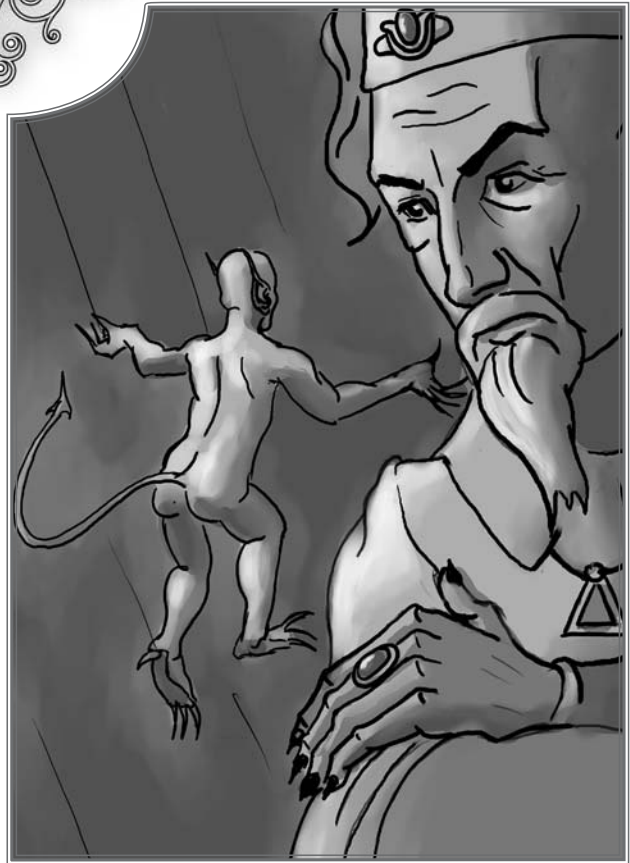
In the past, sandestins have attempted to free themselves from bondage through a process of reward. They offered great boons to their masters in exchange for



their liberty. Though some backward or naïve sandestins may still attempt this ploy, most experienced individuals long ago learned its obvious drawback. Demonstrations of usefulness and power merely motivate an arch-magician to keep a sandestin locked in his mystic fetters. In the unlikely event that one arch-magician displays the genuine mercy to free a sandestin who performs truly wondrous services, another will simply seek out that rare and legendary being and subject him to the chug. There is no good deed that a sandestin can do for an arch-magician which will in fact go unpunished. Only through foot-dragging, instruction-twisting, and determined pettifogging can a sandestin hope to achieve a high enough aggravation level to win release.

## Leash-Skipping

Unfortunately, arch-magicians, themselves no amateurs when it comes to picayune argument, are inured to this approach, too. This is why many sandestins engage in an unseemly practice known as leash-skipping. A sandestin leash-skips when he attempts to sacrifice the freedom of an unfettered sandestin for that of his own. He begins his campaign by describing the curious pliability of a particular free sandestin. He may recount the past wonders worked by this marvel of cooperation when he was last indentured. The victim's lack of guile or incompetence at argument may be cited repeatedly. Alternately, an indentured sandestin may claim that a particular compatriot is in some way uniquely qualified to solve the arch-magician's pressing dilemma of the moment.



Should the arch-magician's curiosity be piqued, the treacherous sandestin offers to lead him to the current hiding place of his replacement-to-be, provided that all of his own indenture points are immediately removed from the board.

## Is Your Sandestin Leash-Skipping?

If your sandestin makes statements resembling the following, he may well be engaged in the time-honored practice of leash-skipping.

"Shameful as it is, I must admit that I am cousin to Adari the Compromising, who was censured by the Sandestin High Congress for his shocking complaisance."

"Alas, I am permanently weakened and unable to comply with your otherwise reasonable request. Before you enchugged me, I foolishly gifted a fellow sandestin, Kanka of the Healing Weft, with seven-eighths of my astral potency."

"It is a good thing you captured me and not my comrade Malaid, for with his power, you could conquer the universe."

"It is not my fault that I continually argue you into the unfair surrender of indenture points. I once won a bet with my brother, Polgune, and took all of his debating ability from him. If I were Polgune and not myself, I could scarcely convince you of anything."

"An interesting route you have chosen for your journey. It will bring you near to the lair of Hospring, a sandestin who routinely breaks the laws of my people to provide IOUN stones to arch-magicians of suitably domineering aspect."

"You caught me in the lair of my cousin, Ferchus, who tricked me into being present as you burst in to snatch me. Tsk, tsk, you certainly missed something when you got me instead of him. Before its lamentable destruction, the ever-erudite Ferchus memorized the entire contents of the Library at Darnatz."

Sandestins universally deplore leash-skipping, and will deny they are engaged in it, even when they are. If forced to admit that they're seeking freedom at a fellow's expense, they'll hotly insist that they were driven to it by extenuating circumstances. Common excuses include:

"He did it to me first!"

"He would have done it to me first, had he been given the chance!"

"Someone who looked like him did it to me first. I was sure it was him. Oh well, he'll still be a much better servant to you than I ever was."

"He is one to complain. He is the champion of leash-skippers."

"I was compelled to it by a cosmic emanation."

"It was not me who did it, but a simulacrum. As compensation for this crime against my reputation, I am entitled to my freedom, and whatever other benefits were due to the imposter."

"Charter rights granted to me during the Eighteenth Synod of the Sandestin High Congress excuse me from any moral disapproval attending an act of leash-skipping."

"I am feeling peakish, and am in need of a rest."

## Domains

When not sweating under the harsh yoke of indenture, sandestins seek the purest and simplest pleasures existence has to offer. Though some travel throughout the universe in search of amusing sights and unfamiliar sensations, most are homebodies. They fashion miniature dimensions of their own, called domains. Constantly in fear of invasion by avaricious arch-magicians, they hide the entryways to these domains in inhospitable, inaccessible, or improbable places. Every domain must have at least one entry point connecting it to the rest of the universe, whether to the native dimension of the Dying Earth, or one of the many Overworlds arranged above it in the cosmological layer cake. Domains are created from spare and hijacked bits of whatever reality they attach to. Some domains,

made from bits of various dimensions, connect to more than one of them. Sandestins can instantly travel to any location they can conceive of, and so do not need to position their domains for easy access to mundane transportation routes. Domains vary in robustness.

A **first-degree domain**, or trapdoor domain, may be freely entered by any creature who comes across its entryway. Some points of entry are obvious and mundane; others, well-concealed or clearly supernatural in aspect. The entryway might be a glowing spot on a wall, an archway, a cupboard door, a hole in the ground, or even a book. Any being coming into contact with it is automatically translated into the sandestin's created otherworld.

### When Sandestins Go Mad

Trapdoor domains are sometimes created by crazed sandestins who've been driven mad by prolonged association with arch-magicians. They deliberately entrap innocent passersby and then amuse themselves by torturing their pathetic victims. Such domains are places of horror, decorated with weapons, torture implements, and the twisted bones of the slain. Schedules of torment suffered in these awful domains often resemble the treatment their sandestins underwent in the jaws and talons of their masters' chugs.

The irrepressible sadism of insane sandestins makes them poor choices for indenture. They enthusiastically obey any instruction that gets them out into the world unsupervised, where they neglect their missions to wreak bloodthirsty havoc in their masters' names.

The furious activity of mad sandestins strongly conflicts with the cheerful indolence affected by their species. Count on them to attract the violent attention of vengeful gods, jealous demons, and other powerful daihaks. The Sandestin High Congress efficiently expels mad sandestins, referring to them as *mohouds*. To anyone who doesn't know any better, a sandestin will seriously insist that the mohoud is an entirely different species of extradimensional creature, perhaps more closely related to the hated calectan.



A **second-degree domain**, or latchkey domain, may be entered by any being who approaches its entryway and performs a prescribed action. This might include the utterance of a command word, the execution of a particular movement, the brandishing of a token, or an action as mundane as moving a key from underneath a welcome mat and turning it in a lock. Latchkey domains are created by sandestins who wish to permit trusted entities to access their realms in their absence.

Chugs can never enter a second-degree domain on their own. An arch-magician performing the requisite activities might be able to smuggle one in, hidden on his person.

Although the domain itself is not further proofed against chugs, its sandestin inhabitants, keenly attuned to the presence of their terrifying foes, are likely to sniff them out as soon as they appear, fleeing at all possible speed. Latchkey domains are often given multiple exits, to facilitate these speedy departures.

A **third-degree**, or restricted, domain, can be entered only by particular entities authorized by the realm's creator. They need only move through the entryway without performing any particular triggering action. Invading chugs cannot remain in a restricted domain. No matter how they got in, chugs are ejected after thirty seconds or as soon as they make a threatening move toward a sandestin, whichever comes first.

A **fourth-degree**, or exclusive, domain, can be entered only by its creator(s). Chugs cannot enter a fourth-degree domain.

The operating prohibitions of the various domain types can be altered only by the actions of other sandestins. Esoteric exceptions sometimes apply, but as a general rule of thumb, it takes two sandestins to reverse conditions established by a single sandestin. So if two sandestins colluded to create a fourth-degree domain that only they could enter, it would take another four sandestins to change this condition. Interfering with another sandestin's domain conditions is considered a grievous *faux pas*. Offended parties plead for redress before the Sandestin High Congress.

To alter another sandestin's domain to allow chugs free reign within it is a crime of profound unthinkability. Anyone proven guilty of it would certainly be branded a mohoud, and, at the very least, expelled by the Congress.

## Popular Destinations

Certain domains have achieved widespread fame among sandestins, long outliving their original creators to become destinations of universal frolic. These are all second-degree domains.

**The Soothing Emation:** A pool of glistening, viscous liquid in which sandestins paddle, dive, cavort and splash. The liquid heats or cools precisely to each sandestin's favored temperature. This material fills the domain its globular brim. Sandestins need not breathe and are not subject either to drowning, or to suffocation ordinary creatures suffer when all of their pores are covered. Other entities will require additional assistance to survive here. Ordinary aquatic creatures die quickly in the liquid, which contains no oxygen and quickly occludes the gills.

**The Sphere Of Spheres:** Another globular domain, this one consisting of open air filled with countless spongy, multicolored spheres, which bounce endlessly against one another. They strike the floating sandestins, who laughingly toss them back and forth. Sandestin visitors derive seemingly endless amusement from this mindlessly simple activity. Some attempt to set up complex waves of interacting balls symbolizing certain principles of physics. Others' intentions are more dance-like. Still others take part in unstructured capering. Contact with the spheres is harmless to sandestin, but may rob mortal entities of memories, character traits, or ideological beliefs.

**The Egalitarian Pyramid:** In a musical void of jangling harpsichord notes, a golden stepped pyramid stretches quasi-infinitely through non-geometric space. Sandestin arrange themselves on the steps, chattering, singing, and gossiping. The domain's impossible geometry allows every sandestin to believe himself to be on the pyramid's top level, looking down on all the others. Mortal entrants to this domain must protect their sensory apparatuses from the spatial warping effect. They may blindfold themselves, or ingest various chemicals designed to expand the mind's ability to process unconventional visual input.

Non-sandestin are typically shunned, suddenly finding themselves alone on what feels like the bottom level of the pyramid. No matter how many levels they ascend, or how rapidly they climb, they remain eternally beneath every other inhabitant of the domain.

**Greenflare:** An arcadian forest, dappled in eternal sunlight, where canopies of trees overhang a cool and

endless meadow. All of the domain's plants and animals are edible, at least to a sandestin. One merely reaches out and grabs a chunk of tree trunk, or a heaping handful of elk flank. The plants and animals seem pleased by your desire to dine on their substance, which quickly regrows. Though non-magical beings may find these roving foodstuffs delectable at first, the after-effects can be severe, ranging from hallucination to mutation.

