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# Secret Societies

by Landon J. Winkler



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by Landon J. Winkler

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## Secret Societies

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# Introduction

This book is intended to assist GMs in using secret societies in their game worlds, and as a source of ideas. Each world should have its secret societies, whether those organizations are enemies, neutral powers, allies, or patrons to your PCs. Secret societies have existed in our world since the dawn of civilization, and failing to include them in game civilizations is a disservice to the world you're trying to create for the players.

When using this book, it is important to remember that secret societies are collections of people, not piles of statistics. The power of belonging to a secret society is reflected in knowledge and social confrontations, rather than combat. As such, it's important to consider the social realities of your world when you introduce secret societies.

You won't need to read this entire book, let alone in order, to use the information it contains. Using one of the detailed societies doesn't require knowing anything about the others, so don't feel rushed. However, Chapter 2 provides some good guidance on how to get the most out of secret societies in your games, even if your games regularly include them.

Six societies from the real world are fully detailed, accompanied by notes and game information to help you mold them into your game. These six are ready for immediate game use, or can be adjusted and altered to meet your exact specifications. However, if you prefer to build your own societies from scratch, dozens of societies are provided for reference and example, along with tables to provide inspiration and guidance.

This book is divided into five chapters.

**Chapter 1** is the introduction you're reading right now.

**Chapter 2** covers how to use secret societies, both imagined and from the real world, in your games.

**Chapter 3** examines six real-world secret societies and their use in game:

- ▶ The Assassins, a divergent sect of Islam that controlled the Middle East from their mountain fortresses through the perfected art of assassination.
- ▶ Aum Shinrikyo, a religion begun by one frustrated man whose drive for power led to a massive secret society and the release of Sarin gas in Tokyo subways.
- ▶ The Freemasons, a revolutionary society that was once a massive power and still looms high in conspiracy theory.
- ▶ The Knights Templar, an order of knights during the Crusades forcibly dissolved by the Catholic Church under accusations of dark magics and other misdeeds.
- ▶ Mossad, the preeminent Israeli secret police, representing the furthest possible reach of government power.
- ▶ The Thule Society, a secret cabal largely responsible for the rise of Nazi Germany, with its own mythology and system of magic.

**Chapter 4** takes a look at a wide range of other secret societies in shorter form.

**Chapter 5** provides tables and terms to help apply the lessons of real-world secret societies to the process of making new ones for gaming purposes.

## Genre

Three genres or time periods are considered throughout the book: fantasy, modern, and science fiction. Secret societies are in no way limited to these three, but most games can take the advice from at least one of these genres. If all else fails, read all three to choose which ideas and concerns best fit your setting.



# Secret Societies in Gaming

This chapter covers all aspects of using secret societies as a GM. Much of the guidance provided here applies equally well to all settings and societies, but separate advice is also provided for special situations. The chapter is divided into four sections.

The first section of this chapter serves as a general guide to using a secret society in any game, providing information on the concepts that make secret societies what they are, setting the mood and revealing a society through the course of a game, and handling the real-world connections your players may have with societies.

The next section explains how to handle and adapt secret societies in different genres, specifically the typical *Dungeons & Dragons* fantasy setting, modern-day settings, and generalized science fiction. Secret societies can and do appear in any genre, however, so a GM using a genre not specifically covered in this book should read through the advice and determine what parts are relevant for her campaign.

The third part of the chapter covers different control levels possible for a society in the setting. Situations are discussed ranging from one society that controls the entire setting to many societies with some control resting outside their hands.

The final section examines the many roles a secret society can play in your game, what challenges those roles present the PCs, and some advice on the challenges you can expect in return.

## Running a Game with Secret Societies

Bringing a secret society to life in your game can be quite a challenge. Having real world examples helps a lot, clearly showing what direction history took the society. Beyond those examples, a few guidelines and basic principles will take you the rest of the way.

### Women in Secret Societies

Traditionally, most secret societies have been exclusively male. However, there's no reason that has to be true in your game. The easiest way to decide is to consider the role of the secret society and the culture it resides in. A society drawing from the social elite of a matriarchal society would likely be exclusively female, for example.

## Living Conspiracies

Secret societies are, first and foremost, made up of people. For a secret society to seem alive, those people need a reason to join the society. The society's past, symbols, and philosophy must create a story that those people can believe in. Internal divisions, used correctly, will also show the players that they're dealing with an organization of people, not piles of statistics, and offer the party a chance to beat the society at its own game.

Why do people join secret societies? It varies from culture to culture, but there are a few common answers. Often, members are just looking for spiritual wholeness or answers to philosophical questions. Some people join for the power or connections they think membership will provide.

Those societies openly loyal to a cause gain recruits through their ties to that cause. Open affection or friendship among members entices many otherwise lonesome individuals in the modern day. Certain societies can also gain members through tradition, especially along family lines.

It's important to consider how a society gets its recruits, especially when NPC members appear. Some societies, like the Freemasons, offer several reasons to join. For those organizations, consider how members with different motives are treated and why major NPCs joined. A Mason who joined for the business contacts will approach the order far differently than one who joined because his father and grandfather were members.

Some societies are more difficult to play than others, especially those with beliefs wildly different than the GM's. The easiest option, short of only playing those societies you agree with, is to consider every situation hypothetically. Ask yourself "If I believed in this, what would I do?" After you get comfortable with this method, it will become easier to fall into society personas.

## Societal Teachings

Members who actually take their society seriously are deeply affected by its teachings. On the other hand, even those individuals who joined the society for spurious reasons take home some effects of the teachings. Each society has its own teachings, but three practices are fairly common: initiation, oaths of secrecy, and simulated death.

Beyond these general aspects, each secret society has its own body of teachings. The society's basic philosophy, symbols, and history all affect its members. For PCs or important NPCs, it's best to think about how each of these aspects affects that

## The Basic Teachings

### Initiation

Almost every secret society has some rite that separates members from outsiders. Usually initiation is where the oaths of secrecy and simulated death, described below, are applied as well. Many societies also split into multiple levels of initiation, with progressively more trying rites, stricter oaths, and more access to secret information.

The signs, handshakes, or passphrases used to identify other members are usually taught during initiation. Some extremely secure societies will change the identification method by region or even for each meeting to keep one slip from exposing the whole society. Changing recognition methods like this is more common in societies attached to governments or those that are actively being hunted. More open societies have far less security.

Another important lesson of most initiations is trust. Members of a secret society are expected to trust their fellow members, or at least their superiors. Many orders also expect their members to abandon old ties and trust no one outside the society.

Societies range widely in their initiation rites. Some have a simple swearing-in or party to accept the new member, where others will take weeks to break down the new member's personality and rebuild him from the ground up according to the society's ideals. Members of the latter societies can be especially hard to for outsiders to deal with, since those members will rarely accept outside authority or respond to external pressure.

### Oaths of Secrecy

Secret societies always have some kind of oath to secrecy, for obvious reasons, which usually includes

some gruesome description of what happens to oath breakers. Most society members are good to their word in normal circumstances, even if the consequences are known to be fictional. Belief in the consequences of oaths that are truly enforced create an even more tight-lipped environment.

Even if a society started off as a harmless endeavor, the atmosphere of secrecy creates a perfect environment for shady acts. In many cultures, secret societies have been used as forums for free speech or revolution. In other cultures, conspiracy and criminal activity have been and continue to be the norm.

### Simulated Death

Societies with an interest in the mystical tend to have a simulated death somewhere during the path of initiation. Often this represents leaving an old life behind or a voyage to another realm. Sometimes it's just another trust-building exercise. Other times, simulated death is used to great effect, as when the Assassins showed their initiates Paradise.

When average secret society members have passed their simulated deaths, they generally end up with less fear of actual death, among the other lessons taught. With more believable deaths, the fear can be almost entirely sublimated. Again the Assassins provide an excellent example, with their members being more than willing to die for the society's cause.

In a more fantastic setting, this may include an actual death and rebirth or a very believable simulated one. Knowledge of what awaits beyond the veil of death could affect people in many ways. A rush to martyrdom, a sudden change in lifestyle, abject despair, and renewed faith are some of the more likely options.





character. Even for lesser NPCs, choosing some way in which the society has shaped them can be a great help.

Basic philosophy causes the most straightforward changes in an individual's behavior. A secret society that advocates freedom and equality wouldn't take terribly kindly to slavery, for example. Some organizations have beliefs that are a bit harder to understand, like the Thule Society's confidence in Aryan superiority, but still affect the society's members just as strongly.

Symbolism usually affects secret society members on a more subconscious level. A society that constantly compares its enemies to animals, for example, would end up with members that consider their enemies to be subhuman, and would probably have a less friendly view towards animals as well.

If the symbols are not covered by oaths of secrecy, members might work the symbolism in their daily speech as well. Members of Aum Shinrikyo might refer to a particularly wise leader as "touched by the Clear Light," both marking the speaker as a member and possibly providing an insight into the group's philosophy.

### The Lessons of History

History is obviously important to those who participated in the various events, but it can also have an effect on the society as a whole. If there was some major change in the society during the recent past, you should consider how the society's important members dealt with that change. This is doubly important if the PC group has managed to make some major change in the society, as the players will be expecting some impact.

The impact of history is usually seen in the actions of individual members. If your players reveal the leader of a society as an imposter, many reactions will form among the members. Those members truly faithful to the society's cause might abandon the society, believe they are being tested, or construct elaborate stories about the leaders not truly being imposters. Members who joined for personal benefit will probably remain as long as the benefits remain. Meanwhile, you should consider the decisions and actions of important NPCs with thought towards their personalities and reasons for joining.

Events further back in history will be revealed in the society's philosophy. For example, a society with a history of betrayals and infiltrators will be very careful when choosing new members and provide as little information as possible about the society's secrets. An order with a long history of success with a certain tactic, such as assassination or hiding from larger threats, will likely use that tactic when confronted with problems.

### Internal Divisions

Internal divisions are one last factor that can help make your secret society seem alive. Even in a society that desires absolute conformity among its members, there will generally be some amount of internal tension. Some secret societies, like the Freemasons, are actually a number of different societies grouped under one convenient label and seen as one entity only by outsiders. Other societies that act together still have internal conflicts.

Societies often divide along personal cliques, geographical areas, outside loyalties, and philosophical differences. Most of these divisions are open knowledge among the society, although sometimes secret cliques form within the society (see *Wheels within Wheels* within..., page 10) Either way, most factions will still work together against outside threats, but many may engage in underhanded activity against other factions. For an internal division to be meaningful, the society must play a prominent role in the campaign and the division must be revealed carefully. Evidence that parts of the society are working against each other, perhaps followed by an infiltration or questioning of the society's beliefs, is usually the best option.

Turning factions within the society against each other can be as difficult for the PCs as you'd like, but words alone will usually not turn the tide. Each side will have considered the option before and will have its reasons for rejecting division. However, evidence of betrayal, a promise of aid, or signs of weakness from the other side may all touch off conflict.

### Revealing Secret Societies

Secret societies, by their nature, should begin their presence in the campaign in the shadows. Even if the society's open actions are visible, there is always more under the surface. This brings up the obvious challenge of revealing the secret society without making the investigation too easy for the players.

Getting the players on the trail of the society is usually the hardest part. Once players realize something is going on that people don't want them to know about, the group will usually keep following the trail until they've either hit a brick wall or get distracted. If the party does fall off the trail, another encounter with the society or a new clue will normally get them back on. Some players will need extra prompting to start chasing again where they failed, so the encounter may need to be especially vicious.

One way to reveal a secret society is through its actions in the public arena. Sudden deaths and obvious assassinations are the classic reasons. If those have become cliché, history shows us that societies have also been revealed through government corruption, strange business acquisitions, anonymous aid, and various criminal activities.

Having PCs deal with several members of the society, then allowing them to make the connection is also a fairly common technique. The party will need some way to connect the individuals. Tattoos or jewelry with society symbols work, but are overdone. Communications from a single individual, a certain way of dressing or acting, ritual tools at members' homes, and a distinctive style of fighting or magic can give away members in a less trite manner.

One of the most common ways for real world secret societies to be revealed is through failed recruitment attempts. These attempts rarely take the "join us or die" route, but are rather more gradual affairs. The individual will be invited for some sort of fairly innocuous activity, like membership in a social club or discussion group. She will then be watched for some time and, if found worthy, approached by the society.

Some societies don't recruit directly, instead leaving signs (obvious or well-hidden) to attract prospective members. These signs can easily draw the party to the society or serve as a clue when several people in the same field of study begin acting very strangely. An excellent example of these signs are the Rosicrucian manuscripts, or pamphlets with a small taste of the society's knowledge and philosophy, with the promise that there is more to come upon joining the society.

Renegade members or outside investigators will sometimes betray the society to the public. This hook can be hard to use correctly. The informant will go to someone she trusts and thinks can help her. Unless the PCs are exceptionally trusted members of the community, this means they will often find out through the authorities or media. Alternately, if the PCs have earned the informant's trust, they may be approached directly.

Another easily overlooked option is that one or more PCs might be part of the secret society. You should work out with these players how they joined the society, who they know in the society, and what they know about the society. For an interesting campaign, the renegade member mentioned in the hook above could be a PC.

It's important to remember that, for all their power, secret societies are still made up of people and people will make mistakes. This is doubly true when multiple secret societies attempt to manipulate the same arena. Two societies trying to kill the same man or vying for control of a company makes the events far more likely to seem suspect.

Once the party is on the trail, it's usually easy enough to keep them investigating. There's only one important thing to keep in mind: your hints aren't as obvious to the players as you might think. Consider a few possible ways to find the society, even if you don't detail them up, for when the players miss what you thought was an obvious clue. Another somewhat sneakier option is to let the players stew after missing a clue for a while, then give them some insight when they make their next attempt at investigation.

Consider your players' tone and skills when you plant clues. A group of loud players that aren't accustomed to listening to NPCs will probably never notice the subtle vocal clues you offer. Similarly, a group that meets only rarely might need you to remind them that the pattern on the dagger they just found is the same as the one before.

### Wheels within Wheels within...

It's very common for secret societies to exist within other secret societies or public organizations. For example, many people say the inner circles of the Freemasons still follow the creed of the Knights Templar. Similarly, some conspiracy theorists say that entire companies are controlled by cabals of Freemasons.

This layering of societies within other societies is a very useful tool in game, as it creates shifting loyalties with all sorts of internal intrigue and tension. However, you can only layer the web so deep before the players start to think it's silly or simply lose interest.

Two layers in from the open organization is the deepest you should go in most games. This doesn't count the layers and ranks within the various organizations, just the number of totally separate orders. From the earlier examples, let's say the company is run by Freemasons who are in turn controlled by Templars. The Freemasons may control many companies and the Templars might control a few other secret societies, but the Templars are free from external control. This is just a guideline, and if the situation demands it – especially if the players catch on – you should feel free to slip another layer in there.

Also keep in mind that some societies have multiple organizations within them, each partially controlling the front society's resources. Continuing the previous examples, let's say the Templars control some Freemasons, but perhaps other groups of Masons are manipulated by the Thule Society. The two controlling societies would divide the Masons' resources and provide a difficult puzzle for your PCs without making them fight through an endless series of societies.

### Real Life Connections

Chances are pretty good that some member of your group has a relative who's a Freemason, or perhaps someone who thinks that Mossad is the greatest thing since sliced bread. This issue is obviously unique to real-world secret societies. Most players don't mind having societies they're familiar with cast in a strange light, and some even specifically like it. However, it's important to keep the players' feelings in mind so that everyone can have fun.

The easiest way to deal with this is to change the name of the society and make a few other tweaks as you're transferring it over to your setting. For fantasy settings, you should probably do this anyway. In Chapter 3, there are notes on how to adapt each society to various settings. In modern and science fiction settings, though, you may want your PCs to be actually dealing with the unaltered real-world society.

In that case, find out what you can about the players and whether they would mind using the society. You might simply mention that you're considering using some real world conspiracies and see what your players say. You can just stay away from any societies that seem to be particularly sore spots with your players. If any players have obvious ties to or fondness for one group, try to cast that society in a positive light. If you do use part of that society as an enemy group, try to focus on the corruption as something that sets that particular faction apart from the rest of the society.



If all else fails and you don't want to tip your hand, keep the societies as true to form as possible. The Freemasons are the most likely group to have ties to your players, so keep them on the side of the righteous or ensure that most of the society's members are unaware of the corruption.

The other side of this coin is that some secret societies are fairly foul, the Thule Society being an obvious example. While these sorts of societies make fantastic villains if not overused, be sure to consider the players' reactions strongly before including them as good or even neutral forces in the setting.

### Conspiracies Through the Ages

Many different time periods and genres are used throughout gaming. All of them can contain secret societies, but those societies have to adapt to changes in technology or supernatural tools. The advent of modern communications has had a great effect on how societies must operate, as would divinations, telepathy, or other supernatural means of gathering information.

Although certain secret societies began and grew in different times, most of their philosophies apply across the ages. Some societies, like Mossad, will be associated with a specific country, religion, corporation, or faction. As that society's host waxes and wanes, the society's power will likewise change.

### Fantasy

In settings modeled after the Middle Ages, secret societies have an edge. Geographical divisions between towns and nations make it easy for a society to seize control of one area without alerting those around it. Many societies can keep control of their areas over relatively long time spans, expanding only when the opportunity presents itself.

Secret societies also offer something few other institutions in the Middle Ages did: a chance to advance beyond your in-born station in life. Many fantasy settings provide means of gaining position other than birthright or ignore this problem all together, but secret societies still provide an excellent opportunity for personal advancement.

However, the facet of the fantasy genre which will have the most impact on a secret society is magic. When an organization is concerned with security and secrecy, even the most basic divination spells pose a potential threat, and more powerful magic has the potential to propel the society's agendas or bring it crashing down. Any successful secret society in settings with this kind of magic will have members familiar with it, both for protection and for the society's own use.

Not responding, changing the subject, or telling a partial truth can defeat *discern lies* and most other similar effects. However, the party may eventually corner subjects and interrogate them with one such spell. At that point, the subject has already lost and his best course of action is either to not talk or try to make the PCs jump to conclusions with their detections.

*Detect thoughts* and other powers that read surface thoughts are usually pretty harmless. Unless the PCs catch a stray thought about the society by pure luck, there's little to be had outside the

society's meetings. Even interrogating a secret society member while reading his surface thoughts will show mostly thoughts about trying to avoid breaking oaths of secrecy and the horrible things that may happen if the oaths are broken.

*Detect evil* and its counterparts will only cause problems for societies with extremely selective alignment choices. Most societies have a fairly wide range of alignments, but tend towards the lawful end of the spectrum more than any other. Thus, spells that detect a lawful alignment are slightly useful, but still force the caster to sort through town guards, politicians and normal, law-abiding citizens to find the society's members.

*Scrying* and similar effects are generally only useful when the target is at a secret meeting place. Societies with any concern for secrecy will protect their meeting places against scrying through whatever means are available. The society's members may carefully apply spells that protect against scrying, build their meeting places from materials with anti-scrying properties, keep plants or creatures that block scrying in the area, or they may have forged a bargain with a god or dark power to protect their meeting places. Particularly thorough societies may apply several of these protections.

*Charm*, *dominate*, and *suggestion* spells are dangerous interrogation tools. Members of secret societies generally won't tell even best friends about the plans, so *charm* isn't terribly useful unless the target can be convinced that the caster has a right to know. *Dominate* and *suggestion* may cause problems if worded very well, but keep in mind the fact that a member revealing society secrets might very well qualify as a suicidal action.

*Commune* and *contact other plane* will gain whatever information that the god or extraplanar creature knows. If the society has remained hidden from that entity's followers and generally kept a low profile, the entity may easily know nothing. These spells will be more helpful about societies with long histories or ones that had a higher profile at some point in the past. There is also the chance that god or outsider seeks to protect the society, refusing to answer or giving intentionally misleading information. Societies that directly serve or follow a god are most likely to receive this sort of protection.

*Speak with dead* and returning the dead to life can cause a serious problem, given the tendency of many societies (and individuals) to kill people to keep secrets. The body would need to be hidden, damaged, or destroyed to neutralize these spells. Secret societies will take this into account. If *soul bind* is available, societies may use it in extreme circumstances.

On the other side of the coin, there are many spells that the society will be able to use towards its own ends. Some of these spells merely counter irritating divinations, while others help advance secrecy.

Spells that negate divinations are always helpful, such as *undetectable alignment*, *misdirection*, and *glibness*. Even more powerful spells like *mind blank* and *anti-magic field* can be used if the situation demands it, such as a society member on a high-

risk mission. *False vision* can be especially useful for protecting meeting places.

Spells of disguise, such as *disguise self* and *veil*, provide members the ability to conceal their identity while on society business or perhaps even from other members. Also, any methods of communication without chance of interception, like telepathy, *secret page*, and *illusory script* are precious commodities. Spells that allow escape are also extremely useful for the leaders of secret societies, ideally used while intruders are approaching, rather than after a drawn-out fight with said intruders.

Abilities like *modify memory* also stand out as exceptionally useful. Removing memories of certain incriminating incidents, adding memories of things that seem reasonable but can be easily disproved in order to weaken someone's credibility, slipping in memories of other "members" to make the target unwilling to approach them for help, or making the society seem much more pleasant, are only a few of many interesting options.

### Modern

As societies in fantasy settings are concerned with magical detection and countermeasures, the societies in modern settings must focus on the technological side of things. The most important consideration with modern secret societies is how they deal with the ease of modern communication. The sheer interconnection in the modern world puts secret societies at risk of exposure.

There are a few tactics that societies can take to protect themselves against this risk. Older societies are likely to merely tighten security, hoping that if no one knows about the society no one can spread the news. This isn't the best solution unless the society is involved in strictly legal activities; otherwise, literally any security leak becomes a grave risk to the society.

With instant and ubiquitous communications, hundreds of people can find out about the security leak within minutes. If the evidence is damning enough, the authorities and media can become involved almost immediately.

Another solution is to hide in plain sight. A small, eccentric group might easily be ignored if it doesn't take obvious action against the established order. The society can even circulate horrible baseless rumors about itself to make any accusations seem ridiculous.

A society can easily fake its own demise, especially if it is willing to sacrifice some of its number. Any accusations of the society's survival will be filed into the "conspiracy nutcase" folder and never thought of again. All the society has to do is lay low for a few years and let some harmless poseurs take the society's old name to make the illusion complete.

More powerful societies can take control of the media. If the media ignores secret societies and drones on with its normal white noise, only a tiny fraction of modern humanity will question the deception.

A society in the modern world also has an important decision to make: how its members should communicate. Modern communication with cell phones and e-mail allow for instant communication, but also pose a security risk. Any society using them must focus a great deal of attention on cryptography, both enabling encrypted communications and preventing cryptographic keys from falling into enemy hands.

Other options for communication exist for secret societies, however. More old-fashioned or security-minded societies may rely on couriers carrying encrypted messages, thus preventing electronic interception. Societies with access to supernatural communications are likely to use those, sending magical messages, spirits, or telepathic communications between its members. The most strict societies will only allow contact between its members, possibly disguised, at pre-planned meetings at secured sites. Although this method of communication can be terribly slow, messages can only be intercepted by well-placed infiltrators.

### Science Fiction

The future can be hard to pin down into one setting. However, in general, the same tricks needed in a modern setting are needed in the future as well. Communications are even more prevalent, and the technologies to secure and hack information evolve at a blazing rate. On the other hand, there is even more information available in futuristic settings, making it more difficult to find pertinent pieces and easier to discard conspiracy theories out of hand.

Although the glut of information will prevent secret societies from being noticed at first, it can also assist the society's hunters. Once someone is actually on the trail, it is easier to find more about the society. The only problem is sorting through the reams of data to find useful information.

An extremely dangerous sort of science fiction is one where the societies have the tools to monitor all that information and communication. A society involved in designing the computer or communication systems can implant specific security flaws to allow monitoring. Incredibly powerful computers under the society's hand exploiting those security flaws and sifting through the data to track enemies would be a setting where technology is the enemy.

Some other sorts of science fiction worlds, especially post-apocalyptic ones (like *Gamma World*) and some space operas (such as *Star Wars*), are more easily thought of as fantasy settings for this purpose. They have their own sorts of special abilities, which must be dealt with like their magical counterparts in the fantasy genre.

### Control Levels

When you decide to use secret societies in your game, you must choose how far the societies' control reaches. This choice is very important because it affects everything from the general tone of the game to how the societies themselves function.

Even during the course of the campaign, major discoveries and events can change the control level you present. The players

may discover that the organizations are actually stronger, weaker, or more divided than expected. A monolithic society can be shattered by internal struggles or one conspiracy could cement its control over all opposition.

There are three general control levels that the societies in your game can have. One society can have total control of the open power in the campaign, or that power might be shared but still completely held by secret societies. The third control level is to have many secret societies holding only a part of the open power of a setting, with the rest of the power resting in more legitimate hands. These three control levels are detailed below, each with adaptations for the various genres.

### Total Control, One Society

This control level describes one secret society that is somehow able to subvert all open power in the campaign setting. This is the realm of the most extreme conspiracy theories, depicting Freemasons, aliens, or some other force having an absolute stranglehold over society. Every bastion of open authority in the setting is directly or indirectly controlled by the secret society. The Assassins provide an excellent example of how this can occur, at least on a regional scale.

Paranoia is the natural offspring of this sort of setting. Every action and every word can be tracked by the conspiracy, should it bring its resources to bear. PCs in this setting must constantly be wary of attracting the conspiracy's wrath. Unless the PCs have world-shattering abilities of their own or are high-ranking tools of the conspiracy, they will generally not have the power to confront the organization directly.

If the party does have those tools at its disposal, this world-spanning conspiracy can provide an ultimate epic adversary for the PCs to face off against. An entire campaign can be formed around the discovery, investigation, and eventually destruction of such a conspiracy. After the society's power is broken, the PCs can become involved with threats from outside the original scope of the setting, help rebuild after the inevitable damage and chaos, or simply end the campaign on the note that they were ultimately victorious.

A secret society of this magnitude is hard to make believable, especially if the PCs are able to stand against it. The society needs to have some source of power completely beyond the people it controls. Powerful magic in a setting where no one else has access to it, direct intervention of a powerful god, technology far beyond that of the general populace, or even just control of the military in a setting-wide totalitarian state can grant this sort of control.

True control can also rest in the hands of those that created the world. If the world we see around us is the result of psychological conditioning, whoever controls the conditioning has total dominance over the world. If the setting is an illusion or some sort of pocket dimension, similar control can be achieved. Another way to make this society believable is to set the campaign entirely inside some fairly small area, like a single city or space station. A powerful secret society micromanaging everything inside a city is far easier to believe than one

controlling an entire world, although you should expect the PCs to attempt escape once they discover the conspiracy. The struggle to escape can be a campaign in itself, as could the party's continued struggle against the area's secret masters.

The setting is also restricted to having that one society as an absolute power. Any new society introduced must either be subservient to the main conspiracy, or it will completely change the power structure. As a GM, you should try to avoid changing the power structure mid-campaign unless it's as a direct result of the PCs' actions, as that can otherwise really cheapen the players' sense of accomplishment.

Societies of this power level can easily fail to notice, or care about, minor disruptions. However, to allow reasonably powerful PCs a chance to combat this sort of society, it needs a weakness. This will usually be related back to the source of the rulers' power, such as a set of rituals that will nullify the society's magic, or a device that confuses the technology used by the society. The weakness can also be a separate source of power that they have not yet learned to control.

Weaknesses, if the conspiracy is remotely aware of them, will be well-shielded. Research that could reveal the weakness will be halted, and mazes of contradictory information will be left in the research's place. You should detail in depth why the weakness hasn't been discovered yet. This serves the dual purpose of maintaining believability and showing what obstacles the PCs will find on the road to finding the society's weakness.

### Fantasy

Conspiracies that rule an entire world through dark power, and the downfall of such societies, are almost cliché in fantasy settings. Unless cliché is the goal, it's best to look at the other control levels. Another option is to have societies control the setting through more political means, as the Assassins or Freemasons might with their networks, or as part of a criminal empire.

The traditional dark power conspiracy will need some incredible power far beyond the norm for its world. In a world where divine magic is possible, the society may have its god directly intervening for it. When arcane magic is the primary tool, the society likely has archmagi at its disposal or controls the source of magic itself. Political and economic power, however, do not require to this sort of power escalation and are usually easier for players to confront.

Every society in fantasy, especially one so powerful, has to avoid divination. Part of the society's strength may come from a powerful method of avoiding such divination. Generations of a civilization depending on divinations revealing crimes and minor conspiracies will be ill-equipped to find a powerful conspiracy that their divinations lie about or fail to reveal, giving the society an easy path to power.

### Modern

Although this situation is often put forward by conspiracy theorists, it's difficult to make believable in your game. Like other settings, the modern world requires some source of power

outside normal ken. A modern secret society with powerful ritual magic, psionic abilities, science fiction technology, or true miracles might be able to manage complete control.

A major concern in the modern day is that given increasingly powerful communication, the setting encompassed almost has to be the entire world. The keystone of control will have to be media and education, causing ridicule of conspiracy theorists and generally controlling the peoples' awareness of the world. Even with that control, though, some supernatural component will usually be needed to maintain cohesive power.

If you seek a mundane solution to global control, worldwide media control would be the most likely avenue. Pushing a constant stream of petty conflicts would keep governments and individuals too occupied to see the society pulling the strings. Explaining media control mundanely is difficult but not impossible. A group of powerful media leaders could join together to cement their control, or some organization with enough wealth could buy and bribe media outlets one by one.

The Freemasons are most often credited with this level of control, through their extensive contacts and many powerful members. To truly explain total control from the Masons, however, some method of keeping the many lodges working together would need to be introduced. Some ancient ruling council could provide such a method, as could supernatural power or immortal leaders.

### Science Fiction

Only a few dystopian settings flesh out this idea in science fiction, but it shows some promise, especially in believability. In dark science fiction settings, especially those still set on Earth, progressively more power is gathered in the hands of the few. Just a few careful alliances and a secret society with complete control could be formed.

Science fiction conspiracies can have powers coming from many sources, although those societies will need media control as much as their modern counterparts. Extremely powerful technology, control of space travel (should the setting have it), or simply universal economic power concentrated in the hands of the super-rich can provide scientific reasons for the society's dominance. Powers from supernatural sources can also propel a society to total control, especially in a setting that has long denied the existence of the supernatural. Complete invasion of privacy with microscopic recording devices, replacement of the society's enemies with robots or clones, and mental control through cybernetic implants or psionics are all possibilities in this setting. Even more care will have to be taken in this setting to define what the conspiracy's technology can accomplish, and to give the PCs a chance.

### Total Control, Multiple Societies

In this scenario, the world is completely controlled from the shadows, but power is split between multiple organizations. A game truly rife with conspiracy can be given this control level, dividing up the setting between multiple organizations and allowing the players to explore their natures and conflicts throughout the campaign.

This control level is excellent for a special sort of paranoia. Shifting alliances and each person's unknown secret agenda can create an environment where everyone is suspect, even within one of the conspiracies. PCs can make considerable progress in this sort of setting, at least in beating back the societies they oppose.

However, with everything controlled by one conspiracy or another, it can be difficult to make much progress without a patron, and the whole quilt of conspiracies can be confusing. The confusion can usually be helped if you introduce the setting with three or four secret societies at the most. Five or more and most players will be too confused to maintain interest.

Keeping the number of societies down helps maintain the paranoia by forcing the players to consider which society controls each open organization. This, of course, only works if it's made clear to the players that everyone is dancing to the tune of some secret organization or another. It's best to let them discover that they live in this sort of world fairly quickly after you introduce conspiracy elements into the game. Otherwise it will just seem like the party is running into one secret society after another with no apparent reason.

Societies with this control level have divided up the world among themselves by accord, constant struggle, or tradition. Some societies will bring their control along corporate lines or dominate certain religious groups. Others, especially the traditional ones or those serving governments, focus on certain geographical areas. Certain groups instead gain as much power as they can in one domain, such as military power, energy sources, or computers.

Another option to consider is that there was once a single society that controlled everything, but it eventually collapsed to internal pressures. Each fragment of the old society will have whatever resources they were able to grab during the collapse. If this happened recently, the fragments may still be embroiled in secret wars to seize control of various resources.

How the societies divide their areas of control can help you decide which societies to introduce first. If the government of the PCs' city is controlled by Freemasons, several prominent companies are Mossad front organizations, the Templars have subverted all the major churches in the area, and control of other organizations is fought out between them, that tells you which groups will be immediately relevant and should be introduced earlier in the campaign. You can then decide the societies' relations to one another, forming the backdrop for the campaign.

With this control level, secret societies will often be brought into conflict with each other. Simply trying to expand their areas of control will bring them into direct opposition. Aside from societies' usual cloak-and-dagger operations, certain tactics have been shown to effectively change the balance of power in the past.

