

THE HIDDEN PAPERS

Extra Material for issue 27's "Weaving the Web" article

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More Types of Society

Magical Secret Societies

Society of Brass - The Society of Brass is a small group of alchemists in Kislev and The Empire who secretly attempt to transmute the common metals into gold. This accomplishment has long been a desire of alchemists, and this group has over the decades gathered together countless research from their predecessors, and cooperated closely in their exchanges of research data. Within this secret society there are a few alchemists who employ warpstone in their experiments without the knowledge of their peers, and although this minority is extremely cautious in their experimentation, it is only a matter of time before the inner circle is discovered or a mishap befalls the researchers.

However, within this society is the Council of Brass, a dozen alchemists who are at the centre of the group who are interested in more than just tampering with the composition of metals. Years ago one of its members discovered a number of ancient texts on necromancy outlining research on artificial life. These alchemists were more interested in the essence of life than the necromantic aspects, and they have spent decades trying to fabricate homunculi, small hybrid animals, and simulacra in their laboratories in their

experiments in creating new life. A few of the members have researched related tangents and are looking into distilling the essence of life and creating an elixir that halts the aging process. The members of the Council of Brass are brilliant researchers and their results have generated not only a number of answers but ethically and metaphysically troubling questions about the nature of life that would transform philosophy and understandings of life and death, if this information were made public. It is far more likely however that a witch hunter will eventually discover this group's research and burn both researchers and their work in the same pyre.

"And now I shall reveal to you, my patient comrade, the real threat to the safety of the Empire." The old man's cloudy yet mesmerising eyes fixed Lutz to his seat.

Lutz leaned in closer to the old man, every inch of him tense, awaiting the revelation that the old man had for so long been hinting at.

"The hidden menace, unnoticed for so many years is..."

"Yes...?" Lutz gently urged the old man.

"...it is..." The old man dawdled on.

"Yes, what is it?" Lutz asked anxiously, unable to wait any longer.

"It is..." the old man paused one last time for dramatic

effect, "The danger at the heart of the Empire is...Halflings..."

"What? I'm sorry," Lutz sputtered, "...I must have misheard you..."

"I said it is Halflings!" The old man uttered it with great conviction and solemnity.

Lutz sat there dumbfounded, an uncertain smile betraying his confusion.

"Yes, Halflings, the enemy within! Yes, those clever fiendish little people who outwitted the Emperor into giving precious land in exchange for a duck in a garlic wine sauce! Who else, I ask you, has so cleverly infiltrated every noble and genteel household? Think of it: a Halfling spy and poisoner in every kitchen of every luminary in the Empire! Listening in on dinner conversation! Halfling gardeners spying in as people speak in great confidence in studies overlooking gardens! There is not a word spoken that escapes their greedy little ears! What dark and perverse things do they do in their little homes in the ground? No, you would never suspect it from such a diminutive people, but the smile of a Hhalfling is the leering grimace of a monster, I tell you..."

The old man's voice had become impassioned and loud, and he had stopped looking at Lutz as he ranted on.

With the old man's attention diverted, Lutz carefully put his hat on and quietly snuck out the door and into the streets, leaving the old man to his delusions.

Illuminati

Groups known collectively as the *Illuminati* exist in the imagination rather than in any reality. *Illuminati* are usually imagined as the ultimate secret society: groups that can exert incredible influence and control society for their own secret machinations with none the wiser. These groups are claimed to control the heads of state and religions as puppets, manipulating them to carry out the *Illuminati*'s plans for domination of society. Although these accusations have been levelled at Chaos cults, no Chaos cult has ever come close to claiming, much less exerting, such extensive power. The distances entailed, problems of communication, and many other structural problems endemic to life in the Old World would undermine such an effort if ever undertaken.

One group may exist that loosely fits this description. Only after decades of searching will one even begin to find hints of the existence of such a group. Rumours claim that a people older than even the Elves, ones with unimaginable power that sailed the stars as people now sail the seas, long ago visited or lived in this world. They knew of a great disaster that would befall their people, and left behind items of power to carry on their legacy. These items would compel their owners to carry out duties for the ancient masters. What these duties could be, none know. It is stated that those who do carry out their charges can then use these artefacts freely, and that they are endowed with great knowledge and power and discover a truth unknown to the rest of the world. These illuminated individuals are said to recognise each other on sight, and, when encountered, issues of the utmost significance are discussed and the future of countries and continents hang in the balance.

Not a moment to lose!

The alarm had been sounded, allowing those few important seconds needed to flee the haven. This cellar, beneath a nondescript building, was a flurry of activity. In seconds the trapdoor leading to the sewers below

had been thrown open and people hastily gathered together papers and a few possessions. Thinking quickly, Richard had already splashed lamp oil over those papers that they could not carry with them.