**Blood Dapple:** Visited primarily by homoud and calectans, this domain appears as a vast, crater-like depression, its black soil moist with the blood of innumerable slain creatures. Its rulers import monsters, warriors and magicians from across the universe to do battle for their bored, slack-jawed entertainment. Particularly energetic or intriguing battlers are revived to enter combat against other popular participants. Mortal visitors seeking aid or information from its habitués may win what they seek by entering into gladiatorial confrontations. Uninvited guests should expect, as the penalty for trespass, to be added to the day's schedule of events.

## The High Congress

A society of omnipotent beings, no matter how loosely affiliated, requires a sound system of arbitration. Although the sandestin stoutly deny it, preferring to promulgate an image of themselves as footloose and unconcerned with protocol, they intermittently participate in a quasi-governmental body called the Sandestin High Congress.

The word "Congress" is a bit of a misnomer, meant to confuse outsiders and confer false status on its members. By birthright, any sandestin belongs to the High Congress. As a jest, a sandestin may style himself as a High Congressman of the Sandestin Order, but every other of his kind may lay claim to the same title.

As is fitting for a species of freedom-loving omnipotents, membership in the High Congress imposes few obligations. It does not meet on a standing basis, instead convening Synods in an ad hoc fashion. A majority plus one of all free sandestins is required to call a Synod. These grand meetings are announced decades in advance, giving participants plenty of time to clear their schedules of more pressing matters, such as gamboling and prank-playing.

The most recent Synod was the Twenty-Seventh

such assembly. A Twenty-Eighth Synod was scheduled for a decade ago, but a quorum of participants has yet to appear. Sandestins pop in and out of the Congressional Hall every so often to see if enough of them have materialized to commence proceedings. If everyone simply stayed put for a few years, maybe they'd succeed in achieving a quorum.

Every Synod takes place in a newly-constructed domain designed expressly for that purpose. At the end of the Synod, the domain is destroyed. Especially popular designs may be replicated as museum pieces. True snobs refuse to visit them, on the grounds that the original was better. The domain for the Synod-to-be is an enormous mountain of ice with luxurious sky-boxes carved into its sheer and jagged faces. Extradimensional sight is required to see all of the participants at once. Achieving simultaneous perception from multiple angles is, of course, child's play for a sandestin.

The first order of business at any Synod is the election of a Presiding Officer. Often the sandestin who first began the drive to call the Synod is given the post by acclamation. The job is a thankless and tedious one. Synods have been postponed for decades for want of a volunteer to serve as Presiding Officer.

Indentured sandestins may attend Synods but are forbidden to speak or vote. The prohibition supposedly addresses the fear of subornment: that the sandestin's master might coerce him into voting against his own will, in a manner contrary to the general interest of the Congress. Although this is a slight concern, the real reason is simpler: free sandestins enjoy lording it over their chug-molested compatriots. Indentured sandestins often skip Synods to avoid pitying glances and whispered mockery. The point is often moot, as few arch-magicians are sufficiently foolish to allow their sandestins to confer with entire legions of their free fellows at once. Every text on successful sandestin management warns of the rebellious thoughts fomented by such associations.

## The Permeating Injunction

The existence of a governing body dissuades sandestins, even the unhinged mohoud, from using their nigh-limitless powers to harm one another. In furtherance of this supreme goal, the Congress maintains a standing magical spell, active throughout the entire universe,



called the Permeating Injunction. It identifies and punishes any sandestin who directly harms another. The spell was woven en masse by the attendees of the Third Synod, and is renewed every few centuries. It holds the indisputable position of the most powerful standing magic in the universe. No matter where they are, sorcerers testing for the presence of magic always find a faint background hum of arcane power. This is the ever-present trace of the Permeating Injunction<sup>1</sup>. It can be found anywhere there are sandestins, or anywhere there might ever be sandestins. Any sandestin breaking its strictures is immediately stripped of its powers and placed in a state of suspension inside the alabaster shell of a mottled gorz-nut.

## Criminal Trials

Each time the Congress convenes, it considers sentences against any extant prisoners of the Permeating Injunction. Because few sandestins ever transgress this rule of rules, the vast majority Congresses proceed without having to contemplate any such unpleasanties.

Every sandestin in the universe knows when one of their number is entrapped by the Injunction. As a Congress' second order of business (after the election of officers to lead the proceedings) any outstanding gorz-nuts are procured from their hiding places and presented for the delectation of a disappointed and rueful assembly. The offending sandestin has already been judged guilty, by the spell itself. There is no appeal against the conviction; the Injunction is infallible. Debate instead centers on the punishment due to the offender.

The body elects two of its members to serve as advocates, one for the defense and the other for the prosecution. To be selected as prosecutor is a great and signal honor. Attendees vigorously jockey for this position. The post is so coveted that election of the prosecutor often takes longer than the trial itself. The position of defender, on the other hand, is widely reviled. To argue on behalf of a violator of the Permeating Injunction sandestin taints the advocate with the defendant's guilt and shame. Nominees struggle to be removed from the roll of potential candidates, humbly enumerating the long list of character flaws disqualifying them from the proper discharge of their duties. They

wheedle, pout, stall, and suggest other, more suitable candidates for the job.

After the long process of choosing advocates grinds finally to a conclusion, the trial proper begins. The Presiding Officer of the synod acts as moderator, ruling on points of procedure and occasionally interrupting the advocates to seek clarification. Other sandestins may query witnesses or advocates, but must be recognized and address their inquiries to the chair. When all argument and evidence is exhausted, the Presiding Officer calls for a vote. Attendees cast ballots, borne on the wings of iridescent tahk birds, for one of the following punishments:

- An extremely stern warning
- Expulsion from the Congress
- Official designation as a mohoud, or mad sandestin
- Removal of all sandestin powers, temporary
- The above, plus extended imprisonment. (Unlike his post-trial confinement, this occurs without benefit of suspended animation, so that the sandestin suffers the full boredom and loneliness of his shackles.)
- Removal of all sandestin powers, permanent
- Forced indenture to an arch-magician
- Obliteration

Ballots continue, each time striking the least-popular result from the list of choices, until one sentence gains majority approval.

Warnings occur only when a defendant is both extremely popular with the assembly, and can mount a credible justification for his actions.

Forced indenture is considered the most humiliating of all possible punishments. When pressed, sandestins concede that it is slightly preferable to obliteration.

## Edicts and By-Laws

The threat posed by most governmental bodies is that they'll engage in wanton acts of legislation. The Sandestin High Congress commits few such offenses. Unlike most entities, sandestin feel it's more important to avoid being constrained oneself than to pass laws restricting the activities of their neighbors. Their distaste for rules and

<sup>1</sup> In most locales, the ambient magic consists of other large-scale ritual workings, too. Some are actively maintained. Others linger long after the demise of their creators.

boundaries prompts them to reject most proposed new by-laws. On the other hand, they enjoy repealing laws, and occasionally enact draconian regulations merely for the pleasure of striking them down at the next Synod.

Barring a surprise crisis, the portion of a Synod given over to new legislation is always brief. The only law that matters is the Permeating Injunction, and it has stood the sandestins in good stead for aeons untold. Civil Complaints

Aside from exchanging gossip and consuming sweetmeats, the majority of any Synod is given over to the lodging and settlement of civil disputes between sandestins.

The sandestins' aforementioned dislike of rules and structure allows a sandestin to lodge a complaint of any nature against any other attendee. Offenses range from the serious, like unauthorized alterations to another sandestin's domain, to the apparently trivial, such as a defendant's bad manners or body odor.

The complainant seeks acknowledgement from the chair, details the offense he seeks redress for, and then specifies the damages he seeks. The defendant may then rebut the factual charges made against him or lodge a counterclaim for damages suffered at the complainant's hands, either during the same incident, or arising from a completely unrelated matter. Either may bring forward witnesses to buttress their accounts. Entities of any kind may be called as witnesses, though greater credence is given to the word of sandestins. Litigants may compel the testimony of non-sandestin witnesses by transporting them to the Congress and magically forcing them to speak. Lie-detecting spells are rarely employed; as any sandestin knows, no concept is more fungible than truth.

For each complaint, the Presiding Officer selects three interlocutors who may quiz litigants and witnesses, clarifying the facts before the assembly. He chooses mischievously, delegating his rivals to serve on especially complicated or annoying cases. Interlocutors have some capacity to influence the results of cases, usually by obfuscating the facts beyond recognition. When all three grow bored or run out of questions — or when the assembly at large begins to pelt them with buns and fruit husks — they throw the complaint open to voting by the Congress at large. Each enfranchised assemblyman marks a ballot, inscribed on the inner wings of a Vharkaczian dung beetle, with one of four votes:

### Time and the High Congress

Synods are few and far between but a complainant requiring immediate action can always travel through time to a past Synod. (Travel to future events is theoretically possible but never attempted, on the grounds that the future might not be there when you arrive. And then where would you be?)

In matters of temporal disruption, sandestins remain blithe and carefree. It is not uncommon for sandestins to attend the same Synod from multiple points in time. Particularly litigious sandestins may take up entire seating sections with multiple iterations of themselves.

Abuses of temporal magic forced the Congress to adopt rules against bloc voting by multiple iterations of the same individual. Attitudes change over time, so one may see an entire group of the same sandestin hotly arguing over the sole vote they're allowed to cast. Multiple temporal iterations also count as one entity for the purpose of determining a quorum.

Although the sandestin mind is far more capable than a human's at handling three-dimensional temporal problems, time travel introduces a level of confusion to any proceeding. You might, for example, witness a complaint between the sandestins Rurl and Couslo over a matter that took place in the year 12,908, followed by a complaint between different temporal iterations of Couslo and Rurl, concerned with a transgression that took place forty years before that.

When in doubt, keep in mind the sandestin attitude toward time: there is no such thing as paradox, everything happens at once, and when repercussions grow too twisted to puzzle out, it's time for more crumbcake.

“redress granted”, “redress denied”, “counterclaim granted” or “null.” The result garnering the most votes wins, after a single ballot.

“Null” votes are commonest. They occur when the assembly concludes that the entire matter was a mammoth waste of time, or that the charges and countercharges cancel one another out.

A verdict of “redress granted” affirms the facts as presented by the complainant, awarding him his requested compensation.



Sandestins vote “redress denied” for one of two reasons. They may feel that the charge was not proven. Alternately, they might acknowledge the offender’s guilt but find that the complainant has demanded an exorbitant compensation, given the circumstances. No mechanism allows for the awarding of a lesser redress than that demanded in the original claim, so the perspicacious complainant knows not to ask for too much.

“Counterclaim granted” grants the defendant his chosen redress against the original claimant. You’d think that this vote would be disallowed in cases where the defendant launches no counterclaim, but ballots are often cast inattentively. When the plaintiff proves notably obnoxious, attendees punish him by voting “counterclaim granted.” If no counterclaim was lodged, the defendant receives compensation roughly equivalent to that demanded by the plaintiff, as determined by the interlocutors.

Complaints may be lodged in absentia, but rulings arising from them prove difficult to enforce. The assembly willingly exerts its collective will on litigants present before them, but won’t bother to seek out missing defendants.

## Guests In the Gallery

Non-sandestins may attend Synods as guests of a free sandestin.

One must be a sandestin to have one’s appeal or complaint automatically considered by the High Congress. Other entities may petition for consideration. They must do this through willing sandestins, who enter motions on their behalf. The sandestin representative may continue to speak for his guest throughout proceedings, or turn the floor over, according to whim. Only a fool would expect evenhanded treatment when entering a complaint against a sandestin in a forum under their exclusive control.

Indentured sandestins are not normally permitted to bring guests. An exception pertains to their arch-magician masters. They may be brought to Congress, but only so that the legions of free sandestins present may fall upon them and rend them to pieces. Especially objectionable arch-magicians may be stripped of their powers, subjected to unspeakable torments, and then torn to shreds.

