

# ESOTERROR SUMMONING

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Pelgrane Press



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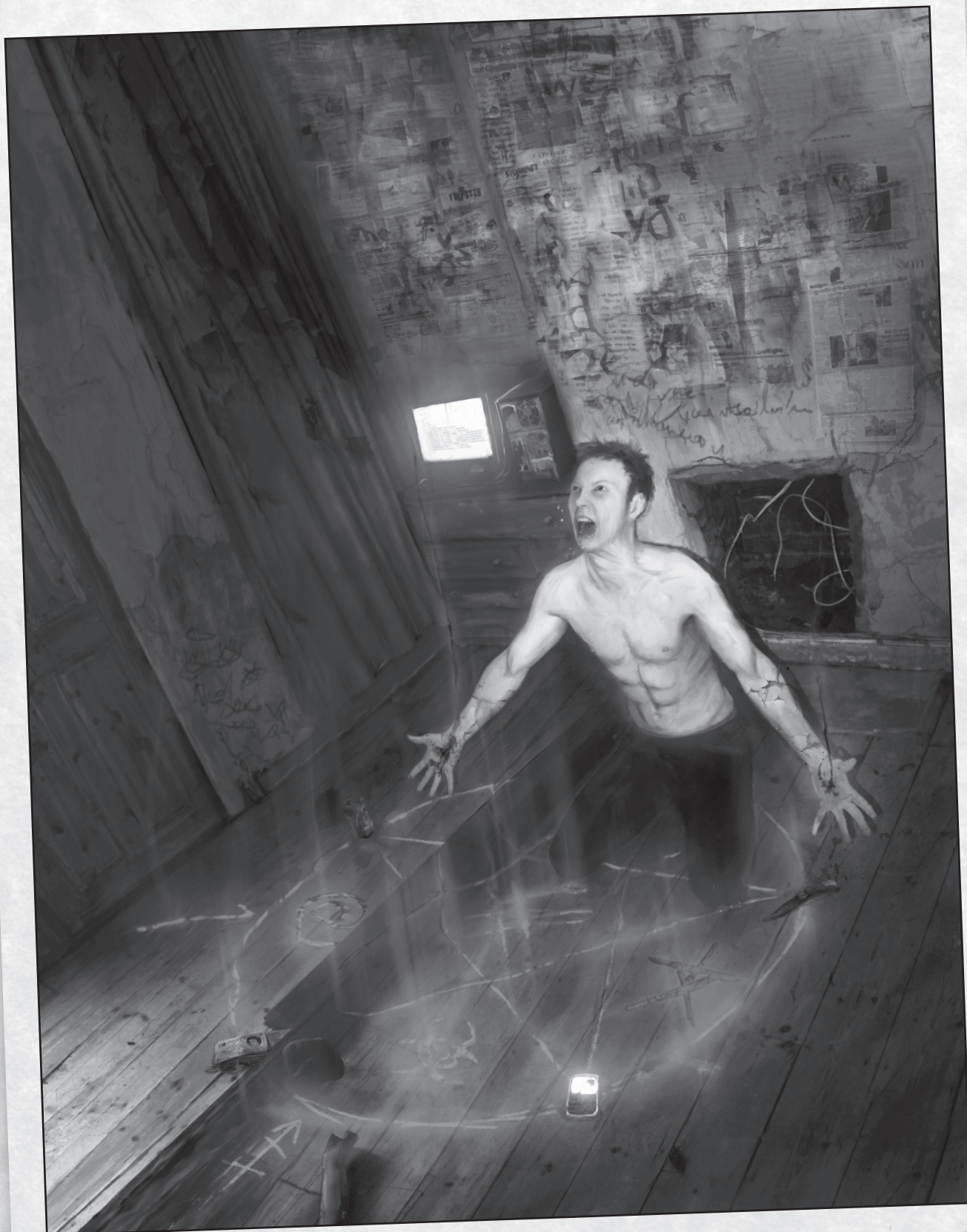


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# The State of Play

The recent Operational Review, presented at the sixteenth Global Conference, presents an alarming and singularly pessimistic outlook on Ordo Veritatis efforts to contain the Esoterror threat. As discussed in the 1979 Strategic Overview Assessment, the overall Ordo strategy has changed over time in response to the actions of the enemy, the limitations of Ordo resources and the level of support, cooperation and tolerance from friendly governments and organisations. The 1979 assessment listed five strategies that might be pursued; Eradication, Suppression, Containment, Mitigation and Survival.

Under the Eradication strategy, pursued from the foundation of the organisation until the seventh Global Conference, the aim was to completely destroy Esoterror and eliminate awareness of the Outer Dark from the human knowledge corpus. This 'zero tolerance' approach was predicated on being able to thoroughly liquidate any Esoterror conspiracies, contain any knowledge transfer, and ensure that no trace remained of the conspirators and any Outer Dark Entities (ODEs) involved. As part of the Eradication strategy, OV agents infiltrated groups that were deemed vulnerable to Esoterror corruption, eliminated potential Esoterror recruits, and attempted to guide societal development towards a form deemed favourable to our aims.

Eradication proved overly ambitious, especially as communication methods improved and the ability to wholly erase all references to Esoterror-related material was lost to us. Destroying a single diary or a few locally printed books is simple; destroying every copy of a thousand-book print run that has been distributed across the United States is much more difficult; completely suppressing information in the age of the internet an impossibility. The ultimate but unattainable goal of Eradication was to completely destroy even the possibility of Esoterror, in the hope that the lack of ontological trauma would permit the Membrane to harden and even calcify, permanently locking reality into a 'safe' state.

The seventh Conference recommended a retrenchment and a move to a Suppression strategy.

Under Suppression, the Ordo abandoned the aim of completely destroying Esoterror as a concept, and instead concentrated on wiping out manifestations as soon as they occurred. Monitoring activities were expanded, so that field teams could be deployed to suppress Esoterror activity and seal breaches as soon as problems were detected. Rather than try to destroy every single Esoterror-related document or thought pattern, the Ordo Veritatis aimed to identify vulnerable groups and cauterise any infections before they could spread. The policy was described as 'triage and culling'. We have operated under Suppression until the present day.

It was hoped that Suppression would restrict Esoterror activity to a minimal level that would not impact severely on the Membrane. The damage caused by a handful of short-lived cults, conspiracies, memes or other enemy action is comparatively low, as long as these Esoterror cells were eliminated promptly. Other cells would inevitably spring up to replace those destroyed, but as long as the Esoterror activity remained below the so-called epidemic threshold, the contagion could be kept manageable. The quicker an Esoterror cell is suppressed, the lower the risk of a significant breach in the Membrane. Damage to the Membrane increases non-linearly over time - a hundred short-lived cults are less damaging overall than a single cell that goes undetected long enough to cause a breach. The key to successful Suppression is the Ordo's reaction speed; for the Suppression strategy to work, the Ordo has to be able to eliminate Esoterror cells before they have the occult resources to wound the Membrane.

To be blunt, Suppression is on the verge of failure. New Esoterror incidents exceed our ability to suppress them. Since the seventh Conference, the number of operations classified as 'some supernatural presence', 'new Low Membrane Strength Location', 'active possession by ODE', 'localised reality collapse', 'considerable supernatural presence' and so on (rung 21 or more on the modified Kahn/Steadman escalation ladder) has risen from 1.2% of missions to more than 25%. The presence of active supernatural opposition not only makes field operations vastly more hazardous, it also accelerates the spread of Esoterrorist beliefs and reduces the probability of a successful Veil-Out.



According to a study presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference, there is an 8.4% chance on average that a suppressed cell gives rise to future Esoterror activity through means such as:

- Escaped Esoterror members
- Copy-cat incidents based on media reports
- Copy-cat incidents based on Esoterrorist propaganda
- Lingering supernatural activity
- Memetic infection

The rate of re-occurrence rises to more than 40% if the suppressed cell involved active supernatural elements. In short, if the Ordo is unable to suppress a cell in time, it not only makes the current operation harder, but also means that the Esoterror is much more likely to spread – and we are increasingly unable to successfully implement suppression.

The overall estimated strength of the Membrane is 39% lower than it was in 1900. The rate of decay is increasing; current projections suggest that Low Membrane Strength Locations (LMSLs) will grow in size, intensity and frequency by up to 200% within the next decade, possibly forcing the Ordo to move to a new strategy of Containment.

Under a Containment strategy, whole regions would be deemed no-go areas where conventional reality no longer holds sway. These areas would be concealed from the public by various disinformation methods (claiming that the area is polluted, toxic, radioactive or hazardous; purchasing the afflicted region through

a front corporation and establishing a *cordon sanitaire*, designating the afflicted region is an anarchistic free-thought zone comparable to the Copenhagen freetown, and contrasting such zones with the 'safe' civilised areas). Our emphasis would shift from trying to destroy Esoterror and protect the Membrane to a policy of holding its effects to a limited area. Our initial Containment goals would be to limit Outer Dark control to a maximum of no more than 5% of the Earth's land surface and 10% of the human population.

If the Ordo is to avoid the 'long defeat' of a Containment strategy, we must improve our ability to Suppress Esoterror cells that include supernatural aid. We must study the occult weapons of the enemy and develop effective counters for them. This briefing document is a first step towards reversing the tide of battle.

## About This Document

*The Membrane* discusses the wall between our reality and the Outer Dark, how it is measured, how it can be injured and repaired, and speculates about its nature and purpose.

*Summoning Techniques & Countermeasures* discusses common methods used by the enemy to invoke entities from the Outer Dark, and how these methods can be countered by Ordo agents.

*Negotiating with the Dark* describes how to deal with Outer Dark Entities after they have manifested. Direct contact with ODEs is not recommended if any other options exist.

*CELL DEATH* is an adventure based upon material presented in this document.



# The Membrane

The membrane has been variously described as a wall, border or shield against the Outer Dark. Some researchers argue that the 'membrane' terminology should be discontinued in favour of a measure of 'reality inertia' or 'local causality minima'. The local strength of the membrane acts as a limiter on the 'supernatural' effects that can manifest. A strong membrane prevents the Esoterrorists from invoking even the weakest ODEs. A weaker membrane allows them to summon more powerful creatures, or make use of fetishes and other magical charms. Presumably, an even weaker membrane would enable the use of magic and the invocation of previously unknown ODEs.

The Ordo has no way of measuring the membrane directly, so indirect methods must be employed. The simplest way of determining the strength of the membrane is to observe Esoterror progress. The time from the start of Esoterror activity to the point at which they become able to invoke ODEs is determined by local membrane strength. Other signs of low membrane integrity include the classic signs of hauntings (cold spots, unexplained noises or smells, electronic voice phenomenon, feelings of unease, nausea or *déjà vu*), unusual patterns of decay or disease, unusual weather patterns, anxiety and uncertainty and other behavioural oddities (See *The Esoterrorist Factbook*, page 105, for more details on membrane observation).

The precise nature of the relationship between the Outer Dark, the membrane and human belief is a complex one. The membrane correlates to a belief in certainty and stability more than anything else. The membrane's decay moves in lockstep with the mounting anxiety, uncertainty, confusion and malaise of human society. While places traditionally associated with suffering, madness, death and fear weaken the membrane, places or events where hope, certainty or creativity are corrupted or subverted are even more damaging. A failed revolution that initially offered hope of change before it is brutally suppressed does more damage to the membrane than an autocratic regime that goes completely unchallenged. An artistic festival that promotes wonder and creativity, but is then struck by a brutal series of murders is more damaging than if spirits had never been raised. As

our ability to envision a prosperous, stable, secure future for ourselves diminishes, it creates openings for our worst fears and neuroses to seep into reality and be made flesh.

One intriguing metaphor is that the membrane is the 'corpus callosum' of existence, the gap between the collective unconscious/possible realities and the rational world/actual realities. A balance must be maintained between the two in order for life as we know it to continue.

## The Outer Light?

While virtually all the ODEs so far encountered by the Ordo have been hostile, dangerous or otherwise baleful towards humanity, they appear to be shaped or influenced by the worst aspects of the human condition. It is conceivable that there are other entities who are more sympathetic to the Ordo's goal of stability. However, following AMBER BRIDGE, Ordo agents are to avoid any contact with ODEs, even ones that appear friendly, as such overtures are likely to be false flag operations and attempts at deception. Trying to contact 'beings of light' or other positive manifestations from beyond the membrane has invariably lead to madness or the corruption of Ordo agents.

## The membrane & humanity

Researchers theorise that if the membrane is affected by human consciousness, it could in fact be a product of human consciousness. Ordo records of membrane intensity begin in the 1850s. There was a rise in membrane strength during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a fall corresponding to a growing belief in spiritualism, which matches established theories about human belief influencing membrane strength.

The great unanswered question is the state of the membrane during earlier time period, before



records began. The dark ages, for example, were a time of superstition, fear and eschatological fervour – prime territory for the Outer Dark. Was the world overrun with monsters in such conditions? Could the membrane have thickened only with the growth of rationalism and science since the 18<sup>th</sup> century? How much of history is reliable, and how much congealed out of impossible contradictions left by the retreating Outer Dark? The events of the WINTERGREEN dig suggest that it is possible for history to be created out of whole cloth when the supernatural is rendered impossible by shifting reality conditions. In such a scenario, the last three hundred years represent an unusual island of stability, and the continuing degradation of the membrane is simply a return to a status quo, albeit one that is likely incompatible with our civilisation.