A society turning two of its enemies against each other can destroy one or both, but must be carried out with great secrecy,

because you run the risk of suddenly having two very irate foes. Another tactic is to undermine the opponent's area of control by covert strikes, rendering it obsolete (in areas such as technology or supernatural power), or scandalizing the target's companies, governments, and religions. Except for physical attacks, undermining areas of control is usually slow and difficult to resist.

Forced conversions of societal members are perhaps the most powerful tool when secret societies clash, although finding a target can be incredibly difficult. By taking a member of another secret society and bringing her into your own society, you gain inside knowledge of the other society and deprive that order of the resources it spent developing its agent. Kidnapping and brainwashing are often necessary for forced conversion, although bribery or threats will sometimes recruit spies within enemy organizations.

#### Fantasy

Many organizations present themselves as possible secret society fronts in fantasy settings. Any organization where orders are followed with little question make excellent fronts, with fantasy guilds, religions, and governments falling into that category. Several secret societies, like the Knights Templar and the Priory of Sion, have associations with certain bloodlines that would bring the societies into power if those bloodlines were to return to the throne.

Another option to consider with fantasy worlds is that racial lines are usually fairly distinct and can be used to divide areas of control. The Thule Society could easily integrate itself with the elven or dwarven ruling class, turning the nation's focus to destroying humans or some other hated race.

Many fantasy settings put great distance between areas of civilization. In a setting like that, a society can control a few towns or cities completely with little outside interference. A regional secret society will be involved in almost everything happening in its area. This approach also allows you to easily introduce societies of widely varying power levels as the PCs travel.

#### Modern

This sort of setting is common in conspiracy literature, although it usually depicts two societies at war with each other. A rich tapestry of societies ranging from the global societies to local cliques can cover the world. Normal events can easily be read as the ripples of their secret war.

Societies in the modern world are likely to divide the world along national borders or focus on certain institutions (such as a religion, government body, or type of company). Other societies will break these trends by grabbing power wherever they can, resulting in a chaotic mix of holdings. A good mix of these will allow the PCs to meet several societies in a given city and become involved in the conflict.

The leaders of all but the smallest societies will be incredibly wealthy, even if that is not their goal. Many real-world conspiracy theorists see wealth and power as a sign that a given

individual is a member of a secret society. You should consider whether powerful and wealthy people in your setting are related to the various societies, and in what way.

Each of the larger societies will likely have some control of the media as well, to create disinformation and white noise. It is usually in no society's best interest to reveal others to the media, as it attracts more attention and credibility to the concept of secret societies. Given this situation, even if someone did reveal one or more societies to the media, enough ridicule and derision has been directed at conspiracy theorists that it would be difficult to get the message out.

#### Science Fiction

This control level can take many different aspects in science fiction. Perhaps the most obvious of these are the cyberpunk genre's Big Corporations, which could easily become a vessel for total control. Secret societies can also control interplanetary governments, star systems, cities, or merchant organizations as they would in other settings. Setups like George Orwell's *1984* are possible, where history is defined and redefined by the secret masters of various factions to further their conflict.

Even more than in modern settings, individuals in science fiction worlds need something to distract them from the security breaches that inevitably occur between various societies vying for control. Increasingly realistic forms of entertainment, an outside threat, cults of personality around glamorous individuals (like starship captains or mecha pilots), or the old favorite of gladiatorial combat can all serve this purpose and help hide the societies.

#### Partial Control

If asked, this is where many people would say we live in the real world. Secret societies exist and they have some power, but it is fairly limited. This control level covers any setting where secret societies are more in danger from legitimate authorities than each other.

Partial control is fantastic for believability: all you have to do is explain why the society exists and how it influences those it has under its control. This control level also allows you to introduce new secret societies with ease and gives the players a chance at real victory. Each society in this control level can exist in something of a vacuum, influenced by the local authorities but not necessarily having connections with other secret societies.

On the other hand, it can be hard to make conspiracies at this level feel like a major threat. The party can always contact the police or the press when they've gotten enough evidence and hand the investigation over to them. The authorities, especially in modern settings, will be quick to laugh off the characters as cranks unless they provide solid evidence. With that evidence, however, most authorities can be convinced to act.

Some GMs will have every secret society control the police force in the area to prevent this from becoming a problem. That's not the best way to handle the situation at this control level, although it's obviously appropriate at the higher ones. Let the PCs report the society to the authorities and, if they were

actually able to find proof, the society can be taken care of. Not only does this line up with what happens in the real world, but it also makes running into the one society that does control the authorities that much sweeter.

Once you've decided what areas the societies control, you can assign people with control over those areas to the society's membership or control. For example, let's give the local Masonic Lodge control over the city government, a local business, and the sheriff. The mayor can just be a member of the lodge, as could the sheriff and local business owner. Or perhaps the mayor is a member, along with the business owner's main advisor, and the mayor has control over the sheriff through favors or blackmail.

Secret societies in this setting have to be concerned with outside investigators more than other secret societies. The societies will get agents inside the local police departments and news sources if they can, at least to get warning before any public exposure. Opponents of the society might be killed, but some societies use the generally less dangerous defense of convincing everyone else that the target is insane. Many longer-lived societies have also set up plans whereby they can scapegoat "rogue members" or sacrifice a local branch, pretending it was the entire organization.

### Fantasy

Most fantasy settings have a few minor secret societies. Most guilds, especially those in illegal trades, have some secret society elements. Governments always have their intelligence operations. And secretive cults are usually present, whether they appear in the campaign or not.

Fantasy worlds are the natural home of many types of secret societies. Ancient religions can survive into medieval times, guarding some hidden knowledge or dangerous power. Adventuring groups that move on to individual pursuits will usually maintain ties between ex-members, creating a sort of mini-society. Many of the societies detailed in this book existed or emerged during the Middle Ages, and can easily be brought into a fantasy setting with a partial control level.

### Modern

Modern society has many places for secret societies to slip in, as proven by the sheer number of them that have been exposed over the years. Companies, government agencies, and cults are often the power bases for these organizations.

Keep in mind that it's very difficult to rouse the populace in modern society. Even media exposure will cause only side effects: making the society's operation a bit more difficult, starting a police investigation, or tipping an election. Local police or federal agents are usually the only outside forces that can directly attack a secret society, and that sort of action definitely requires solid evidence against the society.

Conspiracies of this level are mentioned on occasion in the news, although only rarely are they described as secret societies. The practices of initiation, blackmail, and infiltration often tip off investigators as the society spreads its control, but police

forces rarely become involved until there are repeated, major violations.

### Science Fiction

Even the brightest science fiction setting usually has some secret society in the background, but darker science fiction is often run through with conspiracy. Mega-corporations, government agencies, cliques within companies, and an assortment of cults are often present.

The power of secret societies in this setting is largely dependent on how much authority the open government has been able to maintain. Where the government has weakened, secret societies fill in the gaps or take over the government from within. Strong governments typically keep the secret societies on defensive footing, but encourage the formation of rebel groups that are secret societies in their own right.

Any group with special powers, be they mutations, psychic abilities, or even hacking skills, is likely to bond together for mutual support and protection. The inventors and controllers of important technologies also have an easy time becoming a secret society.

### Roles of Secret Societies in your Campaign

While it's easy to just use secret societies as another brand of mindless foot soldier for your resident evil genius, that's really a waste. The society itself can be a campaign-spanning villain; it could also be the PCs' ally, or it might be manipulating the situation towards its own ends. PCs can be members of secret societies (either individually or as a group) and they can even rise to positions of power.

Secret societies can provide a far richer background than public organizations. Intrigue, cover-up, forbidden knowledge, and world-shaping plots all add to the secret society's mystique.

Some of the various roles a secret society can take in your campaign will be discussed at length below. The two most obvious are an enemy of the party or as a powerful ally. Additionally, a society can be a neutral force, neither directly supporting or opposing the PCs. PCs can also become members of societies, in which case the society fills yet another role, or the PCs can rise to power and actually control the secret society.

### Secret Societies as Enemies or Rivals

The most common role for a secret society in gaming is as a foil for the party. A small secret society can be uncovered and destroyed over the course of a single adventure, hinting that there may be more out there. Or an expansive society can be discovered and serve as the primary enemy for the entire campaign. These roles are both perfectly valid. Secret societies generally have superior resources at their disposal, along with multiple branches that can be challenged separately to show some progress on the PCs' part. They can make truly excellent enemies.

Three of the societies covered in more detail in Chapter 3 seem ready-made as enemies, although any society can really fill that role. The Assassins are in many ways the archetypical villain



## Secret Society Feats

These feats may assist you in representing the influence secret societies have over communities and their members. None of these feats is necessary to join a secret society or represents membership itself. Anyone can be a member of a secret society, regardless of her feats or class. These feats simply represent some of the advantages a character in a secret society might have.

In addition to these feats, members of secret societies often have feats such as Deceitful, Iron Will, Leadership, Negotiator, Persuasive, and Stealthy. Depending on the focus of the society, many other feats may be appropriate.

### Focused Devotion [General]

Your drive to serve your secret society overwhelms all obstacles.

**Prerequisites:** Iron Will, member in good standing of a secret society

**Benefit:** As a free action before rolling a skill check, saving throw, or attack roll, you may add a +2 bonus to that roll. If you use this ability directly serving your secret society (DM's discretion), the bonus is +4 instead. You may use this ability once per day.

### Lies Within Lies [General]

Layering truth with lies, you can convince even those who see through your deceptions of another, deeper untruth. When someone sees through your lies, you have a second cover story waiting, explaining the lies and casting you in the best possible light.

For example, when a noble's guards realize you're lying about the reason you want to see him, you may convince them you were lying because you have a secret message from the king.

**Prerequisites:** Cha 13+, Bluff 4 ranks

**Benefit:** Once per day, you may reroll a failed Bluff check immediately after you learn it has failed. The target still

realizes you were just lying, so you must choose a new story for the reroll attempt. The difficulty for the new check is determined normally.

**Special:** You may take this feat multiple times. You may use the ability an additional time per day each time you retake the feat.

### Ranking Member [General]

Your high rank in a secret society grants you many social benefits.

**Prerequisites:** Member in good standing of the chosen society, have completed appropriate initiation rituals

**Benefit:** You receive a +4 bonus on all Diplomacy checks against fellow members of the secret society. You also gain a +4 bonus to Gather Information checks when you have access to a local branch of your secret society.

**Special:** This feat may be taken several times. Its effects do not stack. Each time, you choose a different secret society for the effects to apply.

### Social Network [General]

You can use your influence to manipulate individuals outside of your order. Some societies exist openly enough that displaying a ring or declaring your allegiance puts power behind your words. Other societies must resort to invoking the power of fellow members.

**Prerequisites:** Ranking Member (with selected society)

**Benefit:** In communities with large or powerful branches of your society, the society's influence extends beyond its membership. You receive a +4 bonus on all Diplomacy checks and Intimidate checks while within such a community. These bonuses do not apply to fellow members of your society.

**Special:** This feat may be taken several times. Its effects do not stack. Each time, you choose a different secret society for the effects to apply.

secret society, controlling an entire region at knifepoint and composed of zealots willing to sacrifice themselves at a moment's notice. Aum Shinrikyo provides a working example of the sort of apocalyptic cult that rarely gets off the ground in the real world. The Thule Society and its spiritual offspring, Nazi Germany, really don't require any explanation. They're easy to hate and have proven the capacity to build a war machine from scrap.

To be a proper enemy, the society you choose needs to have a few things. It needs an aspect that will cause the party to hate or at least oppose the society. It needs enough power to seem threatening, but not enough to crush the party out of hand. It also needs a solid reason to be doing whatever it's doing.

### Hatred and Opposition

Players will usually freely hate a society if they see it doing something truly unjust, like killing or trying to enslave innocents. Of course, the party can also be assigned to work against the society, but it's usually better to give players some personal reason. Hunting down a secret society can be frustrating work and doing it on another's behalf can become grating.

Most players will react with hatred towards a secret society when their mission becomes extremely difficult or fails due to the society's meddling. This applies doubly if they weren't told the task was easy to begin with. Most people learn quickly that an "easy mission" will not be, but players usually don't expect a moderately difficult mission to suddenly become nigh-impossible.

### Balance of Power

Deciding how much power the society has at its disposal can be the most challenging part of having a secret society as an enemy. Usually the decision is that the society is extremely powerful, but its attention is distracted from the PCs. If you choose this route, the control level option "Total Control, Multiple Societies" is a good explanation. The society must constantly watch its areas of control or other organizations will gather them up. Taking on powerful societies can also work if the society the party faces is just one part of a larger conspiracy, which has internal divisions unless united by a strong outside menace.

Another option is to give the society some sort of weakness that the party can exploit. Perhaps the society has excellent social control but its leaders' physical prowess isn't up to the mark. Or maybe the society draws its power from a certain source that can be destroyed or disabled.

In the real world, most powerful societies had to be brought down by police or military action if they've ever been brought down at all. This suggests that the PCs should consider handing the case over to the proper authorities, although the sort of vigilante justice that PCs seem so inclined towards could make the society a long-running feature.

Getting on the bad side of a secret society can be extremely unpleasant. The anticipated assassination attempts might occur, but many societies instead focus on discrediting their enemies.

The society's enemy will be framed for crimes, idiotic claims will be made in his name, and evidence may be manufactured of long-standing mental illness or desire to slander the society's leaders.

Some organizations will gladly give up a member or even a local branch to break an investigative trail. Others, once they notice they're being watched, will either pull their agents out of the area or start feeding false information to the watchers. Societies can redirect the attention to other societies, either through planted evidence or having members present themselves as members of a different society altogether.

### Motivations

The society's long-term plans will usually be clear, but you want to make sure there's a reason for each of its major actions. The Assassins, for example, didn't engage in senseless brutality, they chose targets for their political significance.

Knowing beforehand why the society is undertaking an action will give you a much clearer picture on how its members react to interference. If the society just wanted to make a point, it may call the mission off. On the other hand, if the action is central to the society's long-term plans, its members will do everything in their power to force the mission through.

### Secret Societies as Allies or Patrons

Whether the PCs are members of a secret society or not, they may get aid from one at some point. This help can take the form of money, power, direct aid, or help from behind the scenes. The society may even have brought the PCs together for its own purposes.

Of the societies described in detail later, the Freemasons are the easiest to make into believable allies. The Masons' beliefs generally mesh well with player beliefs and their motives are fairly reasonable. Any society can be an ally, though, if its needs line up with the party's.

Having a secret society as an ally can be far more complex than using an open organization. There will always be trust issues involved, along with the usual questions of why the society needs the PCs. Helping from behind the scenes can also be more difficult than it appears if you want to maintain tension and mystery in the game.

### Trust

The party will have little reason to immediately trust a secret society, even one that helps out consistently or provides funds. The party is much more likely to question orders and try to verify information.

No rule says this distrust has to be treated as a problem. It adds complexities between the PCs and their allies that could be lacking otherwise. Most players will strive to learn more about their allies or at least question the society's motives.

Some parties will also take the opportunity to make their own adventures. They may go off to investigate corruption within the society with little prompting. Some characters will sit down

and study their ally's past, trying to find what they're up to. On the other hand, some parties will ignore the possibility of gathering that information until you present them with a clear reason to.

Calling the trust of an organization into doubt is easy enough. You can set off alarms by dropping any sign that the party hasn't been told the complete truth. Missions with poorly defined motives might also bring player's attention to the information gap. Open betrayal will also bring trust to the fore, but the party will probably abandon its allies very quickly after that.

Building trust can be a bit more challenging. Whenever the party openly does something to challenge the society's claims, the evidence and results of that action must support the society's views. For example, if the PCs were told to be sure to kill every member of a vicious cult, for example, and they let one "innocent" get away, have the survivor start up the cult anew in a different city, thus showing that the society was right.

#### Making the PCs Useful

No secret society would take the risk of open action without good reason. The PCs will have to be doing something that the society wouldn't normally be able to do itself for the society to consider giving aid. That's the main thing to keep in mind: if the party weren't useful, the society wouldn't help.

Perhaps the PCs are the society's local representatives or have a set of skills the society doesn't normally have. The party may be able to act openly in fields that require that sort of brashness. In any case, the PCs are providing a valuable commodity for the society and you should decide exactly what that is.

The other half of this problem comes up when the society has to bail the PCs out of a bad situation. The players will usually feel a bit useless after that. This is a good time to focus on the society's reason for helping the party to begin with.

Another way to make being saved a little easier to bear is to have assignments in which the party needs to bail out other society operatives or clean up after failed missions. If the players have done this a few times, they won't feel so bad when the society does the same for them.

For example, the party can save another group working with the society as one of their first missions. Then, later, when the society sends in a group (perhaps even the same group the party saved earlier) to rescue the PCs, it will seem less unheroic.

#### Helping from Behind the Scenes

Secret societies are usually reluctant to openly interfere with anything in the eye of the public, even to help their own members. Small bits of help from behind the scenes are usually about what players should expect, rather than men in dark suits appearing in the nick of time to gun down their enemies.

A secret society's influence can often be helpful. The society can manipulate a judge to rule in the party's favor. Or, society pawns in the media can be used to hype or downplay a story. The society might force an informant to help the PCs' stalled

investigation. All these sorts of aid can be disguised as normal actions.

Some societies can also help through monetary means, but these funds will usually be brought in some untraceable form. In modern society, the money might be brought in from a Swiss bank account, be a paycheck to a fictitious person, or left in cash at some drop point. The Assassins gave promissory notes payable by wealthy members, but societies with more focus on secrecy would avoid that method.

Information can be the greatest asset in many situations. An anonymous message, be it an untraceable email or a *sending* spell, containing a tip or vital information about a threat, can turn the tide. However, it's important not to let these messages replace the party's investigation. Mysterious messages can kick off an investigation, provide a framework, or fill in some gaps, but should never provide the whole story. A good reason for societies to send cryptic messages is that longer and more detailed messages make it easier to narrow down who may have sent the message. Also, in settings requiring cryptography, longer messages make it easier for outsiders to break the cipher.

If a society must involve itself in some sort of combat situation, methods will vary. Some societies will be more than happy to send their agents in, clean up the situation, and then withdraw them immediately. Other societies would rather hire outsiders to decrease the risk of discovery. If the PCs are traditional mercenaries, the society may even hire them to be that sort of outsiders to aid another group.

#### Secret Societies as Neutrals

Without a single driving agenda that either opposes or supports the party, most secret societies can safely be considered neutral. When the party is working in line with the society's agenda, the society may help the players. When the PCs are working against the society, it will oppose them. The rest of the time, societies will just ignore or observe the party.

Neutral societies are a challenge in that they should remain mysterious while the reason for their shifting loyalties is at least intuitively apparent, such as the Thule Society siding against its traditional enemies. A society that doesn't make any sense will hold a player's attention for a while out of sheer confusion, but usually won't remain engaging over the long term. Even if you don't want to reveal the society's motives, or if those motives are very complex, having a single obvious answer for why the society appears the first few times can help players interact with the society, even if that answer is ultimately wrong.

The best neutral secret societies are therefore the ones with relatively easy-to-understand goals. Mossad, for example, is interested in maintaining its country's well-being and will ignore anything that doesn't involve that. The Knights Templar, after their fall, are mostly interested in survival and rebuilding their lost power.

Some neutral societies can be seen as power brokers. The main purpose in power brokers' existence is to gather as much power as possible. However, they're likely to have some other,

hidden goal that involves what they'll eventually do with all that power. While the society focuses on gaining power, anyone who opposes it is a temporary enemy and anyone who helps is a temporary friend.

To maintain the air of mystery with these societies, never say exactly what their agenda is unless the players have found that out through other means (see *Revealing Secret Societies*, p.9). However, if their agenda is simple enough, the basic outline will become apparent through the players' encounters with the society.

For example, the PCs may first encounter the Freemasons as enemies trying to blackmail a local leader. When the party later see that society funneling resources to local freedom fighters and breaking political dissidents out of prison, the players will probably see the anti-government pattern in the movement. As long as the PCs remain out of the fight between the government and Freemasons, the society's members will remain neutral. When the party chooses a side, the Freemasons will become either allies or enemies.

The players, once they've discovered the society's basic agenda, will probably end up either trying to ally with the society on a long-term basis or become irritated enough that they'll oppose it at every turn. If that happens, it's better to slide the society over to an ally or enemy role. The enemy path is usually the more likely result when the party ends up failing a mission because the neutral society interfered.

### PCs in Secret Societies

In some campaigns, it's perfectly reasonable to have a member of the party belong to a secret society, or have the entire party form one cell of that society. If only one member of the party is in a secret society, it might open a whole can of worms. On the other hand, the entire party being members doesn't typically cause any problems.

Another, strange sort of party is one fashioned from members of several different secret societies. That, like having only one member be an initiate, is a mess waiting to happen, but can be a lot of fun. In general, being part of a secret society can be an interesting gaming experience. Secrecy, advancement within the society, and the other challenges found within societies can be rather unique.

Secrecy is the first concern of many societies. A player member will be expected to keep a low profile, not mention the society, and clean up after her missions. Whatever happens, the PC should make sure that her actions couldn't be traced back to the society. Some societies take the dire consequences of their oaths of secrecy very seriously.

The missions associated with a secret society are a bit different than those faced by open organizations. Members will be expected to help remove threats to the society's security, investigate other societies, gather personal power to help the society, watch out for any problems from local authorities, and generally advance the overall goals of the society.

### Moving Through The Ranks

Advancement within a secret society can be an important goal for PCs, providing you with a way to both reward the PCs and tie them more closely to the society. There are usually at least three layers to a society: the leaders, middle echelons, and new recruits. Although actually becoming a leader of the organization is beyond the scope of many campaigns, advancing to the middle ranks isn't unlikely for a successful PC.

Loyalty, knowledge of the society's philosophy, and success in outside ventures are usually required to advance within a secret society. Most societies mark the advancement with a ritual, more complex than the initiation, in which further secrets are revealed. After the ceremony, the character will be expected to carry orders from the leadership to the recruits and in all ways carry herself as a superior member of the society.

### One Member

Having one character of a party be a member of a secret society requires a mature group of players and/or a delicate touch. That character will, by necessity, have goals and activities that are hidden from the other characters. It may be worth mentioning that characters will have their own personal goals and agendas separate from the party's, if your group doesn't usually touch on this.

You can keep the character's solitary activities outside of session. For example, meetings with the PC's superiors could be handled through email or one-on-one sessions with the player. If you're going to use this method, it's best to give each player some time outside of the normal game session to handle her outside responsibilities. This method has the dual advantage of not leaving people bored during the session and not forcing people to separate player/character knowledge. However, the other players may be angry when they find out what's been going on.

You could also run those activities in session. This will cause you several problems with player/character knowledge and wasted time, especially if those activities take a while. This becomes even more complex if the rest of the characters find out about the character's membership, as the players' and characters' knowledge starts to overlap and becomes harder to sort out. However, if run correctly, activities in the session can serve as an interesting plot device. For example, the character's reports to her superiors could provide a recap for the last session or foreshadowing for the current one.

Another approach to avoid time issues is to have the character be an independent operative. He's been assigned a mission and is to report back when that mission is complete, or something of that nature. This is used by some societies to reduce the chance of exposure and works equally well for that purpose in your game. However, keeping secrets can still cause negative feelings from the other players.

The character's mission can be another source of contention. If the society has put its agent in opposition to the rest of the party, especially if he's to wait until the right moment to strike, the other players can feel betrayed, frustrated, or angry. Carefully think about how your other players will react before

setting them up for a serious betrayal like that. On the other hand, if the character's mission is in line with the party's or is completely unrelated, there shouldn't be as many problems.

As an example, a character from the Mossad-like secret police in your fantasy world is working with a party investigating a cult in a neighboring city-state. The member has an overlapping mission of trying to find means to destabilize the neighboring city-state that may or may not be controlled by the cult. The character in the society will rarely conflict with the other party members, thus allowing the player to enjoy the benefits of participation in the society without frustrating the other players.

#### Entire Party

Many secret societies are organized into cells. These can serve as an easy basis for a group of PCs. The PCs will have some missions passed down from above, but also a large degree of autonomy. If the party loses a member, a new one can be provided without any plot contortions. As members, they also have whatever resources the society can give them.

In this situation, all the advice from Secret Societies as Allies or Patrons definitely applies. The party will be responsible for its own affairs, but can call in the larger society if the need arises. For this sort of party, the secret society and its goals should be worked out in great detail. This will determine the types of missions the party will be sent on and should probably be discussed with the party during character creation, unless the characters were just picked off the street or you're planning on recruiting them over the course of the campaign.

Most secret societies will assign each cell to a higher-ranking member who acts as the cell's point of contact with the rest of the organization. Communication between the cell and its handler will be as secure as the society can manage. Changing the handler, or his sudden disappearance, can create an interesting situation for the PCs and provide a plot reason for changing their relationship with the society. Maybe the PC's new handler has a vastly different philosophy, calling the party's beliefs into question and indicating that the new handler is potentially an imposter.

Some societies have a more open structure in which the characters will form one branch. They'll know at least one higher member and probably several members from other branches near them, but the local area is under the party's control, within reason.

Another factor to consider is the possibility of double agents. Even if the characters are members of the same secret society, some can also be infiltrating the society for another organization or visa versa. Or, on an even more complex note, the agents can be playing both organizations for their own ends or at the desires of a third organization. Layers of complexity beyond that, however, is probably best left to the realm of parody.

#### Hodge-Podge

A party where each member represents a different secret society can easily go several different routes. These groups can be perfectly serious, but lend themselves to a certain comedic bent.

Perhaps the most insane is a cloak-and-dagger arrangement where party members aren't aware of the others' loyalties. The comedic potential, at least for the GM, is immediately obvious. However, it can also be interesting to watch the truth unfold and the PCs come to an uneasy truce or permanent working relationship.

This sort of party begs for an explanation. Is literally everyone a member of some secret society? Did the party's first mission have special interest for secret societies? Are the PCs members of a government agency that's been totally overrun by shadowy organizations?

There can also be an alliance of secret societies working together in some sort of truce, handling certain matters jointly (like keeping the existence of secret societies hidden). In this situation, the PCs are members of a task force dealing with mutual problems. Each character knows at least what societies the other members belong to, although any knowledge of the society beyond that may be sketchy.

This option provides the tensions of having several competing objectives without the maddening layers of secrets upon secrets. It also gives the party an excellent reason to stay together. Similarly, each party member can belong to a different organization, but ultimately report to one central conspiracy. This option is similar to having members of many societies, but creates a more unified goal for the party. Characters will also have the strengths of several organizations to draw on.

#### PC-Run Secret Societies

Allowing the PCs to control secret societies is rarely considered, but can create a very interesting campaign. It's only natural for a promising PC to reach the top ranks of a society over time, or create her own. What then?

The PCs get an entirely new set of challenges, many of which the party previously saw from the other side. Power-hungry lower-ranking members, conflict with other societies, recruiting new members, expanding areas of influence, sudden changes in the outside world, trying to advance the great work, and overzealous investigators all occupy the time of secret society leaders.

Most of these problems aren't solved through force of arms. Running a secret society requires a level of planning and social thinking not required in most games outside of epic-level play. The best leaders for societies are chosen not for their strength in magic or gunplay, but for their ability to plan and organize. This sort of campaign can actually have fairly low power levels, in the combat sense, but the party will have more power to change the world than all but the strongest magi.

Some people won't be interested in this sort of game. It's best to give your players a taste of what you're planning in advance, as they move upwards through the ranks or while they start their own secret society. See if all your players are interested before you spring the full duties of leadership on them. If they don't like the idea, you don't have to give up on it, but try to work out an amicable solution.

Some of the potential issues mentioned above are sketched out below as guidelines for making them challenging. Also, the events in the tables in Chapter 5, Secret Society Generation, can help with ideas or even randomly generate adventures for this sort of game.

### Internal Tensions

Internal tensions usually occur when lower ranking members, unable to advance and not completely agreeing with their superiors, begin conspiring against the current leadership. Sometimes more powerful members without another outlet will use the same techniques.

Internal tensions will begin slowly with members gathering together to complain about their lot. Eventually, they'll begin working side missions to advance the new agenda, effectively being part of two secret societies. If the situation deteriorates enough, the members will obey orders only selectively or drop out of the society entirely. In the worst situations, they may attempt a coup, physically taking out the old leadership and replacing it.

There are a few methods traditionally used to solve this problem and none of them are pleasant. The first is giving in to the rebels' demands, which may not even be possible depending on how deep the dissent goes. Another option is to kick them out of the society wholesale, which will usually create a security breach at best and a new enemy more often than not. Killing them all is tempting in this situation, but generally creates even more internal tension among the survivors. Ultimately, resolving this kind of tension requires time and creativity on the players' part as leaders of the society.

### Inter-Societal Conflict

Another society has moved to oppose the PCs'. The enemy society may want to gather resources, absorb the PCs' society, exact revenge or clear the path for its own plans. This sort of conflict can be especially difficult for the players to handle because it raises the risk of either society being exposed. Most of these conflicts remain low-key for exactly that reason.

The first stage of most inter-societal conflict is investigation and determining the opposition's capabilities. Whichever society finishes this first can attack with relative impunity until the other catches up, so it's very important to maintain staff capable of skilled investigations. Some societies use external allies or pawns for these investigations, cutting down on possible exposure and loss of members.

If the PCs are extremely unlucky, the first sign of enemy activity will be attacks against their power structure. This is an extremely dangerous situation, because the aggressor can attack with impunity or even reveal the PCs' society with little fear of retribution.

More often, though, the PCs will actually be the aggressors. Depending on how careful they are in their initial attacks, they'll get a few "free shots." Once the other society has noticed the PCs, counter-attacks will be the order of the day.

Once both societies know what's going on, they can begin directly opposing each other. Some societies will take this opportunity to begin a wave of assassinations or forced conversions. Others will undermine their opponents' power bases, feed the enemy false information, or attempt to recruit double agents.

PCs will often go straight for trying to kill the opponent's leader as soon as they can find her. This works against a new society formed around one charismatic leader, but most societies handle it much better. Many societies have whole groups of leaders or delineated lines of succession, so the party would have to kill everyone with leadership potential. Upon the assassination, some societies will actually become far more dangerous, looking on the fallen leader as a martyr.

The real danger during this sort of conflict is that one side will decide it's doomed and go to the authorities. In some settings, the authorities are already controlled by secret societies or have more pressing concerns, but in others this can be a serious threat. In many settings, the threat of exposure can create the equivalent of mutual assured destruction, where neither side is willing to fully commit to any conflict.

### Expanding

In literature, when most secret societies appear they are already at the peak of their power. In the real world, societies take decades or centuries to grow to their full potential. PCs that control a society will probably try to expand the society's membership rosters and areas of influence more quickly than this.

Secret societies must be at their most careful while they're expanding. Potential members who resisted recruitment have exposed many societies. Taking control of new businesses, churches, or agencies is also a lot more noticeable than maintaining control of them once they've been acquired.

For most societies, lesser members suggest new recruits. Then the prospective members are watched for a time, approved by the higher-ups, and recruited. Some societies, the slightly more open ones, let new recruits come to them. Unless the society's outside face is very different than its inner one, letting recruits initiate contact is a much safer method of recruiting, just much slower. Only very foolish societies try the "join us or die" approach, as that grants power over the recruit only so long as the threat is imminent and worse than what the recruit is already dealing with.

Recruitment drives also risk infiltration by other societies or law enforcement. The PCs, as the society's leaders, may take personal responsibility for screening recruits, or they might leave it to underlings. Either way, if any outside organization knows of the recruitment attempts, there will be at least one potential double agent in each batch of candidates.

Taking over outside organizations is usually the quickest way to gain power, but it is always dangerous. Individuals within the target organization will likely notice, although they may not understand exactly what's going on, and it's possible that

the organization is already influenced by a different secret society. Targets with secretive leanings, like intelligence agencies and criminal groups, are the most likely to notice attempts at control.

If the target notices corruption within its ranks, the control attempt will likely fail and the infiltrating conspiracy may be partially exposed. Those who suspect the infiltration will usually go to the head of the targeted organization or, failing that, the appropriate outside authority. This can begin an investigation either from the target, law enforcement, or the people that noticed the issue in the first place.

By far the safest method of expansion is to have an organization the society already controls take control of the new organization, through normal, legitimate means. Getting a lower ranking member into the target, then aiding his rise to power can be very successful. Recruiting or otherwise controlling the current leader of the organization is also a possibility. Some societies with more manpower than influence will induce their members to join the organization in large numbers, then take it over from within. For societies with more money than members, purchasing companies outright is a good option.