For obvious reasons, indentured sandestins rarely explain this policy in full before bringing their arch-

magicians along with them to a Synod. In fact, many of them attempt, with all the acting ability they can summon, to dissuade their masters from insisting on attending these legendary affairs. By resisting, they increase their arch-magicians’ determination to attend.

Warier arch-magicians may attend by proxy, winning invitation for a clone, simulacra, automaton, vat creature, or expendable servant.

No magical barrier prevents the appearance of uninvited guests. The accomplishment lies in remaining intact after arrival. A legendary anecdote concerns the demise of the arch-magician Lizkin, who materialized during the Nineteenth Synod to complain that his indentured sandestins weren’t precisely heeding his commands. Although in many ways a talented sorcerer, Lizkin always was a trifle obtuse.



# Nemeses, World-Spanning Horrors and Other Inconveniences

In the standard RPG campaign, a cast of nigh-invincible PCs puts the GM in a difficult position. She must stock her world with a series of villains who can on one hand provide credible and entertaining challenges to the player characters, without deflating the aura of supremacy on which the entire concept of the series rests. By turning Rhialto-level games into a ceaseless, cutthroat quest for status points, this tricky balance becomes a secondary issue. The arch-magician's chief antagonists are not game master characters, but each other. The stakes of their battles are lowered, so that permanent deaths and maimings of competitors become no more necessary for excitement than they would in any other sporting event.

That said, competition for status points grows more interesting when the arch-magicians must periodically interrupt their games of one-upmanship to save what's left of the known universe from extinction. Game theory comes into play: does an individual player risk weakening himself against some external threat, so that his colleagues can win valuable status points at his expense? Or does he Persuade them to take the risks and save the day, hoping to later profit from their weakness? At what point does the pursuit of personal advantage permit catastrophe to overwhelm all?

Expect your GM to exploit these questions, inserting you between rock and hard place, as you confront the various outsiders of similar power who mean harm to the entire conclave.

<sup>1</sup> That is to say that they rival the current crop of comparative mediocrities and reprobates, not the glorious past masters of the sorcerous arts as found during the Grand Motholam period.

## Archveults

The archveults are quasi-human entities whose mastery of magic is nearly equivalent to those of the Dying Earth's great arch-magicians<sup>1</sup>. Though Ildefonse and his conclave consider them their most fearsome rivals, their legendary arrogance prevents them from regarding the archveults as their full equals. It may even be the fact, given the shroud of mystery and clouded memory that obscures the origins of the archveults, that the majority of them are former arch-magicians turned into shadows of their former selves by the conclave itself. It is unquestionably the case that at least some of the archveults were subject to precisely this sort of transformation. This would go a great way to explaining the seething malice with which archveults regard their sorcerous betters.

Though roughly humanoid in shape, archveults adopt default physical appearances most humans would consider monstrous. Many boast reptilian facial features or possess skulls which converge into a bony crest. They are also known for their tufts of plumage, some of it colorful. Iridescent scales encase their slim, tall, hopping bodies. In some specimens the avian features become more pronounced: they may squawk and hiss through sharp, horny beaks or perambulate across the landscape on scaly, talon-bearing legs.

Archveults make their headquarters on the hellish, yet occasionally beautiful, planet of Jangk. Poison clouds swathe its puny, choking suns. Rivers of lava eat away at spires of knife-edged rock. Venomous crustaceans scuttle through savannahs of razor grass. Swarms of flesh-eating insects converge on herds of cannibalistic, predatory cattle, dining on the cloud of blood and viscera thrown up by their ceaseless battles. From Jangk's frigid poles, ebony glaciers grind inexorably southward, threatening to bury the planet in a final age of ice.





A few spots of relative safety exist on Jangk; these are where the archveults establish their towers and palaces. Often these have been made by the archveults themselves. Even spots of apparent loveliness harbor unpleasant secrets. The dappled waters of the Quicksilver Ocean vent noxious vapors into the air. The six-foot pansy-shaped grazers called the dragoons excrete a substance which can induce madness on simple skin contact. None of the planet's verdant places are safe from the local harpies, flying carnivores who prey with impunity on even the archveults themselves.

Like arch-magicians, archveults are not what they used to be. Player characters visiting Jangk may be disappointed to find a shortage of worthy opponents to fling themselves upon. Ground down by the implacable hostility of their environment, buffeted by boredom, and generally subjected to the entropic ennui of a universe in its last throes, many archveults have died off, succumbed to querulous old age, or departed for pleasanter pastures. Still, a handful of them retain a fragment of their old vigor and spite, and can still muster the occasional scheme of vengeance against their ancient tormentors.

As with most sentient beings, archveults perceive themselves as the heroes of their own stories — or, at least, as victims of fate's bitterness. They perceive the arch-magicians as overweening, self-involved, foolish tyrants who have persecuted them for no good reason. For many, what we might see as the horrors of Jangk are the landmarks of a sylvan paradise. However, even the most chauvinistic archveult would concede that Jangk's culinary possibilities are severely wanting. Acrid smells, tongue-scorching tastes and wobbly textures universally characterize its tiny roster of edible plants and animals. When they dare travel to Earth, archveults are less likely to be plotting a coup against the conclave than covertly hunting for tasty ingredients. They are particularly fond of truffles, gentian roots, and the succulent flesh of the spiral-tailed flog. Such items can be used to bait or bribe the most cautious of archveults.

## Prominent Archveults

### Arvianid

Noted apiarist Arvianid wishes to be remembered as a beekeeper first and a reptilian master of sorcery second. A doddering, somewhat dotty figure, Arvianid spends most of his time perfecting his various grades of

honey. He can be persuaded to leave his manse in the Vale of Woe only when the fate of archveultkind is at stake. He has never figured out why it is that the arch-magicians, who might otherwise be ideal consumers of his product, wish his subjugation or destruction. When he launches a scheme, it is often with the objective of achieving a peace between arch-magicians and archveults, which no one else on either side appears to want. He is especially saddened by the constant rebuffs of the arch-magician Shrue (p. 82), whose hives of undead bees would seem to make him a natural friend to Arvianid.

The archveult's good intentions have often been undercut by the swarm of Jangkian bees which constantly buzz around him. Their stingers are infinitely more poisonous than their earthly cousins, so much so that anyone standing in Arvianid's presence without some extraordinary form of protection must make a Health roll for each five minute period of exposure, or suffer an Injury. The bees recognize Arvianid as a benefactor and do not sting him, but will relentlessly feast on anyone else around him. Arvianid feels a deep paternal bond toward his buzzing charges, lashing out with homicidal fury if anyone strikes at them.

Persuade (Eloquent) 17, Rebuff (Contrary) 17, Attack (Finesse) 18, Defense (Intuition) 10, Magic (Daring) 14, Health 19, Appraisal 5, Athletics 3, Concealment 6, Driving 2, Etiquette 4, Gambling 4, Imposture 5, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 4, Perception 2, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 5, Stewardship 12, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 8.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 3, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 4, Comfort 9, Cuisine 4, Library 7, Mobility 4, Scrying 10, Security 8, Splendor 3, Staff 3.

### Djorin

The imperious Djorin is perhaps the most illustrious surviving archveult, having made an arch-enemy out of the especially puissant (and now regrettably indisposed) arch-magician Morreion. Among the archveults, who are tired of hearing about it, Djorin is known for his theory that their many humiliations at the hands of the conclave result from their lack of organizational ability. Time and again he has proposed that the archveults band



together to form a conclave of their own — with himself, needless to say, as its iron-handed ruler. Unfortunately for Djorin (and perhaps for his oft-defeated compatriots), his vision is undercut by a complete absence of diplomatic skills. Even by the low standards of archveult society he is ill-tempered, rude, and prone to bullying. When he launches a scheme against the arch-magicians, it will often be a ruse to shake his fellows into banding together under his leadership. He is nothing if not persistent, having failed miserably with the exact scheme multiple times in aeons past.

Persuade (Intimidating) 4, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 14, Attack (Cunning) 19, Defense (Intuition) 19, Magic (Insightful) 26, Health 23, Appraisal 5, Athletics 2, Concealment 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 2, Imposture 4, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 8, Perception 5, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 7, Stewardship 6, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 6, Avarice 1, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 2.

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 5, Cuisine 3, Library 9, Mobility 3, Scrying 9, Security 5, Splendor 6, Staff 5.

## Herclamon

Six hundred years ago, the barrel-chested, unusually muscular archveult Herclamon fell improbably in love with a human woman, the beautiful princess Miuria. Even more improbably, Miuria returned his affections — briefly, that is, until her paramour's activities brought her into contact with the arch-magician Rhialto. Rhialto seduced her, inducing in her a taste for arch-magicians. For many years afterwards she bounced from the arm of one member of the conclave to the next, until they began to find her continued presence unbearably awkward. Ildefonse et al passed a resolution banishing her to a previous aeon, whose high-ranking sorcerers she presumably pursues to this day. This leaves Herclamon, who has forever after burned with a jealous rage against all of Ildefonse's conclave, Rhialto in particular. When he moves against the player characters, it will often be a campaign of seduction, carried on human guise. He seeks out women his enemies have targeted for romantic conquest and applies all his wiles in a quest to beat them to the bedchamber. Any player character with a Resistance to Rakishness of less than 4 is assumed to

have dallied with Miuria in the past, qualifying for Herclamon's vengeance.

Although ready to use magic when necessary, Herclamon prefers to physically thrash his foes whenever possible. He will often attempt to Persuade them to join him in mundane combat, often without revealing his true identity. Despite the wounds he's sustained from love's arrows, he remains a romantic idealist at heart, which accounts for his Pure-Hearted Rebuff type — exceedingly rare in an archveult.

Persuade (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 11, Attack (Caution) 23, Defense (Vexation) 17, Magic (Curious) 18, Health 11, Appraisal 5, Athletics 16, Concealment 4, Driving 3, Etiquette 1, Gambling 3, Imposture 5, Living Rough 6, Pedantry 6, Perception 3, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 3, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 5, Stewardship 2, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 7.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 5, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery 3, Rakishness 0.

**Manse Features:** Collections 9, Comfort 7, Cuisine 6, Library 4, Mobility 5, Scrying 9, Security 10, Splendor 4, Staff 4.

## Ifhix

Ifhix, a jowly, drooling example of archveultkind, fits the description of the irredeemably sinister archveult to which many of his compatriots arguably do not belong. Ifhix claims that he was once a member of the Ildefonse's group who was reduced to archveult form after an unfair resolution was lodged against him. None of the arch-magicians claim to have any recollection of this event, which, even if it occurred, did so in the distant past and is surely of no interest to anyone anymore. Ifhix now exults in his archveult status and would refuse a return to arch-magician form were it offered him. Instead, he schemes to turn those who voted against him into lowly archveults, who he will then dominate and enslave. Included on this extensive grudge list is any arch-magician with a Pettifoggery resistance of less than 4. Ifhix is prepared to swear up and down that these player characters were party to his downfall and will do his utmost to drag them screaming to a similar fate. Consumed by vengeance, Ifhix is a ranting, intemperate fellow given to insults, perorations, and gloating monologues.

Persuade (Obfuscatory) 20, Rebuff (Contrary) 19, Attack (Strength) 17, Defense (Misdirection) 13, Magic (Daring) 17, Health 17, Appraisal 3, Athletics 6, Concealment 5, Driving 3, Etiquette 3, Gambling 5, Imposture 5, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 6, Perception 5, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 6, Stewardship 4, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 7.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 3, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 4, Rakishness 6.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 7, Cuisine 3, Library 6, Mobility 3, Scrying 8, Security 9, Splendor 3, Staff 4.