Another possibility is that the membrane rises and falls periodically, independent of human conditions. Myths of monsters and gods may be accounts of ODEs. This would imply that if the Ordo can shepherd humanity through the current low membrane conditions, the membrane will naturally repair itself in the future.

A third possibility, raised by materials recovered from an enemy safe house and classified under APPLE HOWDAH, is that the current state of the membrane itself is an aberration, and that for most of human history, there was only minimal leakage between subjective and objective reality through the membrane. This theory states that something changed in recent years, allowing the Esoterrorists to affect the membrane. The earliest confirmed antecedents of Esoterror cells date to the 18<sup>th</sup> century – under this theory, those proto-Esoterrorists somehow infected the membrane and rendered it vulnerable to their methods.

The Outer Dark itself also reflect humanity's beliefs and fears – but is this a deliberate act on the part of ODEs, who clothe themselves in our nightmares, or are they literally the product of our fears? Does the subjective reality of the Outer Dark exist without human consciousness to observe and feed it? Was there an Outer Dark before intelligent life evolved to dread it? Investigation into the supernatural characteristics of 'virgin' territory is ongoing (cf ICE PILGRIM, PLUNGE, HIGH CHARIOT); we can only assume the enemy is also eagerly expanding

into new frontiers (Astronaut Edgar Mitchell's Institute of Noetic Science is almost certainly an Esoterror front).

## Damage to the membrane

The membrane is weakened by:

- Overall psychological condition of the human population. Fear, uncertainty, paranoia, credulity and especially eschatological beliefs all contribute towards a weaker membrane.
- Acts of shocking cruelty, seemingly meaningless carnage or sadism, bizarre perversity, surrealism or other events that damage people's faith in an ordered, reasoned reality.
- Ritual acts and magical discharges, especially those fuelled by sacrifice, suffering, physical pain or death.
- Traumatic events such as fatal accidents, serial killings, natural disasters
- Accounts or events that suggest that the commonly accepted version of reality is incorrect or incomplete (urban legends, conspiracy theories, fringe beliefs, pseudoscience or radical paradigm shifts in science)
- Supernatural events or the presence of supernatural entities

## Breach Categories

Such damage degrades both the membrane as a whole and the immediately locality of the damage, causing Low Membrane Strength Locations (LMSLs).

These breaches are categorised as follows:

- **Class One (Weak Membrane):** Hauntings and other low-membrane phenomenon. No significant supernatural presence. Allows for the use of fetishes, but only with limited reliability.



- **Class Two (Bleed):** Allows, with the considerable investment of resources, for the summoning of lesser entities and the use of fetishes.
- **Class Three (Wound):** Allows for the comparatively easy summoning of lesser entities. Summoning greater entities becomes possible. Fetishes become more powerful. Random supernatural effects may occur. Impossible structures and spaces may materialise in our reality.
- **Class Four (Overlap):** Entities of the Outer Dark may freely enter our world. Reports suggest that a class four breach allows humans to cross into the Outer Dark, although whether they can survive there in any recognisable form has yet to be confirmed.

## Repairing the membrane

Fortunately, the membrane repairs itself naturally over time once the source of damage is removed. This healing process can be accelerated by correct action on the part of Ordo agents. A successful Veil-Out is a necessary first step. The methods used vary depending on the Esoterror threat at hand – if the enemy used Ontological Summoning techniques, then their manipulation of local beliefs should be reversed by debunking any belief in the supernatural. If they used Invocative means, then the agents should find a method of grounding any lingering magical effects and rendering the zone safe.

In the longer term, Ordo Social Engineering Teams (OSETs) can be deployed to a former LSML region. OSETs operate using a variety of cover identities, from investment capitalists to religious organisations to media groups, to reinforce social structures and promote stability. Since the PAPER TIGER incident, Ordo investment in OSETs has risen by 192%; in the longer term, however, OSET operations are unlikely to arrest the ongoing decline of membrane strength.



# Summoning Techniques

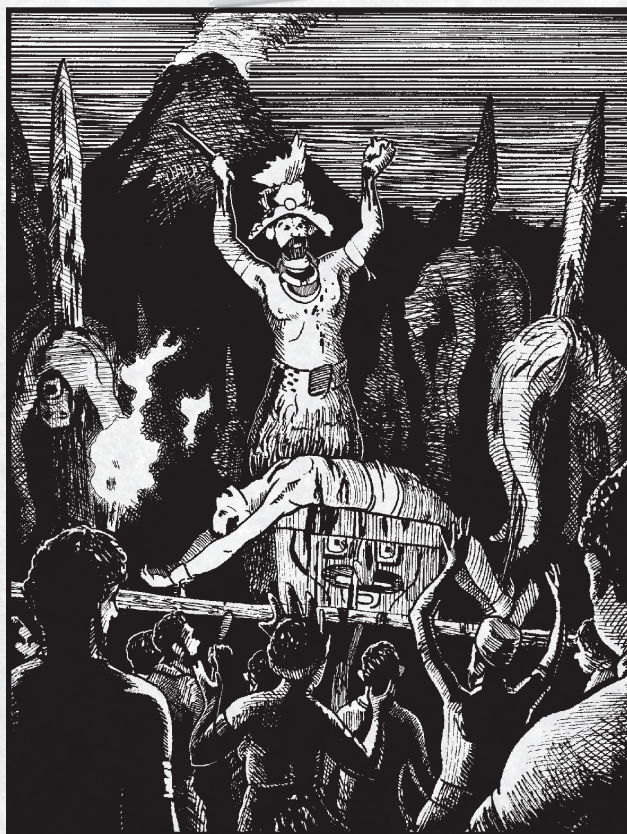
The essence of Esoterror is power through transgression. The Esoterrorist gains power by performing acts that are unthinkable, unconscionable, or even unimaginable by ordinary people. By its very nature, it defies rigid categorisation or even comprehension. Like quantum mechanics, if you are not completely confused by Esoterror thought, you do not understand it. Therefore, this list of methods speaks in terms of broad categories as opposed to specific, repeatable techniques. Every Esoterror cell is very different to the next, and their methods will never neatly fall into just one category, so agents must tailor their counter-measures to the current opposition.

Summoning requires the enemy to overcome two difficulties. Firstly, the Esoterrorists must suppress the membrane and call forth an ODE from beyond. Secondly, they must provide it with a way to survive in our world. This is invariably more difficult and costly than calling the entity. Like deep-sea creatures, ODEs are crushed by the weight of our reality under most conditions. They can survive within the confines of the LSML, but outside these local reality minima such entities need a suitable protective structure. Ordo researchers have identified four major summoning methods and two related lesser methods.

- Greater Invocative
- Ontological
- Constructionist
- Impositional
- Lesser Invocative
- Opportunistic

## Greater Invocative Summoning

This is the 'brute-force' approach to summoning. It works by punching through the membrane with



tremendous amounts of psychic energy. The enemy eschews the use of psychological or sociological means to first weaken the local membrane, and skips straight to calling up horrors from the Outer Dark.

The main restriction on invocative summoning is logistical. To overcome the membrane's natural resistance to magic, the would-be summoner requires

- Considerable numbers of willing believers whose faith in or devotion to the summoner outweigh their belief in a rational world
- Considerable psychic energy, ideally derived from human sacrifice
- Correct ritual invocations that are recognisable to the desired ODE



The number of participants in a large-scale ritual varies depending on local membrane strength and the efficiency of the ritual used. Mathematical modelling by OV analyst WHISKER NEXUS estimates that at least 500 celebrants are required for even the smallest chance of invocation, assuming wholly committed and devoted celebrants. Under more reasonable conditions, where the celebrants are tricked or forced into participating, the numbers required are even higher - 5,000 at least, with optimum results requiring 50,000 participants.

Getting thousands of people together in one place is difficult; doing so for the purposes of a transgressive magical ritual complete with human sacrifice is almost impossible without a leak occurring. In 83% of attempted invocations in the last century, we received advance warning of the planned ceremony, either through leaks, defections, surveillance or even media coverage. (Most of the 17% of large scale invocations that went undetected all took place in extremely isolated, closed communities such as the Sawi Blood Rite of 1947 in Papua New Guinea, recorded in casefile FIRESTONE.)

## METHODOLOGY

Invocative summonings are composed of three intermingled parts - the **ceremony**, the **sacrifice** and the **manifestation**.

The nature of the **ceremony** varies depending on the cultural and magical tradition of the celebrants. The ceremony is usually transgressive (breaking common sociological taboos, encouraging celebrants to cast off their usual roles, involving the use of hallucinogenic drugs, defying local customs, encouraging blasphemy against cultural icons), but the nature of the ceremony is second to the *belief* of the celebrants. It does not matter what they do, as long as they believe that they are helping accomplish the miraculous, the magical or the supernatural. Ideally, the celebrants believe that some great change is about to occur, or are convinced that the end of the world is at hand and they have nothing left to lose. The purpose of the ceremony is to weaken the local membrane and fuel the manifestation. Previous ceremonies found to have included invocative rituals include

- People's Church massacre, Newfoundland, 1980 (902)
- Harmonic Convergence group meditation, 1987 (estimated 100,000)
- 'Star Children' alien contact cult, New Mexico, 1999 (6,363)
- Brotherhood of the Risen Christ, South Korea, 2002 (12,056)

The **sacrifice** element is almost invariably human sacrifice. As has been experimentally determined, violent premeditated death has a significant impact on the membrane (see *Ordo Veritatis Code of Ethics*, page 18 of *The Esoterrorist's Handbook*). Mass death has an exponentially greater effect. Other sources of considerable psychic trauma (torture, rape, shock, exposure to ODEs) can also be used. The sacrifice need not be witnessed by the celebrants, but there must be a strong symbolic connection between the ceremony and the sacrifice. For example, in the case of the Pentecostal Christian group, the Brotherhood of the Risen Christ, the sacrifice took place in a secret chamber beneath the church, was committed by an ordained Esoterrorist, and was symbolically linked to the death of Christ.

The sacrifice is the linchpin of Invocative Summoning. Disrupting the larger ceremony is extremely difficult due to the sheer numbers involved, but a small SSF (Special Suppression Force) unit or OV strike team can interrupt the sacrificial element and rescue the victims, robbing the whole ritual of its power. See *Countermeasures*, below.

Finally, the **manifestation** comes after the sacrifice. The ceremony creates a LSML (Low Strength Membrane Location) and the sacrifice opens a wound in reality, allowing the Esoterrorists to call entities through.

Unlike other forms of summoning, Invocative Summoning does not dictate the shape of the summoned ODE. It can adopt whatever form is most pleasing to its own sense of aesthetics, or take on shapes suggested by the ritual. Note that this flexibility often results in the ODE often ends up taking a form that is incompatible with our



## The Nature of Magic

The ultimate goal of the Esoterror movement is to bring about condition where sorcery is possible. To this end, they utilise ancient scrolls and grimoires, some of which contain fragments of functional spells. The Ordo Veritatis' scholars are divided on the nature of magic. One theory, the Hermetic school, argues that magic is a metalanguage that imposes objective order on the subjective chaos of the Outer Dark. The words themselves have meaning but no power; they are recognised by entities within the Outer Dark who are compelled to carry out the commands encoded in the spell. By this premise, the syntax and grammar of the spell are vitally important; getting a single word wrong makes the spell unrecognisable to the ODEs and therefore useless. The challenge for the Esoterrorists is to recover the fragments of magic left by previous generations (when, presumably, the membrane was weaker and magic commensurately easier to perform) and reconstruct the grimoires. Why these particular words hold meaning for ODEs is a matter of debate, but the leading theory states that the creatures were trained over time to associate certain phrases with LMSLs and membrane breaches.

The other theory, termed the Neologic school of thought, suggests that magical spells and incantations are driven solely by the belief of the practitioner. This is the view espoused by modern (Esoterror-influenced) traditions such as chaos magic; under this system, the words and actions of the spell have power but no meaning. Anything can be a magical act, as long as the sorcerer believes it to be so. If this theory is correct, then the Esoterrorists have no need to use old magical grimoires or research ancient techniques, as everything comes down to the will of the sorcerer and the strength of the membrane. Conceivably, the act of casting a spell involves forcing the stuff of the Outer Dark into a particular shape.

Neither theory has been conclusively proven. Certainly, the OV has encountered Esoterror cells that used only chaos magic that was entirely distinct from any historical tradition, but the supernatural effects created by these groups were comparatively low-powered and could be attributed to the presence of ODEs or simple coincidence. At the same time, the occult underworld is a key battleground against the enemy, and one we cannot ignore. There is the possibility that the right book or spell could bring about the completion of the 'Great Work' of Esoterror in a single ritual by bringing down the whole membrane.