In settings with magic or other supernatural powers, other methods of expansion can present themselves, such as *charm* spells or replacing someone with a duplicate. These methods provide a shortcut for getting control of someone, but often have their own complications like having to keep a wizard onsite to reapply charms, or imperfectly copying the replaced leader's actions. Other magically enabled conspiracies will be on the lookout for such activities, and many such powers have their own inherent limitations like range, duration, cost, and telltale signs of use.

#### Investigators

PCs are usually either confused or deeply amused the first time they run into outside investigators. These individuals or groups can cause serious problems to all but the most powerful secret societies, and there is no good way to get rid of them. Investigators will kill members, disrupt major projects, and try to reveal the whole society to the authorities.

Outside investigators can be put on the trail by any sort of security breach, or through the actions of another secret society that wants the PCs stopped. Investigators are normally either working for some interested party or believe the PCs' conspiracy is somehow shadowy and evil.

Investigators will generally find out all they can about the society's operations and disrupt those plans in every way they have available. The capabilities and methodologies of different investigator groups are as varied as the groups themselves, making them a difficult foe to categorize or combat. As a GM, it's best to have at least some idea about what the investigators are like, why they're investigating, and the methods they're likely to use.

The most dangerous investigators will be those with powers the secret society does not delve into, or those with the ability to



neutralize the society's advantages. When the society does not yet have much political power, a local leader or police officer could be a terrible threat. If the society specializes in arcane magic, investigators with sheer brawn or psionic abilities may be dangerous.

Successful groups of investigators will contain a mix of those good at physical searching, those with social contacts, and those capable of magical divination or technical research. Some investigators will remain in the shadows, studying the society from books and rumors. The braver ones will try to infiltrate the society, eavesdrop on meetings, plant listening devices, and perhaps even assassinate members. Those braver investigators are well served by stealthy colleagues.

Getting rid of investigators can be difficult for societies with less than total control. Killing investigators is an obvious choice, but risks creating martyrs, the revelation of any data they might have been holding, and the strengthening of their word to anyone else they told about the society. Assassination is usually not the best method of dealing with investigators, but is the only one available to some societies.

Discrediting the investigators reduces the harm they can do and, with a convincing accident, might let the society kill them. Unfortunately, acting to discredit the investigators will probably be traceable and may give them the clues they need to reveal the society.

Convincing the investigators that the society really isn't all that bad is a dicey proposition at best. Most investigators will think it's a ploy and very few will stop investigating entirely. To make it worse, this too requires some kind of action which the investigators may be able to track.

Laying false clues to bring the investigators to a different secret society can take care of several problems at once. Methods for this must be adjusted to fit the situation, but can include adopting that society's techniques for crimes near the investigators, planting records that your revealed agents belong to another society, or even approaching the investigators claiming that your society is being framed by another society to cover its misdeeds. Of course, if the misdirection fails, the investigators will return, potentially with the other society's backing.

The only way to truly throw off the investigators is to remove every lead the investigators have. Some PC groups will try to conceal all the evidence of their existence. This isn't going to completely work unless the party either does absolutely nothing or already controls the entire world. A constant eye for security and limiting traceable actions can slow down investigators, buying the PCs valuable time. Pulling entirely out of the area or erasing all members the investigators know about can solve the situation, at the cost of losing progress in that area.





# Six Societies in Depth

This chapter describes six secret societies in depth, representing a wide range of organizations and objectives for those organizations that can double as plot elements in your campaign. Each society has an explanation of its philosophy, history, and symbolism as a basis for running the society, followed by advice and rules for using the society in game across different settings.

The societies in this chapter serve several purposes. You can just drop the societies straight into your game. Each society has a prestige class for its members to help integrate the society into your game. You can also use the societies as templates and examples to inspire your own created societies. Each society has a fictional equivalent society inspired by it to help illustrate this, designed and detailed for you to use in your games.

## The Assassins

### Nizari Ismailis, Nizari, Hashishim

During their time, the Assassins (more properly known as the Nizari Ismailis) were the most feared group in the Middle East. From the eleventh until the mid-thirteenth century, the Assassins infiltrated all levels of society, and whenever a political or philosophical enemy reared his head, they killed him. Although they only claimed a small region as their own, their influence spread over the entire Middle East.

In this way, the Assassins are the most successful secret society we know of. The number of people they actually killed was very small, especially compared to the cost of an actual war, but the fear created by those deaths brought future leaders in line with the Assassins' desires.

The main strength that allowed the Assassins to succeed on a region-wide scale was the unshakable loyalty of their members. The faithful (*fidai*) would infiltrate an organization, rise as high as they could using the skills they had learned from the Assassins, and kill when ordered. The assassination itself was generally accomplished with a dagger and without concern for the survival of the Assassin. Indeed, after an assassination of this type, the Assassins would never flee the scene, allowing themselves to be struck down. This loyalty became so legendary that medieval troubadours began comparing their own romantic devotion to that of the Assassins.

There is no question about whether the Assassins killed people or who they killed. However, even at the time, there was considerable argument about their motives. Scholars from outside the order were quick to accuse them of brainwashing members and rejecting Islam. The brainwashing stories usually

## Imams

The importance of Imams cannot be overstated. In Shi'a Islam, the Imam is both the divinely appointed heir to the dynasty of Mohammed and a leader capable of guiding all aspects of life. Although each Imam is supposed to choose his successor, disagreements about the succession were vicious when they arose.

Many Shi'a groups hold that the line of Imams has been broken or gone into hiding, with the Nizari Ismailis forming a notable exception. Sunni Islam completely rejects the idea of the Imam as divine heir, but still uses the term to designate great religious leaders and those who lead prayers.

involved hashish as a major tool, leading to the appellation *hashishim* that is believed to be the root word for assassin. Charges were also made of killing for pay, but evidence has been found only that they were willing to accept gifts or resources for killings they were already planning.

Also among the Assassin's most powerful assets were their mountain fortresses at Alamut and elsewhere. These served as Assassin training centers, bases of operation, and strongholds when countries angry about their leaders' deaths came hunting. The fortresses were each difficult to reach, solid in construction, and filled with skilled, fearless Assassin guards. Any campaign using the Assassins should have some reflection of the mountain fortresses, locations that serve as nigh-invulnerable defensive positions and symbols of Assassin might.

The Nizari Ismaili faith has some adherents even to this day, primarily in India. These modern followers are ruled by the Aga Khan, purportedly a linear descendant of the Assassin Imams (hereditary teacher/leaders). The first Aga Khan's claim of lineage was investigated and supported by the British government, lending them an air of credibility lacking from other religious groups of that type. The modern Nizari Ismailis, of course, have nothing to do with assassinations, instead focusing on the spiritual aspects of their philosophy.

## Assassin Philosophy

The keystone of Assassin philosophy rests in the Imams, high priests from the line of Mohammad. In the Nizari faith, the Imams can reveal the inner meaning of the Koran. If the Imam's interpretation conflicts with the Koran, the Imam takes precedence, showing the internal truth rather than the external. According to Nizari philosophy, most of the Imams remained

hidden, working through intermediaries and contemplating deeper truths, with only a few directly taking control of the order.

This aspect of Nizari philosophy is the first major dispute most other Muslim sects had with the Assassins. The idea of a living Imam being able to not only interpret, but completely overrule the Koran didn't sit well with other Muslims. However, that absolute control was one major necessity for the Assassins' unquestioned loyalty.

The hidden teachings could, of course, only be taught after an oath of secrecy. The Assassins were by no means the first organization to require such oaths, taking its rites from sects in Egypt at the time. Once the oath was taken and training began, there was little access to external ideas and little that prospective members could do to leave the group.

While the Imams remained hidden, the Nizari waited for what they called the Qaim, the last of the Imams and the judge of a new age. The Qaim would reveal himself openly and serve as Allah's direct representative on Earth. This became extremely important in 1164 when the assassin leader Hasan II claimed to be the Qaim and abolished all normal Muslim practices, such as prayer and abstaining from alcohol, for the extent of his reign.

The Assassins also had a body of beliefs explaining their assassinations and how those actions fit into the greater whole of Islam. Martyrdom served an important role, tempered by the belief that death following the orders of the society's leader would grant entrance to Paradise. According to tales from the time, the order's leaders had constructed an imitation of Paradise in the mountains near Alamut. Initiates were said to be drugged and taken to this false Paradise, then promised they would be allowed to return in martyrdom.

Martyrdom was only applied in one concept: dying while carrying out the orders of the Assassin leadership. Deaths in other situations would not guarantee entry to Paradise, and unauthorized assassinations were dealt with very harshly. Hasan-i-Sabah, the Assassins' founder, is said to have killed one of his own sons for engaging in unauthorized killings.

The Assassins chose their targets very carefully. Even individuals who opposed the order were only targeted with assassination after diplomacy and threats had failed. This policy applied doubly to the Crusaders, who the Assassins saw as having undistinguished leaders that would be easily replaced after an assassination, a situation in which assassination was an ineffective tool. The Assassins reserved their blades for leaders of great individual strength, or those whose deaths would cause collapse or confusion among the ranks of the Assassins' enemies.

As one might imagine, the Assassins had very good reasons to keep their religious leanings a secret. They developed a philosophy, *taqiyya*, around this secrecy, and trained their initiates heavily in its practice. The trainees were given lessons in language, other faiths, deception, and impersonating various groups like soldiers, monks, and merchants. These skills served individual Assassins very well, both keeping their philosophy

hidden and propelling them through the ranks of whatever organization they were infiltrating.

### Assassin History

Hasan-i-Sabah (1055-1124) created the Assassins and led them for decades before his death. Long before that, he became a member of the Ismailis, a branch of Shiite Islam that could be considered a secret society itself. Eventually Hasan split away from the rest of the branch, supporting the rebel leader Nizar as the next Imam. During this dispute, Hasan proved himself as a philosopher and leader, taking control of the new Nizari Ismaili faction after Nizar's execution in 1095.

In 1088, Hasan set his sights on Alamut, an inaccessible mountain fortress near the Caspian Sea, as a future base of operations. Over the next two years, his trusted servants infiltrated the fortress and converted almost its entire population to his cause. Hasan-i-Sabah himself was then smuggled in and, without a drop of blood shed, purchased the castle from its fleeing lord. From that day until his death in 1125, Hasan never left the fortress.

Within fifteen years of taking Alamut, Hasan's agents had so deeply infiltrated nearby courts that his enemies had to remain armed at all times. The Assassins continued to spread, focusing especially on fortresses like Alamut. They took control sometimes through open conversion, sometimes covert. On a few occasions, Hasan's infiltrators were made commanders of targeted fortresses, and handed it over to Hasan after fortifying and stocking it at enemy expense. Several wars were launched against the Assassins during the early years, but their success was limited and the peace settlements were generally quite friendly to Nizari needs.

In his entire reign, Hasan-i-Sabah is believed to have ordered around fifty assassinations. The ability of his assassins to strike directly at leaders was well known and promoted the fear that allowed the Assassins to prosper. Obvious threats like a knife planted in the ground next to a sleeping sultan's head certainly helped promote the order's power. The skill and training of Assassin infiltrators and recruiters also allowed them to spread their control without open warfare. The assassinations were used rarely, in part because they generally triggered wars or slaughters of Ismailis in retribution.

The fourth leader of Alamut, grandson of Hasan-i-Sabah's closest aid, was Hasan II. After a few years of leadership, Hasan II declared that the Qaim, the Last One, had arrived and that the Day of Judgment had already begun. It is said that he used the authority of the Qaim to abolish open practice of Islam among his followers, saying that it was an outer practice that was no longer necessary with the Judgment beginning.

Declaring the arrival of the Qaim effectively made the Assassins a separate religion, distinct from any sect of Islam. A fair analogy is that of Judaism waiting for the Messiah, compared to Christianity saying the Messiah has already come and passed on new teachings. This opened up the door for legitimate religious warfare between the Assassins and Islam, but no one seemed interested in a repeat of the previous hopeless attacks. It did

make recruitment much harder for the order, especially among those with strong Islamic faith.

The Syrian sect of the Assassins split off immediately following Hasan II's death, refusing to acknowledge his successor. Several teams of Assassins following Hasan II's successor attempted to kill the Syrian leader Sinan, but either failed or were converted. Sinan was a legend in his own time, traveling from stronghold to stronghold without guards, leading directly without a set base of operations. His courtesy to allies and enemies was mind-boggling and he was reputed to be an erudite and kind leader. Sinan is also attributed with a variety of feats including prophecy, mystical healing, telepathy, magic, surviving without food or drink, and telekinesis powerful enough to stop rockslides and armies.

After the reign of Hasan II and his son, the Assassins rejected the beliefs of the Qaim's appearance and attempted to return closer to the Islamic fold. This abrupt shift in philosophy seems to have caused no dissent at all. The Assassins at the time may have believed that they were simply applying *taqiyya*, concealing one's true faith for safety.

In 1256, the Mongols under Hulegu accepted Nizari surrender and took Alamut, burning its library. The Imam at the time surrendered to avoid the bloody siege and was eventually killed by the Mongols along with most of his family and tens of thousands of Nizari. It's uncertain how long the Assassins could have held out, but a scholar with the Mongols recorded much of Alamut's defensive capabilities. Food and weapons were stored in chambers cut from the stone below Alamut, channels gathered water for storage in massive tanks, and fields of well-irrigated fruit trees grew in a valley accessible only through the fortress. It was guessed that the Assassins had supplies enough to last for years.

### Assassin Symbols & Signs

Paradise is the Assassin's most important symbol. It is represented as the literal land of milk and honey, filled with women skilled in music, philosophy, and the amorous arts. The Assassins believed that they could enter Paradise after their death through service to the order's master, who could even grant Paradise temporarily during life. Several sources suggest that Hasan-i-Sabah had constructed a representation of Paradise in a secluded valley and smuggled new Assassins into it with the help of powerful drugs. The recruits were given days or a week of pleasure, then drugged again and brought back to speak of their experience.

The dagger was important to the Assassins, although its exact symbolic meaning isn't clear. Assassins would, as far as can be told, use only daggers for their ordained murders. The dagger was also used as a symbol and a threat to outsiders. They never seemed interested in using poison, although whether that is the result of not using it at all or using an undetectable poison can't be said.

While preparing for an assassination, and often while performing them, the *Fidai* (faithful) would dress in white clothing with red boots, sash, or cap. The red represented

## Assassin Ranks

The leader of the Assassins is often referred to as "The Old Man on the Mountain," a term dating back to Hasan-i-Sabah and his reign from Alamut. However, the Assassins more often used the terms Sheik or, when appropriate, Imam. Modern Nizari refer to their leader as the Aga Khan.

The rank of *dai*, teacher, was extremely respected and important. These teachers were responsible for recruiting new members for the order. Unlike many missionaries, a *dai* would focus on single recruits rather groups, and tailor his recruiting techniques heavily to the target's personality and beliefs.

The *fidai*, faithful, were tasked with the infiltration of other organizations and carrying out assassinations. *Fidai* would often remain within other organizations for years, advancing through the ranks, waiting for the time when they were needed.

Below the *fidai*, there were many lay members of the Nizari Ismailis. This rank includes the families of *fidai*, as well as individuals that performed mundane tasks for the Assassins.

the blood the Assassins were about the spill and the white represented their purity and innocence. This uniform would only be worn during the assassination if it wouldn't endanger the mission; Assassins would often dress as soldiers, merchants, priests, or peasants to reach the target.

### Assassins In Game

Using the Assassins in a game requires a certain understanding of their technique. They will construct impenetrable strongholds in inaccessible locations and begin recruiting. After the Assassins have established their first fortress and removed immediate threats to it, they'll begin their campaign of establishing control. As illustrated through their history, they take the fight directly to leaders and let intimidation do the rest.

### Assassins as Masters

This is the most obvious use of the Assassins. They take control of a region or world through intimidation and murder. Knowledge of the Assassins might be common only among the highest levels of government; it may be obvious to anyone who cares to look; or the entire civilization may live in terror of offending the Assassins.

If only societies' leaders know about the Assassins' influence, they're trying to keep the information hidden to maintain respect from their servants and/or citizens. In this case, the Assassins can very easily take control of an area and the elite will inadvertently help keep the Assassins secret.

In settings where those who care to look can find the Assassins, the society will have to spend a great deal of its energies preventing the authorities from becoming involved. With

## Assassinating PCs

It's obviously important that the Assassins are able to assassinate people. Should the PCs pose a large enough threat, this becomes a problem. Having the Assassins repeatedly fail to assassinate the PCs undermines the society's threatening nature, while having the Assassins slaughter the party is rarely the best solution.

It's important to remember that the Assassins will rarely bother to kill lone investigators or small groups. The society's targets are powerful and political in nature. If the party gains a politically powerful ally, the Assassins will likely have a *fidai* kill that ally. Likewise, if the PCs become involved with a threatening anti-Assassin organization, the Assassins will infiltrate the PCs' order and may assassinate one of its leaders as a warning.

the authorities intimidated and the Assassins hidden in their fortresses, even those who learn of the society will be hard pressed to fight it.

If everyone knows about them, the Assassins will function with brazen openness. They *want* everyone to know so that everyone will fear them and not rise up in opposition. In this case, they probably spend a lot of time infiltrating rebel organizations.

The primary goal of the Assassins as masters is to maintain their own power. Their operations beyond that might involve spreading the Nizari faith, taking direct control of governments, destroying other secret societies, or any other plot imaginable.

Campaigns using this type of Assassins will most likely involve the PCs as freedom fighters or outsiders that accidentally get involved in the Assassins' plans. The Assassins might have a positive effect on the region, though, stabilizing what would otherwise be anarchy or open war. In that case the PCs could be Assassin peacekeepers, or rebels that would gladly accept anarchy if they received freedom.

Alternately, the PCs may be outsiders on the edge of an Assassin-controlled area, given the choice to help either the Nizari or those fighting against them. Uncovering the Assassins from an area of different culture could either be very easy or very difficult, depending on the Assassins' methods within that culture. If the society operates in secret, PCs will have to learn foreign customs and earn the trust of the locals before even beginning to investigate the Assassins.

Although Assassins that operate by creating fear in the entire populace would be apparent quickly, further investigations would likewise require earning a great deal of trust and overcoming the locals' fears of reprisal.

### Assassins as Ascending Power

In this sort of setting, the Assassins are just making their rise to dominance. They've just acquired their fortresses (or perhaps

they're still in the process of taking some) and are beginning to expand their influence within the region.

The first few strikes, if history serves as a guide, will be aimed at pursuing their leader's personal vendettas and destabilizing countries that might pose an immediate threat. The ensuing chaos serves two purposes: delaying any potential danger from the destabilized country, and creating openings in the new power structure for Assassin members to take advantage of.

Adventures with these types of Assassins will probably involve the PCs fighting off infiltrators, taking independent action against the Assassins, and generally trying to keep the Assassins contained. Alternately, the Assassins can just be another organization trying to take over, better than some, worse than others. The Assassins are very private with their plans either way and aren't likely to accept help even if the PCs were to offer it.

### Assassins as Freedom Fighters

Depending on the situation in the region, the Assassins may be an oppressed people's last hope. In areas where the all the power is concentrated in the hands a few leaders, the Assassins could very easily be seen as liberators.

Whether the PCs see the Assassins as friends or merely a separate force that happens to oppose the same people is up to the players. Most PCs will react better if the Assassins are less openly concerned with religion and focus exclusively on deposing whatever regime they oppose.

Adventures in this sort of setting will generally involve working against whatever regime is in place (either with the Assassins or independently). A less valiant group of PCs might be working for the Assassins' target, in which case it plays out much like *Assassins as a Rising Power*. Perhaps the best option is putting players into the situation and letting them choose between the oppressive regime and the unknown Assassins.

### Hooks and Seeds

- ▶ The PCs are offered a job defending an NPC leader that has been openly speaking against the Assassins.
- ▶ A new leader has come to head the Assassins and is taking the opportunity to kill personal enemies and prove he is worthy of fear.
- ▶ The Assassins kill the leader of an organization the PCs hate and its new leader is jumping to take Assassin orders.
- ▶ Someone impersonating an Assassin kills the PCs' patron. The imposter is trying to hide her involvement and possibly draw the PCs into a fight they can't win.
- ▶ A philosopher comes through the PCs' settlement and preaches in line with Assassin philosophy. Is he a Assassin recruiter or a harmless philosopher that agrees with some Assassin tenants?
- ▶ A young man from a local family has been recruited into the Assassins, reportedly not thinking it through. By the time the PCs find out, he's already on his way to an Assassin stronghold. If he gets there, there's no chance he's coming back.
- ▶ A newcomer has shown up to several of the local organizations the PCs belong to, telling the leaders what they want to hear and quickly advancing through the ranks. Will the

party risk the possible backlash to determine if the newcomer is an Assassin?

▶ An explorer returns from the wilderness not far from an Assassin stronghold and claims to have found the order's Paradise. If her claims can be verified, the Assassins would have trouble recruiting new agents, but she's already been targeted for death. The PCs either know the explorer, have been hired to protect her, or can work to verify her claims.

▶ Local leaders have been getting orders from on high to ignore the Assassin threat. These orders can be traced back to one political figure that has been threatened into compliance. Nothing will convince him of his own safety. Will the players try to undermine his power, ignore the problem, or stoop to the Assassins' level?

▶ The leader of a nearby fortress or military installation has revealed herself to be an Assassin. Everyone who opposed her has already been converted or transferred elsewhere. A frontal assault would be suicidal, even for a large force, but a smaller group might be able to sneak in.

### The Assassins in Fantasy

The Assassins are most at home in a fantasy setting. Their tactics and history fit perfectly into the usual fantasy ideals, with impenetrable castles and looming threat. In this setting, they'll act much as they did historically.

Fantasy worlds also usually have the advantage of very centralized leadership, placing the power in the hands of royalty. The Assassins can take advantage of this, especially if the next in line is more easily intimidated than the present ruler. The Assassins would avoid those rare fantasy nations ruled by councils and rely more on negotiation and intimidation in those areas.

In history, the Assassins emerged from an environment of strict monotheism, with different factions following the same god vying for control. However, the order could just as easily follow one god from a pantheon, as long as the tradition for a chain of prophets exists.

Creating or choosing a god for the Assassins isn't an easy task. The key is that they believe their god will reward them for their actions. It will not be a god of rogues or assassination, because they are fighting and dying for a cause they believe in, not money. Death is not the Assassins' goal, but a god representing the afterlife might be reasonable. A god of law, justice, or warriors could fit this role, although the other followers of that god probably wouldn't appreciate the Assassin take on it.

Gods of peace are also good choices at least in the sense that the Assassins rejected warfare. In the end, the faith that they follow will be a divergent form of a lawful, and possibly good, god.

Magic can cause the Assassins some problems. Any magic that could detect infiltrators is obviously an issue, one the Assassins would have to develop methods to counter. Once an Assassin has attacked his target, magical countermeasures would be ignored in favor of being struck down. Investigating after the death will just result in finding the killer's identity as an Assassin agent and possibly the identity of his teacher. Assassin recruiters

will take pains to conceal their real identities from even their students.

There's also the problem of keeping targets dead. In some cases it won't be necessary; the target won't be able to return. In some settings, a resurrected target might take the death as a warning and be intimidated enough to work with the Assassins from that point on. In other cases, powerful magics or other techniques will have to be involved. Some Assassin legends say that the *fidai* was sent a golden dagger from the order's leader to complete the assassination; perhaps the weapon is enchanted to prevent the target from ever rising.

### The Assassins in Modern Settings

In the modern world, if it can pass for our world, the Assassins will need slightly different methods. Killing leaders openly to intimidate future candidates won't necessarily work as well with modern weapons and media. On the other hand, if the Assassins can still have an unassailable fortress of some nature (a vast underground network or mildly fantastic options like orbital bases), their methods will have to change less.

The Assassins would depend on either the governments themselves covering up the murders, or a slightly more delicate method of removing enemies. If leaders are convinced that their own power or lives will be forfeit if the Assassins' influence is revealed, those leaders will willingly assist in the cover-ups. The other option is for the Assassins to kill through less traceable means (heart attacks, lone gunmen) and inform the governments or leadership circles that such a death is an Assassin act. Once the world leaders fear them, the Assassins will be able to direct government actions through threats. Assassinations will only have to be utilized to reinforce the threats.

Like many societies, the Assassins of your modern day can be either a continuation of the old society or a new society built on the same mold. If it is a continuation, you'll have to consider the Assassins' history from the destruction of Alamut – what have they been doing since then? For a new society, why was it formed?

If the Assassins are a continuation of the same organization, they'll likely have continued recruiting as an esoteric sect of Islam, offering the disaffected a clear direction and path to Paradise. The order would also have to adapt to centuries of technological advancement and cultural changes, especially with the fact that in many countries an assassination is national or even global news.

For a new organization, the members may follow the same path as the original Assassins, or they may be admirers more than followers. People copying Assassin techniques will probably still have a religious agenda, or a pretense of one, to maintain the necessary loyalty. With slight modifications to Assassin teachings, the group could just as easily be a Christian cult or even a group of New Age mystics.

### The Assassins in Science Fiction

The Assassins can transfer more easily to many futuristic settings than they would to the modern day. If the setting has well-

defined leaders, the Assassins have to work behind the scenes like they would in the modern day. On the other hand, if the setting has more isolated regions or is generally less defined, the Assassins can have free reign, much as they would in a fantasy setting.

In most sci-fi settings, there are many factions vying for control. The order would probably seize control of one or more of those factions through the Assassins' age-old technique of intimidation backed by knives.

Advances in drugs, psionics, genetics, or cybernetics could allow the Assassins a greater range of power if they were interested in mind control, or it could provide them with a stronger assurance of members' loyalty. However, in many bleaker futures, the offer of Paradise is still enough to gather fanatical recruits.

Although it's possible that a society could have survived from the destruction of Alamut to the times of science fiction, that organization would have to be very secretive or very epic. It's more likely that a new society would emulate the Assassins' methods. Any sort of religious organization can contain the Assassins, and in settings with few such organizations, an independent Assassin organization can still gather many followers with the offer of Paradise.

Assassin sleeper agents would spread everywhere waiting for the order to strike. The advent of more powerful and hopefully more secretive communications technology allow one-time connections between the master and his servants. Advances in cybernetics and biological manipulation could help with disguises or even allow agents to replace targets.

In a setting with space travel, the Assassins will probably latch on to asteroids or other barren rocks as optimal places for fortresses. Other great possibilities include artificial satellites, massive subterranean bases (possibly under population centers to discourage bombardment), or other more advanced options like Dyson spheres or multi-generational colony ships.

#### Assassins in d20

There is already an assassin prestige class in the DMG, but it doesn't reflect anything like the Nizari Assassins' methods. Whereas the prestige class represents the sort of killer that strikes from the shadows, Nizari assassins will cultivate a relationship with the target over years waiting for the order to kill, or disguise themselves as members of some other group. As such, a new prestige class is probably in order.

Membership activity in the Assassins is largely based on loyalty. Those with the necessary skills and unquestioning loyalty will be sent into the field as potential killers. Those without are

set to tasks of recruiting new members or simply working as support.

Members undergoing training will learn methods of infiltration, focusing on telling people what they want to hear. Charisma is the primary attribute, along with the Charismatic Hero class if you're using *d20 Modern*. For *Dungeons & Dragons*, they'll train in any class that provides a good cover identity. Priests of local religions, warriors for imitating soldiers, and rogues or bards if nothing else is available in a specific region or setting.

Alignment is a sticky subject with the Assassins. They follow orders absolutely and have their own, very strict, codes of conduct, so they are obviously lawful. It's tougher to say exactly where they fall on the good-evil axis. From their view, they are doing what is right and killing one tyrant to save thousands of lives on the field of open warfare.

Although outsiders would consider their methods distasteful, they could legitimately be considered good. If you're not comfortable with that, lawful neutral is another good option. Lawful evil only works if you're casting them as murderous villains out to control the world.

#### NIZARI ASSASSIN

Complete loyalty to the Old Man of the Mountain (the leader of the Assassins) and willingness to kill or die at his whim typify the Nizari assassins. They are trained extensively in the arts of disguise and telling people what they want to hear. Their lives are subsumed by the various roles they play, only appearing to be a true Nizari assassin upon receiving orders from their master.

Most Nizari assassins are trained from a very young age. It's not uncommon for them to have training as a rogue, cleric or fighter, but they can come from any class. Nizari assassins tend to work alone, but multiple agents are sometimes assigned to particularly threatening targets. Sometimes these members will not even know that the others are Nizari assassins.



**Hit Die:** d6.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become a Nizari assassin, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Alignment:** Any lawful.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +3.

**Skills:** Disguise 5 ranks, Gather Information 5 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 5 ranks.

**Feats:** Iron Will, Weapon Focus (dagger).

**Special:** The prospective Nizari assassin must be specifically

accepted by the head of the order and train in an Assassin fortress.

### Class Skills

The Nizari assassin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (nobility and royalty) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Profession (Wis), Speak Language (None), and Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

### Class Features

All the following are class features of the Nizari assassin prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** A Nizari assassin does not gain any additional proficiency with armor or weapons.

**Taqiyya (Ex):** A Nizari assassin learns to imitate people from different walks of life. At first level, he may choose one specific group of people to imitate. The groups a Nizari assassin can imitate include any organizations in the region of Nizari strongholds. Some examples include soldiers, priests of a specific god, bureaucrats, traveling merchants, or mercenary wanderers.

The Nizari assassin gains a +4 class bonus to all Bluff and Disguise checks to convince others that he is a member of his chosen group. In addition, he receives the same bonus to all Gather Information checks made among members of that group.

The Nizari assassin may choose an additional type of person to imitate at 4th, 7th, and 10th level.

**Absolute Focus (Ex):** Nizari assassins can continue to function while disabled or dying during an ordained assassination. While using this ability, they continue to act as though they have positive hit points, but lose an additional hit point per round. If a Nizari assassin is injured to the point of death, she will still die normally.

**Sneak Attack:** If a Nizari assassin of 2nd level or higher attacks an enemy who is denied a Dexterity bonus to its AC, the Nizari assassin deals +1d6 damage for that first attack. This extra damage is increased by +1d6 every three levels afterwards (+2d6 at 5th level and +3d6 at 8th).

This ability works in all other ways as the sneak attack class ability. This bonus stacks with sneak attack bonuses from other classes.

**Know the Enemy (Ex):** Over the course of minutes, hours, days, or years, the Nizari assassin can study his potential target. Many Nizari assassins know their victims for years or decades before the call comes, if it ever does. After this study, the Nizari assassin gets a knowledge bonus to all his attacks and melee damage rolls against the target, as shown in Table 3-1, below.

To study a target, the Nizari assassin must be in his presence and able to closely observe him (within 20 feet). For longer period observations, the Nizari assassin must be near him regularly throughout that time. The Nizari assassin can only study one person at a time and immediately loses all bonuses against a target if she begins studying someone else.

TABLE 3-1: KNOW THE ENEMY

Length of Observation	Knowledge Bonus	Duration of Bonus
One hour	+1	One day
One day	+2	One month
One week	+3	Six months
One month	+4	One year
One year	+5	One decade

**Badge of Innocence (Ex):** While a Nizari assassin of 2nd level or higher is on a mission for his master, his alignment appears to reflect his obedience to the order. This ability does not actually change the Nizari assassin's alignment; instead, it changes what others perceive. Any spells, abilities or items that detect alignment will perceive the Nizari assassin's alignment as lawful good. Evil or chaotic items worn or carried by the Nizari assassin are not detected as such.

**Assassin's Blade (Su):** The Nizari assassin becomes familiar enough with his dagger that it becomes attuned to him. The dagger is effectively a +1 magical weapon at 3rd level and increases to +2 at 9th. The dagger functions as a normal, nonmagical dagger in others' hands. If the Nizari assassin's dagger already possesses a magical enhancement bonus of +1 or higher, it may gain the *keen* quality instead.

If the Nizari assassin loses his dagger, it takes one month to become attuned to a new one. If the master of the order directly gives him the new dagger, that attunement takes one hour instead.

**Eagle's Splendor (Sp):** A 4th level Nizari assassin can produce a spell-like effect identical to *eagle's splendor* cast at his class level once per day. He can only use this ability on himself. He gains an additional use of this ability at 7th level and another additional use at 10th level.

**Heroism (Sp):** At 5th level, a Nizari assassin can use *heroism* as a spell-like ability once a day. He can only use this ability on himself. The ability functions at a caster level equal to the Nizari assassin's class level.

**Blade of Wounding (Su):** At 6th level, the Nizari assassin's attuned dagger (as assassin's blade) now has the wounding ability. Each time her dagger causes damage to someone, it also deals a point of Constitution damage. Anyone else using the weapon does not gain this effect.

**Glibness (Sp):** The Nizari assassin can use *glibness* as a spell-like ability once per day upon reaching 6th level. He can only use this ability on himself. Its casting level is equal to his class level. The Nizari assassin gains another use of this ability per day at 9th level.