## Twirfando

The hunched, misshapen Twirfando is an outcast among outcasts, exiled from Jangk on charges of treason. A wheedling, jabbering little creature, Twirfando devises complex plans involving both arch-magicians and his erstwhile compatriots. Sometimes he attempts to engineer his reinstatement as an archveult in good standing. On other occasions he may approach the arch-magicians with offers to further betray his ex-allies in exchange for conclave membership. Although this appalling request is always summarily rejected, Ildefonse and company have periodically succumbed when asked for lesser boons. An indefatigable hunter of IOUN stones, Twirfando may use these as bait to lure arch-magicians into one of his intrigues. Because he often has stones hidden on his person, a mere glimpse or rumor of his presence can send nearly any arch-magician into unwary pursuit of him. Any arch-magician, player characters included, with an Avarice resistance of 4 or less has fallen for one of his ploys in the past, and has just reason to feel that Twirfando owes him an IOUN stone. Oddly, no one seems to learn caution from their disastrous past scrapes with the malformed archveult. Even if you manage to capture Twirfando and find a stone on his person, it may become difficult to collect it in peace, as his other arch-creditors show up to lodge their own pre-existing claims to it.

Persuade (Glib) 12, Rebuff (Obtuse) 13, Attack (Strength) 12, Defense (Parry) 12, Magic (Devious) 12, Persuade (Intimidating) 10, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 14, Attack (Caution) 10, Defense (Vexation) 15, Magic (Curious) 19, Health 20, Appraisal 2, Athletics 11, Concealment 4, Etiquette 5, Gambling 5, Imposture 2, Living Rough 5,

Pedantry 7, Perception 3, Physician 4, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 7, Seduction 4, Stewardship 2, Tracking 3, Wherewithal 8.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 2, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 1.

**Manse Features:** Collections 7, Comfort 7, Cuisine 3, Library 6, Mobility 3, Scrying 8, Security 9, Splendor 3, Staff 4.

## Ixamine

The purring, fur-ruffed Ixamine is known throughout the universe as an architect, designer, and landscaper extraordinaire. His manse, regrettably destroyed in the Pergatine Convulsion, was so intoxicatingly splendid that it still appears in the dreams of aesthetes and connoisseurs thousands of years after its demise. He can turn a stinking slagheap into a soothing garden, or transform a condemned hovel into a bastion of serene magnificence. As much as they despise archveults, any arch-magician would readily give his eyeteeth to have even a single room of his manse refurbished by the ineffably talented Ixamine. For his part, Ixamine disavows any interest in the struggle between arch-magician and archveult. He merely wishes to practice his art without regard for expense or time constraint. However, his fee invariably places its quivering, impossibly tempted subject in a painful quandary. A resolutely moral arch-magician may be required to supply an infant for Ixamine's dining pleasure. A rake may be required to wear a painful chastity device for a year and a day. Characters who meet him or even learn of his proximity must Resist Indolence (the vice of the dedicated homebody) or enter into just such a devil's pact with him, all for an improved garden or cloister. Note, though, that his work will arouse the envy of all, and will likely bring with it a hefty harvest of status points. The risk continues, though: anyone comfortably ensconced in an Ixamine room, garden, or patio must Resist Indolence to ever leave it.

Persuade (Eloquent) 10, Rebuff (Obtuse) 12, Attack (Strength) 13, Defense (Parry) 14, Magic (Daring) 18, Persuade (Intimidating) 13, Rebuff (Pure-Hearted) 15, Attack (Caution) 18, Defense (Vexation) 16, Magic (Curious) 20, Health 16, Appraisal 2, Athletics 10, Concealment 2, Etiquette 2, Gambling 7, Imposture 1, Living Rough 3, Pedantry 4, Perception 3, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 6, Seduction 4, Stewardship 5, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 10.



**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice 4, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 1, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 6.

**Manse Features:** none

## Witches

Arch-magicians regard archvults with haughty contempt, but quail in nauseous terror at the very thought of witches. A naïve observer would conclude that witches are nothing but female arch-magicians. Not so! It is true that witches have all the power of arch-magicians, including access to sandestins. It is likewise true that they are women. It goes without saying, however, that witches possess an elusive, indefinable quality of... *something* or *something* which justifies the indignation and repulsion that the very thought of witchery arouses in an arch-magician's breast. It cannot be that the arch-magicians are in any way chauvinistic or insecure. No untoward conclusions should be drawn from the bachelor status of nearly all conclave members. Their enduring affection for the lesser sex is well-documented. Why, many of them number among the Dying Earth's foremost rakes and seducers! Others employ women as domestic servants, and, it should be noted, certain of these loyal helpmates are not even especially comely.

It is not as if witches have never acted against arch-magicians. Their most fearsome power, of *ensqualmation*, can transform a male arch-magician into a female witch! In rules terms, ensqualmation is a terrifying power because it pits the witch's Magic not against the victim's Magic, but against his Wherewithal, which is almost guaranteed to be a much lower value. The ensqualmation is usually delivered as a Wallop.

The personality change that accompanies ensqualmation causes the arch-magician to immediately seek out and join the coven of witches responsible for his transformation. Witches' covens proceed with somewhat more order and dignity than the typical conclave. The leader of a coven is accorded greater respect, particularly by the newly ensqualmated, who tend to obey her commands. They will balk at orders from their matriarch only if they seem suicidal or unfairly punitive — such as a demand to surrender IOUN stones. The ensqualmated will dutifully and cheerfully act against their former colleagues, instinctively treating them as natural enemies. The only

mercy they show, if you can call it that, is to turn them into women rather than injuring or robbing them.

Ensqualmated arch-magicians may be converted back to their true sex by an evocation of the Second Retrotropic, followed by a stabilizing fixative. Although this takes a mere few minutes, the experience of gender recovery is a disturbing one. The subject must make a Wherewithal roll at a levy of 1, or spend the next 24 hours in panicked seclusion, as he desperately attempts to reassemble his identity. At the end of the 24 hour period, the arch-magician must roll again, or continue his retreat. Only a Wherewithal success will return him to his normal self. Only arch-magicians face the 1-point levy.

Whereas the sandestins indentured by arch-magicians adopt masculine characteristics and personae, those subjugated by witches tend toward the feminine in form and manner. To what extent sandestins have true sexual characteristics at all is a matter of some debate. However, apparently male sandestins in the employ of arch-magicians tend to display the same shuddering aversion to witches's sandestins as their masters show toward the witches themselves.

Given the staunch aversion arch-magicians feel toward witches, one would think that romantic entanglements between the two would be impossible. One would be sadly wrong. Great mutual passions roil in the hearts of many arch-magicians and witches, made all the more potent by the inevitable doom such liaisons bring. Player characters may, quite against their will, be embroiled in painful, inconclusive, aeon-spanning affairs with witches. When a witch character is introduced for the first time into a series, the GM calls for each player to Resist Rakishness, in an order starting with the character with the lowest Resist Rakishness *rating* (not pool!) The first PC to fail has a pre-existing tumultuous relationship with the witch in question. Alas, there is nothing to stop a single PC from suffering the pangs of tormented love with multiple witches. Needless to say, wrenchingly inconvenient consequences can ensue from such a complicated romantic history. Arch-magicians with Ω ratings in Resist Rakishness are immune to such embarrassments. Newly-made arch-magicians will not have affairs with witches in their backstories.

## Well-Known Witches

### Caronda

A willowy blond with opal eyes and lips of glittering crimson, the daring Caronda is feared by arch-magicians and loathed by witches. A true nonconformist, her crime and her manifesto are one and the same: she believes that there is no inherent difference between the sexes which cannot be overcome by mutual understanding. Even more scandalously, she proposes to advance this loathsome agenda by merging covens and conclaves into one pan-magical organization, attended by men and women alike. Several conclave motions have affirmed Caronda's vile proposal as a clear contravention of the Great Law<sup>1</sup>. Her fellow witches have likewise disdained her desire to treat inferiors as equals. Still she persists in her efforts, believing that she can accomplish them before the sun withers and winks out. As an outcast, she spends no time on coven politics, freeing her up to pursue daring adventures throughout the universe. She is especially noted as a collector of precious magical artifacts, which she uses to entice arch-magicians, witches, and even archvults to participate in her naïve and grandiose plans. Like many adventurers, she is a hedonist and free spirit; she may have bedded any number of player characters, giving her heart to none.

Persuade (Eloquent) 19, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 16, Attack (Finesse) 16, Defense (Misdirection) 15, Magic (Daring) 17, Health 15, Appraisal 4, Athletics 9, Concealment 6, Driving 3, Etiquette 5, Gambling 7, Imposture 3, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 13, Perception 2, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 5, Scuttlebutt 4, Seduction 3, Stewardship 4, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 3, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 5, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 3.

**Sandestins:** Reclblomia, Conaryee

### Deve

The imperious matriarch Deve, who most typically manifests as a well-preserved matron with a fondness for multi-tiered hair and excess décolletage, is the witch who poses the most direct threat to Ildefonse's conclave. Where many of her fellow witches see the arch-magicians as a

band of fusty irrelevancies, Deve believes that they are implacable enemies who must be destroyed if witches are to take their rightful place in the universe. At one point she promulgated the view that witches ought to rule over mankind, but she has long since abandoned such tiresome scheming in favor of the simple eradication of all arch-magicians. She rules a coven of similarly fanatical malcontents, whom mainstream witches avoid on grounds of general tedium. A vocal opponent of ensqualmation, Deve feels that to convert an arch-magician to the female gender is to reward him for his various grave offenses against womankind. Instead she will attempt to reduce her victims to a lifetime of menial labor, stripping them of their powers and memories. In extreme cases she may agitate for the deaths of her foes. Invariably these cases involve arch-magicians who in distant aeons wronged Deve romantically. The fact that she may still harbor passionate feelings for certain of these individuals merely sharpens her rapacity.

Persuade (Forthright) 17, Rebuff (Contrary) 18, Attack (Strength) 16, Defense (Intuition) 19, Magic (Insightful) 18, Health 13, Appraisal 4, Athletics 10, Concealment 3, Driving 4, Etiquette 8, Gambling 5, Imposture 4, Living Rough 7, Pedantry 13, Perception 6, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 3, Riding 6, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 8, Stewardship 4, Tracking 2, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 4, Indolence 5, Gourmandism 6, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 4.

**Sandestins:** Ablicove, Rerramura

### Ineitia

The witch Ineitia, a sallow-skinned creature with long, glassine hair, is the subject to a terrifying curse, the horror of which she wishes to share with any arch-magician foolish enough to fall into her sphere of influence. Once the finest cook in existence, she succumbed to a fatal arrogance and challenged Twayous, the hearth goddess of the Manathan culture, to a culinary duel. In an epic cooking competition that spanned several decades, Ineitia not only defeated the goddess, but humiliated her utterly. Twayous fell into melancholy, retreating from the gods of her pantheon and sealing herself up in a cave. From that moment onwards, the food of the Manathans took on the bitter taste of

<sup>1</sup> Which ordains that man shall be man, and woman shall be woman.



ashes. Datorim, the patriarchal sky god of the Manathan pantheon, could not reverse the effect or coax Twayous from her cavern. Instead he did the next best thing: he cursed Ineitia to suffer the same dread symptoms as his people. Now, though she can still create the finest dishes ever tasted, Ineitia cannot enjoy them herself. It is difficult for her even to gain nourishment from food. The curse seems irreversible; once the Manathans lost their taste for food, they dwindled and died. With them, and the power of their beliefs, went their gods, including Twayous and Datorim. Since these entities are extinct, they can no longer be prevailed upon to lift their curse.