Project WINDSEED is an ongoing OV operation that seeds fraudulent and traceable occult grimoires in bookshops and libraries, in the hopes of discouraging and identifying potential Esoterror recruits. The Ordo also continues to seek out and destroy certain occult works that are known to contain potent incantations. If you encounter any of the books or documents listed in the *Index of Proscribed Materials*, recover it and give it to a Mr. Verity during debriefing.

reality, and if the membrane 'snaps back' due to a disruption in the ceremony, the ODE can be forced out of existence as the local causality quotient rises beyond tolerable levels. The downside is that the entity is unfettered by human concepts of reality, so the probability of encountering strong supernatural offence or lethal violations of physics

is much higher in these case. Examples of such threats include:

- (RUMRUNNER, 1924) Spontaneous transmutation of all eyeballs within 100 metres to granite



- (CHALICE SECRET, 1946) Accelerated time flow within the ritual area; more than 200 people starved to death when they were confined to a church hall in Melbourne, Australia for 20 minutes (objective time) or four years (subjective time).
- (TABLE MOUNTAIN, 1988) Unknown effect; backup team detected a burst of gamma radiation from inside ritual zone, no remains of SSF team located
- (COAL BLANKET, 1992) Increased viscosity of flesh, causing skin and muscle to slough off the bones of victims
- (JOKEBOX, 2009) Unknown effect; references to victims subsequently found in works of fiction published in 1885

## Countermeasures

The most important consideration when countering an Invocative Summoning attempt is speed. As soon as the field team becomes aware of the attempt, they are working against a ticking clock. Unlike other forms of summoning, there is no clear path to banishing the ODE once it arrives in our reality. The summoning must therefore be stopped before it is completed.

The easiest method is to interrupt the sacrificial part of the ritual. Interrupting the mass ceremony is a second option, but can result in the field team facing several hundred or even several thousand angry believers. Discrediting the Esoterror leadership in the eyes of the celebrants, and hence destroying their belief system can also work, but psychological tactics of this sort are extremely likely to backfire. Attacking the leadership can inflame the rank and file.

Under certain circumstances, the use of friendlies and government agencies is advisable when dealing with a large-scale Esoterrorist cult. A small field team lacks the resources to contain and arrest hundreds of people. However, field teams should be aware of the danger of provoking large numbers of people (especially Esoterrorist followers who are, by definition, unstable and potentially hostile). An Invocation Summoning can easily turn into a tragedy such as the Waco Siege – better than having a hostile ODE loose in our reality, but still

regrettable. Bringing in friendlies also raises the risk of exposing more people to Esoterror.

## Case Study: Celestial Temple of Aquarius

**1999, London, England**

The Celestial Temple of Aquarius (CTA/BUE DRAGON) was a New Age cult created by John Bettlemann in 1994. The cult was infiltrated by OV agents in 1996, who reported that the main purpose of the CTA was to sell membership and psychic crystals to the easily duped, and had no real occult knowledge or Esoterrorist goals.

At some point, Bettlemann was subverted by an ODE possessor summoned by another Esoterror cell, most likely the London-based TALLOW POINT group. This subversion most likely occurred after the OV audit (but see Sacrifice, below, and the report classified under BLUE DRAGON RANGER.) Regrettably, the Ordo did not detect this subversion until mid-'98, when the cult hired a large meeting hall for an 'Aquarian convergence conference.' A team was dispatched to investigate this possible summoning attempt.

**Ceremony:** The cult assembled some 1,430 people to participate in a conference on 'spiritual healing and the coming age of Aquarius'. The majority of these participants were civilians with no Esoterror ties. Crystals and other spiritual paraphernalia were distributed to the participants. These crystals had no inherent power, but were coated in a psychedelic drug that rendered the subjects more suggestible.

Esoterror agents then locked the doors of the building, and called in a bomb threat using a valid code word. The drugged participants interpreted attempts by the police to gain entry as an attack by the authorities on the conference, raising tensions and anxiety to the levels needed for the Esoterror ceremony. The bomb threat also caused difficulties for elements of the field team on-site, when two members who were waiting outside in the support vehicle were arrested as suspected terrorists.

**Sacrifice:** Other elements of the field team penetrated the building via roof access, and



A section for Gamemasters follows the description of each of the summoning techniques. These sections are obviously written from an out-of-character perspective instead of being an excerpt from the Ordo's files. Players may peruse these sections if they wish, as they mostly contain abstract advice instead of secret adventure notes.

Invocative summoning is the classic 'foil the ritual' plot used in so many Call of Cthulhu games. The player characters are up against a time limit - they have to work out what's going on, find the bad guys, and find a way to prevent the ritual from being completed before the Horrible Thing From Beyond materialises and eats them all. GUMSHOE's investigative system can model a ticking clock time limit through the use of point spends - assume that only following the core clues gets the characters to the finale too late to foil the ritual. However, if they spend points on the right clues, they'll either get there in advance or arrive in the nick of time, armed with the information they need.

For example, Lewis and Grey are investigating Sunshine Cruises, a holiday company that they suspect to be an Esoterror front. They've broken into the company's office and are ransacking it for clues. Using Forensic Accounting, Lewis notices that an unusual number of passengers on one ship, the Ocean Queen, did not pay for their tickets; someone in the company cooked the books to let hundreds of people onto the cruise for free. The GM offers Lewis the opportunity to spend two more points for extra information. What Lewis does not know - yet - is that Sunshine Cruises have a contract with a helicopter company to ferry guests onto ships at sea, and if he spends the points to keep digging through the files, he'll get the address of the helicopter company, giving the characters a short cut to get to the ship. If he doesn't spend the points, the characters miss that easy route to the ship and have to find their own transport to the Ocean Queen before it enters the Bermuda Triangle and the holiday-makers are taken hostage and forced to participate in a summoning ritual.

When the characters get to the ritual site, they can use Impersonation, Infiltration and similar skills to blend in with the crowd and try to sabotage the ceremony part, or go in armed to stop the sacrifice, depending on the group's disposition and skills. In either case, they need to avoid excess bloodshed and murder, especially when dealing with hundreds of potential Esoterror followers.

found evidence of a prepared sacrificial chamber complete with crystal knife, stone altar (later analysis confirmed the altar was somehow stolen from a 1,500 year old temple structure in Sri Lanka), and a laser generator aimed at a prism to create a 'pyramid of light' over the altar.

During the investigation of the sacrificial chamber, field agent WATER CARRIER shot one member of the team and then attacked another. WATER CARRIER revealed herself to be an ODE-possessor of the same type that inhabited Bettlemann. How WATER CARRIER escaped detection by our security remains under investigation (BLUE DRAGON RANGER); the sacrifice of an OV agent by WATER CARRIER was avoided only when the

wounded agent was able to temporarily blind the ODE using the laser, giving our team time to flee.

**Manifestation:** The summoning attempt was foiled by the failure of the WATER CARRIER entity to sacrifice another agent. Why the Esoterrorists deliberately lured an OV team into the sacrificial chamber is unclear - was their motivation simply malice, did the ODE seize an opportunity that presented itself, or was there some ritual component to sacrificing an enemy.

In the aftermath, WATER CARRIER escaped. John Bettlemann was arrested by the police, and later eliminated by an OV TET (Tactical Euthanasia Team) while awaiting trial.



## LESSER INVOCATIVE SUMMONING

The greater/lesser distinction applies to the amount of effort required. A greater summoning requires a huge investment of effort and resources to call an ODE in the face of full resistance from the membrane. Lesser summoning (see below) is an easier method, but can only be used to call entities that have previously existed in objective reality.

Greater invocative summoning is often associated with primitive Esoterror cells who lack the sophistication or patience for more efficient methodologies. It may also be employed by established cells who have the resources to use this tried-and-tested method.

The lesser form of invocative summoning is also known as secondary summoning. Once an ODE has been successfully called using one of the other summoning techniques, that ODE now has objective existence in our reality. This means that subsequent attempts to call such entities are much easier, as the membrane's natural resistance to ODEs is already diminished. Lesser summoning attempts require only a ritual or other psychic investment of energy (sacrifice, transgressive ceremony, energy discharge) to tunnel through the membrane. The entity then materialises and takes on a form that has already existed objectively - it echoes the shape of a previously summoned ODE. Lesser summonings 'piggy-back' on previous successes.

For example, during *CHIMNEY TATTOO*, an Esoterror cell (Wellington, New Zealand, 1994) successfully invoked an ODE entity referred to as the Blossomer, using a costly and difficult Impositional Summoning. After this, six other cells were able to summon the Blossomer using much simpler and less intensive rites. Each ODE that establishes a foothold in our reality opens the way



for more of its kind or other instances of itself, or creates a stable, objective shape for other formless entities to adopt, or carves a path of least resistance across the membrane, depending on how much agency and self-hood one attributes to ODEs. Put simply, we are unsure whether or not later summoning attempts summon the same creature again, or another that resembles it, or if there is a difference between these concepts for ODEs. Did the cells call the same Blossomer from New Zealand that somehow managed to cling to our world, or did they call new Blossomers from the Outer Dark, or are all Blossomers one entity?

In short, each successful primary summoning makes it more likely that the creature will be summoned again and again. Each successful



For scenarios where you need the bad guys to control supernatural entities, but don't want the overhead of one of the more complex forms of summoning described in this book, use secondary summoning. The ritual here does not have to be a stereotypical magical ceremony, with chanting and pentagrams and black candles - indeed, such a predictable, cliched form of horror is anathema to the whole Esoterrorist movement. Summoning rituals should be shocking, disgusting, surreal and nightmarish. Maybe the Esoterrorists fuel their rituals by incinerating their victims, or use the unformed, impressionable minds of pre-school children by teaching them to call forth horrors from beyond the membrane.

primary summoning is a setback for the Ordo Veritatis, and pushes us closer to ultimate defeat.

## ONTOLOGICAL SUMMONING

The membrane is eroded by human belief in the supernatural. Urban legends, folk superstitions and fringe science all have deleterious effects on the permeability of local reality. Religious beliefs may also affect the membrane, depending on their structure. Established organised religion tends to have a weight of tradition and calcified ritual that renders its supernatural components void; the religion serves to limit subjectivity instead of glorifying it. Breakaway cults and smaller, more fervent sects are most likely to foster Esoterrorism.

One common manifestation is a belief in monsters and supernatural creatures. While OSETs have been successful in trivialising once-potent archetypes such as vampires through excessive media exposure in anaemic, non-threatening forms, there are new bogeymen and urban legends that can be harnessed by Esoterror for the purposes of summoning. In the right circumstances, an urban legend can be repurposed into a protective 'jacket' for an ODE. By convincing more people of the reality of the urban legend, the enemy open the way for the ODE to manifesting in the guise of the legendary horror.

### Methodology

Ontological summoning begins with the **identification** of a suitable folk belief. Ideal candidates are:

- **Scientifically plausible.** Serial killers or other human 'monsters' are commonly used

with this technique, but cryptids or other phenomenon (such as rumours about toxins or conspiracies) may also qualify.

- **Dangerous and alarming:** The technique requires that the folk belief be associated with violent death or other tragedy. It needs to inspire dread and horror.
- **Easily Recognisable:** The folk belief needs to have some element that is instantly recognisable to witnesses. A monster needs to kill its victims in a very specific, unambiguous easily identifiable way. A fictional disease needs to have easily spotted symptoms. The belief structure has to have its own internal consistency that can be exploited by Esoterror.

As TOLEDO CRESCENT (page 18) demonstrates, the Esoterrorists are capable of seeding beliefs and rumours that they can later reinforce and exploit; however, the belief must be sufficiently widespread among the local population to provide a 'critical mass' of doubt, fear and confusion during the reinforcement process. It is likely that many seemingly nonsensical or highly unlikely urban legends are the rest of Esoterror seeding operations; the egalitarian nature of the internet, with its lack of verifiable authority and trusted sources, makes it much easier for the enemy to sow suitable beliefs, and we expect a surge in Ontological Summoning attempts in the near future.

Once a candidate myth is identified, the next step is to **reinforce** that belief by faking one or more incidents consistent with the myth. These incidents must create the perception among previously skeptical witnesses that the urban legend is in fact real, that the stories were true all along. For example, if the candidate myth-form is a legend of a serial killer who creeps into the back seat of cars and murders



young lovers, then the Esoterror cell needs to commit several such murders in a manner consistent with the myth. At this stage in the summoning process, the enemy is unlikely to have significant magical assets, so while the reinforcement may *appear* supernatural and inexplicable, it is carried out using wholly mundane, non-supernatural means. The enemy is not above sacrificing its own agents for the purposes of reinforcement – in one case, what appeared to be a locked-room murder where the victim had been torn apart as if by the claws of some tremendous beast and their organs scattered across the room turned out to be a very, very determined suicide by a brainwashed Esoterrorist dupe convinced of the rightness of his cause.

The reinforcement process makes the urban legend the most plausible explanation for recent events. This paradox – the ‘impossible’ being the most likely truth – can be exploited by the Esoterrorists. The concept of the urban legend is effectively a local minima in the membrane. The third stage is **manifestation** – the ODE is called out of the Outer Dark. The shapeless ODE flows into the vessel that allows it to survive, and takes on the attributes of the myth-form. The reinforced urban legend gives the entity sufficient objective presence to survive, while still enabling it to utilise supernatural powers beyond those ascribed to the myth-form. In many cases, the entity chooses or is compelled to behave in a manner consistent with the myth-form. A creature summoned into the ‘shell’ of the Backseat Murderer myth-form might start teleporting into cars and murdering victims in addition to providing aid and support to the Esoterrorists who summoned it.

## Countermeasures

The ODE is protected by the belief that what was previously considered fictional or supernatural has now been revealed as real, throwing all previous accepted facts into doubt – if the bogeyman is real, then what else is true? To undermine this protection, the field agents must throw doubt on the initial reinforcement that was the start of the summoning process. An alternative explanation must be found for the deeds and deaths attributed to the myth-form. This is similar to standard cover stories in a Veil-Out (see *The Esoterrorist Handbook*, page 14), but it must specifically attack the myth-form’s potency.