**Greater Heroism (Sp):** At 8th level, the Nizari assassin may choose to gain the effects of *greater heroism* instead when using his *heroism* spell-like ability.

**Gateway to Paradise (Su):** As of 10th level, whenever the Nizari assassin kills an ordained target with his attuned dagger (through hit point damage, a coup de grace, or Constitution damage) that target's soul is extinguished.

Returning the target to life requires destroying the dagger and a carefully worded *wish* or *miracle* spell to free the soul. Only then the subject can be returned through normal means.

TABLE 3-2: THE NIZARI ASSASSIN

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Absolute focus, taqiyya (1st type)
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Badge of innocence, sneak attack +1d6
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Assassin's blade +1, know the enemy
4th	+3	+1	+4	+4	<i>Eagle's splendor</i> 1/day, taqiyya (2nd type)
5th	+3	+1	+4	+4	<i>Heroism</i> 1/day, sneak attack +2d6
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5	<i>Glibness</i> 1/day, wounding blade
7th	+5	+2	+5	+5	<i>Eagle's splendor</i> 2/day, taqiyya (3rd type)
8th	+6	+2	+6	+6	<i>Greater heroism</i> , sneak attack +3d6
9th	+6	+3	+6	+6	Assassin's blade (+2), <i>glibness</i> 2/day
10th	+7	+3	+7	+7	<i>Eagle's splendor</i> 3/day, gateway to paradise, taqiyya (4th type)

**Nizari Assassin in d20 Modern**

Like all prestige classes, the Nizari assassin requires some slight changes to work as a *d20 Modern* advanced class.

**Requirements:** Remove "Alignment: Any Lawful," but the Nizari assassin is still expected to prove absolutely loyal. Knowledge (religion) 5 ranks is instead Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 5 ranks.

**Class Skills**

The Nizari assassin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) (Int), Knowledge (streetwise) (Int), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) (Int), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (None), Sense Motive (Wis), and Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 5 + Int modifier.

**Action Points:** The Nizari assassin gains a number of Action Points equal to 6 + one half of his character level (rounded down) each time he gains a level in this class.

**Example Assassins - The Judges**

Our example Assassin-based society, The Judges, is set in the modern day, an organization of revolutionaries converted and eventually taken over by one who claims the lineage of Alamut. They now operate in deep secrecy, relying on infrequent and mysterious threats to steer political figures in the direction they choose.

The Judges can control as large or as small an area as you'd like. Their main strengths are their absolute loyalty, network of agents, and in-depth training. If your campaign has some supernatural elements, you can consider giving them access to those elements or perhaps leaving them as mundane, albeit very skilled, people who use their cunning to level the playing field.

**History**

It begins with a small, secretive group of religious activists known as the Judges. They tried to bring about change through

propaganda and the occasional touch of sabotage. Eventually, however, some members became so fed up with their failures and the state of the world that they killed a corrupt political figure, trying fairly unsuccessfully to make it look like an accident.

As the authorities were descending on the organization, a figure from high within the political hierarchy diverted the investigators. He then presented himself to the Judges, offering his protection in exchange for their service.

Later, when the figure declared his descent from Alamut and his position as Qaim (the Judge, the Last Prophet), the organization gladly followed suit by becoming a cult centered on him. The first leader died forty years later, leaving his immense wealth and ironclad leadership of the group to his son, who is now referred to as Sinan in honor of the legendary Assassin chief.

A few years after his father's death, the new leader revealed the underground complex his father had begun and led the group to its new headquarters. From that point on, the organization has been growing in power and secrecy, threatening higher-level political figures and inserting members into many organizations.

**Goals**

The Judges seek to serve the Qaim and be granted access to Paradise (the leader will likely call it Heaven in a heavily Christian area, or the appropriate title for other religions). The original leader seemed mostly interested in gathering secular power, but his son seems to buy into the philosophy much more deeply. He wants to stop the world from further descent (defined as deviation from his strict moral code) and eventually start lifting it back up. This moral code centers mostly on avoiding the corrupting influences of this world. Sex, drugs, alcohol, and indulgence in any activity are considered evil. Each Judge sees the code somewhat differently, usually colored by her upbringing and original faith.

More important than the moral goal, however, is the survival and continued secrecy of the order. Its network of sleeper agents continues to improve. The scattered agents are expected to



protect the Judges' interests despite many years between orders, and may eventually be called upon to perform a political killing.

### Methods

The organization does take after the Assassins in their ideology and recruitment, but differ greatly in assassination techniques. The dagger is now a symbol used as an assassination tool when possible, but the Judges do not shy away from firearms should the situation call for it. Members do, however, avoid using explosives and other techniques that would cause unnecessary harm to innocents, except in the most dire circumstances.

The leader of the order personally chooses targets (or if it has grown to gigantic size, regional leaders may also choose). More frequent than actual assassinations are not-so-subtle threats, such as the old-fashioned leaving a dagger at a sleeping target's bedside. Few political leaders are willing to reveal that such a threat occurred and those few that would are usually the ones directly targeted for death.

Judge agents in many fields have instructions to help bring ridicule to the idea of conspiracy theory. Some of them do this by adding more disinformation to the mix and others by simply ridiculing conspiracy theory in public. At least one member has created several of her own "secret societies" that self-destruct in spectacular manners after a few years.

### Membership

There are three main groups of members. The first group, now quickly succumbing to old age, were members of the Judges before it was completely taken over by the Last Prophet. The current leader sees these members as a threat, even those who have proven their loyalty, and keeps a careful eye on each of them.

The main body of the membership is formed from those who have been recruited into the order. Members are chosen because they have beliefs that fall in line with the Assassins', are willing to serve authority, have some religious beliefs but are not too set in one path, and won't be searched for if they abandon their current position in society.

When a potential member is located, they are watched for an extended period of time, then drugged in their sleep and woken in the Judges' stronghold. Each is offered the chance to stay and learn or return to her home. Those who choose to remain are trained, brainwashed, and sent to a new area with falsified credentials. Those that choose to return home are killed and their bodies disposed of.

The final group is a handful of people that have grown up entirely within the Judges. These members reside primarily at the stronghold and are the only people who know its location that are allowed to leave. They are even more fanatically loyal than other members, but are rarely used in assassinations. For the most part, they work ferrying members and potential members to and from the stronghold.

Sinan walks freely among the groups at the compound, but tends to lay his trust in those born to the order. He is extremely

charismatic, to the extent that people who meet him remember little other than his speaking style and powerful aura. He does practice what he preaches as well, staying well away from the temptations of the flesh. This has, so far, left him without an heir, something which troubles him slightly.

### Adjusting Them to Your Campaign

Your main consideration bringing the Judges into your campaign should be how they interact with other societies, secret or open. Any societies with overlapping agendas will step on the Judges' toes and will have to be dealt with.

The Judges, at least at first, work against secret societies the same way as any other opponent: infiltration, threats, and then death. Unfortunately, infiltration is exponentially more difficult against a secret society and knowing whom to kill can also become complicated. If approached with a reasonable offer for peace from an organization that isn't completely heinous, the Judges will generally accept it in order to avoid these difficulties.

Organizations with magical abilities become targets for the Judges' current leader, unless those abilities come from the same divine force the Judges revere. Organizations that falsely claim magical powers are also targeted.

The Judges are less likely to infiltrate organizations with actual magical power and more likely to resort to sending puppet groups after them or killing members outright. The fear of revelation to the public or contamination of their own members is too high a risk except under the most dire circumstances.

Even if the Judges are far more powerful than the opposing society, they have one serious disadvantage. Their communication network is set up to work in one direction: orders go out. Reports filter back in slowly, if at all. The Judges notice if their agents show up in the news or the obituaries, and may send an agent with the appropriate credentials to investigate, but that's about the extent of it.

This can also be handy for PCs opposing the Judges. As long as the party keeps a low profile, the Judges will have a lot of trouble tracking it. However, the moment the PCs draw the Judges' attention, they will probably be framed for several crimes and become the subject of threats and other similar perils. Actually assassinating the PCs is a possibility, but an absolute last resort.

### Aum Shinrikyo

#### Aum, Aum Supreme Truth, Aleph

Aum Shinrikyo is best known as the Japanese cult behind the 1995 Tokyo subway attack, using the deadly gas Sarin to kill twelve people and injure nearly six thousand. The reasons for that attack still aren't entirely clear, and may never be, but Aum's philosophy is relatively well understood, if strange.

The basis of Aum's philosophy is a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age beliefs with an unhealthy dose of apocalyptic Christian thought. Meditation, physical deprivation, and separation from mundane society are its members' primary methods of achieving enlightenment. Another very important

section of its philosophy is the recognition of its leader, Asahara Shoko, as the chosen instrument of Shiva to lead the world away from the impending World War III and create Shambala, an enlightened society of superhuman beings.

As a broad generalization, three types of people joined Aum: disaffected housewives, college students or recent graduates, and scientists. The first two groups joined primarily out of hopelessness and a need for spiritual support. Those members couldn't see a place for themselves in Japanese society and began looking for something more satisfying. This alienation was commonplace in Japan in the late 1970s and early 80s, leading to large numbers of both social classes joining new religions around that time.

The scientists who joined are the interesting ones for game purposes. A handful of them simply believed in Aum's philosophy, but the majority were promising students at prestigious universities who simply didn't do well enough to be allowed independent research. Asahara provided massive funding to the scientists that joined his inner circle, where they were allowed to work on their own research as well as cult activities.

#### Aum Shinrikyo Philosophy

Aum Shinrikyo began as a splinter of a yoga group with some mystical leanings. Aum then steadily added components from Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, and apocalyptic Christian sources. Like many other new faiths at the time, Aum included "scientific" beliefs of questionable validity, although these were included largely to imply the divinity of its leader Asahara Shoko and the need for humans to become more like him.

Through the course of its history, Aum became increasingly insular, but maintained that the apocalypse was imminent. These end times were alternately seen as the Christian biblical apocalypse, a nuclear war between the United States and Japan, or some symbolic mixture of the two. At first, Aum believed that the apocalypse could only be averted by a huge number of people leaving normal society and joining Aum. Later, the focus moved to surviving the unstoppable apocalypse by becoming part of Aum and following its members to Shambala. Finally, Aum perceived Armageddon and the resulting Shambala as preferable to the present state of affairs, leading to Aum's search for and research into weapons of mass destruction.

Shambala was seen as a sort of heaven on earth, a realm of psychic adepts ruled by the ideal king Ruarda Cakrin. Ruarda Cakrin was, of course, identified as Asahara Shoko. Aum's largest step toward the creation of Shambala was the creation of Lotus Villages, communes cut off from the outside world, focusing on physical denial and meditation. Asahara's place in Aum Shinrikyo philosophy is largely accredited to his connection with Shiva, who supposedly appeared to Asahara and declared him "god of light who leads the armies of the gods." Asahara is therefore considered the conduit between Shiva and humanity. Like much of Aum's philosophy, this belief is a cherry-picked piece of information from another faith. Beyond this connection with Shiva, however, the Hindu pantheon is rarely invoked.

## Shambala

Shambala is a concept native to ancient Tibetan culture, later folded into Tibetan Buddhism. It is spoken of on many levels: a physical location, an ancestral home, and a state of enlightenment. Some also associate it with the buried kingdom Agatha and the Aryan homeland. This was especially common among the Nazi mystics involved in Ahnenerbe (pageref).

Shambala was the inspiration for Shangri-La, and many refer to them interchangeably. The Dalai Lamas are said to be reincarnations of the second king of Shambala. Of special interest to Aum is the twenty-fifth and final prophesized king of Shambala, Ruarda Cakrin, who will wipe away the corrupt nations and begin a new golden age.

In addition to acting as Shiva's chosen leader, Asahara also claimed connections with Jesus and the Dalai Lama. According to Asahara, the Dalai Lama entrusted him with the duty to bring true Buddhism to Japan. Of course, the Dalai Lama denies this and Asahara's brand of Buddhism has little to do with the Dalai Lama's, so such claims are rather suspect. The connections with Jesus are even more tenuous.

Asahara also served as the living gateway to enlightenment. His blessing, the placing of his hands on the devotee's head, was said to enable the process of enlightenment. Drinking his blood, bathwater, or even just tap water he had blessed was supposed to grant visions of higher realms and ease the way to enlightenment. The visions that some members actually experienced were largely attributed to trace amounts of LSD or other hallucinogens added to the substances.

#### Aum Shinrikyo History

In almost every way, the history of Aum Shinrikyo is the history of its leader, Asahara Shoko. He was born Matsumoto Chizuo in 1955 to a large, poor family. His father eventually sent Chizuo to a school for the blind, claiming that the child was entirely blind so the family wouldn't have to pay tuition. Chizuo actually had limited vision and used it to bully and extort his classmates, much as he himself had been bullied before transferring. He later failed admission into his favored university and instead opened up a shady alternative medicine shop. Although Asahara was convicted of fraud, many people still purchased his cures at exorbitant prices, allowing him to build up the fortune that would eventually serve as the nest egg for Aum Shinrikyo.

Asahara joined an esoteric yoga group, and then left it, taking with him what would be the original members of his cult. Pictures of him levitating brought in Aum's first new members. During this first period, until 1986 or so, Aum remained close to its yoga roots.

This changed after Asahara's first trips to India, when he began integrating his interpretation of Buddhist philosophy into Aum

teachings. He focused on saving the world, or at least as many people as he could, from the Armageddon he foresaw. Of course, only Aum's philosophy could stop the imminent End Times. During this period, Asahara attempted to expand into other nations, but found little success.

It was during these first visits to India that Asahara claimed to have become the chosen of Shiva. His meetings with the god were said to have many mythological elements, advancing Asahara's place in the group from leader-mentor to emissary of the divine.

In 1989, Aum Shinrikyo's philosophy took another dramatic turn. Asahara began focusing on more esoteric interpretations of Buddhism and apparently began to perceive the End Times as a tool of cleansing. He had lost hope that humanity could be saved and worked to protect his followers instead. They began stockpiling weapons for self-defense during the apocalypse.

During that year, Aum also committed its first known murder. The victim was a member who attempted to leave the organization. He was killed by Asahara's inner circle and then burned until only ashes remained.

That disappearance, combined with other cases of suspected brainwashing and fraud, led to a lawsuit headed by Tsutsumi Sakamoto, a well-known human rights lawyer. Asahara suggested to his inner circle that the lawyer be dealt with. Sakamoto, along with his wife and child, was killed and the bodies hidden. The police found evidence of a struggle and an Aum badge at the crime scene, but dismissed it as a ploy to implicate Aum. The police had reservations about taking on a religious group for political reasons, and dismissed other odd occurrences surrounding Aum for the same reason.

Asahara appeared to give Japan his last effort at peace in 1990, entering himself and some followers in several political races for positions in the lower house. The most notable feature of the race was individuals with giant papier-mâché representations of Asahara's head, chanting his name over and over. The Japanese people found this more unnerving than persuasive and Aum candidates got microscopic numbers of votes.

The next few years served largely as a prelude for their eventual attack on the Tokyo subways. Aum purchased a farm in Australia, which they then used for testing Sarin gas and possibly other weapons. Asahara staged the "Russian Salvation Tour," a massive recruiting drive in Russia, and used his connections there in an unsuccessful attempt to gain nuclear weapons. Attempts to acquire weapons from the United States and Australia also failed.

Aum Shinrikyo also tried several times to use biological or chemical weapons in Japan with poor results, mostly due to lack of experience. For example, one attack was unsuccessful because the agent Aum had chosen broke down on contact with air, and an anthrax attack used a strain of the disease used for animal vaccination, rather than the true toxin. The group's first use of Sarin in Japan, attempting to kill a panel of judges in a case against Aum, would have been successful except for a sudden

## Aum Ranks

At the center of Aum, without a doubt, is Asahara Shoko. He was known as a *yogi* (a practitioner of yoga with a high level of spiritual insight) and, later, as Ruarda Cakrin.

Surrounding Asahara were his scientists and scholars. Some of these joined due to belief in Aum's teachings, but more were lured by the promise of research funding.

Several ranks of initiates served as Aum's lowest levels. They believed Asahara's claims and funneled tremendous amounts of money into the society's coffers.

shift in the wind, killing seven in a neighboring residential area instead.

On the 20th of March 1995, Asahara ordered the use of Sarin gas on the Tokyo subways in the hopes of disrupting a planned police raid on Aum facilities. The gambit killed twelve and injured upwards of five thousand, but the raids went forward regardless. It still took police until mid-May to arrest the Aum leadership.

The inner circle of Aum was broken and many of its followers attempted to return to their normal lives. However, with most or all of their possessions now property of the cult and the public's complete rejection of Aum's old members, they could not find a place in society. Many of them returned to Aum, which maintained spiritual and philosophical connections with Asahara, but purged connections with illegal activities and renamed itself Aleph.

Aleph continues to operate in a limited capacity to this day, led by one of Asahara's senior leaders. Its membership has fallen to around 2,000 members as of 2004, down from its reported height of 40,000.

## Aum Shinrikyo Symbols & Signs

The most important symbol of Aum Shinrikyo was Asahara himself. His touch was a great blessing and any object that came in contact with him carried some of that blessing. His bath water became "Miracle Pond" and his blood was said to have proven mystical properties, a dose speeding the way to enlightenment for roughly \$7,000. Even tap water he blessed became "Nectar Water," which is said to glow in the dark.

Shambala was cast as a nation of psychically awakened humans. Asahara was supposed to lead after the apocalypse was either past or averted. It was spoken of in glowing, but vague, terms. Everyone within Shambala was said to have ascended into Clear Light, a form of pure psychic energy.

The Hindu god Shiva is said to be the source of Asahara's power, or at least the key that unlocked it. Beyond that, Shiva isn't much spoken of in the cult's literature.

Certain devices were also invented by Asahara's scientists and advertised as helping along the path to enlightenment. The Perfect Salvation Initiative was a skullcap studded with electrodes, intended to stimulate the brain and filter the wearer's aura. The Astral Teleporters looked like prayer mats run through with circuitry, supposed to give the meditator part of Asahara's spiritual strength.

### Aum Shinrikyo in Game

Aum can take a number of forms in a game. Replaying the terrorist attack that occurred in the real world is only one option. Like many societies, you have to ask the question: what if they're right? If the apocalypse were coming and Aum's members were the only people working against the End Times, it certainly casts a different light on their activities.

In many settings, members of Aum Shinrikyo could actually have the powers they claim. Their powers were mostly psionic in nature, but they also used a range of weird science devices and the obvious weapons of mass destruction.

### Apocalyptic Cult

Many game settings have a society bent on destroying the world. Aum is one of the very few real-world societies that show us how such a society might come to be. The society's charismatic leader wanted to save the world from the coming End Times, but eventually gave in and welcomes the end as a purifying force that will leave Shambala.

The followers of Aum in the real world never really understood what sort of atrocities Asahara was planning. Most of Aum's members only knew that the end was coming and that they would be kept safe by Asahara's power and the lessons they learned from him. Initiates were told not to fear, that their meditative exercises would protect them from radiation and allow them to ascend during the final moments of modern Earth.

Using Aum in this role, we have a self-righteous leader surrounded by a small group of followers (many of whom are very intelligent and capable) who hang on his every word. The rest of the society provides funds, recruiting, and raw manpower to carry through his plans.

One aspect of Aum important in this setting is its absolute belief in Asahara, at least at the lower levels. For all intents and purposes, Asahara is the society's manifest god, simultaneously powerful beyond human reckoning and a light representing humanity's full potential.

Adventures with this sort of Aum will assuredly involve learning of its plans and trying to thwart them. Recruiting efforts and fundraising can be disrupted at the street level. At higher levels, the PCs can uncover the full range of the plans, attack operations aimed at producing weapons, and eventually take on the cult leadership in direct confrontation.

Another option to consider with this sort of campaign is that Aum is right. Its members will survive the apocalypse and live on as beings of Clear Light on the newly purified world. Of

course, most PCs will still oppose the society, and rightly so, but it does provide a profound reason for Aum to strive against all odds and makes the PCs' enemies a little more human. This option obviously makes more sense for settings with some sort of supernatural events behind the scenes.

### Preparing for the Apocalypse

Perhaps Aum isn't trying to cause the apocalypse at all in your campaign. Asahara is merely convinced that it is coming and wishes to teach as many people as possible the means to save themselves.

This makes Aum rather humanitarian, if possibly misguided, and really just trying to do the right thing. Its members stockpile weapons to defend themselves against the challenges they know will present themselves as the apocalypse unfolds, but their main focus will always be on recruitment.

This sort of organization can make for an interesting feature of the campaign. It isn't dangerous unless threatened (although its definition of threat may vary), and it will help out in any activity that might allow it to forestall the Apocalypse or gain more trainees.

PC actions in this sort of setting can vary broadly. They might act to directly help Aum or ally with it. Or Aum's idea of defending itself might be a bit too broad, leading to clashes with the PCs and the authorities. If the PCs are involved in activities which Aum believes will help draw the apocalypse, the party will face a well-funded, but poorly trained, army of zealots alongside the normal threats of a secret society. This approach is far more effective if Aum has some legitimate reason, such as detailed knowledge of the PCs' employers, to believe that the party's actions may help bring about the apocalypse.

### Cult of Science

Aum Shinrikyo always focused a great deal of its energies into science and research. Even the assertions that Asahara's blood had magical properties were said to be "scientifically proven." In addition to weapons research, Aum also did a fair amount of undirected research, experiments regarding their philosophy, and some investigation into Nikola Tesla, who, among his myriad legitimate inventions, is said to have dabbled in such sci-fi gadgets as death rays and earthquake machines.

By recasting the inner circle as interested solely in study, Aum's outer appearance could be a lie. Those outside the inner circle would just be pawns, recruiters, and money gatherers for the research of the inner circle. This research would probably contain some projects designated by the group, but focuses mostly on each member's personal interest.

Taking this approach requires a GM to come up with the goals of each member of the inner circle. They could be part of another secret society, terrorist organization, or government. The inner circle members might just be disaffected scholars who weren't able to pursue their own research through other means. Perhaps they're the ones who planted the apocalypse idea in Asahara's head.

The inner circle would have immense resources at its disposal and would react negatively to the idea of that power being taken away. Their use of poison gas could be a failed attempt to defend the inner circle and its research.

PCs could fit into this reality in several ways. A group of scientists using a cult as cover probably wouldn't be the first enemy the PCs would expect, and Aum certainly had the resources to make their scientists a terrible threat. The PCs might be members or employees of another society dealing with scientific research, either friendly toward Aum's inner circle or seeking to destroy it.

In fantasy settings, the science Aum is devoted to would instead be study of the supernatural. It may be wizardly magic, but could also be psionics, experiments to awaken the power of sorcerers in normal people, or even an attempt to create a god from nothing with Asahara as the ultimate guinea pig. If they are pursuing wizardly magic, it's possible to avoid stereotypes by reinforcing that they're a group of researchers simply using the cult as a source of funding.

#### Aleph

After Aum was exposed and its leadership destroyed, the society remained adrift for a time. Its members tried to rejoin the public and were eventually forced back into Aum from a lack of anywhere else to go. The order was renamed Aleph and maintained the same belief system, although apparently without the interest in actively defending itself.

An organization in this position is presented with two options: hide forever, or try to regain society's trust. Whether the order has actually given up its old methods is something for the PCs to find out over the course of the campaign.

If Aleph hides, the PCs could easily be involved in continued attempts to infiltrate, investigate, or destroy it. After an attack like the one on the Tokyo subways, many people will see the society fading into the shadows as an offensive action.

An Aleph-equivalent trying to regain society's trust could also be very interesting. It would try to maintain recruitment and money sources, but bend its resources towards helping others. That aid may manifest as direct aid to the PCs, or perhaps it takes the form of various charities.

In a more fantastic setting, the organization's knowledge of strange weapons and advanced technology could come in handy in any number of cases. Its members could offer their expertise, helping a city recover after another, similar attack; or perhaps another society is recruiting them, trying to gather the remaining knowledge, and Aleph is attempting to warn everyone.

#### Hooks And Seeds

- ▶ An Aum member has disappeared. The organization claims that she ascended into Clear Light, thought without flesh, leaving no traces.
- ▶ Several individuals are found insane or dead after attending Aum rituals. Toxicology reports indicate overdoses of

hallucinogenic drugs, which the authorities write off as part of a general increase in drug use.

- ▶ Aum approaches scientists or criminals who have weapons knowledge and seek to recruit them or buy their assistance. The PCs might be these individuals, or they might be called in to help investigate the situation.

- ▶ During a local election (or at any time, really) members of the society show up all over town with giant representations of their leader's head, chanting his name. The locals are looking for help to get rid of Aum, and Aum is looking for help protecting itself against attacks by the locals.

- ▶ Several Aum representatives are digging into information about Nikolai Tesla (or a similar historical figure from your campaign). The authorities are understandably unconcerned, but it might be worth looking into.

- ▶ Aum recruits a promising scientist from the government or one of the PC's organizations. The scientist had information that is potentially very damaging and she needs to be brought back or killed.

- ▶ Aum starts a major recruiting drive in the PCs' area. Several parents complain about children being held against their will, but the children actually seem quite content from the limited contact they are allowed.

- ▶ Horrible smells cover the area surrounding an Aum facility. Aum insists the smell is from a cleansing ritual, but many individuals in the area fall ill.

- ▶ Strange lights are seen over a remote farmstead, which some know has been recently purchased by Aum. The next day, an earthquake decimates nearby villages.

- ▶ Aum has set up a 'Lotus Village' commune near the PCs' homes. Members of the cult start disappearing, with Aum claiming that they're being transferred to other villages. The normal authorities seem placated by that answer. A member of the cult or an outside investigator contacts the PCs to see if they can help locate the missing members.

#### Aum Shinrikyo in Fantasy

Aum fits into the traditional many-gods fantasy setting fairly well. They can easily be dismissed as another, slightly odd, religion trying to recruit as many members as possible. Settings with a more restricted set of religious beliefs might require some changes to Aum, with it either having existed further outside society or with a somewhat different philosophy.

An easy way to fit Aum into your world is to determine what elements within your setting their Shiva and apocalypse references point towards. The alternative would be to leave those references in and bring into your game some history of Shiva and an apocalyptic purification.

Any fairly powerful god can fill Shiva's role. Aum is likely to choose one that is recognizable and known to be powerful, but still fairly mysterious. It will likely be one of the major gods of a nearby culture, preferably one that many people look to as a source for knowledge. For example, if the residents of Aum's kingdom see the nearby elves as aloof, mysterious, and wise, Aum may use the leader of the elven pantheon.

The apocalypse is something that most campaigns already have some version of, if at least a vague looming threat of global

destruction. Aum will co-opt any existing prophecy or theory about the end of the world (especially if it involves rising from the ashes). If there isn't something that fits the bill, you can link Aum back to some earlier prophet or faith that the players simply haven't heard of.

Aum in the real world was involved heavily in scientific research. It stands to reason that, were the circumstances different, its members would pursue mystical research. They'll recruit promising wizards and search incessantly for the mystical equivalent of weapons of mass destruction. Previous sorcerous cataclysms and powerful wizards of the past will be studied with great interest.

They'd still research poisons and disease-based weapons, through magical and mundane means. It's also possible, should you want it in your campaign, that they might start delving into technology, psionics, and other secrets the mortal races were not meant to know.

Aum's inner circle in a fantasy world will appear as a circle of promising mages, backed by enormous amounts of funds. Like scientists, many wizards might join simply for the chance to research for themselves, rather than working on other people's projects for the rest of their lives.

#### Aum Shinrikyo in Modern Settings

Aum existed entirely within and as a product of the modern day. Its basic structure and style have shown up in many other cults. Aum is simply the one that's gone the furthest, taken the most extreme courses of action.

As of this writing, Aum has become Aleph, a fairly nice-seeming organization trying to leave its past behind. Aleph can be used in game, even if people know immediately it was Aum, because it maintains that air of mystery and distrust. Perhaps they were purified, perhaps they weren't.

If you want to use Aum from before the Sarin gas attacks, changing the name might be in order so your players don't immediately suspect what they're up against. Most players in modern games learn to distrust New Age mystics anyway, so using a name that someone might recognize makes the distrust even harder to work with.

One great theme with Aum in the modern day is the degree to which the authorities ignored them. Government officials and police didn't want to hassle a religious organization and accepted explanations at face value. It's known that Aum had at least some members in the police force, so that may have influenced the police forces toward inaction. This blindness, whether the result of influences or not, leaves some great openings for PC heroics.

Aum, if it's still interested in destroying the world in your campaign, will continue to work on its research on weapons of mass destruction. Scientists will be recruited, factories will be built, experiments will be performed, governments will be petitioned, criminal elements will be contacted, and all of these can lead into adventures for your PCs. At the same time, this

plot means the stakes are high, and the PCs' failure can mean catastrophe.

If you're looking to add some pseudo-science to Aum, there are two good routes. One of them is Aum's fascination with astral vibrations and auras, and their creation of devices to manipulate them. The other is the order's obsession with Nikolai Tesla and his research.

#### Aum Shinrikyo in Science Fiction

Aum has always had a technical bent, so much so that it might well be more at home in a science fiction setting than our own modern world. Aum's pseudo-science would still warp to meet the times, dancing on the edge between spirituality and advanced science.

One thing to consider is how Aum would interpret the apocalypse if humanity has spread to the stars. Is it just the destruction of Earth, or all of mankind? If the target is just Earth, Aum might not have a very hard job of either preventing or instigating it. However, destroying all of humanity is not only difficult, but will push Aum's weapons research to new heights.

That research would probably be even more terrifying in a science fiction setting. Biological and chemical weapons will be even more potent, coupled with bombs exploiting new forms of energy like matter and antimatter. If your science fiction setting has any background involving super-weapons or an especially terrible war, Aum will likely be researching it. Any areas of technology with potentially dubious uses, like nanotechnology, will also draw the cult's attention.

In a futuristic setting, Aum will likely play up the technical aspects of its spirituality. Its members can appeal to many people with a combination of religious beliefs, bringing in many people that may have never had a church growing up, and the generally disaffected. At the same time, Aum offers a connection between the high-technology world that these characters live in, and their spiritual nature.

The beliefs of Aum can also lend themselves to the development of psionic powers, should those exist in your setting. Perhaps a combination of meditation, electrical stimulation, and the drugs in Aum's elixirs can actually awaken such abilities. This can be part of Aum Shinrikyo's weapons program, an honest discovery on Asahara's part, or a side effect of Aum's belief system.

In settings where the apocalypse has already come and gone, Aum will be in a rather strange state. Its members may say that the true end hasn't come yet, or that Shambala has already come. Those who believe Shambala is already here will strive towards psychic and technological perfection, and will likely be rather confused as to why their leader is not accepted as the perfect head of Shambala.

#### Aum Shinrikyo in d20

Aum, and especially its leader, Asahara Shoko, is credited with a wide range of mystical abilities. Many of these can be duplicated by psionics or wizardly magic, but the society's range

of technological devices and mystical draughts are another matter entirely.

The abilities attributed to Aum members include levitation, healing, liberation from the body, enlightenment, clairvoyance, surviving the apocalypse, no longer breathing, immunity to radiation, telepathy, x-ray vision, out of body experiences, miraculous recovery from injury or illness, and increased skill at board games. Asahara Shoko was supposed to be able to do all this as well as bless items for his servitors' consumption, commune with Shiva, and serve as the gateway to enlightenment.

Scientist followers, in addition to other abilities, will be given access to top-notch research facilities and large quantities of money. In return, scientists will be expected to perform some research and testing at Asahara's request.

For purposes of alignment, most of the lesser followers would be best classified as lawful neutral or true neutral, but no real alignment restrictions could be had. The highest ranks could safely be considered evil or at least totally insane. The earlier followers of Aum, or members of the Aleph organization, may be considered good.

The Aum Initiate prestige class assumes that at least some of the powers Aum claims are true. If they aren't, then the initiates are poor, deluded fools chasing an empty dream. This prestige class is balanced to allow low level characters to enter the class easily, providing additional tools for the lower-ranking Aum members.

#### AUM INITIATE

The Aum initiate has meditated, fasted, and paid her way into the master's good graces. Her powers begin to unfold; she is expected to maintain her ties to the master before all else, and bring new members into the organization. Many initiates don't know the full scope of Aum's activities, but they are the only group outside the scientists who might be trusted with the information.

Membership in Aum is more closely tied to desire than skill, but members of certain classes do have an edge. Clerics understand the philosophies of Aum very easily, although they aren't often swayed from their original deity. Rogues and bards drawn to the group often advance through the ranks quickly, entering the leader's favor.

Aum followers never work alone. They're part of a large network in which any initiate can call on several lesser members. They are also expected to follow orders without question and act in the best interests of the cult. If they fail in these regards, any further advancement will be stopped.

**Hit Die:** d6.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become an Aum initiate, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Skills:** Bluff 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 4 ranks.