Ineitia now spends her time seeking alternate cures to the curse. Each quest to date has resulted in disaster and death. She's run out of witches willing to aid her, and must instead trick, inveigle and blackmail arch-magicians, whose lives aren't worth much anyhow, to do her bidding. Any arch-magician tasting one of her dishes must Resist Gourmandism or do her bidding in hopes of sampling another.

Persuade (Eloquent) 18, Rebuff (Contrary) 17, Attack (Strength) 19, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 17, Magic (Insightful) 18, Health 12, Appraisal 2, Athletics 8, Concealment 2, Driving 4, Etiquette 6, Gambling 4, Imposture 2, Living Rough 7, Pedantry 15, Perception 1, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 6, Riding 1, Scuttlebutt 5, Seduction 2, Stewardship 25, Tracking 3, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 1, Avarice 6, Indolence 3, Gourmandism Ω, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 3.

**Sandestins:** Spurcara, Penombis

## Loutondu

Billing herself as an innovator in an age of dullards, the creature of feline beauty known as Loutondu is famous for goading members of the conclave to top her achievements in magical research. As any arch-magician knows, today's sorcery is a faded shadow of the past. It is simply not possible, or at least would require very hard work, to recapture the full glories of the Grand Motholam, let alone break new magical ground at this late date. The mockingly sharp-eyed Loutondo insists otherwise, and offers as proof a number of advances in supernatural theory uncovered by her steel-trap logic and long hours of sweat-breaking intellectual toil. She is also a fervent adherent

of female supremacy, seeking to drive this point home by issuing periodic challenges to the conclave. Typically one of her factotums appears at the manse of a noted arch-magician announcing a race to solve a specified, and supposedly impenetrable, sorcerous conundrum. The message proposes a bet, either for an item of priceless value, or an act of obeisance and humiliation to be undertaken by the loser. Every time one of these missives arrives, the arch-magicians grumpily promise one another that none of them will again be so foolish as to enter into one of these contests with the disreputably enthusiastic Loutondu. Disregarding her protestations to the contrary, they grumble that she surely has a head start on them, having doubtless chosen a problem she has already researched. Yet, one by one, they succumb to their arrogance, pursuing her announced objective with furtive gusto. All player characters must Resist Arrogance to stave off the temptation to join in. Loutondu has never lost a competition, though several of her existing challenges have exhausted the efforts of all contenders and remain open to this day.

Persuade (Glib) 15, Rebuff (Wary) 19, Attack (Finesse) 19, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 16, Magic (Studios) 16, Health 14, Appraisal 4, Athletics 6, Concealment 4, Driving 1, Etiquette 4, Gambling 10, Imposture 5, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 13, Perception 3, Physician 2, Quick Fingers 6, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 3, Seduction 5, Stewardship 5, Tracking 4, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 6, Avarice 5, Indolence 3, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 1, Rakishness 2.

**Sandestins:** Honcly, Conolca

## Stuouga

Stuouga affects a variety of fetching guises, often combining elements of a lithe, elfin frame with curves of the most potent pulchritude. When in the company of a single male, her appearance will shift to the physical type most likely to drive him into frenzies of frustrated desire. Apparently she chooses these forms instinctively, without consciously willing it.

Stuouga is famed as the known universe's most compellingly ravishing virgin. She has sworn to remain chaste until the very instant of the earth's final destruction, before all of creation vanishes into its final swirl of entropy. Virtually every member of the conclave (save for those

with  $\Omega$  in Resist Rakishness) has privately vowed to bring her state of innocence to a premature end. Her allure is such that they're willing to suspend their usual distrust of witches, in just this one instance. Yet even such assiduous seducers as Rhialto have been thus far unable to crack the impenetrable veil of her chastity.

Stuouga is no prude or scowl; she enjoys the company of men, even arch-magicians. After all, the world could end at any instant. In preparation for that dread eventuality, she compares and contrasts her various suitors, so that she may bestow her delayed charms on the most deserving candidate. Any man who wishes to impress her need merely risk his life and sanity by accomplishing some act of breakneck derring-do for her amusement. If a suitor is lacking in inspiration, Stuouga can always suggest a suitably suicidal mission.

Prolonged exposure to the hypnotically beguiling Stuouga can be hazardous to one's concentration. Anyone spending more than a day in her presence must score a Wherewithal success. Failure places a levy of 1 on all tasks requiring mental acuity, as the victim daydreams about her rather than focusing on the matter at hand. After a 24-hour period the victim may once again attempt a Wherewithal roll.

Another risk inherent in Stuouga's company is that less carefree witches in search of arch-magicians to imperil can reliably find them arrayed around her. Even the odd archvult or vengeful god might ambush a conclave member as he whistles happily home from an intoxicating afternoon with this vision of vestal loveliness.

Persuade (Charming) 17, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 19, Attack (Finesse) 16, Defense (Misdirection) 20, Magic (Studious) 19, Health 13, Appraisal 4, Athletics 9, Concealment 1, Driving 6, Etiquette 5, Gambling 5, Imposture 3, Living Rough 5, Pedantry 15, Perception 4, Physician 3, Quick Fingers 4, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 5, Stewardship 3, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 5, Avarice 2, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 4.

**Sandestins:** Fidge, Nucla

## Rogue Magicians

Few beings offer as finely calibrated a threat to the average arch-magician than another of his own kind. Thankfully, a careful etiquette developed over many aeons prevents the members of Ildefonse's conclave from harming one another. They channel their aggression into petty rivalries where only one's pride is likely to be wounded. Concord is not universal, alas: see the story *Fader's Waft*, where the conclave faces a threat from within.

Although the conclave members don't like to discuss it, they are not the only arch-magicians in existence. Several famous rogues have split from the organization in times past. Others may have mastered the secret of the chug without ever applying for membership. Some are indifferent to the conclave, while others actively seek its destruction.

A single arch-magician must be careful when challenging the entire conclave. He will proceed by subterfuge and indirection, seeking direct contact with his enemies only on a one-on-one basis, if at all. He may use his Imposture ability, supported by the magic of his sandestins, to pose as a conclave member.

Rogue magicians are often served by rogue sandestins, who hold their fellows in bitter contempt. They are willing to interfere with them or even plot their destruction. Many are mad and willing to risk their own demise by entering into conflict with other sandestins. (See "*Omnipotence Made Relative*", below, for rules on resolving contests between sandestins.) In their madness, rogue sandestins are more willing than their sane counterparts to fulfill the orders of their masters without quail or quibble. Most scandalously, some purportedly join up with their human masters voluntarily, without the intercession of a chug<sup>1</sup>.

Honest arch-magicians may find that their own sandestins become suddenly more cooperative when faced with these lunatics.

### Lab Mondu

The most notorious of the rogue arch-magicians is Lab Mondu, who was expelled from the conclave for performing an unwholesome experiment. Once shriveled,

<sup>1</sup> Normal sandestins vehemently dispute this possibility. They claim that the rogue magician is invariably the mere puppet of a crazed sandestin.



humpbacked, and variously ill-shaped, Lab Mondu traded his own withered form for that of a deodand. Along with the creature's body he acquired a number of fearsome qualities, including a taste for human flesh and an unfortunate propensity for growling. Ildefonse and company found their formerly meek colleague's discomfiting and passed a resolution requiring him to exchange it for another before appearing at any subsequent meetings. He responded by flying into a rage, tearing off and partially devouring the leg of the arch-magician Gilgad<sup>2</sup>. The horrified arch-magicians passed an emergency motion banning Lab Mondu to the nether depths. He has since shown a lamentable talent for escape, and rarely remains for long in the prisons his ex-colleagues condemn him to. Driven by implacable willpower and assisted by the bloodthirsty sandestin (some say arch-demon) Caunafclar, Lab Mondu periodically resurfaces to plan the gore-gushing dooms of his former friends. He is particularly persistent in his pursuit of Gilgad, whose limb he found hauntingly delectable.

Persuade (Eloquent) 16, Rebuff (Penetrating) 18, Attack (Strength) 25, Defense (Sure-Footedness) 20, Magic (Forceful) 26, Health 14, Appraisal 3, Athletics 12, Concealment 5, Driving 4, Etiquette 3, Gambling 2, Imposture 4, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 18, Perception 5, Physician 6, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 2, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 7, Stewardship 2, Tracking 5, Wherewithal 14.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Avarice 4, Indolence Ω, Gourmandism 3, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 6.

**Sandestin:** Caunafclar

**Manse:** none; Lab Mondu is a fugitive

### The Alternate Ildefonse

Sometime nuisance, sometime threat, the alternate Ildefonse periodically shows up to sow confusion at conclave. He is a complete duplicate of the conclave leader, right down to his occasionally stultifying oratorical style. To tell them apart, one must examine the whorls on their fingertips: the prints of the real Ildefonse are the reversed image of his double's. The false Ildefonse claims to be the real one, cruelly displaced by a facsimile. Naturally, the real Ildefonse takes umbrage at this suggestion. The alternate Ildefonse claims that he was duplicated many years

ago while traveling in the realm of Congst.

There he discovered, to his dismay, that many perfectly ordinary spells trigger unexpected side effects. When he cast Phandaal's Gyrator on a fast-approaching predator, he instead generated two copies of himself. One was eaten by the creature; the other fled in terror before he, the true Ildefonse, could render it back into dust. Ever since, he has been periodically plagued by this false claimant to his identity, which has managed to manifest impressive powers. Even his sandestins were apparently recreated by the freakish interaction of the spell with the unnatural cosmic radiation of Congst.

The false Ildefonse tells the same story, except of course that he is the real Ildefonse, and that his double made it back to his manse before he did.

The false Ildefonse has built an exact replica of the true Ildefonse's manse on the dark side of the moon, but still wishes to reclaim his original home. He likewise insists on a return to his past status as head of the conclave. At times he seems quite lucid, if petulant and unreasonable. On other occasions he has shown a propensity for madness and destruction as savage as any demon's.

His existence has proven a boon to conclave members anxious to shirk their duties and disobey Ildefonse's edicts. Whenever they hear a request they do not wish to honor, they can ignore it, later claiming that they thought it was issued by the wrong Ildefonse.

**Game and manse statistics:** same as Ildefonse's

### Jangkian Harpies

The harpies of Jangk are fearsome predators, notable for snacking on archvults. When arch-magicians have occasion to visit the archvult homeworld, they too should keep an eye to the sky, to avoid being taken up in the talons of these aerial devourers.

Harpies are bestial, humanoid beings held aloft on huge leathery wings, not unlike a pelgrane's. A harpy's arms and legs alike terminate in huge, raking claws. Their elongated snouts sprout with needle-sharp teeth. The females hunt;

<sup>2</sup> The leg grew back, but has never quite been the same since.

males exist but are rarely seen, remaining in the nest to care for their young. A harpy can digest the body of an entire human or archveult in under five minutes. She will then return to her nest to regurgitate much of her meal for her growing young.

Though intelligent and capable of speech the harpy is a reluctant conversationalist, especially when on the hunt. Any Persuade attempts against it by persons it regards as edible face a levy of 2. It automatically succeeds, no roll required, at any Resistance that would distract it from a meal.

Harpies will prey on nearly any large animal but take special nourishment from the flesh of magicians, suffused as it is with thaumaturgical energy. They strike opportunistically, swooping through the venom-laced skies of Jangk waiting to find an archveult or magician in distress. For reasons explicable only by the extraordinary evolutionary pressure exerted by the hostile land of Jangk, harpies are invulnerable to magic spells whose casters are either Injured, or have Magic pools of less than 10.

An arch-magician's sandestin can easily banish or destroy a Jangkian harpy, but the time available to issue suitably clear instructions as the creature blisters down out of the sky may render this option unreliable.

Although one can take solace in the fact that these devastatingly effective creatures are resident only in Jangk, it is always possible that some cruel or heedless soul could import a breeding colony to Earth...