In the case of the backseat serial killer, the field team would proceed by finding proof that the initial attack was faked, or was an accident, or that the truth is otherwise mundane and compatible with common expectations. Another option would be to identify a suitable scapegoat. This scapegoat should be:

- **Inoffensive or pathetic:** The perpetrator revealed by the field team must be a figure of pity or revulsion, not fear. The myth-form must be drained of its horrific power to damage it.
- **Obviously mundane:** The methods used by the perpetrator must be wholly ordinary. The field team must explain how the perpetrator accomplished his seemingly impossible crimes.
- **Obviously guilty:** The evidence against the perpetrator must be compelling and air-tight.

Informally, this banishing method has been referred to as the ‘*Scooby-Doo Approach*’ or ‘*pulling the mask off the evil janitor*’ – debunking a supernatural threat by revealing it was all a hoax.

The complication is that while the initial reinforcement is susceptible to debunking, subsequent attacks by the ODE involve genuine supernatural powers. The field team need to discredit the myth-form as a hoax without drawing attention to the fact that it is currently quite real.

Discrediting the myth-form removes the protection from the summoned ODE. This may destroy the entity entirely, or force it to retreat to a Low Membrane Strength Location where it can continue to exist. In the latter case, the Ordo team should move quickly to finish the entity off before it can recover.

## Case Study: Operation SAGE NAPOLEON

1986, Trenton, New Jersey, USA

SAGE NAPOLEON was the first time an Ontological Summoning was successfully countered. The turning point was the capture and interrogation of an Esoterror cell member. Over the course of four



days of intensive questioning, the field team was able to piece together the Esoterrorist summoning technique and developed a strategy to attack it.

An Esoterror cell fixated on the legend of a serial killer, Henry Osborn, who was executed by electric chair in Trenton, New Jersey in 1961. According to local legends, Osborn swore to come back to extract revenge on the police that arrested him.

**Identification:** The Esoterrorists choose the Osborn myth-form as a suitable vessel because of the distinctive nature of his crimes (cannibalism) and his promise to return from the dead. As part of their preparations, they gathered all available information about Osborn's life and crimes, and infiltrated agents into the Trenton Police Department.

**Reinforcement:** Reinforcement began on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Osborn's execution. One of the Esoterror agents in the police force drugged his patrol partner, then drove their police car to an isolated bridge where Osborn murdered his first victim. There, the drugged officer was murdered by Esoterrorists, and his body mutilated in a manner consistent with Osborn's previous victims.

The Esoterrorist police officer was then thrown by his allies off the bridge. He allowed himself to be 'found' by a passing motorist, to whom he gave a panicked account of a 'bloody ghost' who appeared on the bridge and caused the police car to stop dead. Soon, the story spread throughout the local community, and the connection to Osborn's crimes was noticed. People spoke of Osborn's promise to return. The injuries suffered by the Esoterror agent removed any suspicion that he was involved in the murder.

**Manifestation:** The Esoterror cell then called forth an ODE, provisionally classified as an ORGAN GRINDER, which adopted the Osborn myth-form. It manifested as a bloated, blackened apparition wearing Osborn's face with a grotesquely enlarged mouth. The ODE was not wholly under the control of the Esoterror cell; while it carried out some of their commands, it also continued Osborn's vendetta against police officers. One of the other Esoterror operatives who had infiltrated the Trenton PD panicked and attempted to flee, but was captured by the Ordo field team.

**Countermeasures:** The team concentrated on the initial reinforcement ritual. They planted evidence that suggested that the murdered police officer was having an affair with the wife of his partner, and that the partner was responsible for the killing. The tooth marks on the corpse were attributed to wild dogs. With the co-operation of a recruited friendly within the police department, the team was able to disseminate the counter-story, reducing local belief in the Osborn myth-form. This made the ORGAN GRINDER entity vulnerable to conventional weapons and the team was able to destroy it with minimal casualties.

## CASE STUDY: Operation TOLEDO CRESCENT

2006, Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China

This case demonstrates the Esoterrorist's ability to rapidly take advantage of events that weaken the membrane. The trigger here was a series of employee suicides at a large electronics manufacturer, Xoffex. The first suicide, by a twenty-four-year-old worker suffering from exhaustion and mistreatment by his managers, served as a model for further incidents. Clusters of copycat suicides like this (the 'Werther effect') are common in places where large numbers of people are faced with similar intolerable conditions. They are highly damaging to the membrane.

**Identification:** Soon after the third suicide, rumours began to circulate within Xoffex, claiming that before each death, the victim was visited by a *Nǚ Guī*, a female ghost associated with suicides. This spectral figure 'rescued' the victims from the suffering of their lives. This ghost was described as a pale figure with long hair. She could not be seen directly, but appeared in reflection in the touchscreens and computer monitors manufactured by Xoffex. Subsequent investigations suggest that this rumour was seeded by Esoterror agents within the company.

**Reinforcement:** The myth-form was reinforced using a number of subliminal methods, such as:

- Increased use of psycho-active chemicals on the factory floor, rendering employees



disorientated and suggestible.

- Responding to suicides with even more unpleasant conditions; bringing forward deadlines, increasing working hours, cutting pay and benefits.
- Strategic denial of rumours using unpopular managers as mouthpieces; these unconvincing denials actually spread the rumour.
- Displaying images consistent with the *Nũ Guĩ* myth-form from concealed projectors

**Manifestation:** The next stage of the process was marked by an 'industrial accident' at Xoffex that left fourteen workers permanently blinded. While the official reports claimed that this was due to a spill of toxic chemicals, the injuries match those depicted in the the 14<sup>th</sup> summoning ritual of the DANCE HOLLOW text, implying the spill was a cover for a magical ritual. The ODE adopted the form of the *Nũ Guĩ* ghost.

**Countermeasures:** Regrettably, by the time a field team was able to infiltrate the Xoffex facility, the ODE was already well entrenched. Attempts to discredit the initial summoning using standard counter-ontological means failed, even though the team was able to identify the presence of n-hexane, other toxic chemicals and subliminal images at the early suicide sites. The first field team was forced to retreat after taking heavy casualties (three suicides, one chemical poisoning).

TOLEDO CRESCENT was referred to a Containment Committee, who had the factory shut down for environmental grounds via a friendly proxy organisation. Subsequent surveys continue to show a worrying LSML in the vicinity; however, there have been no confirmed sightings of the ODE. Rumours that the entity somehow 'infected' a consignment of touchscreens before the shutdown are being investigated, and occult activity related to consumer electronics from Xoffex should be reported to Mr. Verity under TOLEDO CRESCENT.



## CONSTRUCTIONIST SUMMONING

This approach to summoning ODEs has risen in popularity and effectiveness in the modern era. During the period from 1945 to 1970, constructionists accounted for only 6% of Esoterror summoning attempts; from 1971 to 2005, constructionist-influenced summonings rose to 37% of all known summonings. Advancements in key technological fields, especially genetic engineering, will likely make constructionism an even greater threat in future.



Ontological summoning is great for players who like mysteries. Not only do the characters have to work out what's really going on, they also have to come up with an alternate explanation for the supernatural events to undermine the supernatural entity. It forces the characters to plant evidence, manipulate witnesses and engineer a thorough cover-up. Investigative spends can be used in reverse to hide and falsify evidence, convince witnesses of the alternative explanation with interpersonal skills and a compelling narrative. The Gamemaster should introduce some sympathetic civilian NPCs to humanise the process of undoing the Esoterrorists' plans; the characters have to convince these NPCs that nothing supernatural is going on, even if the Esoterrorists have already summoned a supernatural monster.

Unravelling the 'myth-form' does not automatically banish the summoned creature. It might only weaken the entity in some way, like stripping it of its armour, reducing its Health and Scuffling pools, or removing its Aberrance ability, giving the characters a chance to defeat it.

The core method of constructionist summoning is to first make a body for the ODE. This body gives the entity a foothold in our reality, allowing it to survive despite the membrane's local resilience. The Esoterror cult then opens a breach in the membrane and calls the entity through to inhabit the constructed body. The constructed body continues to protect the entity from the effects of the membrane, by giving it an objective, plausible existence. Unlike the related ontological or impositional techniques, there is no easy way to indirectly undermine the summoned entity's protection - the ODE carries its protection with it. Nonetheless, constructionism carries with it its own difficulties and weaknesses, against which the Ordo can implement countermeasures.

## Methodology

Constructionism is a two-stage process, comprising **construction** and **summoning**.

The **construction** element has changed greatly over time. Early host bodies included:

- Clay or stone 'golems'
- Automata that mimicked the shape of a living creature
- Machines and engines
- Surgically assembled host bodies, using dead human and animal parts
- Surgically assembled host bodies, using living human and animal parts

Few of these hosts were ever viable. If a summoned entity inhabits a constructed host, it must use its supernatural, reality-warping influence to compensate for the inherent improbability that such a host could live. A statue has no internal organs, no muscles, no skeleton. It cannot move, or breathe, or think. If an ODE inhabits the statue, the ODE must exert effort to make that statue into a living thing. Often, the gulf between the needs of the ODE and the restrictions of reality are too great to bridge, resulting in the host exploding or collapsing. Alternatively, the ODE can eschew the protection of the host, but this results in the entity being forced out of objective reality by the pressure of the membrane.

Modern techniques make the construction of a viable host body more likely. A host body may involve contributions from experts in:

- Anatomy, biology and zoology to ensure that the constructed form is plausible and capable of survival
- Art, sociology, history, folklore, to identify latent fears or beliefs among the population that can be exploited
- Surgery, genetic engineering, plastics, prostheses, computer modelling, special effects, costuming, to actually create the host
- Chemical engineering, biochemistry, electronics, computer programming, medical implants, to help sustain the host body using artificial means



The host body is an inanimate, harmless object when constructed. It only becomes dangerous when an ODE is **summoned** into the host using a ritual. The ODE animates the body, warping reality to make the unliving shell into a living body. Using previously living matter is more likely to lead to a viable host, which is why many constructed ODEs include elements of human anatomy.

Most of the host bodies encountered by Ordo teams since the 1970s have been organic constructs, as these yield the most viable hosts. A small but growing number of Esoterror cells are experimenting with mechanical, robotic or even wholly virtual hosts for ODEs; as the general population becomes more accepting of artificial intelligence and synthetic life, the viability threshold for such hosts may drop.

## Countermeasures

Like invocative summoning, the optimum way to attack constructionist summoning attempts to do so before the ODE inhabits the host body. Constructing a viable host is not a trivial matter; such a host body requires the contribution of dozens of specialists and the investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Making a viable host is not something that can be done in a garage or backyard; more likely, the host is built in a hospital, a special-effects workshop or a laboratory. The host needs all specialised components and equipment. Field teams are advised to look for:

- Stolen human organs or sources of artificial organs; teams should also look for grave robbing, patterns of kidnapping or murder, and sightings of unusual creatures
- Bioreactors and other devices used in culturing tissue
- Specialist manufacturing of high-quality plastics and synthetic substances
- Unusual artistic presentations or movements, especially where artists have abruptly vanished or stopped producing work
- Unusual money transfers and investments

If the field team is able to locate the construction site, they can destroy the uncompleted host body before the ODE is summoned. However, even if the team is unable to stop the ODE from arriving, investigating the construction techniques used can provide vital information about the host body's weaknesses and limitations. A creature assembled using cancerous tissue excised from patients may be vulnerable to anti-cancer drugs delivered through a high-powered hypodermic rifle; a creature that incorporates a bulletproof outer shell might have a weak spot at a particular point that can be exploited by a marksman.

The field team is also advised to investigate the inspiration of the creature. Inevitably, the beliefs and obsessions of the makers figure into the final design. An artist preoccupied with themes of rape and sexual assault may make a creature prone to such crimes; a designer with a vendetta against a particular ethnic group might create a monster that preys on that group. Information is our best weapon against ODEs.

## Case Study: TOPAZ NIGHT

**2001, Edinburgh, United Kingdom**

The TOPAZ NIGHT investigation was triggered when a night watchman at a crematorium spotted an intruder tampering with one of the corpses scheduled for incineration. The watchman's description of the intruder was passed onto the Lothian Police; it was flagged by the Ordo as a match for the description of Luke Altarez, a known Esoterrorist who escaped following ORANGE QUADRANGLE.

Subsequent investigation revealed that several other corpses had been tampered with. In each case, the hands of the body were removed and replaced with carefully made plastic duplicates. At least twenty bodies were mutilated in this manner. The Ordo team recovered one of the fake hands by infiltrating a funeral, and were able to trace it to its manufacturer. Under interrogation, he revealed that he knew Altarez and gave the team the location of Altarez's construction site.

There, the field team was attacked by an entity described as a 'burning child'; the creature was



Draw inspiration from the accounts of nuclear weapons inspectors and spies for your constructionist summoning games. The player characters should have to follow a paper trail into danger; the sinister genetic engineering laboratory leads to the smuggling ring leads to the abandoned chemical works where the Esoterrorists are making their monster. The various components give clues about what sort of horror the Esoterrorists intend to loose upon the world - what sort of nightmare creature is made from human hearts, the skull of a crocodile, artificial veins, Kevlar, and the design skills of a troubled German sculptor who murdered his girlfriend by setting a trio of pit-bull dogs on her?