**Special:** Must have forsaken all worldly possessions to the cult, must participate in several initiations including the drinking of the leader's blood, and must be accepted by the leader of the cult.

#### Class Skills

The Aum initiate's class skills (and the key attributes for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int),



Diplomacy (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (None), and Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points per Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features

All the following are class features of the Aum initiate prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** An Aum initiate is proficient with no weapons, armor, or shields.

**Detect Thoughts (Sp):** Once per day, an Aum initiate may use *detect thoughts*, as the spell. She gains an additional use per day for every four levels past first (twice per day at 5th, three times per day at 9th, and so forth). The caster level is equal to the Aum initiate's class level.

**Lesser Blessing:** When the Aum initiate receives this power, she may select a blessed object from the list below, which she may acquire from Aum facilities. If she uses the object, she may requisition another of the same object after one week. Additional objects can be chosen at 4th, 7th, and 10th levels.

These objects serve the initiates normally, but non-initiates are sickened instead of helped. A non-initiate consuming one of these objects must make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be nauseated for 1d3 rounds.

**Miracle Pond:** Bathwater used by the master, this draught may be used to cure poisons or disease. If the drinker is an Aum initiate, she is affected as by a *remove disease* or *neutralize poison* cast by a 10th level caster.

**Nectar Water:** This glowing fluid is tap water blessed by the master. When consumed by an Aum initiate, it is effective as a *cure serious wounds* cast by a 10th level caster.

**The Master's Blood:** This blood, when drunk as a potion, grants the effects of *owl's wisdom* or *fox's cunning* as though cast by a 10th level caster.

**Blood Extract:** An essence extracted from the master's blood, this pill (used as a potion), grants the effects of *heroism* as cast by a 10th level caster.

**Levitation (Sp):** At 2nd level, the initiate may use *levitation* as a spell-like ability once per day. She gains an additional use per day at 6th level, and another at 10th level. The caster level is equal to the Aum initiate's class level.

**Recovery (Su):** A 2nd level Aum initiate can spend ten minutes in meditation once per day in an attempt to recover her health. After the ten minutes, she makes a Concentration check. (DC 10). If she succeeds, she heals 1d8 hit points. For every 5 above 10 she rolls, she heals an additional 1d8 (e.g., if she rolls 15, she heals 2d8; if she rolls 20, she heals 3d8; and so on).

**Clairvoyance / Clairaudience (Sp):** At 3rd level, the initiate can use *clairvoyance / clairaudience* once per day, at a caster level equal to her class level. She gains an additional use per day at 8th level.

**Aid (Sp):** Upon reaching 4th level, the initiate may cast *aid* on herself once per day as a spell-like ability. Initiates in this state often believe they are channeling the warriors of Shambala. She may use this ability an additional time per day at 9th level.

**Greater Blessing:** When an initiate reaches 5th level (and again at 10th level) she can choose a greater blessing. A greater blessing is some sort of permanent device that the initiate can use repeatedly. If the device is destroyed, the initiate will have to wait at least three months for it to be replaced.

**Perfect Salvation Initiative:** This skullcap has electrodes to 'stimulate thought and cleanse the aura.' The wearer, as long as she's an Aum initiate, has a +2 morale bonus to Intelligence while wearing the cap.

**Astral Teleporter:** A prayer mat containing electronics to stimulate the meditator towards the spiritual heights of the cult's leader. If the Aum initiate meditates at least two hours within one day on the mat, she gains a +2 morale bonus on all Fortitude and Will saves for the next 24 hours.

**Super Weapon:** The initiate has access to the product of one of Aum's weapons programs. The device will be unique and probably incredibly dangerous to both the user and all those nearby.

**Greater Recovery (Su):** After reaching 6th level, the initiate is more effective in using her recovery ability. Upon a successful recovery, she may heal an additional 2d8 damage, or purge

TABLE 3-3: THE AUM INITIATE

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	<i>Detect thoughts</i> 1/day, lesser blessing (1st)
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	<i>Levitation</i> 1/day, recovery
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	<i>Clairvoyance/clairaudience</i> 1/day
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	<i>Aid</i> 1/day, lesser blessing (2nd)
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	<i>Detect thoughts</i> 2/day, greater blessing (1st)
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	Greater recovery, <i>levitation</i> 2/day
7th	+3	+2	+2	+5	Ignore radiation, lesser blessing (3rd)
8th	+4	+2	+2	+6	<i>Clairvoyance/clairaudience</i> 2/day, x-ray vision
9th	+4	+3	+3	+6	<i>Aid</i> 2/day, <i>detect thoughts</i> 3/day, no breath
10th	+5	+3	+3	+7	Greater blessing (2nd), lesser blessing (4th), <i>levitation</i> 3/day



herself of one poison or disease (weakest of those present).

**Ignore Radiation (Su):** At 7th level, the Aum initiate can ignore all harmful effects of radiation. She also takes five less damage from electrical attacks.

**X-Ray Vision (Su):** An 8th level Aum initiate can spend a full round concentrating and see through 1 foot of stone, 1 inch of common metal, or three feet of soil or wood. For each additional round, she may see that much further. She will never see through living materials or lead.

**No Breath (Su):** At 9th level, the initiate no longer has to breathe to survive.

Aum Initiate in *d20 Modern*

The Aum initiate requires some modifications to be used as an advanced class in *d20 Modern*.

**Requirements:** Knowledge (religion) 4 ranks is Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 ranks.

#### Class Skills

The Aum initiate's class skills (and the key attributes for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Computer Use (Int), Concentration (Con), Craft (chemical) (Int), Craft (electronic) (Int), Craft (mechanical) (Int), Craft (pharmaceutical) (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) (Int), Read/Write Language (None), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (None), and Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 5 + Int modifier.

**Action Points:** The Aum initiate gains a number of Action Points equal to 6 + one half of her character level (rounded down) each time she gains a level in this class.

**Greater Blessing:** In addition to the gifts listed, Aum may be able to provide specialized computer equipment integrating astral resonance. This equipment provides a +4 morale bonus to Computer Use checks or provides some other similar bonus.

#### Aum Shinrikyo Example - The Clear Light Society

Using Aum Shinrikyo in the modern day can be extremely difficult, especially if players know the organization's real-world history. It's also predominantly a Japanese movement, despite all its attempts at reaching out. However, after a bit of tweaking the facts, we can have a very interesting, plausible society.

For the example, we have the Clear Light Society. They focus on using "technologically assisted meditation" to ascend into a form of Clear Light to survive the coming apocalypse. They seem fairly harmless and pour tons of money into scientific research; but, once they've given up hope in humanity, they'll attempt to trigger the apocalypse they're expecting.

#### History

The Clear Light Society was started about twenty years ago as a small group focusing on holistic medicine and meditation. The most outspoken member of the group and de facto leader was an engineering major at a local college. After one late night in the

lab, allegedly under the effect of drugs, he claimed a revelation in which "a being of Clear Light" came down, outlining the course of the future and what could be done to save humanity.

He promptly assumed full leadership of the group, forging it along the lines of his vision. As the group grew and changed, so did his memories of that visitation. What was first described as a ten-minute vision in a college lab quickly became a several-day meditation deep in the wilderness, steeped in trial and allegory. Most members of the group just assumed there were several visitations and that he always spoke of the most recent when, in fact, he was growing increasingly delusional.

The society has developed a whole line of products based on the teachings of its founder (including the Perfect Salvation Initiative, the Astral Teleporter, and many more). The group has evolved into a cult of personality, worshipping its leader more than the being he claims to represent.

The group has received some limited media attention, primarily while the group was investigated for charges of child abuse (which were never brought to trial). Local papers also print the occasional piece either rehashing the child abuse story or casting the group as a wacky but harmless cult.

#### Goals

The only stated goal of the Clear Light Society is to save as many people as possible from the apocalypse. This is primarily approached through mass recruitment attempts on college campuses and, very rarely, in the broader media. The society has also acquired several local radio stations, a newspaper, and a publishing house to help towards this goal.

A subsidiary goal is testing the bounds of technology, especially in relation to the human brain. Most reputable scientists wouldn't be caught dead associating with the society, but scientists that can't get money any other way or are engaged in research way outside the normal boundaries are able to tap into the society's resources. Although some scientists merely accept this money as grants, many scientists have joined the organization, either through conversion or for increased access to society funds.

The leader's secret goal, which has been festering in his heart since the child abuse scandal, is to somehow trigger the apocalypse early. He hasn't even fully admitted it to himself yet, but with only a few more accusations or a little more scorn from the public eye and he's likely to go over the edge. He's been diverting funds to programs to help "defend" the group, which will quickly transform into offensive weapons programs given a reason.

#### Methods

The Clear Light Society, for all its focus on trying to get new members, really isn't very good at recruitment. The society's approach is mostly quantity based, talking to hundreds or thousands of people for every person that's actually interested. The society's End Times philosophy is fairly appealing to many people, but the emphasis on technology drives most of those away.

As such, the society has begun a program focusing on groups that are either comfortable with technology or completely mystified by it. College campuses, always a breeding group for organizations like this, are swarmed whenever the Clear Light Society has the resources. The group also targets the elderly and the woefully undereducated.

The utter failure of this approach leads to some bitterness among the upper echelons of the organization. However, a more successful method has not yet been found.

Once a member has joined, he is expected to sign over all his worldly possessions to the group and is assured that everything he needs will be provided for. Unlike many cults, the Clear Light Society actually keeps its members moderately well fed and keeps them in decent accommodations. Sleep deprivation and physical austerities for meditation purposes are still common, however.

When enemies present themselves, the society usually begins crying of religious discrimination and digs up (or creates) evidence of bias and misdeeds on the part of the enemy. Several members of the society are experienced hackers, backed by top-of-the-line equipment, and are more than willing to crack into inconvenient systems. The society hasn't yet stooped to murder, but it is stockpiling weapons and has surprisingly little care for outsiders' lives.

#### Membership

The members of the Clear Light Society fit into several demographics, but hold a few traits in common. Each member was rejected by normal society, had spent years looking for something more, and found technology either fascinating or terrifying.

Members tend to be either college-aged or elderly. The elderly members are kept out of sight, mostly, and just given remedies and technology in exchange for money. The younger members are very much the core of the cult.

This grouping all breaks down when considering the inner circle. Most of these members were professionals in a research field at one point and entered the cult either for funding or because they were looking for greater meaning. This group also has the direct ear of the society's leader and receives the vast majority of the resources gathered from members.

At the head of the whole affair is a man being increasingly dragged into his own delusional world. Surrounded by a group of followers unwilling to question anything he does, he's become increasingly sure of his own divinity and correctness. This has amplified his extremely negative reactions to the general public rejecting the society.

#### Adjusting Them to Your Campaign

This group at the start is fairly harmless and could really be dropped into most campaigns without anyone blinking an eye. The trick is to introduce the society while it's still full of harmless, let's-recruit-everyone loonies; then spring the effects of the leader's growing insanity on the players. The party will

probably suspect the group when it's introduced, but playing the society for comic relief and leaving it unthreatening for a time will get most players' guards down.

Something important to consider is how much the society's technology actually works. Depending on how talented its leader is and how wise he's been in choosing research projects, society members could have some extremely advanced technology in a few fields. If you're using the Aum initiate class, some of the more interesting of these new technologies could be used at alternate/additional Blessings.

If your campaign uses psionics, the society's devices would probably interact with it in some way, even if it's just by giving psionics headaches. The group may have several psionically-endowed individuals as part of its elite; or, for a more radical departure, all its members might be psionic.

Magic is less likely to interact with this group. Its members expect powers to come from within, unlocked by technology. Most magic doesn't fit the bill. If the group does encounter obvious magic, they'll probably assume its users are actually drawing on the Clear Light without realizing it.

### The Freemasons

#### The Masons, The Craft

The Freemasons, often just called Masons, are the first group many people think of when secret societies come up. In modern times, the Masons form a network of organizations that function predominantly as social clubs, although still maintaining their ancient rituals and oaths of secrecy. Years ago, the Masons worked as a revolutionary group during both the French and American revolutions. At other times, groups of Freemasons have had close allegiance to various crowns or have even influenced countries directly.

#### Masonic Lodges

The main feature that has allowed the Freemasons to survive so long is their Lodge structure. Each group of Masons (known as a Lodge) is largely separate from the others and maintains its own officers. Several organizations, such as the Bavarian Illuminati (page 82) and the P2 Lodge (page 87), have used this structure to their advantage, taking over one Lodge at a time and using the existing infrastructure to further their own ends.

Above the individual Lodges are Grand Lodges (sometimes called Grand Orients). Each Grand Lodge covers a nation (in Europe and elsewhere) or a single state or province (in North America). Some Grand Lodges recognize others, but these relations aren't universal and there isn't any sort of ruling council above the Grand Lodge level.

Nothing forces the Grand Lodges to work together, although many do out of common interests and mutual good will. In general, Grand Lodges will recognize others that share roughly the same philosophy. Grand Lodges and Grand Orients, (the latter usually accepting atheists), are less likely to have amiable relations between them.

Even Masonic ritual is rather fragmented, being divided into many Rites. The York Rite, the Scottish Rite, and the Swedish Rite are the most widely recognized, but there are many others. Many of the lesser known Rites bring completely new elements into Masonic philosophy.

### Masonic Philosophy

The simplest explanation of Masonic political philosophy is the motto "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." This was the main goal of the Freemasons during the revolutionary era, one that met with a great deal of success. Charity also forms a large portion of Masonic activity, and political activities have largely fallen aside in modern times.

Most Lodges require some sort of belief in a Supreme Being, generally referred to as the Great Architect or Grand Architect. How strictly this is enforced varies widely from Rite to Rite. Some modern Masons have effectively done away with the requirement, while the Swedish Rite requires its members to be specifically Christian. As a general rule, most Rites allow anyone who would either agree that the 'Universe is Created' or the 'Universe is Alive.'

There is also a set of more esoteric teachings contained in the Masons' rituals and symbolism. These teachings are, for obvious reasons, more difficult to pin down. Many modern and past members of the Masons, both in the past and present, haven't bothered with the esoteric teachings. Because of this, the Masons have almost always had one or more societies within the society.

A common theme in Masonic philosophy is that of leaving mundane, unenlightened life behind and becoming an enlightened and just man. Certain Masons would go further and say that with their symbolic death and rebirth, the member becomes a perfect tool for the Great Architect to rebuild humanity with. To these Masons, the Temple of Solomon (often referred to in their rituals) represents the pure form of mankind.

The phrase 'Invisible College' has often been applied to the Masons moving towards those ends. Historically, these Masons have applied science to the world and the human condition. Others have used their own their personal power, and that of their Masonic brethren, to bring political views and cultural norms closer to the Masonic viewpoint.

Another thread in Masonic philosophy is the inclusion of Sacred Geometry. Initiates can be described as moving from the state of 'Rough Ashlar' (unformed stone) state to the 'Perfect Cube.' Many of the Mason's symbols refer to the need for precise measurement. For the most part, at least in modern times, the tools necessary for precise measurement are applied to individuals as metaphors for measurements of their worth. A more literal-minded interpretation, drawing power from the geometry of objects, could explain Masonic magic in a fantasy setting, but this doesn't seem to have much basis in fact.

## History of the Freemasons

### Origins

Masons have claimed many sources for their order over the years: ancient Egypt or Rome, Templar survivors, and other, more mundane notions. Even their rituals aren't completely clear on where the Masonic secrets first came from.

The rituals state that Hiram Abiff was a Master Mason and the head architect of the Temple of Solomon during its construction. Three thugs killed him in an attempt to learn the Masonic Word from him, at which point the Word was lost from the world. His apprentices found his the body and created a substitute word to identify one another as Master Masons. There is little agreement on where the true Master Masons received their training.

Whether or not any of that is true, a manuscript from a group of actual stonemasons (also called operative masons) from around 1410 A.D. is the first real mention of this idea. It indicates that Hiram, King's Son of Tyre, held immensely valuable secrets. According to the text, these secrets were the remains of a science that survived the biblical Flood and were eventually distributed by Pythagoras and Hermes.

### Great Britain

The Freemasons spread throughout Europe, but hold some of their strongest connections to the British Isles. Many Grand Lodges and divisions among the Masonic Rites trace their lineage there. Some Lodges formed among the nobility, while others catered to the lower classes.

It was in England in 1660 that the archetype of the Invisible College idea was openly formed into an organization known as the Royal Society. Receiving a royal charter two years later, this collection of scientists and philosophers eventually expanded to include such notables as Sir Isaac Newton. The Royal Society spoke often of open communication, reliance on experimental evidence, and the "Empire of Learning," where scholars and scientists could share their thoughts freely.

The Society is interesting in that it provides an entirely different view of the Masons. In the Royal Society's case, the Freemasons were largely responsible for its formation and early existence. This idea of "Masons as the patrons of science and human development" can be very useful in a game sense, and is well grounded in their Masonic philosophy. Also in England, in 1717, the first known Grand Lodge was formed, the Premier Grand Lodge of England. Other Grand Lodges sprang up thereafter, probably the most famous being the Grand Orient de France.

### Persecution

Masons, like most secret societies, experienced persecution during their time. Several governments over the ages have directly persecuted the order, including France in the 1730s, Mussolini's Italy, and Nazi Germany. Of more lasting effect were a series of Papal Bulls, beginning in 1738, condemning Masons and excommunicating those Catholics who would join the Masonic order.

Most condemnations of the Freemasons boil down to those groups people in positions of power not liking secret groups wanting to share that power. On the other hands, different Lodges have been involved in less-than-savory plots and attempts to overthrow governments over the years. Other persecutions have sprung up from accusations that the Freemasons are puppets of other organizations, or practice some sort of abhorrent religion behind their the veil of secrecy.

#### Bavarian Illuminati

In the world of conspiracies, 1776 marked another leap forward for the Freemasons, with the creation of the Bavarian Illuminati. Adam Weishaupt, helped substantially by his associate the Baron von Knigge, created an anti-royalist society that existed within and alongside Masonic Lodges in many European countries.

Eighteen years later, the Bavarian government banned all secret societies, and the Illuminati, already damaged by internal divisions, vanished into obscurity. As with the Knights Templar, this deathblow increased the legend of the Illuminati far beyond what it would be otherwise. The society is often said to have survived until the present day and is accused of literally every sort of villainy (generally whatever irritates the author most). If it has survived through contact with the Freemasons, the Illuminati probably still works as a society within a society, recruiting from and controlling Masonic Lodges towards its own ends. More information on the Bavarian Illuminati can be found in Chapter 4.

#### Revolutionary Era and Today

The Masons were heavily involved in the French and American Revolutions. Whether they Masons caused those revolutions is almost impossible to determine, but when revolutions coinciding with Masonic philosophy presented themselves, the Freemasons proved more than willing to take up arms to assist them.

During these revolutions, the Masons served two purposes. One was as an existing structure already tuned to secrecy, which could serve as a staging ground for any variety of secret activities. The other is that once proper war had begun, at least in the American case, Lodges attached to military units allowed for honest communication, bypassing the normal chain of command.

From this period of revolution, the Masons slowly developed into what we see today. With the success of most causes which radical members rallied behind, the majority of the organization became more involved in socializing and charity.

#### The P2 Lodge

One interesting exception to this occurred during the 1970s, with the Propaganda Due (Italian, "Second Propoganda")Lodge in Italy, better known as P2. This, like the Bavarian Illuminati, was a secret society within the Freemasons. It recruited from the Master Masons of the Grand Orient Lodge of Egyptian Freemasonry. P2 eventually expanded to a large network throughout Italy's government and banks, encompassing over 900 members.

The P2 Lodge was involved in many of the activities feared by opponents of Freemasons, at least insofar as conspiracy and government control. The Lodge's members were accused of drug running with the CIA, arranging a railway bombing, massive financial fraud, and plotting a fascist coup. One of their co-conspirators, Archbishop Paul "The Gorilla" Marcinkus, used his control of the Vatican Bank to help P2 launder money and drugs.

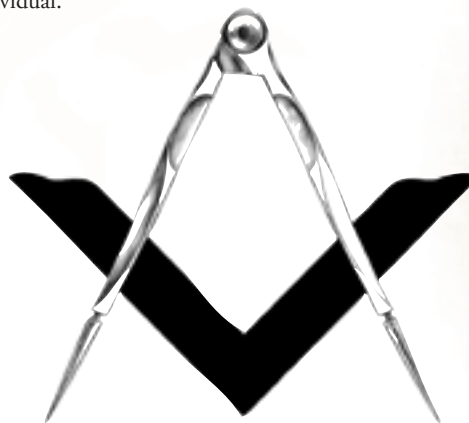
A raid on its leader's home shattered the P2 Lodge. Documents were found there listing the lodge's members, including the leaders of the Italian military and intelligence services. Following the scandals and arrests, most believe the P2 Lodge disintegrated, while others maintain the lodge merely went further underground.

More information on the P2 lodge and its use in game can be found in Chapter 4.

#### Symbols and Signs

One important thing to remember about Masonic symbolism is that the original Secrets of the Master Mason were lost with the death of Hiram Abiff. Many of the symbols and signs, especially the word of the Master Mason, are substitutes for the genuine secrets, waiting for their rediscovery. Some Lodges expand this concept to include many of the other secrets or even the officers themselves, standing in for the real Masters.

Even among their the most common symbols, Freemasons don't share a single concrete interpretation of what they mean. The meanings vary from Lodge to Lodge and individual to individual.



The most quickly identified symbol of the Masons is the drafter's square and compass, arranged in a quadrilateral with the square opening up and the compass opening down. A common interpretation of this symbol is to see the square as the measure of physical reality and the compass as the measure of spiritual reality. Or, similarly, the square represents objective reality and the compass, subjective reality. Regardless of its meaning, this symbol is used widely on signs and vehicles to identify Masons in countries where they are not persecuted.

Another well-known Masonic symbol, although now more often associated with the United States government or the Illuminati,



is the All-Seeing Eye. The most common version of this symbol is that with the pyramid beneath it, as it appears on the back of the U.S. one-dollar bill. Most Masonic uses, however, omit the pyramid and use the eye alone.

In the most general sense, the Eye serves as a symbol of the Great Architect, who “never slumbers nor sleeps” and watches over reality. The Eye also has the ability to peer into the human heart and reward humans based on their merit. On a completely different level, the Eye can also represent enlightenment, literally spoken of as being returned to the light by Masonic ceremony.

Rarely seen outside Lodges, Masonic aprons have their own set of symbolism. A beginning Mason’s apron is white, representing innocence. As the Mason advances, more blue is added, generally thought to represent the inner light or spiritual energy the Mason is discovering. In countries where Masons were heavily persecuted, blue flowers have been substituted as a less obvious means of identification.

The three Craft Degrees (the primary degrees of Freemasonry; other Rites and organizations within Masonry have many more degrees) are Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. The degrees are worked through with moderately complex rituals not unlike morality plays. Unlike those plays, the individual Mason is expected to determine their his own interpretation of the rites and the symbolism therein.

In some Rites, especially those with more degrees, those degrees are referred to by number instead of title. For example, the symbolic death in the Master Mason (third degree) initiation is the source of the phrase “getting the third degree.”

Grips (handshakes) and Words are used to identify fellow Masons. As mentioned before, the Master Mason Word (Macbenae or Mah-hah-bone) is considered a substitute for the true secrets of the Master Masons. The Words of the lower Degrees (Boaz and Jachim) are the names of the pillars in front of Solomon’s temple, often considered to represent power and wisdom, respectively.

#### Freemasons In Game

When you decide to introduce the Masons into your game, keep in mind the question of why the Masons in your setting formed in secret and how secretive they are now. During periods when

### Ranks in Freemasonry

The three universal ranks within Freemasonry are Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. The first two ranks are sometimes referred to as Apprentice and Journeyman. Once a Freemason reaches the rank of Master Mason, he is considered a full member of the Lodge and can pursue further ranks and positions specific to his Rite.

Within each Masonic Lodge, there are a variety of leadership positions specific to that Lodge, generally selected in a yearly election. Highest is the Worshipful Master, who directs meetings and rituals. The Junior and Senior Warden fall just below the Worshipful Master. Junior and Senior Deacons assist in performing the rituals. Most Lodges also have mundane positions such as Secretary and Treasurer. Also of special note are the Tyler and Inner Guard, who are responsible for keeping non-Masons from entering the meeting place.

Grand Lodges mirror the ranks of the normal Lodges they control. The leader of a Grand Lodge is called a Grand Master, while other ranks merely add “Grand” to the title of their counterpart in normal Lodges.

the Masons are openly persecuted or they’re pursuing some sort of hidden agenda, they will maintain a high level of secrecy. At other times, they Masons may be seen as they are now, with their meeting times and places public knowledge and their the order’s rituals only slightly more difficult to find.

#### Revolutionary Sect

This is the Freemasons as they were during the French and American Revolutions. They are willing to support rebels and even take up arms themselves in search of liberty and equality (at least as it’s understood in those days). The society might be merely another part of the revolution, driven by social forces beyond anyone’s control, or it might be the master architect behind the whole revolution.

When modern players hear of a group pushing for religious freedoms, more democratic government, and equality, they’re likely to side with the group. This can change dramatically if the PCs are part of a favored class (nobles, priests in a theocracy) or work for the government that the sect is harassing. Even then, the players may side with the Masons, but with more thought put into the decision. This interpretation of the society also makes for an easy basis for an adventuring group. The characters can be members of one or more Lodges, possibly with friendly outsiders, working together either under their own direction or under that of a Grand Lodge. Membership can easily include all sorts, from secretly rebellious nobles to mutinous soldiers to common men. The PCs can then work against the government with whatever resources they have at their disposal.

A revolutionary sect will provide a good ally for PCs who work against the same government. PCs who are agents or members

of that government have the unenviable job of trying to root out revolutionaries at every level of society while avoiding retribution.

It's also worth considering that many governments have more than one opposition party at work. Another revolutionary group, such as communist workers or the Thule Society, can sometimes work in tandem with a revolutionary sect and sometimes at odds with it.

#### Business Association

In this option, the Masons are much as they appear today, a harmless fraternal order concerned with bettering the lives of its members and acts of charity. Any organization, especially one that cuts across class lines and meets in secret, can serve as a vehicle for business dealings. Being secret, it's easy to assume that those dealings are of an illegal nature, although members may simply be getting a first shot at a business deal or other preferential treatment.

Potentially shady dealings and preferential treatment lead to members becoming wealthier and therefore having more ability to help their fellows. New members may be barred if they don't have something of use to the society, such as a valuable skill or a business of their own.

How far this network extends is something to consider. In most cases, only a single Lodge would be involved, even if other Lodges were independently involved in the same sort of activity. One Lodge involved in this kind of networking can easily gain influence over a city or even complete control of a small town.

If a larger group of Masons were somehow involved, (for example, if it were practice to deal preferentially with all Freemasons of your Grand Lodge or even all Masons), a much larger issue is created. This creates a loose network with no one single leader, members of which have a vastly easier time at business dealings than outsiders. Many conspiracy theorists insist that Masons are involved in this sort of practice on a broad scale.

A business association will probably be neutral to the PCs unless the party is actively interfering in the association's affairs. The Lodge will form a sort of second government of the area, outside the PCs' range of vision but mostly interested in further collection of wealth. In the worst case, the association could force out or kill potential competitors.

Alternately, the PCs might be members of the association or employees of it. As such, they'd get special privileges and probably be expected to aid members of the Lodge in turn. This is interesting in that the PCs get to directly interact with the movers and shakers of their community, outside the normal power structure.

If nothing else, it would allow the PCs to be involved in business or politics in a level that involves more interacting with NPCs and less bookkeeping. And of course, there will always be corrupt members of the society who use it towards ends the party will want to oppose.

#### Invisible College

The idea of an invisible college of scientists or magi trying to reshape the world into their vision of perfection is one that's been around for quite a while. It is also often associated with the Freemasons. This works well in connection with the Royal Society, but it could just as easily be a group of the secret leaders of today's Masons.

The invisible college will attempt to learn everything it can about the human condition, happiness, freedom, and the like. It will then apply this knowledge to the best of its ability, changing the world around it. If the college exists inside a larger Masonic organization, it might use the rest of the order as a tool to spread its message and recruit new members.

Like the revolutionary sect, most PCs will assume the invisible college to be relatively benign. It can be just that, expanding the horizons of knowledge and trying to make the world a better place. The college can serve as good allies and even better patrons, as they probably have access to some rather interesting new research that hasn't been released to the public yet.

Alternatively, the college might not be interested in spreading its research at all. It might be interested in mind control and other applications that will let its members shape the world, only releasing technology in controlled doses when that release would help the society's plans. This sort of society can be an even better patron (the technological advantage gap is even larger) or a rather sinister and understandable enemy. Perhaps its research has shown that the only way to stop war and violence is to wipe away human individuality, and perhaps its members are willing to make that choice. Or perhaps it's found how to identify potential murderers and malcontents and is trying to eliminate those traits through selective breeding.

In some campaigns, the college will operate on a level so distant from normal reasoning that it will be difficult for the PCs to interact with it. The college will focus on topics so esoteric that even the best-educated outsider would be dumbfounded. In this sort of setting, the Masons' actions would be difficult to predict and seem largely arbitrary to outsiders. As such, the college would be neutral to the PCs, but would be extremely helpful or viciously opposed to the party from time to time as different projects are worked on.

#### Secret Masters of the World

In this strange view of reality, the Masons operate as a unified front and control the world's governments, industry, media, and businesses. The difficulty in using this approach comes from describing how the Masons work together and why their secret isn't entirely obvious.

You can ignore the problem of the Masons working together by simply saying that they always have and that their internal divisions are only a ruse. Magical or technological methods of mind control also present themselves as easy options for explanation. Perhaps the rites that the Masons pass through connect them to a hive mind or font of higher knowledge that, once the new members have tasted of it, makes them understand the need for teamwork and secrecy.

Alternately, they may not all work together, either having a fairly small group that happens to be made up of Masons controlling the world, or several groups fighting for control within the Masons. Taking it a step further, the Grand Lodges might be the dividing lines of control.

If you can explain why they all work together, you've probably already answered why they aren't obvious. Also, this theory assumes they control most of the media, so people will only rarely be exposed to evidence. Unlike some other societies, the Masons are actually suspected of controlling the world, so perhaps they do have the occasional security breach.

Using the Masons as a single entity provides for a rather interesting setting. The Masons have millions of members around the globe in positions from the lowest menial laborers to heads of state. If the PCs manage to irritate the Masons to the extent that word gets out, the characters' lives are effectively forfeit. Masons at banks cancel the PCs' accounts, members in law enforcement declare them fugitives, members in the media slander them, and members on the street might even try to kill them on the spot.

Even if the Masons are the Secret Masters, that doesn't necessarily mean that they're all bad. If they control literally everything, or enough that there isn't any reasonable threat, then they pretty much have to be a menace or at least dystopian for story reasons. If the society controls the areas where they are the most prominent (North America and Europe), that still leaves room for other secret societies or outside threats. If you wanted to, the you could easily cast the Cold War in those terms.

#### Pawns of Greater Masters

Many secret societies have used the Freemasons as a proving grounds or target for recruitment. Perhaps one or more of those organizations are has the real power and the Masons are merely a training program for the real secret society.

In any setting with ritual magic, the Masons can be a useful targets for recruitment, even if the Masonic rituals themselves don't work. Mystical societies can easily infiltrate the Masons (or are formed from within the Lodges) and recruit people that agree with the more powerful society's philosophy. The ritual instincts are have already been well trained, and the Mason will be ready to jump right in to more advanced topics. The society can also gauge if the prospective member is actively interested in the philosophical and mystical aspects, or is merely a member for social reasons. Another reason to recruit from the Masons is secrecy. Recruiting from the general populace can be fairly obvious, especially with as hit-or-miss as that can be. Time spent in Masonry also presents the opportunity to determine if the member has broken his vows of secrecy.

If the Masons are being used in this capacity, they might still have their own agenda, but that agenda will likely be overshadowed by the other society's plans. As such, the Masons will probably be basically neutral or benevolent, with some influence from the order(s) within it.

Several orders can easily recruit from the Masons, either casting themselves as higher rites within Freemasonry or as separate organizations. As long as the organizations have fairly distinct requirements for their members, they recruitment efforts would rarely run into conflict. However, the bidding war, as it were, over an especially promising Mason could provide some interesting adventures.