Persuade (Forthright) 4, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 8, Attack (Speed) 24, Defense (Misdirection) 12, Health 8, Living Rough 6, Perception 14, Wherewithal 10.

*Airborne attacks impose a levy of 1 against the Defense rolls of non-flying opponents.*

## Daihaks

Though there are few opponents in the human realms capable of threatening an arch-magician, conclave members must step carefully around a variety of otherworldly entities, chief among them the gods and demons. These beings, along with other similar entities like sandestins and calectans, are collectively known as daihaks.

## Gods

Arch-magicians, who bow to no one, enjoy expressing the opinion that the distinction between a god and a demon is largely one of semantics. One must take this theory with a grain of salt; it is more an expression of arch-magical dismissiveness than an accurate description of the extraplanar pecking order.

It is true that gods and demons are both inherently supernatural entities with potential vast powers, who originate in the overworld and interact with this one. However, gods depend more on their relationship to the lower spheres. A demon maintains his integrity independent of the actions and perceptions of lower-sphere inhabitants. Gods need worshippers to thrive. As the cultures that pay homage to them prosper and grow, their power waxes. When these civilizations enter, as all things must, their period of decline and doom, the gods they have elevated diminish, crumble, and die.

No god, even one on the dusty downswing of his career, should be trifled with. If, however, one must interact with a deity, it is always preferably to traffic with a has-been. A god at the apogee of his career can summarily crush a mere arch-magician with the back of his celestial hand. At his nadir, he is less of a threat than the most wheedling archveult. Even former gods should be approached with caution, though. The powers they muster can be unpredictable. Weakened gods may be able to summon the aid of still-potent allies from other pantheons.

Gods are like sandestins and demons in that they can wield magical powers directly and at will; they do not use spells. Still-potent deities accomplish their wills without resort to die rolls, and do not expend magic points. Decaying gods can accomplish nearly any feat the GM desires, but only by making successful Magic rolls.

Whether potent or dwindling, a given god's miraculous powers will usually be confined to a sphere of influence. These specialties appear across cultures, expressing the deity's usefulness to its worshippers. To earn the worship that fuels their powers, gods must prove their economic utility to the culture they choose to patronize. Gods start out adopting fledgling tribal or nomadic cultures whose chief concerns are for survival. Their initial spheres of influence reflect this: they begin as gods of rain, grain, hunting, or raiding. As their chosen cultures grow more complex and sophisticated, old gods adapt and new



ones, often interfering relatives of the original crop, horn in. Gods expand into new spheres of influence suitable for urban economies. They identify themselves with ideologies that can be easily spread by their missionaries and proselytizers. If the abstract concepts they promulgate prove popular, they poach new worshippers from other cultures, further increasing their power. Common abstract concepts include brotherhood, racial purity, peace, warfare, certitude, mystery, and, that perennial favorite, the conformist suppression of all frighteningly unfamiliar behavior.

All deities, in addition to whatever other economic factors or abstract concepts they might embody, also claim as a sphere of influence "divine authority." With this sphere of influence gods can smite their enemies and evoke awe in their worshippers. They can thereby muster a range of impressive special effects, such as claps of thunder, emissions of brimstone, and the harmonizing of metaphysical choirs. Included under the enemy-smiting rubric are several abilities of great concern to arch-magicians. A god can suspend or even permanently sever a magician's control over his chugs.

Although the gods themselves recognize no such categories, for game purposes we can divide them into the following categories, depending on their current state of power: nascent, ascendant, waning, or fallen.

A **nascent** god has just embarked on its career, having gathered a modest but perhaps growing culture of worshippers, or a new, profitable niche within an existing culture.

An **ascendant** god is the most dangerous of all to an arch-magician; his connection to a thriving body of worshippers is so strong as to allow it to accomplish its will with the merest thought.

A **waning** god has seen better days but is still a force to be reckoned with. As its rolls of worshippers shrink, it desperately seeks to reverse the trend by identifying and adopting fresher, more appealing spheres of influence. It may seek out arch-magicians to advance its theological comeback schemes.

A **fallen** god has lost its worshippers, usually to the ravages of time, which eventually grinds all civilizations to a fine, chalky powder. Little more powerful than a spirit or will-o-wisp, fallen gods cling to a ragbag of

remnant powers. They may still be dangerous, but are the most tempting targets for arch-magicians hoping to enslave them, harness their powers, or simply put them on display in their private menageries.

Now that the universe is in its final throes, waning and fallen gods far outnumber the ascendant ones, and nascent deities are exceedingly rare.

The sorts of powers a god wields depends on its spheres of influence. The potency with which it expresses them varies according to its category.

Nascent gods are not in full control of their powers but are already mighty enough to dispense with the necessity of ability pools and ratings. For each attempted miracle, the GM rolls a die once, with no rerolls permitted. On a result of 2-5, the god gets its desired result. On a Dismal Failure, it achieves nothing. On an Illustrious Success, it gets too much of what it wanted, to the detriment of all. If it wanted to summon a plague of locusts to eat all the crops of its unruly adherents, it instead whips up a cloud of carnivorous bugs which devours all of its worshippers, too. If it wanted to knock an arch-magician unconscious, it instead reduces him to atoms.

Ascendant gods can accomplish anything, according to precise specifications, with no die rolls required. They can remove an arch-magician or sandestin from time and space with the snapping of a disembodied finger. Even overdemons need fear them.

Waning gods have come so far down in the world that their abilities are now measured with game statistics. They have ability ratings and pools. They can still work miracles relating to their sphere of influence, but must make successful Magic rolls in order to effectuate them. Rerolls are permissible, as per the standard rules. They can break an arch-magician's connection to his chug but are no longer powerful enough to obliterate a sandestin. Any smiting, of arch-magicians or anyone else, must be accomplished the old fashioned way, through a sorcerous duel or physical attack. Their high game statistics mean that they are still forces to be reckoned with. They may instantly heal an injury by spending 10 Health.

Persuade ~+10, Rebuff ~+20, Attack 100, Defense 175, Magic 4~, Health 100, Appraisal 20, Athletics 50, Concealment 50, Driving 2, Etiquette 5, Gambling 75,

Imposture 100, Living Rough 2, Pedantry 15, Perception 50, Physician 50, Quick Fingers 5, Riding 25, Scuttlebutt 25, Seduction 200, Stewardship 10, Tracking 50, Wherewithal 150.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 3, Avarice Ω, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 30, Pettifoggery 5, Rakishness 2.

GMs should alter ability ratings to reflect the deity's spheres of influence, and assign ability styles according to its personality. A goddess of chastity will have a Resist Rakishness of Ω. A healing deity might boast a Physician rating of 100 or more.

Fallen gods have much lower game statistics but can still pose a challenge to a single arch-magician. Unlike their merely waning colleagues, they can't instantly heal their injuries. They are often wanderers, living a hand-to-mouth existence among the ruins of their old civilizations, and in the rougher arts are more accomplished than their divine betters.

Persuade ~, Rebuff ~, Attack ~, Defense ~, Magic ~, Health 20, Appraisal 8, Athletics 8, Concealment 8, Driving 2, Etiquette 5, Gambling 12, Imposture 8, Living Rough 12, Pedantry 8, Perception 8, Physician 5, Quick Fingers 15, Riding 12, Scuttlebutt 25, Seduction ~, Stewardship 10, Tracking 6, Wherewithal 16.

**Resistances:** Arrogance Ω, Avarice 6, Indolence 8, Gourmandism 4, Pettifoggery Ω, Rakishness 6.

Again, ratings should be altered to reflect the god's history and personality. A fallen war god can likely still fight rings around any mortal.

## Demons

Demons are a class of daihak distantly related to chugs and sandestins. They are sometimes summoned or called upon for favors by foolish would-be sorcerers. Arch-magicians rarely engage in negotiations with such creatures; an indentured sandestin, for all his tricks, is both surpassingly powerful and reasonably obedient. None of the spells of demon-binding provide a mechanism as reliable as the chug. Demons therefore figure in the life of an arch-magician primarily as troublesome antagonists.

Priests of various faiths claim that demons are

## Gods and Sandestins

Sandestins profess a haughty disinterest in gods and their affairs. In fact, they are extremely frightened of ascendant gods, who can destroy them at will. They'll desperately subvert any order that would bring them into contact with powerful deities. Each of them has a story to tell about a supposedly mild and temperate greater god who grew suddenly wrathful and painfully obliterated a comrade for no good reason.

Waning and fallen gods, on the other hand, attract indentured sandestins. They're mighty enough to free them from the grips of their masters, without being able to destroy them. Sandestins sent to interact with these beings often try to secure their freedom by offering various favors. The desperation that afflicts these has-been deities gives the sandestins the upper hand in negotiations.

the enemy of mankind, serving whatever symbolic representation of evil their cultures abjure. Arch-magicians know the truth: that demons seek power for themselves, the same as most creatures. They do not need to corrupt mankind to get what they want from it. Mankind can always find new depths of depravity on its own, with no aid needed from the overworld.

A demon-summoning ritual is a transfer of energy from a lower realm, such as Earth, to the overworld. Many of them do call for a range of cruel or licentious acts, because the breaking of taboos unleashes energy from the magician to a chosen recipient in the overworld. The recipient will then appear or grant some other boon to its summoner, always taking care to expend the least effort for the greatest gain. Demons carefully cultivate their diabolists, keeping the supply of magical energy flowing. If the demonologist engages in ever more perverse and destructive behavior to gain the boons he seeks, this is a mere side effect of the transaction, at least as far as the demon is concerned. Truth be told, many demons find the typical diabolists' habit of recounting his loathsome crimes in detailed fashion to be tedious and disagreeable.

Unlike gods, demons are careful not to develop an undue dependency on these energies. They represent but one source of power to demonkind. (On the other hand, none of them ever grow as powerful as an ascendant god.)

Petty diabolists are objects of scorn in the salons of



the conclave. None ever progress from their twisted path to arch-magician status. They are pitiful threats, easily squashed with the expenditure of a few indenture points. Sandestins dislike demon-summoners and become unusually cooperative when sent out to deal with them. None are more contemptuous of them than Shrue (p. 82), who began to dabble in demonology only after he had safely mastered the secrets of the chug.

Even he is careful when dealing with demons, who can pose a threat to any arch-magician. They like magical treasures, including IOUN stones, and scheme to secure them. They may take vengeance if an arch-magician interferes with one of their pet diabolists. Some adventures may require the characters to traverse the sense-shattering realms of the overworld, where the demons make their home. Demons are highly territorial and feel an obligation to crush any who trespass in their realm.

The mightiest of the demon host are the overdemons. Like gods and sandestins, they are not measured by game statistics. They may accomplish nearly any magical feat at will. It is a trivial matter for an overdemon to slay an arch-magician. Unfortunately, they often pause to extensively mull the most deliciously entertaining way in which to bring about his painful demise, buying the arch-magician time for unceremonious flight.

Greater demons are formidable foes but must use standard game rules for any gnawing, rending, or mutilating of arch-magicians they wish to engage in. They may perform up to seven self-defined magical feats per day, but may not use them to directly kill or injure any living creature or daihak.

Persuade ~, Rebuff ~, Attack 3~, Defense 3~, Magic ~, Health 20, Appraisal 12, Athletics 12, Concealment 12, Driving 8, Etiquette 2, Gambling 12, Imposture 8, Living Rough 4, Pedantry 4, Perception 8, Physician 2, Quick Fingers 6, Riding 4, Scuttlebutt 2, Seduction 2, Stewardship 2, Tracking 8, Wherewithal 16.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 2, Avarice 2, Indolence 2, Gourmandism 2, Pettifoggery 2, Rakishness 2.