Make heavy use of Technical and Academic abilities like Chemistry and Natural History. Point spends should give the players insights into the creature's weaknesses. The crocodile-headed monstrosity might be sheathed in Kevlar and immune to bullets, but perhaps some part of the murdered girl's fears were accidentally woven into its creation, and the monster is paralysed by the sound of a dog's bark. If the characters capture samples of the metal rods used to fashion a creature's legs, they could discover that the legs will snap if the monster makes a fast turn while sprinting, and use that to damage the creature in a high-speed chase.

only partially visible, and was able to cause severe cellular damage (manifesting as a mix of first-degree burns or spontaneous tumours) with a touch. The team was forced to retreat, but they were able to retrieve documents relating to Altarez's experiments as they fled. Using these documents, they were able to establish that the creature was vulnerable to the ashen remains of the hand donors; armed with two such urns, the field team was able to drive the entity away, but Altarez remains at large. TOPAZ NIGHT investigation is ongoing.

## IMPOSITIONAL SUMMONING

Impositional summoning is one of the most grotesque forms of Esoterrorism. This technique uses a combination of psychological torture, brainwashing, psychoactive drugs, operant conditioning, surgery and costuming to transform a subject into an ideal host for an ODE possessor entity. The subject may come to believe that they are the ODE, or the technique virtually annihilates the subject's selfhood, leaving the body an empty shell to be inhabited by the ODE. The subject shields the ODE against the natural resistance of objective reality, allowing it to survive beyond the membrane. Once the host body is suitably prepared, the Esoterrorists summon an ODE to inhabit the

victim. The victim's body may be warped and transformed by the ODE as the creature moulds the victim's flesh to its own needs and tastes.

### Methodology

The first step is **procuring** a subject. The subject is then **prepared** and finally the ODE is **summoned**.

In previous Impositional Summoning attempts, subjects have included:

- Kidnap victims (24%)
- Existing prisoners or patients (12%)
- Esoterror volunteers (28%)
- Other volunteers (14%)
- Professional actors (12%)
- Raised from infancy as subjects (6%)
- Other (4%)

Procurement, therefore, ran from the trivial (Esoterror volunteers who wish to merge with ODEs) to the challenging (kidnap victims or existing prisoners and patients). The subject needs to be an ideal candidate for the conditioning process, usually mirroring some aspect of the target ODE.



An Esoterror cult attempting to summon a Sleep Hag (see the *Book of Unrelenting Horror*, page 114) would procure based on criteria such as:

- Age and gender (older female subjects only)
- Sleep disorders, especially insomnia
- Training in stealth, breaking & entering or wrestling
- Terminal or chronic illness

The Esoterror cell might approach the victim directly, offering financial inducements or even the offer of supernatural aid or healing to convince the subject to agree to the process. A victim of terminal cancer might agree to become a Sleep Hag host in the belief that the ODE's life-stealing ability might offer a cure. Alternatively, the enemy may abduct the subject, or attempt to manipulate the subject without the subject's knowledge.

After procurement comes **preparation**. The subject must be brought into alignment with the target ODE, and the subject's own identity must be broken down as much as possible. This is best accomplished in a controlled environment where the Esoterrorists can apply whatever conditioning and stimuli they need to evoke the desired response. In more than 70% of Impositional Summoning cases, the subject was held in a secure location for more than three months before the summoning began; of the remaining cases, the subject was either under constant observation and manipulation by the Esoterrorists, or else the Esoterrorists attempted to take advantage of auspicious events (the discovery of a patient suffering from extreme haemophilia, who can be used as host for a Blood Corpse).

Preparation may include:

- Conditioning the subject to behave like the ODE
- Methodically removing the subject's anchoring in objective reality
- Methodically removing the subject's psychological and emotional support network, such as family and friends

- Using drugs, sleep deprivation and other techniques to alter the subject's consciousness
- Using surgery or psychological conditioning to alter the subject's body image
- Using costumes and makeup so the subject physically resembles the ODE

Finally, the creature is **summoned** using whatever means are suitable to the entity in question, and bound to the host. If the subject's preparation is enough to align the subject with the ODE, the possession goes smoothly and the ODE is able to inhabit the victim. Unlike a normal possession, where the entity seizes control of the victim's mind but has limited influence over the victim's physical form, an Impositional Summoning enables the ODE to completely transform its host into a new shape.

## Countermeasures

As with other forms of summoning, the logistical trail offers a field team the opportunity to interrupt the Esoterrorist's schemes before they can complete the attempt. Our media teams watch for reports of kidnappings and disappearances, especially those involving victims who meet certain psychological profiles. The Ordo also tracks conditions in prisons, mental hospitals, schools and other institutions that are suited for the sort of extreme psychological control and conditioning associated with this technique. If the subject can be rescued before becoming an ODE host, then extensive counselling and psychiatric treatment may be able to reverse much of the damage.

In the event that the team is unable to locate the subject before the summoning, then countermeasures may still be employed. Even though the host's personality is almost completely subsumed by the ODE, it may be possible to encourage the host to assert themselves once more and fight back against the possession. In the past, field teams have accomplished this by:

- Appealing to the host's better nature
- Reminding the host of key memories,



emotions or desires (using photographs or other personal items associated with the host)

- Presenting the host with emotionally resonant items or individuals (family members, friends, lovers)
- Convincing the host to turn on the Esoterrorists by presenting evidence of manipulation and psychological conditioning

Under ideal circumstances, the countermeasures enable the host to throw off the possessor entity. Without the protection of the host, the ODE is unable to survive on this side of the membrane and is forced to depart. The host may even survive the separation, but in many cases, the physical transformation of the host is too extensive for the body to remain viable without supernatural support. If the host does survive, the field team should secure the victim for handling by OV PECO (Post-Encounter Containment & Orientation) teams. These teams will transfer the victim to a secure psychiatric facility where they will be safely 'defused' through a combination of counselling, medication and other treatments. Rarely, victims can be returned to normal society, or at least find a useful role within the Ordo Veritatis. More commonly, the victim must remain in treatment indefinitely.

The most likely outcome, though, is that the countermeasures succeed only in temporarily disrupting the link between host and ODE, throwing the conjoined entity into confusion and disarray. This disruption may include the loss of the entity's supernatural protections. The field team should take advantage of this to immediately apply deadly force.

## Case Study: BELINDA WHALE

Ukraine, 2002

The subject of BELINDA WHALE was a 24-year old woman named Habibah Okoro. She fled her home in Nigeria and attempted to obtain passage to Europe via a known human trafficker; instead, she was sold to an Esoterror cell who brought her to an encampment in the Ukrainian countryside. There, she was brainwashed for four years in an attempt to convince her that she was 'the Withering Walker', a spirit or goddess associated with bad harvests, barrenness, and famine. As part of this process, she was bombarded with images of the entity, surgically altered to resemble its traditional





Scenarios involving impositional summoning are heavier on characterisation and interpersonal roleplaying than other rituals. The player characters need to delve into the horrific, tawdry or bizarre background of the subject of the ritual and find some memory or personality trait that they can use as leverage over the summoned monster. Such investigations have two chains of clues - one leads to the summoning ritual and the creature of unrelenting horror, and the other revolves around the ritual victim and how they came to be targeted by the Esoterrorists.

When the characters finally encounter the summoned entity, they have to use what they learned during their earlier investigations to defeat it. If they found the necessary clues earlier, they can use interpersonal abilities to turn the host against the nightmarish monster and defeat the Esoterrorist's scheme.

depictions, and only allowed to eat food that she stole from other prisoners, who were kept starving to reinforce Okoro's new identity. On other occasions, she was permitted to walk across fields of wheat or other crops; as she passed, the Esoterrorists pumped powerful weedkillers into the plants using concealed pipes, making it appear as though her presence called the plants to wither and die.

A prisoner captured during YELLOW COIL revealed the location of the Ukrainian compound, and a Special Suppression Force was dispatched. Okoro was rescued before the Esoterrorists were able to complete the summoning of the Withering Walker ODE.

Okoro was debriefed by Ordo scientists before being transferred to a psychiatric hospital. As a result of her conditioning, she had a psychic or strong intuitive connection to other hosts for the Withering Walker. Information obtained from Okoro led to the Ordo countering two subsequent attempts to invoke the Walker (BELINDA ORCA, 2003, BELINDA PORPOISE, 2005). Okoro was found dead in her room in 2006, and the recent series of failed harvests and the associated rise in food prices may be due to a successful invocation of the famine goddess since her death.

## OPPORTUNISTIC SUMMONING

This form of 'summoning' does not involve manipulation or damage to the membrane, and bears little resemblance to the other techniques. It is included in this document so that field team

members are able to recognise it should they encounter it.

Despite the best efforts of the Ordo Veritatis and our forebears, and the strength of the membrane, there are unnatural creatures resident in our reality. Such creatures dwell in the shadows and the interstitial spaces of modern society. Opportunistic summoning refers to attempts by the Esoterrorists to contact and utilise such 'wild' creatures of unrelenting horror.

Previously encountered crossover entities of this sort include: Bleeders, Clooties, Death Tappers, Dementia Larvae, Kooks, Motherlodes, Ovvashi, Residue Demons, Sisterites, Torture Dogs, as well as thirteen cases where positive identification of the entity was impossible.

## Methodology

Opportunistic summoning requires the Esoterrorist cell to locate ODEs that are already resident in our reality. They use identical methods to our own system for locating supernatural threats - they track cryptid sightings, unusual murders or disappearances, clusters of suicides and mental breakdowns, unusual medical symptoms, sick building syndrome outbreaks, LMSLs, online chatter and media reports. Often, both the OV and one or more Esoterror cells will flag a potential supernatural report and dispatch investigative teams at the same time.

Once an ODE nest is located, the Esoterrorists attempt to make peaceful contact with the creature or creatures. This requires the Esoterrorists to identify what the creatures need or desire, again using techniques similar to those outlined in



*Negotiating with the Dark* (see page 28). They may offer the ODEs:

- Victims for the purposes of torture, sustenance, reproduction, amusement or other purposes
- Worship and adoration
- Enlarged or more suitable territory for nesting
- Enlarged or more suitable hunting grounds
- Access to a Low Membrane Strength Location

If the ODEs agree to aid the Esoterrorists, the creatures are assigned appropriate tasks, such as sowing fear and uncertainty, eliminating enemies of the Esoterrorists, sexual gratification, capturing or terrorising targets, eroding the membrane, assisting in the creation of fetishes or assisting in larger summoning or other magical rituals. Fortunately, only comparatively weak ODEs can survive for long periods in our reality, so most of the creatures encountered as a result of opportunistic summoning are relatively manageable by a field team with SSF backup.

## Countermeasures

There are no easy countermeasures that can be applied to opportunistic summoning. The creatures are already here, in our reality. They have undeniable objective existence, and it is extremely unlikely that the field team will be able to restore sufficient strength to the local membrane to banish the entities. There is no solution that offers an indirect way of dealing with the ODEs, so they must be faced head on. The bullet, the flamethrower and the blade must be employed to rid our reality of these intruders.

Before charging into battle, field teams are advised to first investigate the links between the Esoterror cell and the ODEs. It may be possible to play one side against the other. In a normal summoning, the ODEs need the Esoterrorist summoners just as much as the deviants need them, but in opportunistic cases, the ODEs can survive without the Esoterrorists. If the entities can be convinced that their best interests are not being served by the alliance, they may turn on their erstwhile allies. Again, refer to *Negotiating with the Dark* (page 28) for advice on handling non-human entities.

## Case Study: WHISKY NEPAL

1965, Galway, Ireland

Creatures of the ODE are capable of adapting to changes in human society. Since the 1990s, Sisterites have been associated with online dating and sex chat-rooms, a mode of communication that allows the creatures to contact and bewitch victims without having to reveal their true forms. Prior to the advent of mass communications, Sisterites were limited in their ability to find new prey; often, they were forced to rely on crude disguises to get close to a victim before feeding – a difficult prospect, given the creatures' inhuman height and horrific appearance. In the WHISKY NEPAL case, a trio of Sisterites attempted to seduce a parish priest by pretending to be hunched old women in need of alms. The priest, Fr. Timothy Goode, was a member of the Esoterrorist network called the Faithful of St. John the Revelator, and recognised the entities for what they were. He proposed an alliance.

The priest arranged for the three Sisterites to be admitted to the nearby Magdalen Refuge, a house for 'fallen women' – primarily prostitutes and unmarried mothers. A hidden tunnel connected the refuge to the local church. Through this tunnel, the Sisterites could

Opportunistic summoning lets even small and underfunded Esoterror cells get in on the supernatural action. The opposition in an Esoterrorists game should always be unexpected – if you find yourself pitting the player characters against sinister corporations, serial killers and fringe religions over and over again, then throw in a pack of feral street children, a penniless artist's collective, or a tribe of sewer-dwelling cannibals backed up with supernatural allies obtained through opportunistic 'summoning'.



sneak into the church and nest in the confessionals. They eavesdropped on the confessions and prayers of churchgoers, looking for young, unmarried, impressionable or lonely males. When they located such a victim, they informed Fr. Goode, who would contact the victim and inform him that there was a young woman at the Refuge who had been sent there by some misfortune (a wicked uncle trying to steal her inheritance, a jealous step-mother, or the girl was too alluring and flirtatious to be allowed out in public while unmarried) and who was therefore an easy prospect for marriage. The victim would visit the Refuge in secret, where the Sisterite would consume

him. In exchange, Goode received occult and sexual favours from the ODEs.