#### Hooks & Seeds

- ▶ When a local resident dies, the media accuses the local Lodge of being involved and stirs up a frenzy. Members of the Lodge contact the PCs in an attempt to find the real murderer and clear their the Lodge's good name.
- ▶ A small group who thought the Masons had a stranglehold on the area, burns down a Masonic meeting place. The members of the group are all otherwise normal, reasonable people with day jobs. They had no relations with each other until they collectively left town a week ago and have just recently returned.
- ▶ A man mysteriously dies of a heart attack during a local Masonic initiation. The Lodge claims nothing out of the ordinary. An investigation is begun by the authorities, but stops the moment the public loses interest.
- ▶ Over the past few years, a powerful company in the area has recruited several new members to the board of directors. Although otherwise unrelated, the members have connections through Masonic circles and plan to take control of the company. A concerned party or whistleblower contacts the PCs to investigate the situation.
- ▶ Several members of a local Lodge have been let off on minor offenses, leading up to a case where the judge throws out charges in the face of compelling evidence. The media is unwilling to make point out the connection, but the judge (or a close associate) is a member of the Lodge.
- ▶ A Mason dies in the area and, although the authorities are investigating, the Lodge asks the PCs to perform a quiet investigation of their own. If pushed, the Lodge will reveal suspicions of anti-Masonic sentiments in the local authorities.
- ▶ An outside secret society with Masonic connections has started recruiting, through extremely forceful or questionable means, those Masons it finds promising. One of the recruited Masons' families, his Lodge, or someone who thinks he's next asks for help.
- ▶ An author has disappeared shortly after the release of his new book. That book claims to be a new tell-all about the Masons, accusing them of running the world and various evil deeds. Cooler heads think the disappearance is a publicity stunt, but would like to have the author found before people start to take him too seriously.
- ▶ A friend of one of the PCs obliquely mentions that the PC might be interested in the Craft Freemasons and offers support should the PC decide to pursue it.
- ▶ The local Lodge, or one nearby, has developed into something entirely different. Its members speak of a new doctrine, have been seen less frequently by their friends and family, and one formerly law-abiding member was convicted of a major crime.

#### Freemasons in Fantasy

In a fantasy campaign, the Masons aren't likely to change much, but are likely to have a cause to fight for. Freedom is a rare commodity in feudal societies, and Lodges can, as they have in

the real world, serve as the seeds of a revolution. At the same time, there will be Lodges in the halls of power that gather nobles, clergy, merchants, scholars, and royalty under one roof, ready to oppose the revolutionaries.

In this sort of situation, there can be multiple conspiracies of Freemasons running at the same time, often opposed to each other. Less involved Freemasons will appear much like the society today, although lacking the Grand Lodges.

Lodges attached to the local lords will have the benefit of the doubt, and other Lodges in the area will may either rebel against it or be drawn towards its policies. These Lodges will serve as the equivalent of Grand Lodges, and the lords may not be quite so kind about settling minor disputes.

Masons are expected to believe in a creator, a Grand Architect. This doesn't interfere with most fantasy belief systems, but some pantheons treat their creator rather strangely. Its best to think of what gods and goddesses are seen as the creator(s) in your setting and think of how their faiths might interact with Masonic philosophy.

Masons are likely to use magic as a tool, perhaps *the* tool, given to us by the creator. Revolutionary Masonic philosophy would frown on wizards lording over people, especially using magic to do so. Even in a fantasy setting, some Masons will be interested in technology, education, and other methods of spreading power to the general public. If you need a mysterious organization behind a center of learning or disseminating magical breakthroughs, the Freemasons are a great choice.

Even more than in other settings, Freemasons in feudal settings can take the role of any sort of conspiracy, and often several at once. There might be a Lodge, formed by powerful local figures, working to maintain its stranglehold on the populace, while an opposing Lodge of peasants fights them using necromantic rituals disguised as harmless Masonic rites. The fact that many opposing societies can follow the same basic philosophy and use the same symbolism adds a powerful level of synchronicity and depth to your game.

### Freemasons in Modern Settings

Masons are a constant feature in most of the western world. Many towns have Masonic Lodges, usually with openly labeled meeting places. The great and powerful are members alongside the average workingman, although not always in the same Lodge.

Revolutionary Masons are uncommon in the modern day. There's less to rebel against, more opportunities for everyday people, and many rewards for not rocking the boat. There may still be some around with the same fire and vigor, but most Lodges work more for charity and mutual aid than vision and revolution.

If you do choose to have revolutionary Masons in your game, they're likely to be fighting against great disparities in power or local injustices. A group of Masons, existing outside the normal hierarchy of a monarchic or oligarchic society, could

be interested in bringing down the upper ruling class, as in the French Revolution.

For a more heroic take, perhaps the revolutionary group has found out something about the elite of society that compels them to action, but is too dangerous or too ludicrous to tell the general public. A modern Lodge discovering that the local elites used real magic or other supernatural arts would probably take this route.

Masonic groups with secular interests and societies recruiting from the Masons have a free hand to gather new members and manipulate society. Although a lot of words are dedicated to condemning the Masons, few of these accusations are actually investigated by the authorities.

Something to note about the modern day is that many Masonic groups are shrinking in membership, mostly due to difficulty in recruiting new members. There are many reasons this could be happening, from increasing disillusionment with the society to competition with other societies. Players interacting with the Masons will notice that members tend to be fairly old, on average, but still healthy and mentally capable.

### Freemasons in Science Fiction

The Freemasons will exist just as well in the future as they have in the past. Their beliefs don't have to change much for changes in technology. However, if society has any major upheavals, the Masons will have a role, such as serving as the seeds of a revolution against an oppressive regime. In the esoteric sense, Masons are striving towards the perfection of mankind. The interpretation of this can go some very different ways. Humankind can be perfected through social or intellectual change, bodily improvement, or remaining pure.

Social and intellectual change generally work the same way they have in earlier eras: just trying to get people to think and work together instead of fighting all the time. Science fiction might offer additional types of intellectual stimulation, like virtual realities and psionics. The Masons could also be interested in applying new technologies to social situations, such as instant direct democracy or cybernetic implants that enhance intelligence.

Bodily improvement might mean cybernetics or biomodification, to whatever extent the setting has such technology. Masons tending towards cybernetics would be trying to leave the human body behind, perhaps even trying to ascend into a state of pure information. Those more focused on genetic modification would focus on improving humanity without abandoning the race as a whole.

Other Masons could hold to an opposed philosophy of remaining pure and staying true to the original form of humanity instead of trying to abandon it. These sorts of Masons could interpret the Temple of Solomon as the pure human form, left behind with the beginning of widespread modification. In post-apocalyptic settings, this sort of society will probably blame modification for the disaster and attempt to return humanity to its unaltered state.



Space travel can likewise be seen either as another step on the journey of human development or a horrible thing, taking humanity away from their intended home. Most Masons, at least those around now, would gravitate towards the first option, seeing the Temple in an internal sense rather than as a structure.

Each of these beliefs, in various combinations and to varying degrees, can be held by a different Lodge, characterizing the fragmented nature of Freemasonry. What changes in sci-fi settings is that communication can be powerful and pervasive enough that a single organization may have been founded, although that still is not likely without outside pressure. Alternately, members may divide even more, being able to find virtual Lodges that closely meet their beliefs without struggling through the inconvenience of distance and communication difficulties.

### Freemasons in d20

The vast majority of Freemasons are normal people (NPC classes or Ordinaries, depending on the system). Those who aren't still usually take normal heroic paths of advancement. There may be a handful, however, that take the time to truly understand the Masonic teachings and use them to unlock power within the Mason himself.

Members of this introspective group tend to be clear-thinking and community-minded, heading towards the lawful and good ends of the alignment system. Masons that aren't reaching towards this particular type of enlightenment are spread across the whole system, although Lodges will tend to weed out those who aren't near the alignment of that Lodge. In fantasy d20 games, it may also be practical to present Masons as the priests of the Great Architect. The Architect can be seen as lawful neutral or lawful good, whichever best fits in your campaign, with the domains of Earth, Good, Knowledge, and Law. The warhammer is the most reasonable choice for a favored weapon.

### Learned Master

In addition to the normal feats common to secret societies (pageref), many Masons are especially knowledgeable. The teachings and libraries of the Masons touch on many aspects of life and those who truly absorb them can be masterful scholars.

#### Learned Master [General]

Even among Master Masons, you are exceptionally knowledgeable. With a broad base of knowledge and access to Masonic records, you are able to answer any sort of question imaginable.

**Prerequisites:** Int 13+, Ranking Member (Freemasons), 1 rank each in at least four different Knowledge skills.

**Benefit:** You gain a +2 bonus to all Knowledge checks. After spending an hour in a Masonic library, you may make a Knowledge skill check untrained.

### ENLIGHTENED MASON

The path to becoming a Master Mason requires years of membership, unanimous acceptance by the Lodge, and three initiation rituals. However, even with the arcane knowledge required by the rituals, not all Master Masons are enlightened. Master Masons are often still members of convenience, using the Lodge as a political or social tool.

Certain Master Masons reach past that banal or "rough ashlar" stage of Masonry to a higher degree of enlightenment. These people, a tiny subset of Master Masons, are able to tap into their internal power or that of the Great Architect to perform seemingly mystical acts. They see these abilities as exercises of the natural order, not any sort of spell magic.

Those who advance this far are likely to be members of scholarly classes such as wizards. The degree of knowledge can be acquired by anyone, but it's easiest for those who have spent a lifetime learning.

Enlightened Masons often belong to existing Lodges, but their scarcity doesn't often result in them working with others of the same prestige class. They will work with other Masons, however, often leading Lodges or providing their spiritual guidance.

**Hit Die:** d8.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become an enlightened Mason, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Alignment:** Lawful good or lawful neutral.

**Skills:** Concentration 1 rank, Diplomacy 4 ranks, Knowledge (arcana) 10 ranks, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) 1 rank.

**Feat:** Ranking Member (Freemasons).

**Special:** Master Mason (see above).

**Special:** The enlightened Mason must either spend several months in solitary study of the rites and symbolism of Masonry, or be trained by another Enlightened Mason.

#### Class Skills

The enlightened Mason's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Diplomacy (Cha), Craft (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features

All the following are class features of the enlightened Mason prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiencies:** Enlightened Masons are not proficient with any additional weapons, armor, or shields.

**True Secrets:** The enlightened Mason walks the path of unlocking the lost true secrets of Masonry or possibly creating his own new secrets. At each level, an enlightened Mason may choose, from Table 3-4, below, a Secret at or below his class level + ranks in Knowledge (arcana). Or, he may choose two or more

secrets with no more total value than his class level + ranks in Knowledge (arcana).

Abilities may not be chosen more than once except those that grant spell-like abilities. Each additional time the enlightened Mason chooses such a secret, he gains either additional uses of one spell per day, or he can choose a new spell.

All spell-like abilities use the enlightened Mason's class level as the caster level.

With the DM's permission, the enlightened Mason may instead gain new spells per day and spells known as though he had gained an additional level in a spellcasting class he belonged to before adding a prestige class.

**Contemplate the Temple:** By spending a day in seclusion and deep thought, an Enlightened Mason can make a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 20). If he succeeds, he may change one of his Masonic spell-like abilities to a different spell from the same list. At 5th level, the change takes six hours instead of a full day. At 10th level, it takes only one hour.

0-level spells: *arcane mark, detect magic, guidance, know direction, light, mending, message, resistance, virtue.*

1st-level spells: *comprehend languages, detect chaos, magic weapon, misdirection, obscure object, protection from chaos, sanctuary, shield of faith.*

2nd-level spells: *aid, align weapon, arcane lock, dark vision, calm emotions, detect thoughts, hold person, identify, lesser restoration, make whole, misdirection, resist energy, shield other, status, zone of truth.*

3rd-level spells: *arcane sight, break enchantment, detect scrying, dispel magic, greater magic weapon, illusory script, magic circle against chaos, searing light, stone shape.*

4th-level spells: *death ward, discern lies, dismissal, nondetection, order's wrath, restoration, scrying, sending, spell immunity, stone shape, tongues.*

5th-level spells: *break enchantment, commune, dispel chaos, false vision, hold monster, mark of justice, passwall, scrying, spell resistance, true seeing, wall of stone.*



#### Enlightened Masons in d20 Modern

Enlightened Masons require few changes to fit into *d20 Modern*, but some of their spell-like abilities are not present in the modern setting. The appropriate spells from the *d20 Modern* book are listed below to replace the spell lists for the true secret class ability.

TABLE 3-4: ENLIGHTENED MASON SECRETS

Class level + ranks in Knowledge (arcana)	Secret	Effect
5	Lowest Arcane Secrets	Choose a 0-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell four times per day as a spell-like ability.
10	Lesser Arcane Secrets	Choose a 1st-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell three times per day as a spell-like ability.
11	Jachim	Before making a save, you can invoke the pillar of stability to give yourself +2 morale bonus to that save. You can use this ability three times per day.
12	Arcane Secrets	Choose a 2nd-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell twice per day as a spell-like ability.
13	Boaz	Once per day, you can invoke the pillar of strength to extend a Masonic spell-like ability as though using the Extend Spell feat.
15	Greater Arcane Secrets	Choose a 3rd-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell once per day as a spell-like ability.
17	The Word	Once per day as a free action, you invoke the word of the Master Masons, to renew your uses of one Masonic spell-like ability as if it were a new day.
19	Capacity for Knowledge	You immediately gain 2 + your Int bonus in extra skill points, which you can spend normally.
20	Master's Arcane Secrets	Choose a 4th-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell once per day as a spell-like ability.
21	Servants of Law	Three times per day, as a standard action, you may use one of your Masonic spell-like abilities to summon lawful creatures as a <i>summon monster</i> spell of that spell's level. You cannot use 0-level spells in this way.
23	Arcane Prowess	The Enlightened Mason's effective caster level is +2.
24	New Learning	You may immediately take any one feat you meet the prerequisites for.
25	Highest Arcane Secrets	Choose a 5th-level spell from the list above. You may produce the effects of that spell once per day as a spell-like ability.
26	Mental Acuity	You gain a permanent +1 bonus to Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma.
28	Bulwark of Law	The Enlightened Mason gains DR 5/chaos.
30	Harsh Light of Truth	The Enlightened Mason is considered a native outsider and can use <i>dictum</i> once per day as a spell-like ability.

TABLE 3-5: ENLIGHTENED MASON

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Contemplate the temple (one day), true secret
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	True secret
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	True secret
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	True secret
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	Contemplate the temple (six hours), true secret
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	True secret
7th	+3	+2	+2	+5	True secret
8th	+4	+2	+2	+6	True secret
9th	+4	+3	+3	+6	True secret
10th	+5	+3	+3	+7	Contemplate the temple (one hour), true secret

**Requirements:** Knowledge (arcana) 10 ranks is Knowledge (arcane lore) 10 ranks, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) 1 rank is Craft (structural) 1 rank, and since there are no alignments, the requirement for alignment only applies in spirit.

#### Class Skills

The enlightened Mason's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Diplomacy (Cha), Craft (structural) (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (arcane lore) (Int), Knowledge (civics) (Int), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (None), Research (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), and Speak Language (None).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 5 + Int modifier.

**Action Points:** The enlightened Mason gains a number of Action Points equal to 6 + one half of his character level (rounded down) each time he gains a level in this class.

#### Spells from *d20 Modern*:

0-Level Spells: *detect magical aura, light, message, read magic, resistance, virtue.*

1st-Level Spells: *comprehend languages, hold portal, magic weapon, power device, shield of faith.*

2nd-Level Spells: *dark vision, hold person, lesser restoration, resist energy, zone of truth.*

3rd-Level Spells: *dispel magic, greater magical weapon, searing light, tongues.*

4th-Level Spells: *discern lies, faith's fury, restoration.*

5th-Level Spells: *break enchantment, hold monster, true seeing.*

#### Example Freemasons - Architects of Humanity

In most futures, humankind develops technology to improve on its form more and more. Some people eschew these advances, while others embrace them whole-heartedly. In this example, there are Masons that bring those technologies into their existing beliefs and advocate some of them for the betterment of humanity.

This group, calling itself the Architects of Humanity, seeks to "rebuild the Temple." This is the group's jargon for returning humanity to the perfect state they it once held. The Architects see humans in this state being powerful enough to mold reality to their wishes and create art with a thought, but intelligent enough to realize the full repercussions of their actions and never use their powers to harm another.

#### History

The Architects of Humanity, originally Freemasons, have a fairly short history outside their ancestral order. Until very recently, the Architects were members of the various Lodges of Freemasonry. As humanity grew more capable of manipulating its form, a split formed between those who sought spiritual growth and those who sought a more physical route. The latter group was at first small, but eventually grew large enough that the greater body of Masondom forced them out.

At this point, the Architects began forming their own Lodges, based on Masonic teachings with their own twists to the philosophy. There was, and is, some exchange between the

Freemasons and the Architects, although only a handful of Grand Lodges officially recognize the Architects.

Perhaps as an effect of their recent birth, the Architects of Humanity are extremely close-knit. Unlike Freemasonry as a whole, they the Architects are a single organization, although the ruling council rarely exerts its full power. Most Architects go about their daily lives doing their part to help human advancement.

#### Goals

The one and only goal of the Architects is to advance humankind towards the form it held before "the Fall." The Fall itself is described only in allegorical terms, because we as lesser beings can't understand it. In general, the perfect form is powerful and intelligent beyond imagining, absolutely god-like and perfect.

However, some Architect Lodges are used for other purposes as well. Some serve as staging grounds for rebellions against oppressive regimes, while others provide help for the sick and injured. All these are seen as secondary to or considered part of the primary goal of returning humankind to a higher state.

#### Methods

Most Lodges work to advance their goals through donations to organizations performing cybernetic research, genetic experiments, or applications of those fields. Members are also expected to speak highly of human advancement, gather advancements themselves, and generally be a good example of what borderline super-humans should be like.

A few Lodges are involved directly in research or application of these technologies; for example, a few medical Lodges or Lodges attached to cybernetic infantry units. These Lodges seek even more than others to lead by example. Doctors will suggest cybernetic and genetic treatments to their patients, generally speaking very highly of the enhancements. Soldiers will fight that much longer and harder to get positive coverage of their roles as cybernetically enhanced heroes.

Lodges in the halls of power seek to bring more funding to these projects and generally give them good press. Members of these Lodges will do things like help sponsor modified celebrities and, if it's remotely acceptable, get enhancements themselves to make the concept more accepted and appealing.

One important and hopefully small group remains. Certain members and Lodges are more interested in the end result than the people that get hurt along the way. They perform horrible experiments, purposefully injure people to encourage them to get implants, put products on the market with genetically active components, or even just flat out abduct people and modify them. Other members who know about these activities either stay quiet or are quickly silenced, and as of yet, the council is unaware of this radical group.

#### Membership

The Architects have a very wide variety of members, although membership does lean towards the upper stratum of society and

professionals in the fields of interest. Poorer members tend to be in it either because they need a group that accepts modifications, because their friends are also members, or because they want to make connections with the upper crust.

In reality, the Architects don't have one leader. The council serves to pass suggestions down, but actual orders are few and far between. Their primary purpose is to keep an eye out for corruption, preventing any stain to the Architects' name. Members of the council are chosen yearly from each of the Architects Grand Lodges, although once someone is elected a member, he will likely be reelected for many years.

### Adjusting Them to Your Campaign

What technologies are available will shape a lot of the Architects' short-term agenda. They'll be interested in any technology that directly better human beings: cybernetics, genetic engineering, psionic advancement, crossbreeding with alien species, nanotechnology within the body, exposure to artifacts or substances that grant power, or anything else that can make someone more powerful. Members are only barely interested in technology that isn't integrated into the human form.

The type of science fiction also somewhat changes the tone of the Architects. Space opera tends to cast modifications in a negative light, so the Architects might be a secretive group of outcasts and philosophers. In cyberpunk settings, the order will be a lot more accepted, with cybernetics being well known if not openly endorsed. A post-apocalyptic setting might have Architects with access to ancient technology or as a group that harvests the mutation-inducing properties of radiation.

## The Knights Templar

### The Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, Templars

The Knights Templar were an order of warrior-monks, the first of their kind, ostensibly formed to defend pilgrims on their way to the holy land. The knights fought heavily during the Crusades and were given huge quantities of both money and land as donations from the nobility.

After the Crusades ended, the Templars remained a powerful force in Europe, controlling much land and using their monetary resources to serve as what may have been the first modern bank. Eventually, the knights' power and the failure of the Crusades made the order a target. The King of France, backed by the Pope, accused the Templars of black magic, worshipping Satan and Baphomet, and other lesser crimes. The order was destroyed, the Inquisition extracted confessions, and the Templars became an important footnote to the history of the Europe. Despite the carefully planned and well-executed attack against the Templars in France, very little of their wealth was ever found, and their ships vanished from harbor. The eventual fate of the Templars that vanished from France and other countries is still a point of much speculation.

One of the more prominent theories is that they took refuge in Scotland, and their secrets may have trickled down to help form the Freemasons. Another theory posits that the Templars fled

to North America. Templars in certain areas are also known to have joined the Teutonic Knights or the Knights of Christ, a slightly renamed Templar order that surfaced in Portugal. Others say the Templars went underground; creating a true secret society that may have resurfaced in some form (such as the Freemasons, Bavarian Illuminati, page 82, or Rosicrucians, page 87).

### Templar Philosophy

Bernard of Clairvaux laid the groundwork for the entire Templar philosophy in 1128, creating the charter that defined the order as a new breed entirely, warrior monks. This charter was continually modified afterwards, largely about matters like military command structures that Bernard knew little of. His order was called the Poor Knights for a reason; each knight, like a monk, gave up his worldly goods when joining the order, and abided by other restrictions suitable for a monastic life.

The original charter defined Bernard's expectations of the order in broad strokes. The Templars were to abstain from the decoration and frivolities that afflicted other knightly orders, originally wearing donated clothing, then simple white robes. The Templars were also to consider every alternative before resorting to arms, but when it became necessary, carry through with absolute devotion.

As the Templars grew to their full power, the Vatican took direct control of the order, with its Grand Master answering only to the Pope himself. They were expected to offer total loyalty to the Pope, but were otherwise effectively above normal laws.

The Templars used this incredible freedom to ignore restrictions on things like usury and burial rights to further increase their fortune. Usury (charging interest on loans) was widely outlawed for Christians and carefully regulated for Jews, but the Templars, with their Papal blessing, were able to ignore both sets of laws. The order rapidly became a dominant, if not the sole, economic power in Europe, lending to merchants, kings, and priests alike. Burial rights were an issue the Templars and their Popes were in more open conflict about. The Templars had been given the rights to bury their dead on the grounds of their outposts, but they extended this service to excommunicated nobles for a hefty fee, negating the worst consequence of excommunication.

If the charges of King Philip of France were true, the Templars had another, hidden philosophy, which centered on their worship of Baphomet and rejection of Christ. This was referred to as their "Secret Rule," in contrast to the Open Rule defining the Templars' knightly and monastic activities.

In holding with the Secret Rule, the Templars were accused of conjuring spirits of the dead, affecting the weather, communing with demons, and a range of sexual perversions. The accusations point towards a different sort of Templar, a knight lured into blasphemy and heretical worship of Baphomet. However, even after the Inquisition's torture, there isn't much evidence as to why the Templars may have forced their members to worship Baphomet.

## Baphomet

The Templars were repeatedly accused of worshipping an entity called Baphomet during their trials. The authorities never explicitly stated what Baphomet was, but it was assumed to be a outside god or demon, either of which would justify destruction of the Templars.

Some claim the name Baphomet is a corruption of Mohammed, marking the Templars as Islamic sympathizers and possibly trying to unify Islam with Christianity. Others claim Baphomet is actually Sophia, the Greek goddess of wisdom, after the application of a certain Hebrew cipher to her name. Most commonly, however, Baphomet is thought to be a powerful demon.

Other authors have accused the Templars of other activities at the highest levels, with differing degrees of evidence. The Templars are generally thought to have been interested in forming a Templar state after their hold in the Holy Land failed. Other accusations lean towards Baphomet-worship only at the highest levels, or a plan to reconcile Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Others point towards the Templars' connection to the Temple of Solomon; that the excavation there found something that changed the Templars' beliefs and was evidence enough of a sacred mission to propel their journey to power.

### Templar History

The Knights Templar were founded around 1119, a small group of knights residing on Temple Mount, where the Temple of Solomon once stood. The order was officially recognized and granted a charter ten years later, charged with protecting pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land. Scant evidence has been found that the Templars ever protected any pilgrims, but they did become a major force in the lands of Palestine.

After they received Bernard of Clairvaux's blessing and papal recognition, the Templars had a much easier time recruiting new followers and began collecting grants of land and gold from European sources. The largest of these grants in the early years was from the King of Aragon, who left the order one third of his lands. In this case, the Templars turned down the land, collecting six castles and a number of financial privileges instead.

Twenty years after the order's founding, Pope Innocent II took direct control of the Templars, effectively making them above all secular and ecclesiastic law short of his own. By the middle of the twelfth century they were the most powerful force in Catholicism aside from the Pope himself. The Templars assisted many kings with the collection of taxes and lent their vault space to house several royal treasuries. They were also engaged in banking on a massive scale, including money lending, interest taking, and promissory notes.

Palestine during this period was an absolute mess. The Templars, Hospitallers (another religious order, now the Knights of Malta, page 84), the Assassins, several independent Christian

kingdoms, and a varying number of Islamic nations all acted in a morass of rapidly shifting alliances. The Knights Templar fought hard to defend their holdings, but Christendom was eventually driven back out of the Holy Land and the Templars with it. Now lacking a purpose, the Templars continued accumulating wealth, land, and power, looking into the possibility of a nation of their own.

In 1307, the Pope was effectively the pawn of King Philip of France. Philip, however, had spent himself into a massive amount of debt, mostly to Europe's only real moneylenders at the time, the Templars. He put out an order on Friday, October the 13th of that year to round up all the Templars in France and place them under arrest for a variety of charges. Most charges centered on the Templars' supposed worship of a creature named Baphomet, who alternately appeared as a skull, a three-faced head, a cat, and many other forms depending on who was asked.

Although most consider the Templars to have died that day, it actually took months for other countries to follow France's lead. In German lands, the Templars were mostly folded into the Teutonic Knights. In England, Philip's demand was carried out slowly and without zeal. In Portugal, the Knights formed a new order, "The Knights of Christ," which they all joined. Even those countries that performed light torture, as opposed to Philip's brutal methods, found no evidence of Templar misdeeds.

Even in France, some Templars seem to have been forewarned. Many Templars escaped into the hills and the entire Templar fleet disappeared out of harbor. The Templars' legendary wealth and those responsible for managing it were nowhere to be found.

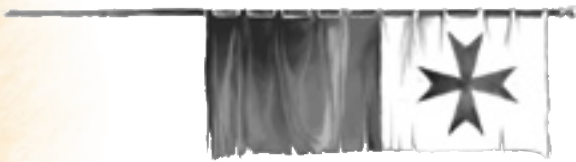
The Pope officially disbanded the Templars in 1312, saying that no right-thinking Christian would want anything to do with them after the scandal. Two years later, the last Grand Master of the Templars, Jacques de Molay, was burned after retracting his confessions.

### Templar Symbols & Signs

The most recognizable Templar symbol is the splayed cross. It was displayed in red on their plain white robes. Like the Assassins, the red represented blood and courage, while the white represented purity. Many people recognize the Templar Cross as the one on Christopher Columbus's sails as he traveled to the new world. This connection is most likely through Columbus's father-in-law, a Knight of Christ.



The Piebald Banner, a plain black and white flag, was used as a symbol for the order and a rallying point during battle. Templars were expected never to leave the field of battle while the banner was raised. The Templars were technically not required to fight to the death (surrender and ransom also being options), but battle to the death became a more and more common practice as hostages were executed during the Crusades.



Often appearing on Templar gravestones is a bas-relief of the individual's sword. The full symbolism of this isn't clear, but Templar swords tended to be extremely functional and eschew gilt and decoration, even during the height of the order's wealth. Ritual swords were an exception, although even they were never as gaudy as similar implements of that type.

The original crest of the Knights Templar depicted two knights sharing a single horse. This represented their humility and vows of poverty, although even during their earliest years each knight had multiple horses. During the fall of the Templars, their enemies said this symbol instead represented rampant homosexuality.

The Inquisition and those who believe it, claimed the Templar's primary symbol and idol was Baphomet. Baphomet is described in many confessions to the Inquisition, although his form seems to shift from teller to teller. Some of the more common manifestations are the head of a bearded man, a skull, a head with three faces, a goat-headed demon, a gold statue of a woman, and a cat. The entity was said to be capable of encouraging plant growth, protecting castles, producing riches, and other feats. It is said Templars blessed cords by touching them to the idol and carried those cords with them at all times.

### The Knights Templar in Game

The Templars have some unique difficulties being used in game. They are fairly well known and came to exist because of a very specific set of circumstances, then vanished. Recreating the Templars in another capacity requires the same Crusades mindset, melding faith in a god with military conquest, and a powerful church.

Unless it's during the period in which they existed, using the historical Templars themselves, rather than a modified version, requires an explanation of what happened to them. That's most of what these options focus on: how they survived and the truth of the charges levied against them.

### Surviving Knights

After the arrests in France, a number of Templars in other nations vanished or joined other orders. The Knights of Christ and the Teutonic Knights served to take in many Templars in their areas of control, allowing some amount of their legacy to live on there. Similarly, many theorize that some Templars fled to Scotland, where they fought alongside Robert the Bruce. A

## Templar Ranks

The Templars served as a military order and it shows in their rank structure. The brethren of the order were divided into four roles: knight brother, sergeant brother, chaplain, and farmer. Only the knight brother and sergeant brother normally saw battle.

The knight brothers were drawn from noble families and were trained as heavy cavalry. The sergeant brothers were accepted from lower classes and functioned as light cavalry and infantry. Chaplains served the spiritual needs of the Templars, leaving them even further outside the normal church hierarchy. Farmers were responsible for administering the Templars' property.

A Grand Master led the Templars as a whole, answering solely to the Pope. Under him were Commanders responsible for certain areas, such as the Commander of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, who held power equal to the Grand Master in his domain. Higher ranking Knight Brothers were known as Commanders of Knights and guided other Templars in battle.

much smaller number believe that the Templars sailed west and established a small colony in North America.

The Knights of Christ were created basically as a cover organization after the Templars were formally cleared of charges in Portugal, making it a rather simple explanation as to how the Templars survived. They simply gave up part of their name, became the Knights of Christ, and eventually went underground.

Other potential routes to show Templar survival are Robert the Bruce and the other knightly orders that accepted ex-Templars, largely due to their need for fighting men. It also showed that few of them believed the accusations of King Phillip, since otherwise the Templars would have been decidedly unwelcome.

The idea of the Templars heading to America can be rather handy for a game based there, as the Templars may have left relics, secrets, or traditions that can be woven into the game. This explanation will seem somewhat strange to many players, so it may be best to offer some supernatural backing to the Templars or keep the evidence of their presence very well hidden.

Some Templars also simply disappeared in Europe. They could have easily created small sects that a modern society could trace its lineage to. These sects would have had considerable difficulty for a first few years in many areas, probably striving to flee to somewhere they could function openly.

Templars surviving in this method probably maintain tight secrecy over the centuries, keeping their knowledge closely controlled. To justify the Templars as a coherent society surviving through to the modern day would require a lot of luck

on their part and a rather powerful body of lore that they're passing down.

The worship of Baphomet could certainly be that body of knowledge. Or it could concern the Holy Grail, the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple of Solomon, or the bloodline of Christ. Nothing says it has to concern their the actual recorded history of the order. It The lore could just as easily be secret magic they discovered during the Crusades or artifacts they found there. The secrets of the Templars can be a great feature in a campaign.

The Knights will probably have a feel strongly about the Catholic Church. They might want to destroy it, reform it, or simply be recognized again. These actions can easily draw in secret societies associated with the church, such as the Knights of Malta and the Mafia.

#### Baphomet Worshipers

It might be that King Phillip was right and that the Templars really were involved in demon- or idol-worship. In this case, the survivors would probably maintain their connection to Baphomet and expand their worship of it.

The most difficult part of using the Templars as Baphomet worshippers is figuring out what Baphomet actually was. It was said to appear in so many different forms that it either didn't have a form at all or it could assume a vast number of them. Its powers were fairly benign, but the rituals honoring it were said to contain a variety of sex acts, leading to widespread disgust among the medieval populace.

If they the Templars did worship Baphomet, it could be as either some sort of calculated bargain or honest worship. In a bargain, they would revere Baphomet and perform rituals in its honor in exchange for power. In honest worship, they would have been converted to the worship of Baphomet at some point, probably through direct encounter of the demon or something equally shocking. Other, more fantastic options, like the Templars capturing Baphomet or using the term Baphomet for a wide range of demons are also possible in appropriate campaigns.

Either way, it's easy to assume that the Templars, then and now, would be engaged in all sorts of rites in exchange for power. Members will use that power to make themselves nigh invincible in battle and incredibly wealthy. Modern Templars with Baphomet's help could reconstruct their mercantile empire from behind the scenes, creating the evil, powerful elite that so many conspiracy stories revolve around.