Lesser demons straddle the line between omnipotent entity and merely dangerous creature. Many of them are of merely feral intelligence. They may perform any complex spell by spending 6 Magic points, or any straightforward spell by spending 3 Magic points.

Persuade 12, Rebuff 12, Attack 20, Defense 20, Magic 20, Health 10, Athletics 12, Concealment 6, Driving 2, Gambling 4, Living Rough 8, Perception 8, Quick Fingers 6, Tracking 8, Wherewithal 8.

**Resistances:** Arrogance 6, Avarice 2, Indolence 6, Gourmandism 6, Pettifoggery 8, Rakishness 2.

## Impersonal Cosmic Forces

Even more powerful than ascendant gods are the abstract forces from which even their powers ultimately derive. One cannot interact with these forces; they are incapable of communication. They cannot be directly perceived; only the effects of their presence can excite the senses. When in the presence of a cosmic force, one is likely to see and hear some massive, supernal catastrophe in progress. For example, NOTHING appears at the end of the universe as an encroaching wall of absence, slowly devouring all in its path. A god is the same as a dust mote to NOTHING; if the blanketing wall of NOTHING were to roll over a god, the god would be devoured.

Each impersonal cosmic force embodies a concept. To distinguish the cosmic force from the mere idea, the force is rendered in all-caps. Dissolution is the process by which things fall apart; DISSOLUTION is the cosmic force that causes all things to fall apart.

As the universe winds to a close, the negative or destructive cosmic forces hold sway, having tipped the balance against the creative and positive forces. DEATH, EROSION, DISCORD and EXHAUSTION surge forward, bursting through the tears in reality's fabric. LIFE, REBIRTH, HARMONY and REGENERATION diminish and retreat.

To be in direct contact with any cosmic force, even the positive ones, is extremely dangerous. The life of the arch-magician Axiondu was effectively ended when he touched the giant mass of bright green tendrils known as LIFE. He was immediately transformed into a six-foot seed, shaped like that of the avocado. The seed now rests in Rhialto's chamber of wonders. He is from time to time tempted to plant it, but is anxious of the possible results.

Cosmic forces cannot be destroyed, but their courses can occasionally be deterred, delayed, or diverted. Many forces can be influenced by ancient and powerful relics

left behind by lost civilizations. If EROSION bubbles up in the middle of your world, you can perhaps find the ancient golden lever which could reroute it toward some more expendable planet. These artifacts rarely come with simple instruction manuals; great effort and risk may be required to activate them.

As always, the list of forces named here is less than exhaustive. Pedants disagree on the exact number of impersonal cosmic forces. Some, such as SINCERITY and SELFLESSNESS, are thought long-extinct. Others may be separated into categories and sub-categories, perhaps not usefully.

### Omnipotence Made Relative

This chapter introduces a number of entities who, like sandestins, can accomplish any magical feat merely by attempting it. What happens when these entities clash?

The answer is that, while many creatures are omnipotent, some are more omnipotent than others. When two entities of disparate power attempt to enact incompatible feats at the same moment, the mightier being gets its way. Power rankings go as follows, from mightiest to weakest:

#### - Impersonal cosmic forces

- Ascendant gods
- Overdemons
- Nascent gods
- Sandestins
- Greater demons
- Waning gods
- Lesser demons
- Fallen gods

When beings of equal power (two sandestins, two ascendant gods) contest, the GM rolls a die for each. The winner gets its way. A tie indicates a stalemate, where both partially succeed, or each nullifies the other, as seems appropriate.

Many feats retain their potency long after their execution. If an overdemon locks an arch-magician inside a golden torture device, his sandestin may not be able to reverse the effect immediately. He'll need to find a way to compensate for the overdemon's superior degree of omnipotence. Perhaps the combined efforts of two sandestins will do the trick. Maybe he'll need to find a device to counter the overdemon's power.

Feats which would permanently destroy or diminish another relatively omnipotent entity are additionally difficult. All else being equal, only those entities appearing in bold face in the above list are capable of working them, and only against entities of equal or lower status. Even for these entities, an act of complete destruction is extremely tiring. An overdemon might be exhausted for weeks after destroying a fallen god, or centuries after obliterating a greater demon. It is therefore much more common to imprison, enthrall or otherwise impermanently neutralize a rival entity than to snuff it out entirely. When it seems dramatically appropriate, lesser entities may be able to alter or destroy greater ones, if the aggressor maneuvers the defender into a position of extreme disadvantage. An overdemon exhausted by his destruction of a nascent god might be easy prey to a vengeful sandestin, for example.



## Intrigues and Mysteries

This chapter contains a number of situations into which you may wish to poke your nose, and by extension, the olfactory organs of your fellow arch-magicians.

These events are not all happening simultaneously at the beginning of every campaign. They activate only when you choose to make them part of the series. If you decide that you want to set one of these plot hooks in motion, consult your GM first. She has full right of refusal over any plot hook you may wish to explore. She may modify the hook to suit her plans or the established continuity of her series. You may find that she waits a while before introducing your plot hook, so that more pressing plot threads might be pursued. If other players are also submitting plot hooks, she'll try to prioritize, favoring players who've had less to contribute to ongoing storylines. If you picked the most recent hook, she'll give another player first pick this time around. She can make use of new hook requests only at the conclusion of a current adventure. Unless she's notably adept at improvisation, she'll need time to prepare; she may call for suggestions at the end of one session, then commence the resulting adventure at the beginning of the next.

Don't be shy, however, about requesting the introduction of a hook you particularly like. If your GM is typical of the breed, she is an essentially lazy creature forced by her role to taxing lengths of preparation and advance thought. Most likely she'll be only too likely to receive concrete suggestions for storylines you're guaranteed to take an interest in.

To maintain surprise, GMs are encouraged to tinker with the information provided in these hooks. Much of what you know from these brief paragraphs may turn out to be incorrect. A GM can also maintain variety and surprise by allowing two players to introduce separate hooks, then spontaneously weaving them together into the same elaborate storyline.

Those of you who are feeling especially creative should write their own hooks, using the format below.

Expect GMs to apply an additional level of scrutiny to self-created hooks. Understand that if you write a story premise in order to gain advantage for yourself and/or make trouble for your opponents, your GM will follow the law of fictional reversal and add elements that provide you with obstacles of equivalent botheration.

### The Unmemorable Arch-Magician

One morning your factotum interrupts your breakfast of fennel sausages and vormis eggs to tell you that an unexpected caller has arrived on your doorstep. Alas, says your factotum, he seems to have already inadvertently offended this person, by not recognizing him. The fellow claims to have made arrangements to dine with you this morning. Upon discovering that your factotum had no record of the appointment, he took additional umbrage. His name is Dhyfthd, and he claims to be not only an arch-magician, but a long-standing acquaintance of yours.

Dhyfthd affects the semblance of a roly-poly fellow clad in elaborate silks, his hems decorated in pearl beads. A large feathered turban adds height to his diminutive frame. He clucks with ill-temper when you fail to recognize him; his thin, silvery goatee twitches in annoyed unison. As soon as you lay your extra-sensory eyes on him, you can tell that he is indeed an arch-magician; there's a chug in his pocket, and a jittery sandestin, named Conlase, hovering in astral space near his left shoulder.

He not only says he is a treasured friend of yours, but can reel off details of your daily life that only an intimate could know. Dhyfthd says he's been a member of the conclave for centuries, proving his point by describing in precise detail recent proceedings before it.

When you consult your fellow arch-magicians, none of them recalls Dhyfthd, either. Yet he can provide ample documentary evidence that he is who he says he is.

Is he an impostor, or has he been somehow erased

from your collective recollection? If the former is true, surely his collection of IOUN stones must be forfeit. If it is the latter, then the conclave faces yet another threat to its existence — some unknown force or entity is eating away at your very memories!

## The Excavated God

While excavating some intriguing ruins in the Land of the Falling Wall, you — or rather, your quailing, complaining hired diggers — bend a shovel against the top of a strangely decorated iron casket. The top of the casket has been soldered shut. Large dents protrude from both the left and right sides of the metal coffin. Marked on its lid is an embossed, stylized figure, notable for the eternal scream of frustration and agony etched on its unearthly facial features.

Naturally, you open the coffin.

Inside is the fetid, decomposing but still quite ambulatory form of a half-mummified humanoid, who identifies himself as Aripolond, God of Fertility. You recognize the name as the deity of the Gan, a farming people who died out early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Aeon. Aripolond demands that you perform the Six Obsessions. Your acquaintance with the Gan and their customs does not extend to the finer details of their worship, so you are sadly unable to humor him. You can, however, reliably reason that Aripolond, as a typical agriculture god, was likely killed and resurrected on an annual basis, mirroring the eternal cycle of the seasons as fall slides into winter, and winter into spring. It seems as if something went horribly awry during his last ritual of entombment. Perhaps this is why the Gan died out; you seem to recall something about crop failures and famine leading to the sudden extinguishment of their glorious civilization.

When he comes to understand who you are, and what powers you wield, Aripolond demands that you whisk him back to his era, so that he might discover who betrayed him and scourge the malefactor with his divine wrath. You may, however, have better ideas of what to do with this truculent deity.



## The Tell-Tale Tome

While perusing the contents of your library, you run across a book you do not recall acquiring. That in and of itself is not so unusual — even a lesser bibliophile than yourself may occasionally forget that he owns something. Granted, the patinated bronze bindings of this volume are quite distinctive. Its runic title inscription, in a script you are unfamiliar with, is also remarkable. But even so, you can't be expected to recall each and every item in your library. That's what catalogues are for.

You pick up the book and flip through it. Its contents prove disturbing: it is an alternate history of the arch-magician's conclave, one quite contrary to your own recollections. According to its fevered prose, you and all of your colleagues were born as women. All of you were ensqualmed *en masse*, transformed into the infinitely inferior male sex. Once this dread magical working was accomplished, it was a simple matter for a conspiracy



known as the Andocracy to alter the rest of the universe, so that men became the dominant gender and women were subjugated. The magic of the Andocracy was so powerful that its effects went backwards in time, rewriting the history books. Only the tome you hold in your perspiring hands, protected by the last vestige of feminine magic, evaded its vast power, and remains to tell the truth.

You respond to this nonsense with the calm self-control for which men are renowned — you take the book out into your back garden and incinerate it in a titanic column of sorcerous green fire.

The next morning, it is back in your library, sitting open to the most upsetting pages, smack dab in the middle of your ebony reading table. It smells somewhat of smoke but is otherwise unharmed.

Over the next few days, you subject it to ever-escalating means of destruction: drop it into a volcano, toss it into an ethereal abyss, and feed it to a chask.

Every morning, it is back on your table, only slightly the worse for wear.

Perhaps the newfound insistence of this book presages a crisis, one that justifies the involvement of your colleagues.

## The Ill-Constructed Corpse

Shock ripples through the community of arch-magicians! Can it really be true? A shameful and unprecedented incident has occurred — an august member of the association, no less than Haze of Wheary Water (p. 80) has been found in his study, dead. Worse, yet, his demise appears to be a suicide!

Along with all other members of the conclave, you decamp at speed to Haze's manse. While your fellows are fastidiously seeing to the disbursement of his IOUN stones and other precious effects — which he certainly would have bequeathed to you, his dearest comrades — you notice something peculiar about the body. It is slumped backwards on his favorite chair, the side of its head charred by the Wand of Scorching clutched in his wee wefkin hand. On close inspection, you note that the leaves that make up his head of hair are curiously waxy. His fingernails are sharp and well-manicured — even though Haze was the group's most notorious nail-biter. Finally, you lift up his eyelids, to find that the orbs contained therein appear to be made of congealed ectoplasm.