Between the first contact between Goode and the Sisterites (believed to be in 1943) and the elimination of the nest, the ODEs grew considerably in power and numbers, and took over the Refuge. The Refuge was one of the infamous laundries where hundreds of women were abused and virtually enslaved. The Refuge was burned down by an OV field team in 1965. However, the site remains a LMSL, and there have been more than thirty sightings of the building since its destruction.





# Negotiating With The Dark

**Preface:** This document contains methods and tactics for establishing a dialogue with Outer Dark Entities – both possessors who control a human body, and manifested entities – and negotiating with such creatures. The existence of this document should not be taken as an endorsement of direct communication with such entities except under extreme circumstances. Past experience has shown that extended contact between humans and ODEs results in psychological trauma, hallucinations, schizophrenia and other dangerous symptoms (recurring dreams, memory implants, shadow distortion, psychic bleeding). 40% of those who engaged in extended dialogue with ODEs were forced to retire from active service within six months; some 15% had to be retired or went dark.

The entities do not think like we do, communicate like we do, or respond like we do. Their goals and desires are incomprehensible or intolerable to rational humans. Attempting to communicate with such things opens up new channels of attack for the ODEs. Many entities can alter the perceptions or thoughts of those around them, and speaking to an ODE may render a field agent vulnerable to such coercion.

Only attempt communication with an ODE if many lives are at stake, and no safer, saner option exists.

## When is Negotiation viable?

Not all ODEs are capable of or willing to negotiate. Unintelligent monsters like Shatterers or Motherlodes lack the necessary intellect; other creatures simply do not communicate in any manner human can understand or discern. Even if a creature is capable of communication, it may not be willing to negotiate. Consider opening negotiations if:

- The creature is contained within a defined area. Possible situations: you have the building surrounded; the creature cannot leave a summoning circle or LMSL; the creature is bound to a location or object)

- The creature has demonstrated a willingness to communicate. Possible situations: the entity desires to evoke more fear and suffering, and is taunting you; the creature has possessed a human host and has masqueraded as human; the creature has been observed speaking directly to other humans such as Esoterrorist allies.
- Both sides have something to gain. Obviously, you will not negotiate if you are already in a position to eliminate the threat, or if stalling for time will only benefit the enemy. ODEs may negotiate to buy time for themselves, to obtain something they desire that you can provide, or to open up new modes of attack.

## Goals of Negotiation

The field team should identify their goals before negotiation begins. Valid reasons to negotiate with inhuman entities are:

- Stalling for time
- Ensuring the safety of endangered civilians
- Obtaining tactically useful information (information about the entity that can immediately be used against it)

## Crisis Negotiation & Esoterrorism

While this document concentrates on negotiation with non-human entities, such events are rare. By contract, in more than 50% of cases, the field team had the opportunity to negotiate with human members of an Esoterror group. In many of these cases, proper negotiation could have either averted a more violent resolution, or bought vital time by stalling the enemy.



- Obtaining a tactical advantage over the entity

Do not negotiate if your motivation can be summarised as:

- Curiosity about the Outer Dark
- Curiosity about the entity
- Curiosity about the entity's reasons for opening communications
- Fear of the entity
- Sympathy for the entity
- Avoiding risk
- Obtaining strategically useful information (information about the Esoterrorist movement, information about the entity that is of no immediate relevance)
- Personal gain

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION

If the entity has fully manifested, then avoid direct communication - negotiations should be carried out via telephone or another electronic medium. Prolonged direct exposure to ODEs is invariably damaging. Contact with possessed victims is safer, although still hazardous. When dealing with a possessed victim, the situation is effectively a hostage negotiation where hostage-taker and hostage happen to be sharing the same body.

### Proxies

The number of people involved in the negotiation should be minimised for two reasons. Firstly, it is vital in negotiations to send a consistent message. Everything that the subject perceives should reinforce what the negotiator says. If the negotiator promises that the creature will not be harmed and that he only wishes to talk, and the creature can see a

heavily armed SSF team moving into position, the creature will naturally assume that the negotiator is lying. Keeping the number of people involved in communications to a minimum reduces the possibility of mixed messages. Use a single negotiator. Avoid psychological tricks like 'good cop/bad cop' that rely on subtleties of human psychology.

Secondly, exposing fewer people to the ODE reduces the inevitable psychological damage. One option is to use a captured Esoterrorist as a proxy, to relay your communications to the entity. Obviously, such prisoners are unstable and cannot be considered trustworthy, but as the probability of negotiation bearing fruit is small anyway, it is often the safest option. Some ODEs will communicate only with certain people. A creature that preys on the nightmares of children has no interest in talking to adults; a Torture Dog can communicate telepathically to victims of its venom. Field agents are permitted to use such individuals as proxies if necessary.

If the ODE will communicate only with individuals who meet a certain criterion, and it is within the power of the field team to meet this criterion, normal rules of conduct may be temporarily bent to allow negotiation to proceed. For example, during BELLWETHER STONE, the summoned entity would only communicate with those who were marked with the 'sigil of the blood'. It was permissible for agent Fellows to draw this sigil on his forehead using freshly spilled blood, as the entity held fifty-four hostages and it was agreed that negotiation was the best approach.

### Impersonation & Verification

Conventional hostage negotiators are advised to open negotiations by stating their name and the fact that they work for the police, making a personal connection to the subject and reminding him of the authority they represent. Such a tactic is not always advisable when dealing with ODEs. Giving a personal name, even a Permanent Ordo Appellation cover identity, is very unwise, as it can establish a link between the entity and the negotiator. Instead, negotiators should use the protected name of Mr. Verity, of the Ordo Veritatis.



## The Perils of Direct Contact

Multiple studies demonstrate that entities of the Outer Dark use non-standard communications channels that operate on a subliminal level. Examples include:

- Analysis of camera footage of one entity revealed that every 1.13 seconds, it took on a different shape for 0.01 seconds before reverting to its previous form. This shape, visible only using a high-speed camera, appeared to be an aged, balding Caucasian male wearing a prison uniform from the 1920s. The figure mirrored the body language of the interrogator - a classic gambit to make the other party agree with you.
- One possessor entity made subsonic vocalisations beyond the normal range of the human vocal cords. Recording, playback and translation revealed that these words were subliminal commands to its victims, commanding them to stop fighting back and give themselves up. When a negotiator tried to convince the creature to release its prisoners, the entity instead managed to convince the negotiator to turn his gun on the rest of the field team.
- When dealing with a trapped scourger that attempted to plead for its life, former Ordo agent CHANCE ECHO reported that the creature spoke through CHANCE ECHO's four-year-old son; the child echoed everything the scourger said, word for word. The child has not spoken since the scourger was destroyed.

If the situation allows it, it is better to avoid mentioning the Ordo. Instead, initially pretend to be an unusually well-prepared civilian, such as a police officer. ODEs and their Esoterrorist allies feel superior to the 'common herd' of humanity, and are convinced of their inevitable supremacy even in situations where they are plainly outmatched. An Esoterrorist who thinks he is surrounded by armed police may cling to the delusion that he will be able to outwit and outthink them; an Esoterrorist who knows he is facing an Ordo field team may realise his predicament and decide to take as many of us with him as he can. You can always reveal your true affiliation later if necessary.

### Authentication

Early in a negotiation, the negotiator should ask the ODE to identify itself. If the creature responds, it may provide useful information about past encounters. For example, a possessor case in 2004 identified itself as the 'Maw of Chano'; using a secure connection to OV databases, the team was able to match this title to another incident in 1927, when another entity using the same name departed moments before the host died. The team used a dart rifle to inject the possessed victim with a deadly poison; the ODE departed, and the team were able to apply an

antidote in time to save the victim's life. Information is our best weapon against the Outer Dark, and the more information that the negotiator can trick the ODE into revealing, the better. ODEs are inherently solipsistic; they have no name, shape or identity of their own, only what others project onto them. Therefore, when challenged, they can only respond with names they have been given before by others, or by describing their desires or origins.

Demanding authentication may also give useful insight when dealing with a possession or Impositional Summoning - when directly asked for its identity, the creature may give that of its host instead.

### Avoiding Entanglement

'Entanglement' is the catch-all term for undue influence that the ODE may exert over the negotiator. Entanglement may include:

- Supernatural influence, such as mind control, illusions, unnatural compulsions
- Physical influence, such as the ability to threaten the negotiator or things the negotiator cares about, such as hostages



- Emotional influence, such as an existing emotional connection to the ODE's host or even the entity itself
- Stockholm Syndrome, coming to sympathise with the entity's plight
- 'Going Dark', desiring forbidden knowledge or the liberation and power of Esoterrorism

Entanglement can be minimised by keeping one's distance from the ODE, by focussing on the task at hand, and by maintaining emotional detachment. Becoming too invested in a negotiation is a mistake – remember, these entities cannot be truly reasoned with. In the majority of cases, the only benefit of negotiation is the time it buys for the rest of the field team to move into position or to regroup.



## INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE DEMANDS

Instrumental demands are things the subject needs for immediate survival – for humans, this includes food, water, and may also include shelter or medical attention. In a crisis negotiation with a human, the negotiator will begin by offering food and other such basic supplies. The subject can easily articulate his instrumental needs, and the negotiator can easily fulfil them, allowing the establishment of a dialogue between the two parties.

Expressive needs are more complex desires that the subject possesses, and may not be able to clearly articulate, but which drive the subject's behaviour. A hostage taker in a bank may be subconsciously motivated by a desire to strike back at paternal figures who remind him of his own father. Unable to express this directly, the subject appears emotional and unstable. Guiding the subject to state their expressive needs in a concrete, realisable way is a goal for the negotiator, as it allows the subject to say what they actually want, and allows law enforcement to either meet that demand and bring an end to the crisis, or continue to negotiate with a clearer understanding of the subject.

Applying these criteria to ODEs is difficult, but is the best approach to dealing with such entities. The expressive needs of inhuman creatures are incomprehensible to us; they rely on concepts that have no meaning on this side of the membrane. An ODE that sucks the marrow from the bones of children may not do so for sustenance, or pleasure, or out of jealousy or any other motive that can be communicated to humans. The role of the Ordo negotiator is to find a way for the entity to state its needs in a manner we can understand, even if the reasoning behind those needs is opaque or non-existent. Asking *why* an entity is demanding the name of your first



## Getting Too Close To The Dark

Having a conversation with a creature of unremitting horror definitely demands at least one Stability check, and may involve more for an extended negotiation or series of interrogations. If a check fails, the character is disconcerted by the creature's eerie presence, and the cost of all Interpersonal spends increases by 1 when dealing with the creature. This point levy goes away if the character stops talking with the creature and takes time to reconnect with rational humanity.

The difficulty of the stability test varies depending on the type of creature and the extent of their interaction.

Incident	Stability Loss
Talking with a possessed victim	3
Talking with a minor creature	4
Telepathic contact or other strange mode of communication	5
The creature knows things about you it shouldn't know	6
Talking with a possessed friend or loved one	8

sexual partner is pointless; the negotiator should concentrate on giving the entity what it wants in exchange for concessions, or else buying time by making the entity believe that negotiating is a route to its desires.

### Offering a way out

The Ordo has yet to definitively determine what 'death' means to ODEs. We are unsure if killing an entity actually ends its existence, or if it simply returns it to the Outer Dark, or if there is a distinction between the two. The Ordo has encountered entities (such as BLACK HENRY and TAMBOURINE) that appear to have returned from the Outer Dark after being destroyed in this reality. While terminating an ODE is preferably to allowing it to return to the Outer Dark, the Ordo is willing to accept a certain temporary victory over a chance at a questionably permanent destruction. Once communications have been established with an ODE, the negotiator is permitted to offer the entity the opportunity to be returned to the Outer Dark. If the creature accepts, then it should be escorted to a zone of higher membrane strength where the entity may be forced out of existence. Alternatively, the Ordo may be able

to bring in Intrusion Countermeasure Specialists (ICSs) who have the skills and training to banish a compliant entity. Only make the offer to the entity if:

- You have demonstrated the ability to threaten, damage or injure the entity

and:

- Your ability to destroy the entity is in doubt

### The Ethics of Negotiation

The negotiator must tread carefully along the limits of morality. As an Ordo agent, you are authorised to use your best judgement in making deals with otherworldly entities. You may offer the creature concessions and supply it with what it needs, as long as it is clear that making such a deal is the best possible option for containing the Esoterrorist threat. If allowing a vampiric entity to take blood from one of the field team saves innocent lives, or if a member of the field team can be exchanged for several innocent prisoners, then you are authorised to make such trades. The line is drawn at:



- Taking actions that would weaken the membrane
- Taking actions that would permit the ODE to reproduce or spread its influence
- Sacrificing civilians
- Endangering the Ordo Veritatis
- Accepting supernatural gifts or abilities

Negotiation is permissible only as a weapon against the Outer Dark. Our struggle against the entities is not one that will ever be resolved through diplomacy or mutual understanding. Their mode of existence is inimical to ours. Negotiation can be, at most, a temporary stay of execution. Your first priority must always, always be the protection of the membrane and a sane reality.