Above there was a crash as the Duc's soldiers entered the building, and they could be heard trampling through the house yelling as they ransacked the house above smashing furniture.

Henri looked at the printing press and the pamphlets littered about. He regretted the loss of these important tools; however the press and the pamphlets could be replaced, but not the fervour and intelligence that formed the poetics of the revolution. The occupants of the room hurriedly disappeared through the trapdoor leading to the sewer. Henri stopped to take one glance at the room, and then looked at Richard, who was standing there with a guttering torch awaiting the order. Henri simply nodded, and flames lit the room. He descended into the darkness below. Moments later Richard joined him and they splashed through the filth to the home of a sympathiser of the upcoming revolution.

The cronies of the Duc would have to content themselves with the cinders and burning embers that the revolutionaries were leaving behind for them.

Doomsday Cult - In the heart of The Empire, Altdorf itself, there is a secret doomsday cult that refers to itself simply as *The Divine*. Their leader is a fallen Sigmarite Priest who, inspired by Sigmar's ascendance, believes that he and his score of followers can become gods as well. At present they believe the Chaos Gates will one day open forth, heralding a day of doom. However, they believe that Sigmar turned the stuff of Chaos into divine energy, and they seek through ritual to open up the gates of Chaos to render Chaos inert, transforming themselves into gods, thus creating a new dawn on earth. They earnestly believe that they are prepared now and seek to open up the gates to challenge the gods while the cult is at the height of its powers.



John Keane

Many profit from the power that the Emperor wields. Although the Emperor has many enemies constantly seeking to undermine his power, there are those who rely upon his patronage for their welfare. For these people the Emperor's interests are *their* interests as well. These Imperial clients are the functionaries that support the Emperor, his bureaucrats, ministers, officers, Reiksguard, and other government officials.

One group in particular has taken a keen interest in the Emperor's continued well being, a group known as the Gryphon's Umbra, or the Umbra for short. The Gryphon's Umbra has one primary goal: to protect the institution of the 'Emperor'. The Gryphon's Umbra constantly intervene in plots and conspiracies against the Emperor and have saved the lives of Emperors a number of times, yet none but the Gryphon's Umbra

are aware of their efforts on the Emperor's behalf. Some observers have noted a shadowy group around the Emperor, but this group is dismissed as merely cronies of the Emperor.

The Umbra should not be mistaken for being personally devoted to the reigning Emperor, but rather their loyalty is to the institution rather than the individual. Indeed if an Emperor should be deemed weak, than it is the Gryphon's Umbra's responsibility to remove an ineffective Emperor and make way for a candidate that they feel is more suitable according to their criteria. With this in mind, they have long developed various plots to dispose of such an Emperor while remaining beyond suspicion. The truth of the matter is that this group's minor success has lulled its members into a false sense of confidence and they see themselves as the final say in what is good for the Empire.

History

It was formed during the independence of the Wasteland when the Emperor's few able administrators feared that Emperor Dieter's incompetence would result in the collapse of The Empire and the loss of their own political power; consequently they played a small but important role in the resulting change of Emperor. The conspirators then decided that a group should remain close to the Emperor to ensure that such events never again occur.

Since then the Gryphon's Umbra has continued to exist, with its membership carefully monitoring assistants and peers for those that might prove worthy candidates. The Gryphon's Umbra has continued to carefully watch both the Emperor and his enemies, and have at times played roles in not only undermining Emperor's enemies, but those policies of the Emperor's with which they disagree.

Membership

The core membership of the Umbra is never more than a dozen souls. Over the years the actual membership

has seen a slight decline in its individual members' influence.

Today the acknowledged leader of the group is Arch Lector Kaslan of the Cult of Sigmar. The Gryphon's Umbra has always had members of the Cult of Sigmar, since they have a vested interest in keeping the institution of Emperor under their control. With the exception of Arch Lector Kaslan's assistant (and co-conspirator) who is also a former Church Inquisitor, no other members of the church are aware of the group. Arch Lector Kaslan personal motivation is to ensure that the Emperor continues to work closely with the Cult of Sigmar.

The other highly esteemed member of the Gryphon's Umbra is the Captain of the Reiksguard, a man of noble birth whose position is critical to the Umbra's influence. Although his title is primarily a political one, he takes his position seriously.

One of the least powerful conspirators is the Emperor's Personal Physician, Doktor Hoeckmann. Although he has relatively little influence in the Gryphon's Umbra and his influence on the Emperor is unremarkable, his position is strategic for the future plans of the Umbra.