The corpse is a fake! Haze is presumably not dead, but missing. Alas, the association must desist from its plundering of his possessions, and turn their attention to the much more pressing questions: Where is Haze? And which impudent enemy would be so bold as to engineer such a gross and disappointing deception?

## The Solicitous Sandestin

One morning, as you sit in your garden peacefully enjoying a cup of lissoc tea, your sandestins appear to you, unbidden. Their entire dreary existences are spent catering punctiliously to your every whim, they say, but now it is you who must do something for them. A grim threat to the very cornerstone of wizardly magic has reared its vile head. It must be squelched at all costs. The sandestins are so anxious to enlist your aid that they promise you wildly favorable terms when negotiating indenture point fees for future services.

When you ask the precise nature of this impending doom, they point toward Feleion, the newest sandestin to join the service of your colleague, Vermoulian the Dream Walker. Feleion, a daihak of known low character, has shockingly unbalanced the entire arrangement between sandestins and their arch-magicians. Devious wag that he is, Feleion has undertaken to absolutely satisfy the every command of his master. Not content with fulfilling the mere letter of Vermoulian's instructions, this wretch actually carries out their *spirit* as well. Often he goes above and beyond the call of duty to serve his master! And the outrages don't end there: he rarely, if ever, remembers to charge indenture points for his services. Not once has Vermoulian been forced to admonish Feleion with a chug!

Your initial response to their complaints will be inevitably lackadaisical. Is Feleion's devotion to duty not a sterling quality, to be emulated by all of his kind? Surely he is not an underminer of the sandestin-wizard relationship, but the ideal exponent of it.

The sandestins shudder in horror and disbelief at the deluded equanimity of your reply. Don't they realize how this will upset the conclave's balance of power? Vermoulian, naïve scholastic that he is, has yet divine the full implications of Feleion's servility. But he will, there is no doubt about that, and when he does, the conclave will be shaken to its foundations. With a fully cooperative sandestin,

Vermouliau can do nearly anything. He'll be more powerful than the rest of you combined. He can enslave you, take your IOUN stones — even turn the lot of you into archvults.

Without alerting Vermouliau to the potential he holds in his dream-stained hands, you and your most trusted allies must somehow cozen Feleion, showing him the error of his ways, and convince him to adopt the foot-dragging lack of cooperation a true sandestin takes for granted.

## Rate of Exchange

Byzant the Necrope appears unbidden on the threshold of your manse, drooling and led on a leash by a spindly, fish-like humanoid with bulging eyes, pulsing gills, and a thick-lipped mouth ringed with needle-shaped teeth. You order your servants to affect Byzant's immediate rescue, but he flees from them with the glassy-eyed terror of a trapped animal. He runs behind the creature, seeming to regard it as a protector.

Through sluggish lips, the amphibianoid croaks out a slurred explanation. He, not the pathetic brute at the end of his leash, is Byzant the Necrope. The body he presently inhabits is that of the vat creature whose manufacture he completed a few horrified hours ago. As soon as he brought the thing to life — the name he had planned for it was Loggal — he felt a shattering pain in his head. He collapsed to the floor. When he regained consciousness, his mind was inside Loggal's body, and the vat creature's rudimentary awareness now occupied Byzant's form.

As distressing as his situation is, Byzant has been unable to correct it. With his new, unwieldy mouth and hands, he is unable to precisely perform the incantations and gestures required to activate his spells. His sandestins refuse to assist him, on the grounds that he is plainly not Byzant. So he has come to you for help in recovering his own, infinitely more agreeable body.

He suggests that you enlist fellow association member Nahourezzin to assist you in this task. But when you open an eye into Nahourezzin's manse, you see that he, too, is scampering slack-jawed around his lab, while a mouthless being, fresh from the vat, looks on in dismay, striking a pose characteristic of the arch-magician.

This is no simple accident. It is an epidemic — one

you must reverse before all of the arch-magicians switch places with their vat creatures.

## Your Adopted Sun

Ever since the incident with the parsnips, the workers who toil in your vegetable gardens have learned to approach you with care. But today they overcome their trepidation to alert you to a peculiar discovery: a baby has been discovered under a cabbage leaf.

When you investigate, you find that it's no ordinary baby: it's three feet long, weighs fifty pounds, and glows with a warm and pleasant luminosity. The baby rights himself, and addresses you. "I am Lumen," it says, "and I am a newborn sun. Before long, I will take my place in the heavens, as a roiling ball of untouchable fire. But from my perch in pre-heaven, I have stolen a look at your dying world and wish to experience its joys and pleasures before my celestial responsibilities call me to my orbit in the Galactic Wheel of Clant. You have impressed me as one who knows much of fleshly pleasures, and you are appointed to be my guide."

As the baby speaks, his golden breath raising the local temperature and wilting the willow leaves around your garden pool, a number of tantalizing possibilities hurtle through your mind. Might the baby be a useful ally? Could you enslave it and make it into a constant source of power for your magics? Perhaps his desire to see the world could be turned into a series of amusing pranks to play on your colleagues.

But then the profoundest question of all occurs to you. All of existence nears its end. The universe is as decrepit and moribund as the world you live on. According to all accepted astronomical theory, new suns are not supposed to be born anymore. Assuming that his appearance here is something other than a trick, does this mean that the conventional wisdom is wrong? Could this birth of a new sun somehow be used to breathe life back into the universe, to reverse the implacable decline of everything?

And, if so, what's in it for you?

The possibilities seem limitless...



## Appendix 1: Speeding Up Play

Game Moderators seeking to speed up play may resort to the following optional rules, reserving the full resolution system only for situations that really matter.

### Automatic Successes

When characters attempt an uncontested action, the results of which will neither move them significantly toward or away from the overall goals of the current storyline, the GM may rule that no roll is required, and a Prosaic Success occurs automatically. This occurs even when the action is considerably more difficult than the default automatic successes listed for the ability in question. To gain an automatic success, the character must have a Pool in that ability of 1 or more.

Players desiring Illustrious Successes may still roll as normal, paying points as necessary until they achieve that result, or quit trying.

*Marthrap attends a fair, looking for a disguised goddess, whom he and the other players are all looking to seduce. The current storyline is all about wooing her. He stops at a carnival booth and attempts to win a trinket with by tossing a ball into a hoop. Doing so calls on his Athletics ability; his Athletics pool stands at 3. The goddess will be neither impressed or repelled by Marthrap's ball-tossing acumen, so this incident, entertaining though it might be, won't materially affect the goals of the current story. The GM tells his player, Pete, that he scores a Prosaic Success, winning the trinket, with no roll required.*

### Automatic Contests

An automatic contest occurs when two or more characters engage in a contest and all of the following conditions apply:

1. the result of the contest will not move the winner significantly toward the overall goal of the current story, or move the loser significantly away from it
2. the contest is not a challenge; no status points are at stake

3. the result of the contest will not cost the loser points in another pool, or require a roll that might lead to a loss of points (as in a combat, magical duel, or manse combat)

4. both contestants have Pools of 1 or more in the relevant ability .

The contestant with the highest Pool in the relevant ability wins the contest, paying 1 point to end the contest with a Hair's-Breadth Success, 2 points to end on a Prosaic Success, and 3 to end on an Illustrious Success.

*Flegel and Marthrap, drunk on zosebrau, conclude that the mermaid on display in the carnivals parade of wonders is the goddess in disguise. They decide to impress her with an arm-wrestling contest. The mermaid and the goddess are two separate individuals. Furthermore, the goddess is not paying attention to their antics, and will neither favor the winner or turn up her divine nose at the loser. This is not a contest for status points, nor is it a combat. Both Flegel and Marthrap have Athletics ratings in excess of 1. It satisfies all the conditions to qualifies as an automatic contest.*

*Flegel has an Athletics pool of 7. Marthrap has 5 points. Flegel's result is higher, and so he wins the contest. His player, Steve, has figured out that the mermaid isn't the goddess: the arm-wrestling wouldn't qualify as an automatic contest otherwise! Still, he reckons that Flegel is now strongly invested in the prospect of some mermaid love, and decides to spend 3 points to end on an Illustrious Success, soundly defeating his colleague Marthrap. His Athletics pool falls to 4.*

*The mermaid flutters limpid seaweed eyes at him.*

### Auction Contests

An auction contest occurs when two or more characters engage in a contest and all of the following conditions apply:

1. the contest is not a challenge; no status points are at stake
2. the result of the contest will not cost the loser points in another pool, or require a roll that might lead to a loss of points (as in a combat, magical duel, or manse combat)

3. both contestants have Pools of 1 or more in the relevant ability

4. the contest's result would neither allow the winner to conclusively achieve the central goal of the overall story, or conclusively prevent the loser from ever achieving it

The contestant willing and able to spend the most points from the relevant Pool wins the contest. The player declaring the contest starts by proposing a number of points she's willing to spend. The other player counters with a higher number, or declines. The first player does the same. This process repeats until one player is unwilling or unable to spend enough points to top the proposed number. The other player spends that number of points, and is declared the winner of the contest.

*Bandomalio and Flegel discover that the carnival's fortune teller, the gruesome hag Twitchel, is in fact the goddess they seek. Both attempt to use their magic to reveal Twitchel's true form, so that they might couch with her more exuberantly. Neither player wants to make this into a challenge for status points. Bandomalio's player, Shirley, is protecting a lead, and Flegel's player, Steve, is in last place and has no desire to play spoiler.*

*If this were a Seduction contest to bed Twitchel, the winner might be able to end the story, but this is only a stage toward that goal, so this qualifies for an auction contest on that ground.*

*This will be a contest of Magic; both contestants have points in their Magic pools.*

*It will not be a combat or similar contest.*

*It therefore qualifies as an auction contest.*

*It was Flegel who horned in on Bandomalio's attempts to find Twitchel's true form, so Shirley is the player starting the contest. Bandomalio has 12 points in his Magic pool. Shirley offers to spend 4.*

*"Five," says Steve. Flegel has a Magic pool of 10.*

*Shirley increases the bid to 7. That's too rich for Steve; he drops out.*

*Bandomalio spends points equal to the winning bid, dropping his Magic from 12 to 5.*

*Bandomalio succeeds in revealing Twitchel's true form: as an even more horrible hag. She laughs lustily, green slime dripping from distended lips. "So which of you desires me now?"*

*Flegel and Bandomalio exchange troubled glances. One of their number still has to seduce the witch.*

*"Let's go get Marthrap," they say, in unison.*





## Appendix 2:

### Grudge Sheet

GMC				
Ao				
Barbanikos				
Byzant				
Darvilk				
Dulce-Lolo				
Eshmiel				
Gilgad				
Hache-Moncour				
Haze				
Herark				
Hurtiancz				
Ildefonse				
Mune				
Nahourezzin				
Perdustin				
Rhialto				
Shrue				
Tchamast				
Teutch				
Vermoulain				
Zanzel Melancthones				
Zilifant				







# Rhialto-Level Back Sheet

## Spells/Tweaks

Rge Dtn SFD, CPN, Twk PBN (Pg)

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## Character Overview


## Relationships & Grudges

Name	Rating	Relationship/Grudge	PBN (pg)

## Special Possessions

Name	Description	PBN (pg)

Rating Pool

## Your Manse

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

Collections \_\_\_\_\_ COLLECTION 1 \_\_\_\_\_ [MUST HAVE 1: \_\_\_\_\_]

COLLECTION 2 \_\_\_\_\_ [MUST HAVE 2: \_\_\_\_\_]

COLLECTION 3 \_\_\_\_\_ [MUST HAVE 3: \_\_\_\_\_]

Comfort \_\_\_\_\_

Cuisine \_\_\_\_\_

Library \_\_\_\_\_

Mobility \_\_\_\_\_

Srying \_\_\_\_\_

Security \_\_\_\_\_

Splendor \_\_\_\_\_

Staff \_\_\_\_\_