# Cell Death

*It was time for him to be the monster again.*

*He pulled on his real skin, which was clammy against the pink flesh he wore as a human. Once, he had seen his real skin as nothing more than a biohazard suit covered in asbestos padding and mottled movie-makeup latex, but he now knew the truth. The monster was his real self.*

*There was a girl in the killing room. She did not scream when he entered. She looked up at him with a blank expression, like a cow awaiting slaughter. She would scream soon enough.*

*He raised his hands and willed her to die. She began to choke, her fingers clawing bloody gobbets from her throat. He forced himself to ignore the hiss of the gas jets. He was the monster, he was killing her, not the concealed gas jets. He was alive because he was the monster, not because of the suit.*

*It was easier to believe when the fire came. The flames scorched her weak pink flesh, and caused his own monster skin to blister, but he was unharmed.*

*Then they came and worshipped him. They knelt before him and proclaimed him a living god. They pleased him, and as they did so, one of them slipped the syringe in through his skin. A numbing warmth flooded through him. He would sleep away the long hours when he had to be human, sleep until it was time to be a monster again. The monster times were getting longer, the human intervals more infrequent.*

*His true self called out to him from beyond the Membrane.*

*Soon we shall be one, promised the monster. Soon.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Cell Death* is a short investigation for the *Esoterrorists* roleplaying game about an attempted summoning ritual. It uses material from the other sections of this book; the players should be familiar with the different types of summoning and the associated investigation methods.

The adventure takes place in Rome, Italy and the fictional town of Bluewater, Idaho. The Ordo

Veritatis will provide transport between cities and cover stories for the characters to explain their absence from their everyday lives. The Ordo can also provide a limited amount of money and intercede with local law enforcement, but otherwise the characters are on their own.

Bluewater itself has no significance, and can be replaced by any small town of your choice if you want to bring the horror closer to home.

## BACKSTORY

### Investigative Trigger

**Lucio Mancini** is dying in a hospice ward in Rome. He's riddled with cancers, and he is drifting in and out of consciousness. Strangely, in the moments he seems most lucid, he claims to have been a magician and a terrorist, and begs for forgiveness. The characters are sent to interrogate Mancini.

### Sinister Conspiracy

Mancini and his son Gulio were both involved in *Esoterrorism*. When they suspected they were under surveillance by the order, Gulio fled to the United States and joined a different *Esoterror* cell there. This cell, led by another *Esoterrorist* named **Graham Park**, is on the verge of successfully invoking a new creature from beyond the membrane, an entity they call the Balefire. They are using impositional summoning, and the subject of this summoning Gulio. Park intends to use the summoned creature as an occult weapon of terror.

For several months, Gulio Mancini has lived in a specially-built compound on Park's ranch, where the *Esoterrorist* cell brainwashed him to make him a suitable vessel for the Balefire Man. The impending death of his father was Gulio's psychological tipping point; it broke his attachment to reality, and now he is ready to accept his nightmarish destiny.

Although Lucio was responsible for his son joining Park's cell, he has come to bitterly regret his decision to send Gulio delving into forbidden arcana. He believes Gulio is doomed, and intends to use the Ordo Veritatis to put down both his old ally and his hideously transformed son.



The entity that the Esoterrorists are attempting to summon is the Balefire Man, described on page 44.

## Trail of Clues

Lucio Mancini's last words in Rome sent the characters to Bluewater in Idaho. The town is an unlikely candidate for an Esoterror summoning attempt, so the characters are quickly able to eliminate several possible methods for the Esoterrorists to use. This summoning must be either a Constructionist or Impositional attempt; cross-checking likely elements of such a summoning with Mancini's testimony puts the characters on the trail to Park's ranch.

At the ranch, the characters make their way past the Esoterrorists' defences. Depending on their approach, they may be able to deal with the Esoterrorists on their own terms, or have to fight it out. Meanwhile, the summoning ritual is completed, transforming Gulio into the Balefire Man. The

characters must find a way to disrupt the Outer Dark Entity or they will be destroyed by the horror.

## Antagonist Reactions

As the investigators have the edge (thanks to Mancini's confession), the Esoterrorists' scope for reaction is limited. Unless the players do something very foolish, like announcing that they are OV agents in the middle of Bluewater, they can get the drop on the cult cell without running into any Antagonist Reactions.

## CURATOR FOUR

### Scene Type: Intro

The characters are called to Rome by a Mr. Verity. Optionally, you can run this scene and *Dying Alone* for a subset of the player characters, if some of them are more likely to be in Europe than others.





The rest of the player characters can join up when the investigation heads to Bluewater, Idaho.

Mr. Verity meets the characters in an anonymous hotel room near Leonardo da Vinci airport. This particular Mr. Verity is a tanned young man dressed in expensive casual clothing and sunglasses; he looks like he should be partying in some nightclub, not briefing the investigation team. He speaks in clipped, professional tones. He explains that the characters' assignment is to visit Lucio Mancini in the nearby Hospice of St. John.

- Lucio Mancini is a former occultist and rare book dealer.
- The Ordo suspected him of having ties to the Esoterrorist movement in the mid-90s, and investigated him under the code name CURATOR FOUR. The investigators never found sufficient proof to warrant further surveillance. Resources were tight in the lead-up to 2000.
- He leaves the characters with a dossier on CURATOR FOUR (see below)
- Mancini is now dying of inoperable cancer. According to his doctors, he has claimed to be an Esoterrorist agent and wishes to repent. He demanded to 'talk to Verity' and screamed at the nurses to 'call the pluggers'. The characters are to gain entry to the hospice, question Mancini, and determine if anything useful can be garnered from his confession.
- He can provide the characters with false identities if necessary.
- He also gives the characters a contact number and a platinum credit card.

## Investigating CURATOR FOUR

The dossier describes the Ordo's previous scrutiny of Mancini. He operated a rare book shop, specialising in occult books, especially works on alchemy. For two months, the Ordo tapped

his phones, hacked his computers, and kept him under surveillance. Mancini is described as 'highly paranoid and secretive' and he took extensive precautions to avoid being spied upon. The final entry in the report states that Mancini sold off most of his collection and closed down his business; the unnamed Ordo agent suggests that while there is no proof that Mancini was an Esoterrorist, he suspects that he was in contact with the enemy and was 'spooked' by the surveillance. The report suggests that the surveillance operation may have convinced Mancini to cut his ties with the occult.

**Research** lets the characters read through the full dossier.

- Mancini's wife died fifteen years ago, of a degenerative lung condition. Mancini believed that toxic smoke from an incinerator in a nearby industrial factory caused her illness, but his lawsuit against the company went nowhere. Several years after that, the owner of the company died under suspicious circumstances – he drowned in a canal, and one eyewitness claimed a 'tentacle' dragged him under.
- 1-point **Forensic Psychology** spend: Personal trauma and the feeling of being 'wronged' by fate are commonly associated with turning to Esoterrorism. Mancini's Esoterrorist allies could be responsible for the death of the industrialist, but that case is twelve years old and the trail is ice cold.
- Mancini has a son named Gulio. Gulio was working closely with Mancini at the start of the surveillance period, but leaves two weeks later. After that, there is no further contact between Gulio and his father, and the Ordo was failed to track Gulio Mancini's movements after he left Rome.
- 1-point **Data Retrieval** spend: There is no trace of Gulio Mancini anywhere after he left. He must be operating under an assumed identity – and it takes considerable resources to establish a cover identity that is complete enough to hide from the Ordo. He must be working with the Esoterrorists.



**Textual Analysis** lets the character read the dossier to get a psychological profile of Mancini. This gives the character a 2-point bonus to Forensic Psychology and Bullshit Detector when dealing with Mancini.

**Forensic Accounting** suggests that Mancini's business and property was worth several million euro, but he is dying in a hospice for the poor.

A 1-point **Law** or **Impersonate** spend lets the characters bluff their way into Mancini's lawyer and get a look at his will. All his property, bar a small amount of money for the hospice, is going to a distant cousin. There is nothing for his son. If the characters question the lawyer about this, he shrugs and says that Mancini told him that Gulio died in the United States.

## DYING ALONE

### Scene Type: Core

The Hospice of St. John is located close to the great basilica of St. John Lateran, in the heart of Rome. It is part of an old, weather-beaten hospital; it smells of old people and disinfectant. The characters are met by Sister Maria, an elderly nun. **Impersonate** lets the characters claim to be doctors or family members, while **Reassurance** convinces the nun to trust them. Maria shows the characters to Mancini's bed.

Lucio Mancini is a skeleton in a thin envelope of too-tight, papery yellow skin. He mumbles to himself, muttering lists of books, holding conversations with long-dead friends, or calling pitifully for the nurses. Sometimes, he asks for 'the pluggers' or 'the quieters'; at other times, he moans and complains about 'leaving before the great work is done'. He mutters about 'rewriting the world' and how it has 'rewritten him', and how he is caught between 'the lead world and the gold'. He blames 'the faithless bastards' for leaving him in this state.

- **Occult Studies:** The lead world and the gold are terms from Esoterror. The lead world is objective reality, while the gold world is reality transformed into magic.

If the characters identify themselves as members of the Ordo Veritatis, he sits up and becomes more coherent. He greets the characters with a hideous grin, and mocks 'you pluggers' for not getting him sooner. He will die of illness, not an Ordo bullet.

**Intimidation** or **Reassurance** gets him talking (**Core Clue**). He tells the characters that there is an Esoterror cell in Bluewater, Idaho, run by 'Park...that bastard Park... he took my son. They're going to call up the Balefire... plug Park, you fuckers... do it fucking properly this time.'

- **Bullshit Detector:** Mancini believes everything he's saying.
- **Trivia:** There's a small town called Bluewater in Idaho. There have been no reports of supernatural events or horrific crimes there, but that does not rule out a deep cover Esoterror cell.
- **Evidence Collection:** Mancini is wearing his wedding ring. In the photographs in the dossier, Mancini was not wearing any such ring.

If asked why he is betraying his Esoterrorist allies, Mancini refuses to answer.

- **Forensic Psychology** suggests that Mancini blames the Esoterrorists' attempts to change reality for causing his cancer, and that he might be willing to confess if the characters promise to exact revenge on the Esoterror movement. He is trying to make peace with the world before he dies, and for him, that means settling scores. He could be sending the characters into a trap.
- Asking about Mancini's son upsets him. He mutters '*no...no... he's gone, no coming back, no coming back.*' **Forensic Psychology** suggests that Mancini's son is somehow central to the old man's distress.
- Spending 2 points of **Reassurance** here lets the character calm Mancini enough to get a little more out of him. '*Gulio... he believed. We both did... he went with Park. Went to complete the great work. Went away...*'



- After passing on the information about 'Park' and 'Bluewater, Idaho', Mancini sinks back into the pillow and closes his eyes. He won't answer any further questions. **Medicine** confirms that he's dying and trying to extract any more information would just kill him. He has only days left, perhaps hours.

As the characters step out of the room, Mancini mutters something under his breath. A 1-point **Languages** spend lets the character catch the occultist's last words. He mutters in Hebrew, quoting from the book of Genesis: "*for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man*". **History** or **Occult** lets the character remember the context - Genesis, chapter 22, verse 12, God speaking to Abraham after Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac.

## Heading to Idaho

The obvious next step is to travel to Idaho and search for an Esoterror cell there. If the players do not immediately follow up on this clue, Mr. Verity can prompt them to move on.

## CLEARING BLUEWATER

### Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: Mancini's deathbed confession

Bluewater, Idaho is a small farming town of around 5,000 people. It is a wholesomely dull place to life. Crime rates are well below the state average, there are no dangerous neighbourhoods or darkly fecund ruins where monsters might lurk. The people here are comparatively well-adjusted and free of neuroses. The membrane is strong here.

**Research:** There is no-one named Park or Mancini living in the town. Presumably, the Esoterrorists are using false names.

1-point **Research** spend: A recent study showed a statistically unusual cluster of cancers and autoimmune diseases around Bluewater. Scientists are still investigating the cause.

With no obvious leads, the best approach is to run through the known methods of summoning and determine which system the cell might be using.

## Greater Invocative

There are no large gatherings of people scheduled in Bluewater. Unless everyone in town is an Esoterrorist, the chances of a Greater Invocative summoning here are non-existent. There is simply not enough psychic force.

**Anthropology:** No evidence of any large religious groups other than Christianity, and the local churches are wholly conventional and are not hiding anything.

## Lesser Invocative

Lesser invocative ceremonies need fewer participants, but can only summon entities that have already passed through the Membrane.

**Occult Studies:** Mancini's testimony strongly suggests that the cell is trying to summon a wholly new entity. There is no way to rule out a lesser invocation, but there is no strong evidence for one.

## Opportunistic

No Low Membrane Strength Locations, no unexplained deaths, no hauntings - if there are Outer Dark Entities already resident in town, they are keeping an amazingly low profile.

## Ontological

**Anthropology:** There are no suitable urban legends that are especially strong or well-known in the area.

## Constructionist

**Chemistry (core clue):** The character notices a truck parked in town that bears the logo of an industrial chemical supplier. Such supplies could be used in a constructionist summoning. The characters can get more information by:



- **Flirting** with the driver
- Using **Surveillance** or **Electronic Surveillance** to track the vehicle
- Hacking into the chemical company's database with **Cryptography**

Any suitable approach reveals that the driver has made several deliveries in the last few years to a farm outside town. Most of the deliveries consisted of chemicals, but the company also supplies laboratory equipment and safety gear.

- **Chemistry:** A sufficiently skilled chemist could make all sorts of dangerous substances with those chemicals, including poison gas.
- Based on this, the characters can use Preparedness to have biohazard suits to hand for the confrontation at the end of the scenario.

**Research or Data Retrieval:** An internet search turns up a number of postings about a 'research farm' outside town. This farm is rumoured to be a secret US Military base where they 'test chemicals'.

This is all strong evidence for constructionist summoning.