Opposing Baphomet's worshippers could be a classic example of fighting against a purely evil secret society. What the Templars are capable of depends a lot on how you define Baphomet, but the party PCs will have their work cut out for them discovering, hunting down, and neutralizing worshippers. The worshippers of Baphomet may also have split up over the years, creating their own societies or operating independently. This can create a far more complex setting for the PCs to work their way through. Individual worshippers of Baphomet may very easily oppose others or even adopt the PCs' party as their own personal weapon.

#### Great Unifiers

During the trial of the Templars, they were charged of befouling the cross and worshipping Mohammed. Some later authors even suggested that Baphomet was a corruption of the name Mohammed. The idea arose that the Templars had learned much of Islam and Judaism while in the Holy Land and sought to reunite those faiths. In other words, they came to respect their enemies and end the war through unity rather than destruction.

If the Templars were striving towards that goal (which seems unlikely), they would be put in an interesting position through the ages, trying to calm religious tensions and bring the Abrahamic religions back under one roof. If this is the case, the Templars are probably supporting the Masons, given that organization's acceptance of all monotheistic religions and many religious tolerance movements.

This option is even more interesting in a setting with multiple deities, the Templars serving one god which they believe represents some or all of the others. They may seek to combine different faiths by identifying the leading deities as one and the same; they may be interesting in the gods symbolically marrying; or they may simply wish to bring all gods into the same pantheon.

The PCs will probably be able to agree with these Templars, at least in theory. After all, it would be a far more peaceful solution. However, if the PCs belong to one of the faiths the Templars are trying to merge or the PCs honestly hate one of the groups they're supposed to merge with, they may take to the idea a lot less kindly.

#### Inner Cabal

The Templars were said to have an Open Rule and a Secret Rule, the second describing their worship of Baphomet and other crimes. If this is the case, it's likely that recruits were introduced to the Open Rule and fully indoctrinated before the Secret Rule ever came up. Some knights might go through their whole career without receiving even a hint of the Secret Rule.

The inner cabal could have formed the leadership, but judging by de Molay's confessions and denials, it probably wouldn't include him. So it could be a group of lower-ranking knights, or a cross-section of the order with some leaders in the inner cabal and others not.

This society within the Templars could hold its meetings and worship in secret, combining the blessings of Baphomet with their martial training. The inner cabal may have survived the purges, perhaps separately from the main Templar order, and continued its traditions of steel and magic. Members of the inner cabal could continue to parasitize military orders, especially when those orders are given unquestioned control.

A smaller inner group could be far more depraved than if the entire order were involved, so long as they concealed the Secret Rule from their fellow knights. As such, the inner cabal members are likely to be villains, although not necessarily powerful ones. On the other hand, depending on the strength



of magic (and Baphomet) in your world, some of the original members dating back to the purges may still survive.

#### Economic Powerhouse

When the Templars were rounded up in France, their legendary wealth was nowhere to be found. Likewise, only tiny amounts of money and weapons were acquired in other countries. There are several reasons this may have happened, but in this adaptation, the Templars made off with it.

The knights that brought the treasure with them and their descendants carefully doled out the money and invested slowly over the years. By the modern age, they could own the largest corporations and many governments, having a vast amount of capital at their disposal.

This begs the question of why they the ancestors would stay together after the threat of the church passed. Perhaps they didn't and they now bicker among themselves trying to gain control of the world's financial markets. It's entirely possible they had some sort of philosophical underpinning that kept them together, like Baphomet or the grand unification idea discussed above. They might have realized they stood a better chance of succeeding if they stuck together, thus binding the society together to the present day. Another possibility is that they did originally split, and then one of them took control of the others by any means necessary.

An organization with this much raw wealth has a powerful hold on society. They can just as easily be patrons, allies, neutral, or enemies. This can serve as a reason for the incredible wealth and power of another adaptation of the Templars, or even a completely different modern secret society. If they are purely secular, the society is likely to remain neutral to the PCs unless they prove troublesome. Members might be employers with their own normal secular needs or business rivals, but they aren't terribly more likely to have world-destroying schemes than other members of rich families.

#### Hooks & Seeds

- ▶ Children in an isolated village have found several rare coins of different nations minted just before the Templars' fall from grace. Once the news gets out, hordes of treasure seekers, conspiracy enthusiasts, and undercover Templar agents descend on the village.
- ▶ A group of "New Templars" has formed and is trying to dig up a number of Templar sites.
- ▶ Anti-church rebels in the area claim the Templars as spiritual ancestors and emulate them in all ways possible, drawing more of their philosophy from the accusations than from reality.
- ▶ A known Templar who survived the purges (or one of his descendants) vanishes suddenly. Evidence points to a radical group in the church or a group interested in the Templars' secrets.
- ▶ Rebellious youth in the area have been found with a variety of statuettes, different in form but each bearing the inscription 'Baphomet.' Even when pressed, the teenagers refuse to divulge any information, but parents are suspecting some sort of new cult or gang activity. In-depth investigation can reveal their ties to Templar survivors or Templar writings.

▶ The Church claims that, after the purges, several ex-Templars hid in the PCs' area. The Church begins persecuting members of several wealthy families in the area, planning to seize the property and execute anyone who gets in their way.

▶ The PCs are suspected of being Templar agents and are trailed by Church representatives. Other groups, upon finding out, may also begin investigating the PCs.

▶ Several members of a new Templar order are found dead after attempting a ritual with Templar origins. Their bodies appear to have been mauled by animals, perhaps to obscure the ritual evidence or cause of death.

▶ An old ex-Templar is trying to recreate his lost glory days, recruiting several members of the local gentry and training them in Templar techniques.

▶ A prominent local figure has far more money than he should legitimately have and the PCs are asked to investigate. Several yearly tributes, once paid to the Templars, are now being secretly paid to that local figure.

#### The Knights Templar in Fantasy

The Templars are at home in fantasy, being both knights in shining armor and despicable villains beyond any chance of redemption. However, many fantasy realms exist without the huge unified church and crusading mindset that made the Templars possible.

The first step towards using the Templars is to determine what church they were aligned with. The church throughout the Templar story is extremely powerful, benevolent in its basic teachings, lacking a real standing army, involved in a protracted war, and willing to torture the Templars to obtain confessions.

If there's a church that has all those traits, it's an obvious choice. The most important parts are that the church is popular, basically good, and involved in a holy war. If you can safely change your setting's history a bit, try to make that church line up with the ideal of a powerful, ruthless church during the time of the Templars. Some fantasy settings don't have a single church large enough to serve as the Templars' backers. A coalition of several faiths, holding together for the duration of the holy war, could have created and funded the Templars. After the Templars were disgraced, the alliance probably crumbled.

Once it's determined whom they served, figuring out what they were accused of is pretty easy. Worship of a dark god and practicing questionable, likely necromantic, magics is enough to distress most faiths. If the faith has any particular hang-ups, you may want to add those to the list of charges as well.

The Templars' enemy in the holy war may already be obvious from deciding the circumstances surrounding the war. The enemy can be any group, really, but it works best if the enemies are strangers with foreign ways or gods that the church can accuse the Templars of being infected with. Even philosophical conflicts against other sections of the Templars' church could be cause for a holy war.

The Templars, if publicly destroyed more recently than a century ago, are probably a large enough force in history that they should be included when the history of their regions is laid out.

If your setting is already established and you want to introduce them during the campaign, it's better to set their destruction further back in history.

Another option would be to have the Templars and their church not involved in the areas the PCs are really familiar with. The PCs could even enter during or right after the purges in this case, seeing the horrors of the war and its after-effects from outside eyes. In this case, the party could also be approached by Templars seeking help escaping.

### The Knights Templar in Modern Settings

There are two basic ways to handle the Templars in modern settings. The first is to assume that they survived their persecution relatively intact and passed on their teachings. The second is having a society that based itself on Templar teachings or myth, but doesn't have an unbroken line back to the Templars.

It's a popular belief that the Templars survived to the modern day by passing their beliefs onto the Freemasons, but we're talking about a different level of survival. This sort of survival means the Templars still exist in some form or another as a secret society in and of itself, practicing dark rites, controlling trade, or still crusading in their own way.

The Templars could have survived by escaping across the sea, hiding in the wilderness, or joining new orders. You should decide which group formed the core group of your Templars. If they went across the sea to the British Isles or America, they would still have their most powerful influence there. Hiding in the wilderness would probably result in the development of a need for secrecy beyond all else. Joining a new order gives the Templars more time to spread their teachings and will probably result in an order that maintains some of its martial focus.

The Templars have a powerful body of myth surrounding them that has survived, largely intact, to the modern day. Many societies have based themselves off chosen elements of the myths, mimicking what they believe the Templars were really like. These societies run the gamut from New Age to Satanic to Christian reformers. One of the societies that lead into the Thule Society (page 69) was actually based on the Templars in this way, as is the Ordo Templi Orientis (page 86).

With a new Templar group, choose their interpretation of the Templars and stick to it rigidly. It's not likely to be complex or nuanced like a surviving society, but instead be direct and to the point. Everything that supports the order's one particular view will be accepted and everything else ignored.

### The Knights Templar in Science Fiction

The Templars provide a rather unique set of options in science fiction. Their order may have survived through all their intervening years, it may be a new order based on the still-living myths, or it may be a created order that merely happens to resemble the Templars.

If the Templars survived, they'll be very small and secretive or incredibly powerful, and very likely both. They will almost

certainly be behind one or more of the open powers in the setting, perhaps controlling the entire setting. In a science fiction game, it's less likely to be important whether or not they worshipped Baphomet, but more a question of whom they've managed to get under their thumb.

A new order based on the old Templar order implies that the legend survived all the intervening years, which honestly wouldn't be surprising. The society based on them, like one in modern times, would take one fragment of the myth and use that to construct a society around. It may be that the society is even being used by a government or church to create a group of elite warriors.

It's also possible that another situation has come to pass again that creates another group like the Templars. They need a holy war propagated by an extremely powerful church, but a group of warrior-monks with access to science fiction technology would be a sight. They could appear as a traditional military outfit, a group using 'retro' sword and plate mail-themed equipment, or a group of crack fighter pilots. The end result will be an organization so powerful, wealthy, and respected that it will either take over or be put down.

Another, extremely strange, option is to have the Templars survive because they discovered something out of science fiction in the Holy Land (likely inside Temple Mount). Perhaps it's taken them years to understand it or perhaps they've been using it in secret. The device could be a powerful weapon, a device allowing dimensional travel, an amplifier for psionic powers, a device to implement nanotechnology, or any number of other options. In this case, the Templars may only now be losing the edge their technology gives them, powerful and decadent from the centuries of undisputed control. Perhaps they were responsible for the advances to science fiction level technology.

### The Knights Templar in d20

The Knights Templar have a diverse set of legends, so giving them one single set of statistics is never going to cover everything. This prestige class will cover their role as warriors in the Crusades, but other versions of the legend cast them as clerics of Baphomet or dark sorcerers.

The rank and file of the Templars would be fighters. Their chaplains could very easily be clerics. Paladins would find themselves readily at home in the order. The NPC aristocrats also make sense thematically. Other classes can find homes much more rarely as scouts or advisors. Baphomet as depicted by the Inquisition would be a lawful evil deity. His domains would be Death, Evil, Magic, Plant, and War. His favored weapon is long sword.

Some sources say Baphomet is actually a very, very veiled reference to Sophia, goddess of wisdom. If that were the case, neutral good alignment along with the domains of Good, Knowledge, Magic, and Protection wouldn't be out of line. As for favored weapon, quarterstaff is the most appropriate.

One last possibility while we're talking about priests would be to set up a specific Templar priesthood. The domains of Law,

Protection, Travel, and War are extremely appropriate. The best alignments are lawful good or lawful neutral. Their favored weapon would be long sword.

Templar priests could also be perfectly normal clerics of the god the Templars follow openly. In this case, they function as normal priests of that god, although many would probably consider multiclassing into a class more focused on melee combat.

#### TEMPLAR ELITE

Many individuals who join the Templars continue on their old paths or simply stagnate, performing non-combat duties. Templar elites continue their training, learning to focus themselves towards greater and greater heights.

Templar elites come from all martial professions, but most often fighter, paladin or the NPC warrior class. There is a great deal of discipline involved, so lawful individuals tend to fare better. Wealth is also a major consideration, as the entrant has to donate everything he owns to the order. His equipment, included in his donation to the order, is only given back to him for use in service of the Templars.

Templar elites are working alone only in the strangest of circumstances. Generally they'll operate out of a fortress or temple

with many other Templars in residence, probably including other elites. Anyone interfering in a templar elite's business is, by proxy, interfering with the entire order and will be treated as such.

**Hit Die:** d10.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become a Templar elite, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +5.

**Skills:** Diplomacy 2 ranks, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) 3 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 2 ranks.



TABLE 3-6: THE TEMPLAR ELITE

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	Focused strike (1/day)
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Fearless charge
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Focused strike (2/day)
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Bonus feat, silver strike
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Focused defense, focused strike (3/day)
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Templar's strike, unyielding
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Focused strike (4/day)
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Bonus feat, magical strike
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Focused strike (5/day)
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Strength of presence

**Feats:** Mounted Combat, Power Attack and either Spirited Charge or Trample.

**Special:** Must be a member of the Knights Templar, having given all personal goods to the order, and being of noble birth.

#### Class Skills

The Templar elite's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (nobility and royalty) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Ride (Dex), Speak Language (None), and Survival (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 2 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features

All the following are class features of the Templar elite prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Templar elites are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor, and with all shields.

**Focused Strike (Ex):** Once each day, the Templar elite can focus his force of personality into an attack. As a free action, before he rolls an attack, he may add his Charisma bonus to that attack. At first level, this ability can be used once per day. He gains an additional use per day for every two levels past first (2/day at 3rd, 3/day at 5th and so on).

**Fearless Charge (Ex):** At 2nd level, Templar elites can tap into their inner reserves of courage and heroism while riding a mount against unmounted opponents. The elite has a +2 morale bonus to all attack rolls, Ride checks, and saving throws against fear effects in this situation.

**Bonus Feat:** At 4th level and 8th level, the Templar elite can choose a bonus feat from the list of feats available to fighters. This is in addition to any feats he may normally receive.

**Silver Strike (Su):** Once the Templar elite reaches 4th level, all of his melee attacks are considered to be silver for the purposes of piercing damage reduction.

**Focused Defense (Ex):** At 5th level, the Templar elite can choose to use his focused strike ability to improve his defense

instead. At the beginning of each round, he may use one of his focused strikes for the day to increase his Armor Class by his Charisma modifier for the round.

**Unyielding (Ex):** A 6th level Templar elite can remain conscious and functioning normally until he reaches -10 hit points. He continues to lose hit points normally.

**Templar's Strike (Ex):** At 6th level, a mounted Templar elite deals additional damage when using his focused strike ability. If that attack strikes, it deals additional damage equal to the Templar elite's Charisma bonus.

**Magical Strike (Su):** At 8th level, the Templar elite's melee attacks are considered both silver and magic for the purpose of piercing damage resistance.

**Strength of Presence (Ex):** A 10th level Templar elite has a permanent +2 bonus to his Charisma.

#### Templar Elites in d20 Modern

The rules modifications necessary to fit the Templar elites into a modern setting are less of a concern than explaining them within the setting. Some changes are needed to let them fit in to a world without mounted knights, unless you want to have them riding horses regardless.

**Requirements:** Instead of the current required feats, a character must have three feats from the following list: Archaic Weapon Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (any), Cleave, Combat Expertise, Exotic Melee Weapon Proficiency, Great Cleave, Heroic Surge, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus, or Whirlwind Attack.

Instead of current required skills, the character needs Diplomacy 4 ranks, Knowledge (tactics) 3 ranks, and Knowledge (philosophy and religion) 2 ranks.

Noble birth might be waived in the modern day, or it may mean something different, such as being born to a family of high wealth or great familial power.

#### Class Skills

The Templar elite's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (nobility and royalty) (Int),

Knowledge (tactics) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Ride (Dex), Read/Write Language (None), Speak Language (None), Survival (Wis), and Treat Injury (Wis).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 3 + Int modifier.

**Bonus Feat:** Choose one bonus feat from among the following: Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Armor Proficiency (any), Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Defensive Martial Arts, Elusive Target, Exotic Melee Weapon Proficiency, Frightful Presence, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Bullrush, Improved Damage Threshold, Improved Initiative, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precision Shot, Quick Draw, Quick Reload, Sunder, Unbalance Opponent, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus, or Whirlwind Attack.

### Templar Example - Guardians of the Temple & Servants of the Five

This example is a lot different from the others in that it lays out a mythos and history for two different orders. Both orders are part of the Templars' remnants, set in a fantasy world.

The Guardians of the Temple are a group tracing itself back to the Templars, concerned with guarding certain dark relics the Templars found during their crusade. The Servants of the Five (often just called the Five, the number referring to that society's ruling council) were a secret cabal within the Templars exploiting those secrets. The two orders, even years after the Templars' destruction, work at violently cross-purposes.

#### History

The Templars (or whatever you wish to call them) were formed by a collection of churches to face what they saw as a major outside threat. During that campaign, they found a number of items on the borderlands, seemingly fragments of one black stone. The smaller fragments were fairly harmless, but the largest held tremendous power.

A small group within the Templars was charged with rounding up these fragments and guarding them. They continued working after the Crusade had been won and the other Templars fell into decadence.

Eventually, as happened in the real world, the Templars' religious backers turned on them. Many were killed and the others scattered. The handful of individuals actually involved in the dark arts escaped, allowing the rest of the organization to take the brunt of the abuse.

The survivors of those dealing with the fragments formed a new organization, secretly calling itself the Guardians of the Temple. This new society attached itself to a series of other knightly orders for the next few hundred years, passing down Templar techniques and keeping the stone fragments safe.

At the same time, a circle of five individuals that practiced dark arts settled into the seediest city they could find and began recruiting followers. The followers began calling themselves the Servants of the Five and the name just sort of stuck.

Membership in the Five's inner circle has changed substantially over the years, but one member has found immortality through the dark stone shards.

Once the Servants of the Five had gathered their strength, a process taking several decades, they began searching for the remaining fragments, among other projects seeking dark magics and ancient texts. This led them into conflict with the Guardians and a secret war has been raging between the groups ever since.

#### Goals - Guardians of the Temple

The Guardians are predominantly concerned with their survival as an organization and keeping the fragments, along with other dark artifacts they've acquired over the years, away from the public. Given the extra time and resources, they also help the poor or sick and fight in what they consider just wars.

#### Goals - Servants of the Five

The Five are little interested in world-changing events; they're mostly concerned with personal power and immortality. This doesn't apply so much to the centuries-old head of the organization, who has become either insane or possibly has surpassed mortal understanding. His current mindset is that he's gathering all the evil in the world to him so he can destroy it in one fell swoop. However, this is prone to change after a few days' thought on his part, so no one can really tell what he's going to do next.

#### Methods - Guardians of the Temple

The main focus of the Guardians is their series of safe houses for dark magics. When one safe house is corrupted or compromised, the keeper hands off her items to another Guardian who creates a new resting place for them.

The Guardians of the Temple regularly attach themselves to other knightly orders and use the tactical and mystical knowledge passed down from the Templars to make progress through the ranks. They Members then use those positions to recruit new Guardians.

An often-used quote from the Guardians' founder is "our fondest dream is a world that no longer needs us." To this end, a small group within the Guardians is tasked with trying to destroy the relics in the Guardians' keeping. This group is comprised mostly of scholars, some with positions in major centers of learning, who spend much of their life in research.

The overall organization of the Guardians is very dispersed. The leader of the order has a few lieutenants who guide specific arms of the organization. Most communication between the ranks is accomplished through magical means, but most Guardians know two or three other members personally.

#### Methods - Servants of the Five

The Servants of the Five use any and all means at their disposal. They're already involved in dark magics, so anything more seems like a small step. They don't flinch at using murder, intimidation, or torture to further their goals. Most members consider themselves scholars and justify their actions in that way.

Members of the society usually keep to themselves unless the Five is gathering a mission team. Once the call goes out, Servants usually jump at the opportunity. Succeeding at a mission means getting in the Five's good graces, with more access to mystical knowledge and magical items.

The Servants are a fairly close-knit group in that they each know a significant number of the other members. The society depends on their members' personal power and positions in society to defend itself. So far, they haven't been proven wrong, although many weaker members have been killed by the Guardians or outside forces.

#### **Membership - Guardians of the Temple**

Most Guardians are recruited from within knightly orders the Guardians have infiltrated. The remaining handful of members is recruited from family members, close friends, or fellow scholars. Most of the upper leadership is retired members of knightly orders or active members without many duties to take up their time.

Members of the Guardians, even scholars, are expected to be able to defend themselves and train in the arts of swordplay.

#### **Membership - Servants of the Five**

Members of this order each have their own reasons for joining. Some found out about the order and convinced a current member to train them, some were promising apprentices that were recruited, others were approached to get access to special knowledge, and there are other reasons besides. Each character has her own reasons, however, and they should be considered for each character individually.

After joining, the member is expected to continue her own training in the arts. No one from the order will train her without reason, but research materials may be provided if the end results are shared. If the Servants didn't have such an impressive body of resources available, no one would ever bother joining. Getting access to anything requires convincing someone it's in his or her best interests to provide it.

The only real way to advance in the order is to take part in missions gathering new knowledge or items. Novice members without outside resources often have to go on several missions before a member of the Five notices and sponsors them. A few members are talented enough that they can barter using their research skills, but most are stuck with risking their lives doing missions.

Becoming a member of the Five is largely dependant on a seat being vacated. After that, the remaining members of the Five choose appropriate individuals to fill those vacant seats. The Five themselves are the only ones with full access to the society's resources, so the positions are as coveted as they are rare.

#### **Adjusting Them to Your Campaign**

These societies are a bit more intrusive than most, so a few questions need to be answered. Which churches banded together to form the Templars in the first place? What was the outside threat against which they fought? What knightly orders

exist in your campaign for the Guardians to attach themselves to? Where is a nice shady city for the Servants of the Five to base themselves in?

The history assumes that the crusade the Templars were involved in was a few hundred years ago. If it was more recent, the PCs will definitely have heard of it and it will have more political ramifications. Setting the crusade further back lets it be "just another war" when the PCs begin investigating it.

The exact nature of the artifacts held by the Guardians and the magics practiced by the Servants are sort of up for grabs. The black stone fragments can run the gamut from minor permanent magical items to world-shaking major artifacts, depending on the campaign type. In a particularly low magic campaign, the fragments may be the primary source of magical items, focusing a great deal of attention and power on these societies.

The Servants will also gobble up any sort of magic they come into contact with, so they'll have a wide variety of magical tools, with each members specializing. If you wish to introduce some new form of dark magic to the campaign, the Five make an excellent source for that magic.

#### **Mossad**

##### **Ha-Mossad le-Modiin ule-Tafkidim Meyuhadim**

Mossad is the best known of modern Israel's intelligence agencies, with history and capabilities matching the agencies of much larger countries. Like most intelligence agencies, Mossad has had its mix of stunning successes and equally stunning failures. Unlike many other agencies, its members have been given comparatively free reign. If they believe assassination or sabotage, even on the soil of a friendly nation, is the best solution, they've been allowed that latitude.

That freedom provides the most interesting aspect of Mossad, showing what an agency like this can do if left mostly to its own devices. Also shaping its actions, and allowing those freedoms, is the constant tension its nation feels and the ever-looming threat of war and terrorism.

Mossad has been able to use that freedom to defend its nation in many ways: locating leaders of terrorist organizations, cementing relations with other nations, stopping several weapons programs, and probably many other things that may never be revealed to the public. The same freedom has also led to a number of hideous failures: being caught several times impersonating citizens of friendly countries, killing innocents on the soil of those countries, and other plots that damage Israel's relations with other nations or result in the deaths of Mossad agents.

#### **Mossad Philosophy**

As a purely secular secret society, Mossad doesn't have a philosophy in the same way a mystical order would. However, it does still have a rather strong worldview and techniques that define how it acts as an agency. The driving goal of Mossad is to defend Israel from outsiders, including terrorist organizations and opposing countries. The organization serves as both information gathering and the first line of defense for

its country. Mossad therefore takes its role very seriously and is willing to use whatever means necessary to accomplish its goals.

HUMINT, or human intelligence, is gathering intelligence through traditional spying and infiltration of other organizations. All organizations use HUMINT to some degree, but Mossad has an extensive training program and a network of operatives larger than those of many wealthier nations. Outsiders are also recruited, sometimes even in a 'False Flag' operation, where Mossad agents pretend to be from another country or organization. This network has managed to include even enemies like retired Nazi commando Otto Skorzeny, using False Flag, blackmail, bribery, and other techniques.

SIGINT, signals intelligence, is another Mossad stronghold. SIGINT involves wiretapping or other forms of eavesdropping on electronic messages. Before Israel even became a nation, Mossad's predecessors installed many agents in telephone switching stations and kept careful watch on opposition leaders and diplomats alike. More recently, even stranger techniques have been used, like replacing entire telephone poles with hollowed out imitations filled with eavesdropping equipment.

Internal security and secrecy are a requirement for any intelligence agency. Mossad agents are expected to work alone or in small groups to prevent one agent from bringing down many others. Coded messages, ever-changing meeting times, and convincing cover stories are all designed to avoid attracting too much attention. Once an agent is discovered, there is little that can be done to help him, especially if that agent is caught on foreign soil.

For any nation as close to war as Israel tends to be, obtaining and studying samples of rivals' technology takes a center stage. Mossad has been fairly successful in this regard and takes it a step further, assassinating enemy scientists and destroying research facilities. These more extreme methods are generally reserved for rocket technology, weapons of mass destruction research, or other technology likely to be used directly against Israel.

Counterintelligence is carried out with a similar fervor, although it is just as often handled by feeding false information to enemy spies as by killing them. Mossad has even used infiltrators from an enemy's organization to good effect, such as tricking one agent into taking "a very important secret package" (in other words, a mail bomb) to his superior. Often, however, an enemy spy will have to be killed or imprisoned to avoid revealing important secrets.

Mossad's siege mentality has led it to a number of other actions outside normal intelligence activities. Its agents have assisted in smuggling Jews from resistant countries into Israel. Mossad also helps maintain relationships with other countries' secret police. Some of those countries are allies, but in many cases they don't have any formal relations with Israel, making Mossad the only pipeline between the two. Mossad has also used techniques that step outside the normal definition of assassination, like mail bombs, military raids, and carefully targeted missile attacks.

## Mossad History

Mossad was formed under its current name in 1951, although its predecessors had been around for much longer. It's hard to see the history of Mossad as a single strand, with so much of it still classified. Many interesting events can be picked out, though, showing some interesting trends in the life of a secret service.

Three years after its formation, Mossad undertook a drastic plan in an attempt to break up possible US-Egypt relations. A cell bombed several American businesses in Egypt and attempted to blame it on local forces. One bomb detonated early, enabling the Egyptian police to capture one of the bombers, who revealed his entire cell. This became known as the Lavon Affair, or the Unfortunate Affair, and was Israel's first major scandal.

However, Mossad has also had great successes. In 1956, Mossad was able to get a full copy of the speech Premier Khrushchev was planning on making to denounce his predecessor, Joseph Stalin. Mossad was the only agency to get the entire speech in advance, an impressive task given the difficulty of securing information from within the USSR. When agents gave it to several other governments, it cemented relations and proved Mossad's worth as an equal partner.

One of Mossad's success stories came a few years later when they its agents began investigating Nazi war criminals that had escaped justice. They located Adolf Eichmann, an SS officer involved with the concentration camps. He had escaped to Argentina with the help of a Vatican passport. Mossad eventually led an operation to capture him and smuggle him back to Israel, where he was publicly tried and executed.

Over the next decades, Israel was forced back onto war footing. Mossad was of mixed use during this period. On a few occasions, its agents underestimated their enemies. On the other hand, they also provided valuable information about enemy air forces before the Six-Day War against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in 1967, helping towards Israel's surprise attack and decisive victory.

In 1966, Mossad managed to acquire a MiG-21 fighter jet that the Soviets had sold to Iraq. The theft was one of the most sterling samples of tech espionage in the modern age. The pilot was paid in excess of a million dollars and his family was smuggled out of Iraq by Mossad operatives in exchange for his turning over the jet to Israel. The United States, which were not able to acquire such a plane on their own, were later given a chance to examine the craft by Mossad.

At the Munich Olympics in 1972, Palestinian radicals known as Black September kidnapped the Israeli wrestling team. Black September's attempts to negotiate for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israel were rejected, and an attempt by West German police to rescue the hostages was horribly botched, resulting in the death of all hostages. Later, the captured terrorists were released by German authorities in exchange for other hostages. Mossad later "enacted terminal reprisal" on many Black September members involved, along with one innocent waitperson in Lillehammer who had been mistaken

for a Black September leader. Foreign governments, especially Norway, on whose soil the assassination took place, and Canada, whose citizens the Mossad agents were impersonating, were outraged by the mistaken killing.

Mossad continues into the present day, its power waxing and waning as times and international pressure calls for it.

### Mossad Signs & Symbols

Mossad does not have symbols the way that many secret societies do. It uses secret methods of recognition like any spy agency, but those methods change as often as security mandates.

### Mossad In Game

Mossad can be an interesting addition to a game, but it's important to keep real world considerations in mind. Most people, even those strongly sympathizing with Israel, won't have much problem with Mossad being cast in a questionable light, but it can be a touchier subject than intelligence agencies in other nations. The best advice, if you aren't sure, is to ask your players if they'd be uncomfortable with its inclusion in your game.

In many settings, Israel won't exist in its modern form. This works out just fine with Mossad. The only thing they really need is a country under siege by armies and spies. If Mossad serves another country, a name change might also be in order.

As for what role Mossad plays in your game, it mostly depends on the PCs' relations with Mossad's sponsor country. If the PCs work for an opposing country, Mossad can make excellent enemies, whereas if they just work for a neutral country, Mossad can alternately be a foil and an ally.

Most Mossad operatives are used solely for information gathering, so a PC member of the organization could easily keep his secret concealed.

Mossad can serve several roles in your game, mostly distinguished by what nation the agency is attached to. Mossad within an enemy nation can be a fearsome enemy, while that agency within the character's country can be a stalwart ally or oppressor. The many roles of Mossad are detailed further below.

### Mossad Ranks

A single director, chosen by the Israeli Prime Minister, controls Mossad. Beneath that director are the heads for each department, each controlling an area like information collection, political relations, technology research, psychological warfare, or special operations.

Agents are arranged within each department to suit that department's needs. Those departments actively involved with the outside world also have external contacts that provide information.

### Mossad Nation

If Mossad guards the PCs' nation, they're likely to get along fairly well. If the PCs are working actively for their nation or against an opponent, Mossad will probably keep an eye on them and help out if the situation is dire. Otherwise, Mossad will ignore the PCs unless they start acting like subversives.

When Mossad does help, it will usually be if the PCs are trying to do something Mossad would have sent agents to do eventually anyway. Mossad isn't likely to become a permanent guardian angel for a group unless that group joins up as some sort of troubleshooting team. If the PCs are subversives or would be easily mistaken as such, Mossad can be a serious threat. Surveillance will always be the first step, possibly leading to evidence (falsified or no) finding its way into police hands. If it is verified that the PC is up to something serious and police action won't do it (for example, if they've escaped to another country), Mossad will try to kill them through whatever means are convenient.

Parties that work in other intelligence agencies of that country (like Israeli military intelligence or internal security) are likely to butt heads with Mossad more often than not. Intelligence agencies throughout history have had issues with sharing resources and information; Mossad is no exception. As such, the PCs and Mossad will end up stepping on each other's toes.

### Mossad Operatives

Having a PC double as an agent for Mossad (or your in-game organization) is definitely a possibility. Unfortunately, intelligence really isn't all that interesting on a day to day basis in the real world, although Mossad comes closer than most agencies to breaking that mold. Most Mossad operatives focus on collecting information and getting it back to their superiors. These agents generally don't have a lot of contact with each other, but can recruit assistants. The party, as operatives, would be charged with finding information about whatever country or organization they are in, possibly involving less-than-legal methods. In extreme circumstances, the group might also be tapped to take direct action.

An action-based campaign makes more sense when PCs are already have a few levels under their belts and work as a sort of special trouble-shooting team. They would be responsible for investigating and neutralizing threats based on intelligence Mossad has already collected.

Or, the party might be a group recruited from or sent into an enemy country with a vague objective that many players will interpret with the maximum amount of pyrotechnics available. The Lavon Affair, where a group of agents trying to disrupt Egypt-US relations by bombing several ships, could be seen through this lens. Several groups smuggling Jews from hostile countries to Israel have also had rather interesting encounters.