Secrecy

All Umbra members take a vow of secrecy and to date none have revealed their role. Some of its members have been compromised at times; one member was killed by an unknown group of suspected conspirators, another hidden away in an asylum by concerned Gryphon's Umbra conspirators, and the most recent exposure was a member dismissed from the Imperial court for corruption while siphoning funds for the group.

The Gryphon's Umbra has a strong incentive to remain unnoticed, for if their political enemies or even their allies discovered them their lives would be forfeit.

Since they normally work closely together in their work and share similar social circles, they are an intimate group with strong bonds. When they do meet, none suspect conspiracy, simply perceiving their interactions to be part of their formal and professional duties, providing them with ideal cover for their meetings.

Influence

The Gryphon's Umbra has a powerful but restricted influence in the politics of the Empire. The Umbra has significant influence over the Emperor and his apparatus, but is careful to influence him in a discreet fashion. Their power over the Emperor is subtle and subdued, but should they wish to dispose of the Emperor, few others are so well placed. Although the Emperor's life is in their hands, significant political power still eludes the group for much of the power in politics lies in the hands of the various Electors over whom the Umbra has no direct power at all.

The Gryphon's Umbra can influence appointments within the Imperial Bureaucracy, but their power is miniscule compared to the influence wielded by powerful noble families, including the Electors who will truly decide who the next Emperor should be. As the Gryphon's Umbra is composed primarily of minor nobles and other people of similar status, their influence within the noble dynasties is limited. They are however unwilling to allow powerful nobles into their organisation for fear they will use the Gryphon's Umbra for their own political and noble machinations.

Means and Ends

In their role to protect the Emperor the Gryphon's Umbra relies upon many of the institutions already in place, the Reiksguard, Sigmarite and Imperial Inquisitors, and Witch Hunters. For political foes, the Gryphon's Umbra relies upon spreading of rumour, hearsay, and the like to discredit foes. Those who are persistent or powerful are observed until some sordid detail is noted that can be used to blackmail or reveal

publicly through interested third parties. If there is no evidence of wrongdoing, evidence of such misdeeds may be planted.

Their own political power is important, and to maintain this the Gryphon's Umbra relies heavily upon favouring its own membership, giving each other and their allies recommendations, pay raises, and advancement to higher positions. They use patronage and favours to win influence over their peers and equals and allow the Gryphon's Umbra to exploit the resulting obligations owed by non-members.

Resources

Although the Gryphon's Umbra never number over twelve, they have considerable resources at their disposal. The membership is capable of mobilising military forces such as the Reiksguard if they ever felt such measures were necessary. Arch Lector Kaslan is capable of drawing upon not only the Sigmarite Priesthood, but also the associated groups.

The group also employs the Imperial bureaucratic machinery as cover for its activities and a means to control others. Enemies find themselves hindered by the need to fill out this or that form, acquire permission from distant authorities, attain affidavits to be signed by non-existent functionaries, pay outrageous fines or fees, and any number of other bureaucratic obstacles. Allies on the other hand will find that things can be accomplished for them effortlessly.

Furthermore the Gryphon's Umbra can rely upon its former members to come out of retirement to offer advice and assist in exerting influence. It should not be surprising to note that all the Umbra's members retire from their government positions extremely wealthy with large pensions. The current members themselves have amassed a small fortune between themselves, and the group has access to large sums that can be acquired quickly without raising suspicions.

Historical Conspiracies

The GM may want to introduce conspiracies that changed the history of the world, some fictional, some real, some no-one will ever know the truth of.

Conspiracies that Were

Some already exist, such as the secession of Marienburg, the Pleasure Cults of Ulthuan, or the machinations of the Skaven that created the crusades. The GM can create some of his own to give his campaign world a unique feel. Perhaps the elevation of Sigmar to god was not true but a conspiracy by nobility to hold onto their power. Perhaps the collapse of the warp gates resulted from a secret pact between Elves and Daemons, or the Dwarves had secret assistance from the Dark Elves during the Dwarf-Elf war. The repercussions of these sorts of actions should still resonate in the Old World today.

Conspiracies that Never Were

Some commonly accepted conspiracies may be completely false. Perhaps it is commonly believed that the nobility supported and used the Emperor Boris the Incompetent as a puppet and that the blame for that dark era lies upon the shoulders of the nobility, when in truth the Emperor was just as responsible for what happened as the nobility. Nonetheless Imperial allies point to this as an example for the need of a powerful Imperial family and weakened nobility.

People will constantly fabricate secret and shadowy forces in the past as a rationale for much of the suffering in the world, and thus conspiracies abound. However, few of these conspiracies are little more than coincidence linked by suspicion or ignorance, but can be just as powerful and dangerous as any true conspiracy.