## Impositional

An impositional summoning attempt needs a suitable candidate for the invocation. That candidate should then be held in isolation while he or she is prepared as a vessel for the ODE to be summoned.

**Occult Studies:** Mancini mentioned 'the Balefire'. If the characters checked the dossier, they know that Mancini's wife died as a result of toxic smoke inhalation. It is a thin lead, but it could indicate a connection between fire, the Mancinis, and the summoning. The complete disappearance of Gulio Mancini is also potentially of significance – the fewer connections one has to normal reality, the easier it is to become a vessel for an ODE, and Gulio appears to have fallen right out of the world.

## Graham Park

Athletics 6, Health 10, Scuffling 4, Shooting 6, Stability 2, Surveillance 6 Damage Modifier: +1 (Heavy Firearm)

**Streetwise (core clue):** The 'research farm' outside town is very isolated, and surrounded by high fences. The people there are oddly secretive. It does fit the profile for a brainwashing centre. A 1-point **Streetwise** spend gets the character a rumour from a few years ago – the story goes that an FBI agent came to town to investigate the farm, but she died in a car crash on her way back to Boise.

Based on this, the characters can determine that the most likely form of summoning being employed is either constructionist or impositional – either the Esoterrorists are building a body for the 'Balefire', or are brainwashing a volunteer, possibly Gulio Mancini, into becoming a vessel for the entity. Either way, the clues point to the farm.

## Investigating the Farm

Diligent player characters may wish to learn more about the farm before driving out there.

1-point **Cop Talk** spend: There are four or five people living out at the farm. They only come to town to get supplies. Weird folk, but they don't make any trouble.

1-point **Forensic Accounting** spend: The farm is owned by a company called 'NCL Agriscience', and it seems to be their only holding. The company is registered in the Cayman islands. A little more digging confirms that Graham Park is the only shareholder of NCL Agriscience.

1-point **Data Retrieval** spend: The character digs up satellite photographs of the farm. There is a main farmhouse, surrounded by smaller buildings, but there is also a second set of buildings concealed by a small copse of woods. These buildings look like concrete bunkers. Some of them have tall chimneys and large air vents, consistent with an incinerator.



# The Farm

## Scene Type: Core

**Lead-In:** The characters' investigations in Bluewater

The NCL Farm is twenty minutes' drive down narrow country roads. It is composed of three sections - the main house, the outbuildings, and the bunker complex. From a distance, there is no sign of any movement.

The characters have arrived just in time for the summoning attempt. Cell leader Graham Park is in the main house, monitoring the situation in the bunker via CCTV. The rest of the cell members are in the inner bunker, summoning the Balefire Man. Gulio Mancini is also in the inner bunker, about to become host for the ODE. The layout of the complex is described below, along with the

The order of events depends on what the player characters do. If they do not intercede, then the Esoterrorists complete the summoning ritual and bring forth the Balefire Man.

## Layout

**Main House:** A large farmhouse that has been home to the half-dozen members of the Esoterrorist cell. The kitchen and other 'public' rooms are a slice of everyday Americana, completely normal and devoid of personality in case of unexpected visitors. Upstairs, it's a cross between a frat house and a Satanic mass, with occult books and scrawled magical symbols vying for space with chemistry textbooks.

In the basement (accessed via a concealed door under the stairs) is Park's command centre. This room is crammed with screens and computers; from here, he can monitor events in the bunker as well as check the feeds from the hidden CCTV cameras around the farm. He can communicate with the bunker and the surface buildings via an intercom system.

The entrance to the command centre is protected by an armoured door. Getting through this door requires **Explosive Devices** or **Cryptography** to override the electronic lock.

The cell's armoury is also in the basement. They've got assault rifles, grenades and plenty of ammo.

**Outbuildings:** These sheds contain farm equipment and supplies. Notably, there is a diesel generator that provides back-up power for the whole complex. There is also a makeshift firing range; checking the targets with **Ballistics** suggests that these guys have access to assault rifles.

Hanging in one of the sheds are half-a-dozen bizarre costumes. They resemble grotesquely bloated humanoids, but **Evidence Collection** reveals that underneath the slightly scorched latex, the suits are actually functional biohazard suits. There is a thick layer of a heat-resistant substance between the plastic suit and the latex covering. These suits were part of the brainwashing process, but the characters can use them as protection against the Balefire Man. A character wearing a suit is immune to the Balefire Man's steam clouds and burning touch bonus damage, but at a cost - any Athletics, Infiltration, Shooting or Scuffling spends made the character suffer a 1-point levy because of the suit's bulk and weight. (A levy reduces the effective spend by 1, so if a player spends 4 points from Shooting, he only adds +3 to his attack roll. If he spent 1 point, he would add nothing.)

**Bunker:** These concrete vaults have been Gulio Mancini's home for five years. The process of transforming him into a vessel for the Balefire Man was a slow and painstaking one. The outer vaults contain supplies used in the brainwashing process, while the inner vault contains Gulio's quarters and the summoning chamber. As the characters explore these vaults, they find several clues relating to Gulio's transformation.

- **Evidence Collection:** At the back of the bunkers, there are eight graves. Most are several years old, but the most recent one was dug in the last few days. The graves are shallow and contain corpses wrapped in plastic. **Forensic Anthropology** shows that half the victims were burned to death; the others were poisoned or exposed to toxic chemicals.
- **Forensic Entomology:** One of the bunker vaults contains several canisters of chemicals, including a powerful insecticide.





These canisters are connected to pipes that run into the summoning chamber; if the bad guys are still unaware of the characters' presence, then the PCs can poison the Esoterrorists with a successful Mechanic check (Difficulty 6) to flood the inner vault.

- **Explosive Devices:** There are also several cylinders of natural gas and other explosives. The cultists used these to burn victims of the Balefire Man. A two-point **Explosives Devices** spend lets the characters detonate the bunker complex, eliminating any surviving Esoterrorists (but not the Balefire).
- **Chemistry:** Another vault contains medical supplies. A quick examination shows plenty of hallucinogens (mostly derived from psilocybin ) and sedatives. If the characters are looking for something specific, like medical treatment for exposure to the

Balefire Man, a Chemistry or Preparedness spend lets them dig up something suitable from this pharmacy.

The inner vault is accessible via an airlock. There are two rooms here – the summoning/sacrificial chamber, and Mancini's room. The summoning chamber is a scene of horror. The Esoterrorists have sketched a weirdly angled pentagram in the greasy soot on the floor, and placed gobbets of diseased flesh at the angles of their summoning glyph. Depending on when the characters arrive, they may encounter the remaining Esoterrorists here just as they complete the summoning of the Balefire Man, or find their blasted corpses lying on the floor.

- **Forensic Anthropology:** The corpses were partially burned. Unexposed flesh that was not damaged by the fire shows rashes and boils from some sort of infection.



## Jeremy Pollard

Athletics 6, Health 8, Scuffling 6, Shooting 4, Stability 2, Surveillance 3  
Damage Modifier: +0 (Light Firearm)

## Pete Holden

Athletics 4, Health 8, Scuffling 4, Shooting 6, Stability 5, Surveillance 2  
Damage Modifier: +0 (Light Firearm)

If they have time to visit the farmhouse and tool up, give them both Heavy Firearms (+1 damage) and light body armour (reduces Scuffling damage by 1 and Shooting damage by 2).

Mancini's room contains only a mattress and a bucket. The walls are covered with photographs of diseased or burned people, a litany of horrors from napalmed Vietnamese to cancer patients with fist-sized tumours to lepers to close-ups of the results of flesh-eating bacteria.

**Evidence Collection:** Mancini has made a horizontal cut into the mattress, creating a hiding space in it. Inside, the characters find a battered novel in Italian, *Se questo e un uomo* by Primo Levi. The pages of the book are yellowed and oddly stained.

- **Chemistry (1 point spend):** The damage to the book is consistent with smoke damage, suggesting the book was exposed to a considerable amount of thick, ash-heavy smoke.
- **Art History (1 point spend):** The book, known in English as *If this is a man*, describes the author's experiences in the concentration camp at Auschwitz.
- **Textual Analysis:** With a careful examination, the character can decipher the partially destroyed inscription on the flyleaf. The book is dedicated 'from Gulio, to his mother'.

The characters can use this in the final confrontation with the Balefire Man, if they use it to bring out Gulio's memories of his mother or point out that his monstrous transformation echoes the horrors of oppression, imprisonment and war.

## Getting In

There are concealed CCTV cameras around the perimeter of the farm. Sneaking past these cameras requires an Infiltration test at Difficulty 8; a character with **Electronic Surveillance** can spend 2 points to sabotage the cameras, dropping the difficulty to 4. One test must be made to cross from the main road to the farm; a second test is required to sneak between the farm and the bunker complex.

## Antagonist Reactions

As soon as Park spots the player characters, he contacts the bunker and orders two of the Esoterrorists to intercept them. The pair are armed with pistols; if circumstances permit, they head back to the farmhouse first and pick up assault rifles from the basement armoury. The two Esoterrorist guards are **Jeremy Pollard** and **Pete Holden**. Pollard is extremely gaunt, with a tattooed shaven head and numerous piercings, while Holden is a gentle-eyed biochemist. Both have had paramilitary training and are good shots. The Esoterrorists attempt to capture the player characters and sacrifice them to the nascent Balefire Man if they believe the PCs are helpless tourists or other civilians. If they believe the player characters to be federal agents or Ordo Veritatis, they come out shooting.

## The Balefire Man

The remaining Esoterrorists complete the Balefire Man summoning at the cost of their own lives. They tear open a hole in the membrane and merge Gulio



Mancini with an entity from beyond, but they are cooked alive by the Balefire Man's hellish steam clouds as they flood the small bunker.

The Balefire Man entity emerges from the bunker and makes its way towards the farmhouse. It is disorientated by its appearance in our reality, and by lingering elements of Gulio's personality. It is drawn towards Graham Park. If he can, Park makes his way towards the Balefire Man and speaks to it from a safe distance; otherwise, he hides in the command centre and communicates with the Balefire Man using the intercom system.

Park promises the Balefire Man the opportunity to grow and to kill. He shouts that it is death incarnate, the anti-life, and that he has brought it forth into this world. He orders it to eliminate the player characters, who are its enemies.

## Stopping the Balefire Man

A direct attack on the Balefire Man is risky, unless the characters have brought protective clothing or find the protective costumes in the outbuildings. The creature can be destroyed with sufficient firepower.

If the players have worked out that Gulio Mancini is the host for the Balefire Man, they can try appealing to Mancini's humanity. Mentioning Lucio Mancini's regrets about his son, or his slow death from cancer disrupts the ODE's hold on

the host and removes its supernatural protection, dropping its Armour.

Optionally, if the characters lack heavy firepower, then the creature can instead turn on the Esoterrorists, stumbling into the farmhouse and exploding in a toxic fireball that kills both Mancini and Park.

Saving Mancini is difficult. Even if the characters are able to banish the ODE that possesses him, its presence has already warped his body and damaged his lungs, liver and kidneys by flooding his bloodstream with toxins. A Difficulty 7 Medic test is needed to keep him alive until emergency services arrive. If he survives, he switches sides and agrees to inform on the Esoterrorists to the Ordo Veritas. Another Mr. Verity collects Mancini from hospital; the player characters will never see him again, but his debriefing can lead to future investigations.

## The Veilout

Fortunately, the farm is sufficiently isolated that there are no witnesses to any supernatural events. Ordo agents can collect the Esoterrorists' equipment and documents before bulldozing the bunker. The media are informed that NCL Agriscience is another victim of the recession and has gone bust.

The unexplained increase in cancers around Bluewater starts to level off, but the toxins invoked by summoning the Balefire will linger in the water and soil for decades.



## Appendix: The Balefire Man

The pockmarked skin of a Balefire Man is bloated with gas. Its eyes shimmer like an oil slick. It vomits clouds of boiling, radioactive steam as it moves. As it moves, bizarre organs and viscera blossom and rot beneath its flesh, and anyone it touches is infected with the same cancerous growth and rapid decay. Fire is associated with purity and cleansing, but the balefire is a thing of poisonous smoke and sickness.

Athletics 8, Health 16, Scuffling 15

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: -2

Weapons: +2 Scuffling

Armour: 5

**Hellish Steam:** A Balefire Man belches out clouds of yellow-tinged sulphurous, radioactive steam. Anyone within three metres of the creature suffers a -1 penalty to hit with Scuffling or Shooting attacks, and also loses one point of Health per round. Suitable protective gear (such as a biohazard suit or gas mask) avoids this health loss, but conventional armour like a bullet-proof vest is of no help.

**Burning Touch:** The flesh of a Balefire Man is agonisingly hot and dripping with toxins. It inflicts extra damage equal to the number of Scuffling points it spent on the attack, regardless of whether or not the attack was successful. For example, if a



Balefire Man spent four Scuffling on an attack, it would deal four damage if it missed, and 1d6+6 damage if it hit (1d6+2 for its normal Scuffling damage, +4 for the Scuffling points it spend). This bonus damage can be avoided by wearing protective gear like a biohazard suit.

**Blight:** The presence of a Balefire Man destroys plants and inhibits healing. Health points lost to a balefire cannot be restored by first aid.

**Explosion:** If a Balefire Man is reduced to 0 Health, it collapses in on itself, then explodes. All characters nearby must make Athletics tests (difficulty 8), or suffer damage equal to the margin of failure.