The Conspiracy that Continues

Possibly one of the longest conspiracies in existence is one conceived a thousand years ago, whose creator still carries out his conspiracy, known as the Order of Wolves' Teeth and is centred in the heart of the Adumson estate in southern Middenland. The conspirator at the heart of this was, or still is a former advisor for a noble in the Reikland, Bernhardt Schlossel. Imprisoned and persecuted by Sigmarites he eventually fled his prison an embittered man and retired to estates run by an Ulrican noble who ran a small chapter house for the Wolves of Ulric, a small knightly order. A man broken by his torture, he was unable to participate in their military campaigns, but he found a means of spreading his hate.

Bernhardt discovered a secret passage way between the walls that ran behind the Chapel of Ulric. He carefully chiselled holes in the wall behind the chapel decorations and during late night devotionals would whisper forth his charges that Sigmar was a heresy and an affront to Ulric. Those praying late at night would often be struck by these revelations and the locale soon became a hotbed of anti-Sigmar sentiments. One night Bernhardt died in the secret passageway, but so great was his will that the remained there, whispering his secrets. He wanders the secret passageways listening in on conversations about the current politics of The Empire and continues to whisper his venomous proclamations about Sigmar. The Adumson estate has become an Ulrican Monastery and the pronouncements in the Chapel are taken as the word of Ulric, and the icy cold ever present by the altar as proof of the Ulric's divine presence.

Questions Regarding Secret Societies

A GM can use the following questions to help develop a cult or secret society.

History

- Who founded the society?
- When was it founded?
- Why create this society?
- What happened to the founders?
- What myths surround the society?

Society Identity

- What is the society's official name?
- What is the society's common use name?
- By what name do outsiders refer to the society?
- What language do its members use?
- What symbols do they use?
- How do members recognise one another?

Leadership

- Who is the society's leader(s) today?
- How much power do the leaders have within the society?
- How much power do the leaders have outside the society?
- What schisms exist between the leaders?
- What differences exist between leaders and the membership?
- What secrets do the leaders know the members don't?

Agenda

- What is the society's agenda today?
- What measures does it take to fulfil its agenda?
- What other related agendas does the society pursue?
- Who would be opposed to their goal?

Membership

- How and where does it acquire its membership?
- How many members does it have?
- How are they initiated?
- What is expected of the membership?
- What are the responsibilities of the members?
- What are the benefits of membership?
- What rituals do they perform?
- Do they possess any artefacts or tomes, magical or non-magical?
- Is there a hierarchy in the organisation?
- How do members leave the society?
- How are relations between former and current members?
- How does the society fund itself?
- What measures does the society take to conceal its identity?
- What rules govern behaviour among members?
- How is morale in the society?

Assets

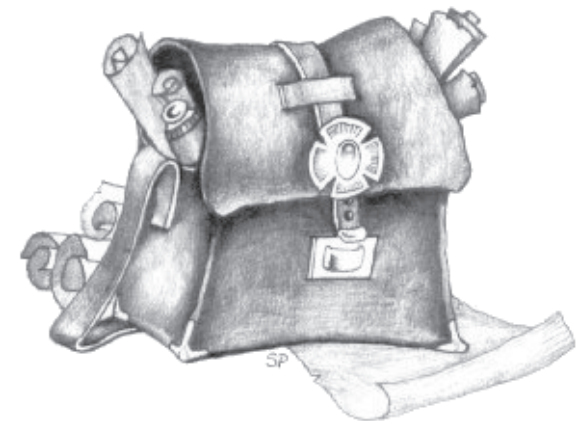
- Academic Influence/Power?
- Criminal Influence/Power?
- Flunkies/Lackies/Patsies
- Hired help? (Mercenaries, thugs, wizards?)
- Information?
- Lackeys?
- Legal Influence/Power?
- Magical Artefacts?
- Magical Influence/Power?
- Military Influence/Power?
- Money?
- Political Power?
- Popular Influence/Power?
- Professional Influence/Power?
- Religious Artefacts?
- Religious Influence/Power?
- Zealous Membership (Willing to die, or other acts)

Society Relations

- What differences exist between members and leaders?
- What differences exist between members?
- What measures do members take to conceal their identities from each other?
- What betrayals have occurred in the past?
- What betrayals are brewing currently?
- What happens to members betraying the society's trust?

Relations with Outsiders

- Would society disapprove of this society?
- Is this society persecuted?
- Is this society used by another?
- What enemies does this society have?
- What measures does this society take to maintain secrecy?
- Do any outsiders know of the society?
- What happens to outsiders who learn of the society?
- Is this society illegal?
- Does this society know of other secret societies?



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