### Neutral or Friendly Nation

If the PCs work for a nation that has an alliance with Mossad's or is generally neutral, they run into a far more complex situation. Mossad will often funnel intelligence to friendly nations if it suits Mossad's interests, but it is just as willing to



impersonate those nations' citizens and perform assassinations on their soil.

How much Mossad involvement the PCs see depends on what sort of job they do normally. PCs in the intelligence community would be more likely to see the positive side of Mossad interaction (getting intelligence, having Mossad clean up mutual enemies). People from other occupations would be far less likely to find Mossad operatives at work within their country.

If confronted with evidence of working inside a friendly country, Mossad will generally deny everything. If that isn't an option, official apologies are likely to follow with stern reprimands and a scandal back home.

#### Opposing Nation

PCs loyal to a country Mossad opposes are in for a hard fight. Mossad works its hardest to plant agents within opposing countries, often buying the loyalty of low-ranking military officers and other functionaries with valuable information. So if the PCs rise to a position of prominence in their nation, Mossad will most assuredly be watching them and trying to get agents as close to the party as possible.

Strangely, PCs on enemy soil may be a bit less likely to be targeted for assassination. Mossad resources in enemy nations are extremely valuable and won't be wasted taking out anyone but the most potentially damaging enemies.

Individuals that become especially powerful or directly act against Mossad's country are in much greater danger, however. They will be killed with the minimum chance of exposure on Mossad's part, possibly taking place while they are visiting a neutral country.

For even larger threats, such as weapons programs, Mossad is willing to stage multiple assassinations or even targeted bombing strikes. Important members of those programs are well advised to defect or stay well hidden.

#### Hooks & Seeds

- ▶ A PC who is down on her luck is approached about the possibility of some low-level spying (just keeping an eye out and making periodic reports) for Mossad.
- ▶ While traveling through a country opposed to Mossad's, one or more party members are accused of being Mossad agents by that nation's government.
- ▶ A diplomatic envoy from Mossad's country is killed not far from the PCs. The party is brought into the search in hopes of catching the perpetrators before Mossad becomes involved.
- ▶ After an attack by rebels, Mossad agents kill several rebel leaders and a seemingly innocent friend of the PCs.
- ▶ In a country other than Mossad's, a contact of the PCs is accused of being a Mossad agent and arrested on charges of treason and other crimes (likely some sort of industrial espionage). She may be guilty, but the PCs still need information from her for their current mission or a long-term project.
- ▶ A Mossad agent has been spying on the PCs for the last several missions at the behest of the PCs' government.

▶ The PCs are informed by a reliable source that the group that has been hassling them is a cell of Mossad agents, although the hassling is separate from the agents' main mission. The PCs are now faced with the choice of attacking them and angering Mossad, gathering evidence and turning their enemies in, trying to inform Mossad to get their agents in line, or some other, more devious plan.

▶ Mossad's government, based on Mossad evidence, accuses a friend, relative, or party member of heinous crimes and asks for them to be extradited.

▶ A local group begins spreading rumors about Mossad activity in the area, and then murders someone with anti-Mossad leanings (or one of that local group's own members) in the hopes of starting an internal or international conflict.

▶ Intelligence agents in the PCs' area have begun cross training and information sharing with the Mossad as part of a new program. This may result in tougher local intelligence, PCs training alongside Mossad agents, or new crimes suddenly discovered by correlating the two agencies' evidence.

#### Mossad in Fantasy

The most important part of using Mossad or a similar agency in your game is choosing what nation it's attached to. In the real world, Mossad's nation is surrounded by threats and must remain entirely focused on its own security. Many fantasy nations would fit that bill.

This organization can serve equally well as the underside of a good nation, the secret police of an enemy nation, or a neutral force that will shift quickly depending on who's being hurt. All the roles Mossad can play fit well in fantasy.

The name Mossad will probably have to change to keep continuity. Where many people wouldn't object to having Templars in their fantasy game, a modern secret service would cause more dissonance. Acronyms are usually a bit too modern, but giving it some vague bureaucratic sounding name can work. People will just naturally nickname it with part of its name, as happened with Mossad.

Mossad will use magic in every form in which it is available, both for gathering information about its enemies and for protecting its own members. Agents will keep careful watch on magical investigations in other countries, stealing the results and killing the researchers if necessary.

#### Mossad in Modern Settings

The easiest way to use Mossad in a modern game is to directly reference the real world agency. Almost every nation has some opinion of Israel, and Mossad's targets aren't well known for staying in one place. A campaign set anywhere in North America, Europe, or the Middle East could just drop Mossad in without a second thought. Other areas would just need a bit of backstory to explain the agency's interest.

This approach does have the problem with of possibly bothering players. Some people have very strong opinions on Israel and Mossad. It's best to know what they are before you introduce Mossad in its raw form.

Another use of Mossad is to use its techniques, tactics, and actions as a guide for another country's secret agents. Mossad has been given wide freedom of action and any agency you base on it should also have such freedom.

That freedom of action allows Mossad access to friendly countries, even if those countries may not approve of or allow its methods. PCs in a friendly country, or working for Mossad, can be pulled into these sorts of activities very easily. Generally, this will only happen in situations involving anti-Israeli terrorists, weapons of mass destruction, or hunting down Nazi war criminals. If you're using Mossad with a different nation, consider that nation's religious or political tensions and choose appropriate situations.

### Mossad in Science Fiction

If Israel still exists in some form in a science fiction setting, Mossad probably exists alongside it. Otherwise, Mossad can be used as the pattern for viciously efficient intelligence. The society sponsoring it will still need to be threatened, but the amount the agency needs to hide may be rather different.

Many societies will feel like they have enemies on all sides in science fiction. Much sci-fi has the world or universe divvied up into factional blocks. Mossad can serve one of these blocks against the depredations of the others. When that much power is concentrated in the hands of the few, it becomes more likely that an agency with no real limits will be created to serve the leadership's needs.

Damage control with bad press at home and abroad may or may not be needed for Mossad. If the factions are openly at war, Mossad can operate with relative impunity. The possibility of retribution might still be a concern if a civilized war is being fought. On the other hand, when the factions are part of a larger structure or otherwise co-exist or depend on each other, Mossad will have to be very, very careful. Any misstep will be picked up by the media and can tear down alliances. Although media technology provides a threat, Mossad can use many other sorts of technology to its advantage. As electronic

communications become more pervasive and automated, Mossad will continue implanting agents to gather that information. Any ability to change appearance will also serve a great role with Mossad. If psionic powers or the like are available, Mossad will be sure to capitalize on that as well.

Mossad has always worked against any nearby nation that acquires new weapons systems. This becomes doubly important in settings with more advanced technology, as weapons can be developed to destroy entire worlds. Scientists will be killed, prototypes stolen, and production facilities utterly destroyed if the situation calls for it.

### Mossad in d20

Mossad agents are drawn from all classes and walks of life. Rogues might have an advantage, but everyone is welcome as long as they're loyal to the cause, have some basic skills, and are willing to accept training. Let's assume for the purposes of this class that the training involves a full range of assassination techniques, undercover operations, and demolitions.

That special training is represented here by a prestige class, but if you're creating a whole group of Mossad agents, it's best to assign them useful skills and only give the appropriate ones the prestige class. Mossad agents working alone are more likely to have the class than those working in cells.

Something to keep in mind is that the majority of people who report to Mossad aren't proper agents. They're just people who are being paid for information. The agent, in the sense of this prestige class, is someone who works full time for Mossad as a special problem solver.

### MOSSAD AGENT

A Mossad agent is primarily interested in gathering information, but has to be prepared to kill or be killed at a moment's notice. They are assigned missions that range from smuggling immigrants and investigating enemies of the state to destroying research facilities and assassination.

TABLE 3-7: MOSSAD AGENT

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Deep cover, sneak attack +1d6
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Demolitions
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Bonus language, sneak attack +2d6
4th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Bonus feat
5th	+3	+1	+4	+4	Sneak attack +3d6
6th	+4	+2	+5	+5	Bonus language, greater demolitions
7th	+5	+2	+5	+5	Sneak attack +4d6
8th	+6	+2	+6	+6	Bonus feat
9th	+6	+3	+6	+6	Bonus language, sneak attack +5d6
10th	+7	+3	+7	+7	Immersive cover

Many active agents have this prestige class, with higher-level members sometimes leading the lower. Members of nearly any class can join, but must prove their loyalty to the country and Mossad.

**Hit Die:** d6.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become a Mossad agent, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Base Attack Bonus:** +3.

**Skills:** Gather Information 8 ranks, Bluff 6 ranks, Profession or Craft 6 ranks, Sense Motive 4 ranks.

**Feat:** Great Fortitude, Iron Will, or Toughness.

**Special:** Must be an active Mossad employee involved in special operations.

**Special:** Must be considered by superiors to have unquestionable loyalty.

#### Class Skills

The Mossad agent's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (local) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Lock (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Speak Language (None), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Rope (Dex).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 6 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features:

All the following are class features of the Mossad agent.

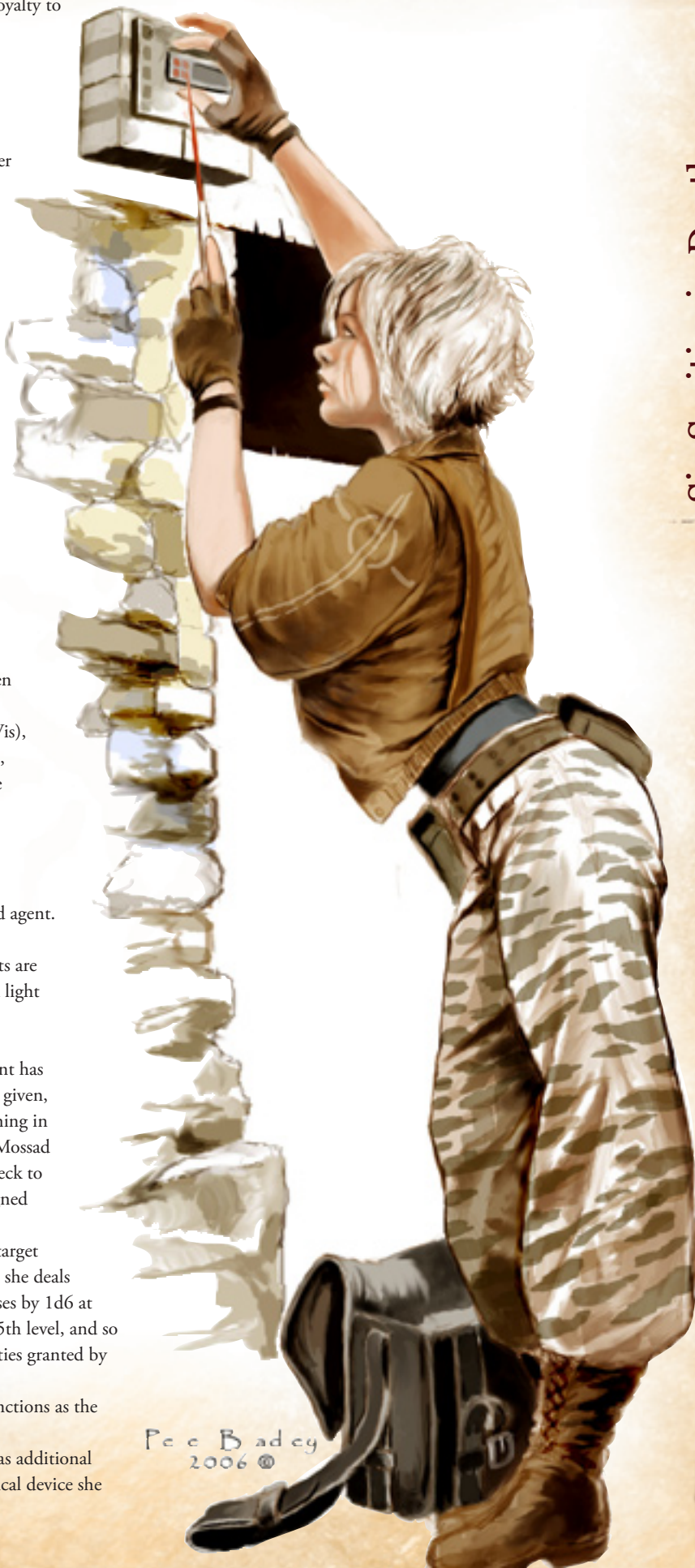
**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Mossad agents are proficient with simple and martial weapons and light armor.

**Deep Cover (Ex):** At first level, the Mossad agent has been trained to fall perfectly into any role she is given, assisted by painstakingly forged papers and training in the new identity. After a week of training, the Mossad agent may add her Intelligence bonus to any check to convince someone that she is her currently assigned identity.

**Sneak Attack:** When a Mossad agent attacks a target that does not receive its Dexterity bonus to AC, she deals an additional 1d6 damage. This damage increases by 1d6 at each odd class level (+2d6 at 3rd level, +3d6 at 5th level, and so on). This damage stacks with sneak attack abilities granted by other classes.

In all other ways, this sneak attack functions as the rogue ability of the same name.

**Demolitions (Ex):** A 2nd level Mossad agent has additional training in explosives. Any alchemical or chemical device she



sets to detonate is extremely effective. It does an extra 2d6 of damage to its area of effect and any save DCs to avoid its effects are +2. Small explosions doing less than 3d6 base damage receive only 1d6 bonus damage.

**Bonus Language:** Each 3rd level Mossad agent is taught an additional language without cost of skill points. She is taught another language every three levels after that.

**Bonus Feat:** At 4th and 8th levels, the Mossad agent may choose a bonus feat from the following list: Alertness, Armor Proficiency (medium), Brawl, Combat Expertise, Deceitful, Improved Critical, Improved Initiative, Improved Precise Shot, Investigator, Iron Will, Negotiator, Persuasive, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Quickdraw, Rapid Reload, Run, Self-Sufficiency, Skill Focus, Stealthy, Track, Weapon Finesse, or Weapon Focus. Appropriate feats from supplemental sources may be added to the list at the DM's discretion.

**Greater Demolitions (Ex):** Further training at 6th level doubles the benefits from the demolitions ability. The explosion now does +4d6 damage and save DCs are +4. Even small explosions now receive 2d6 bonus damage.

**Immersive Cover (Ex):** At any time after 10th level, the Mossad agent can completely immerse herself in a role. Once she's played the role for a month continuously, no skill check or even telepathy will penetrate the ruse, so complete is the deception. Only extremely powerful magics (such as *wish*), going against the role, or evidence outside the agent's personal control can reveal the agent.

Mossad Agent in d20 Modern

**Weapons and Armor Proficiency:** Mossad agents are proficient in all simple weapons, personal firearms, and light armor.

#### Class Skills

The Mossad agent's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Computer Use (Int), Craft (Int), Demolitions (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Drive (Dex), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Investigate (Int), Knowledge (current events) (Int), Knowledge (streetwise) (Int), Knowledge (tactics) (Int), Knowledge (technology) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Pilot (Dex), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (None), Repair (Int), Research (Int), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Speak Language (None), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), Treat Injury (Wis), and Use Rope (Dex).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 7 + Int modifier.

**Demolitions (Ex):** At 2nd level, this character has a +4 training bonus to Demolitions checks.

**Bonus Feat:** At 4th and 8th level, the Mossad agent gains a bonus feat chosen from the following list: Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Aircraft Operation, Alertness, Armor Proficiency (Medium), Attentive, Brawl, Builder, Cautious, Combat Expertise, Dead Aim, Deceptive, Drive-by Attack, Far Shot, Force Stop, Frightful Presence, Gearhead, Heroic Surge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Low Profile, Meticulous, Nimble, Point Blank Shot, Quick Draw, Quick Reload, Surface Vehicle Operation, Track, Trustworthy, Vehicle Dodge, Vehicle Expert, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus, or Windfall.

Appropriate feats from supplemental sources may be added to the list at the GM's discretion.

**Greater Demolitions (Ex):** At 6th level, the bonus from Demolitions increases to +8.

#### Mossad Example - Eyes of the Crown

In a standard fantasy world, sovereign kings and queens rule most countries. This version of Mossad exists in such a world, serving one of these rulers. Enemies both internal and external besiege its country, as with many fantasy countries, and the Eyes serve their crown with absolute, fanatical loyalty.

#### History

Around sixty years ago, the ruler of the country found that her secret police were feuding among themselves, working at cross-purposes, corrupt, and generally useless. That leader abolished the old secret police and spy agencies, and then formed a new agency under the cover of deepest secrecy.

At first the agency wasn't given a name, but it soon came to be called the Eyes of the Crown. Its first years were extremely rough, with a number of missed cues and outright failures. The actions of the Eyes damaged relations with other countries and generally served little purpose.

Once the agency got its feet, however, it began addressing problems with a great vigor. The agency killed the nation's enemies, halted dangerous magical research, rooted out insurgents, and warned of forthcoming wars. The Eyes still had their mix of problems after the transition, with the occasional botched assassination or failed scheme causing an international incident.

As of the present, the Eyes continue to serve without question. Huge amounts of resources are expended creating and maintaining contacts to warn of war or rebellion. The Eyes still hold the favor of the crown, but many other factions within the government feel they have too much power and seek to unseat them.

#### Goals

The Eyes' goal is easy to state, but complex in execution. They exist solely to defend their nation and its ruler. All of their actions are pointed towards that purpose.

#### Methods

The Eyes of the Crown use every method and mystical tool at their disposal. The majority of their funding goes to their vast network of spies and contacts. A sizeable portion of the rest goes to training special operatives (especially magic-users) in the arts of espionage.

The mindset behind the Eyes is generally reactive. They wait for a report to come in from their network, then apply what they feel is the appropriate amount and type of force to solve the problem.

Solutions for problems are weighed entirely on how they affect the country. Assassinations are frowned on not because they're difficult or immoral, but primarily because it might cause

problems with other countries. However, no action is outside consideration if the Eyes feel they can get away with it.

The Eyes spend a lot of time defending against supernatural infiltration, having had trouble with it in the past. They keep a very close eye on wizards in service to enemy countries, magical research projects, and creatures capable of shapeshifting or the like. Psionics, if a part of the setting, fall under the same category. This focus leaves the Eyes a little weak to old-fashioned infiltration because, even though they have the resources available to watch for it, they're always looking towards magic.

Second in priority only to mystical threats, troop movements and general military plans for every country even remotely near their own is under the Eyes' close scrutiny. Small groups of scouts and mercenaries slip through the Eyes' net fairly often, but even the quietest mobilization for war will reach their ears.

On occasion, the Eyes will trade information with agencies in other countries, even those opposed to them. This can rapidly degenerate into a game of disinformation and manipulation, but it's a game the Eyes are skilled at.

#### Membership

The only real qualification to be part of the Eyes' network is willingness to pass along interesting information, possibly for money. Many individuals in the network are not even informed they're working for the Eyes or that country, but are said to be working for some other group closer to the recruit's political leanings.

Actually being a field agent is a bit more complicated. The first criterion each candidate must pass is an absolute, unswerving loyalty to the crown. This is verified through magic to the best of the Eyes' ability. They check the applicant's entire history, meticulously screening for conflicting interests. Only then are skills considered. The Eyes' general philosophy is that skills can be taught, but loyalty is inborn.

Half-breeds are looked on favorably. Their loyalty is always slightly more suspect, but they are more easily able to pass through different societies. Those trained in a wandering profession such as bards or merchants get preferential treatment for the same reason. Members come from a wide variety of professions and generally don't seem particularly strange. Field agents are grouped for each assignment, which may last hours or decades, based on their capacities. Most members do have some basic combat training and a lot of cultural and infiltration training, but anything beyond that is left to specialists.

#### Adjusting Them to Your Campaign

The Eyes need little adjustment to fit a given campaign, really. A few details have to be added regarding their past, however. Keep in mind who the Eyes have assassinated and what nations they've angered by doing so. Also consider that the Eyes are more than willing to impersonate citizens of other countries and take action on foreign soil, so the repercussions could extend far beyond their target's country.

For creating the agency's past, it's easiest to assume that older problems have been mostly smoothed over and only the past two or three crises are still really important. The Eyes have probably irritated at least a few people in every country if you need it for a plot line later.

Their time scale may be slightly longer than sixty years if the empire they serve is made up of long-lived species.

### The Thule Society

#### Thule Gesellschaft, Germanenorden

Following World War I, many anti-Semitic groups and several Aryan groups sprang up in Germany. The Germanenorden was one of these, unique in that it pandered to the powerful and wealthy nobles of the old regime. Its largely independent branch in Munich functioned under the name Thule Gesellschaft, called the Thule Society in English. That society is often considered responsible for the original creation of the German Worker's Party, which eventually became the Nazi Party, all the while retaining some Thule Society teachings.

The Thule Society took racial purity very seriously, which prominently figured into the society's brand of mysticism. Joining the Thule Society required an actual written application including details of hair, eye, and skin color, along with racial information about parents, grandparents, and spouses. The "unpleasant-looking" or disabled were denied entry. A plastometer, a device that measures the skull in certain ways, was used by some lodges to determine racial purity.

The members' mysticism blended directly with their race theory, claiming that they had found and were using a set of runes that had been in use by the original Aryan empire. Furthermore, they felt that any location where one of those runes – including the virtually universal swastika – shows up is part of their birthright. These runes played a major part in their ritual and mystic studies, even being used as models for hand signs and yoga poses.

#### Thule Philosophy

The primary tenet of the Thule Society, and the most important for those outside the group, is its absolute belief in the Aryan race and the power of its bloodlines. Its members believed that this Aryan race had at one point controlled most or all of the world, including a major stronghold at Thule (an arctic land sometimes identified as Greenland).

Aryan blood, if undiluted, was said to hold a number of powers. Although the exact list varied according to the theorist, it usually included telepathy, physical prowess, and superhuman intelligence. However, interbreeding with other races, which the Thule Society blamed on the Jews, had thinned the bloodline. For this reason, some Thulist writings suggested turning the other races into a sterilized slave class.

As a group, the Thule Society functioned largely as a mutual business aid network for its numerous powerful members. It also served to track Jews and circulate Aryan literature, the vast majority of which was also anti-Semitic. Its hatred didn't stop at

the Jews by any means, extending to include most other races, Christianity, and Freemasons.

The rituals of the Thule Society were equal parts racist paganism, Masonic ritual, and Wagnerian opera. Parts of Wagner operas were actually performed during the initiation ceremony and society leaders took the roles of various Teutonic gods for the course of the ceremony. The master, for example, played the role of Wotan (also known as Odin).

The runes of the Thule Society were associated with the world-spanning ancient Aryan empire. The exact set of runes, the Armanen system, was developed by Guido von List after a period of blindness. It resembles several other rune sets, including the Greater and Lesser Futhark, but has its own set of symbolism. Von List claimed the existence of the runes had been revealed to him in visions, while the runes' exact meanings lie hidden in ancient Norse texts.

In the higher mystical sense, the Thule Society sees runes as the conductors of the energies that run the universe. Crystals were seen in much the same way, as three-dimensional manifestations of runes. The symbolism of each rune was often spelled out in rune calendars, associating the runes with months, Teutonic gods, numbers, elements, Zodiac symbols, and other things. The runes were incorporated into everything from rings and tiepins to, eventually, SS uniforms.

### Thule History

The development of modern Aryanism probably started in 1875, with Madame Blavatsky. She began a movement known as Theosophy that, among many other things, focused on the pre-history of several "root races," including the Aryans. She was also rather fond of the swastika, it being a universal symbol and especially predominant in the eastern lands she looked to for guidance.

It didn't take long for her relatively innocuous studies to become the basis for racist philosophy. Guido von List was one of the first to do so, claiming that Aryans were an inherently superior race and that a Jewish conspiracy opposed them at every turn. While recovering from an eye operation, he developed the Armanen system of runes, the same system eventually used by the Thule Society.

The next major player in the Society's development was Lanz von Liebenfels. He was a monk for several years, but eventually left his monastery. Some sources claimed he was forced out for breaking his vows of chastity, but this has not been publicly revealed. He wrote many books on race theory and attempted to integrate esoteric Christianity, without much success. His major contribution was writing *Ostara*, an anti-Semitic journal with major leanings towards the occult. He also formed the Ordo Novi Templi (the Order of the New Temple or Order of the New Templars), claiming that the Templars had discovered evidence to support his race theory and that was why they had been persecuted.

By 1910, the idea that a Judeo-Freemasonic conspiracy was controlling the world was fairly well-entrenched throughout

the western world. Even many seemingly reasonable people accepted the theory, especially when it allowed them to evade responsibility for their failures. The idea began circulating that the world needed an Aryan conspiracy to wrest control back.

Many people attempted to create this society, but none were nearly as successful as the Germanenorden. Many of the other societies were little more than street gangs, but the Germanenorden drew membership from the aristocracy and new upper class. It served as a hub of occult, anti-Semitic, and Aryan texts and information. The society rapidly spread across Germany, but had difficulty expanding elsewhere.

The society was severely weakened by the draining of its members to help fight the first World War. However, once defeat was had and the system of reparations was in place, the society and others like it had a surge of new recruits. People became increasingly willing to blame all of their problems on conspiracies.

Baron Rudolf von Sebottendorff, a baron in his eyes only, joined the Germanenorden and eventually founded its Munich branch. He came from a slightly different background than most of the Thule members. Sebottendorff was extremely well-traveled and had studied mysticism of several types, including extensive reading of theosophy texts by Blavatsky and others. He would eventually lead the Thule Society through most of its productive existence.

A socialist republic was declared in Munich during 1918, led by Kurt Eisner, a Jew. The branch of the Germanenorden in Munich refused to accept this. It began calling itself the Thule Society (claiming to be a harmless reading group, but fooling no one) and began to organize resistance. Forming an alliance with several more violent Aryan organizations, the society was able to overthrow Eisner's government.

The Thule Society began operating more openly at that point, gathering more power and attempting to bring its dreams to life. Its members created the German Worker's Party (DAP) as a political arm, and many of their allies from the Munich revolt joined the new creation. It's not entirely clear how much control the society maintained over the DAP as it transformed into the Nazi Party. The most that can be said is that certain members of the Thule Society figured prominently in the early development of the Nazi Party.

As the party developed, the Thule Society itself collapsed. After the Munich government captured several society members, Sebottendorff fled the country. Some theorists, of course, say that this is only a cover and the Society continued to exist in secret or in another guise. The SS, which put many of the Thule ideas into practice, is often fingered. Another organization implicated by conspiracy theorists is the Ahnenerbe (page 81), which served as an occult research organization for the Third Reich.

### Thule Signs & Symbols

The most widely recognized Thule symbol is, of course, the swastika. They saw the swastika as a symbol of the prehistoric

Aryan kingdom that they claim spanned the globe. The symbol of the Germanenorden was an abstract symbol combining a cross and a short-armed swastika. The Thule Society used a dagger over a swastika as its primary symbol.

The Armanen runes are also symbols, of course, forming both an alphabet and a system of mystical representation. Each of the eighteen runes had a primary meaning and was also associated with different months, Teutonic gods, emotions, and other such concepts. It isn't known if the Thule Society had any particular favorites, but two show up more often in relation to later organizations. The Sig rune (representing victory) is the lightning-like emblem used by the SS. The Othala rune (representing family or clan), although it isn't actually part of the Armanen system, and others are used by many Neo-Nazi organizations as tattoos.

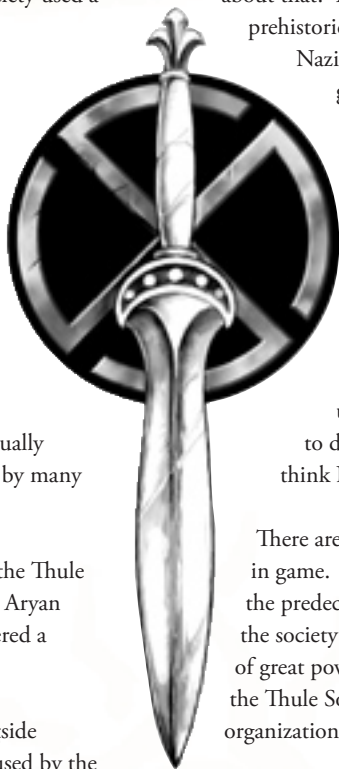
Ice and cold are were considered almost holy by the Thule society, tying into Ultima Thule, the Eden of the Aryan race. The warm homes of other races are considered a symbol of, or perhaps a cause of, their weakness.

The Thule Society also co-opted a number of outside symbolic systems. The Red Eagle or Phoenix is used by the Thule Society to represent the German people and how they will rise from the ashes. The Holy Grail is used as a symbol for Aryan racial purity rather than a physical object, twisting the tales of the Grail-quest into a search for blood purity.

### Thule Society Ranks

Few documents survive documenting the Thule Society's inner structure, but it can be assumed to mirror the Germanenorden, which is in turn based on Masonic ritual. Traditional positions in the Germanenorden include the master, knight, herald, bard, master of ceremonies, treasurer, and secretary.

Important positions within the Thule Society had symbolic weapons they used for ritual purposes. The master carried an iron hammer, while the knights used symbolic swords. In certain rituals, such as the initiation ceremony, the master was also invested with a spear representing Odin's spear, Gungnir.



### The Thule Society in Game

The Thule Society makes great villains, there's no question about that. It's a group of Aryan sorcerers claiming prehistoric roots and carrying all the usual Nazi baggage. Nazis, rightly, make most peoples' blood boil and getting to fight against them in a game is always a treat.

It's worth mentioning, though, that the Thule Society can be tricky to use in game because of the same emotional baggage. Using them as anything but unrepentant villains probably requires a bit of thought on your part, and making sure your group won't mind. Some people will object to the society's use in general, perhaps because they don't want to deal with weighty topics in game or because they think Nazis are overused.

There are four general ways one can use the Thule Society in game. The first is using it with a focus on its role as the predecessor to Nazi Germany. Another approach takes the society through to its goals and places it in a position of great power. A game could focus on the rune magic of the Thule Society, or, as a final option, a GM could use the organization as a foil for other secret societies.

#### Proto-Nazis

This is probably the easiest and most true to form way of using the Thule Society. Its members have a stated agenda



of working towards racial purity by careful breeding and destroying the “lesser” races. They also have strong misogynistic, imperialist, and anti-Christian views, so there’s something there for everyone to hate.

In this situation, the society will be working towards taking over its nation. Its members will achieve this through a combination of personal influence, recruiting low-income workers for manpower, and crushing perceived or manufactured threats to gather public support. In more fantastic settings, the society’s rune magic and rituals could also have important effects.

The society will need a nation suffering from extreme problems for its plans to work at all. The chosen enemies (the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy for real-world Thulists) will have to seem real for the citizens of the nation, likely requiring a combination of existing beliefs and propaganda.

It’s easy to dismiss the Thule Society as crazed or stupid, but that does a disservice to its power as a villain. Its local enforcers were pretty much just thugs offered a target for their rage. The society itself, however, contained a large number of very influential, wealthy, and well-read individuals. There were many other organizations at the time that accepted people based solely on their hatred of a certain group, but those who chose the Thule Society did so because of what they had read and learned along the way.

This is great for gaming purposes because it creates a structure containing two different types of threats. The thugs of the worker’s party (eventually the Nazi party) provide a great one-on-one threat at lower levels, a nice threat in groups at mid levels, and a satisfying target at high levels. The Thule Society itself provides a group of powerful enemies with access to whatever magic exists in that setting, along with money and political power, to foil the party throughout an entire campaign.

#### The Millennium Empire

In the real world, and in the case of the Proto-Nazi interpretation, the Thule Society fell apart before the Nazi party really took off. That doesn’t have to be the case in your campaign world. The Thule Society, or a group like it, can form the core of leadership of an opposing nation or, terrifyingly, the PCs’ own.

The society will be invisible to everyone except for the very top ranks of national leadership. Society members perhaps fill those ranks themselves. They will have set up a demagogue, either their own leader or a pawn under their control, to lead the nation while they control things from behind the scenes.

With the Thule Society in this position, things will play out much like they did during World War II. The nation will take as much ground as possible, first in measured steps, then in a rush, convinced of its own superiority. The beliefs of the Thule Society will be passed down as official mandates, resulting in special breeding programs, forced sterilization, and genocide. Some of their membership may form the core of an elite fighting force, manifesting the society’s dreams about the ancient warrior-priests of Thule.

When you decide exactly what form the Thule Society will take in your campaign, think about what you want the players to be able to do against it. It might be that the Thule leadership is the only weak point in an otherwise unstoppable war machine, giving the PCs a chance to truly shine as heroes. Even if that isn’t the case, harming the Thule Society becomes very important.

With a single leader controlling the society with an iron fist, the society may fall apart after he’s killed. Alternately, it might act as a dispersed network and only destroying the entire upper echelon will cause the final collapse. If you really want the PCs to have a hard time, perhaps the society is very large and has many members that could potentially fill leadership roles. The structure you choose will determine the length of time that the Society can remain a threat, along with how powerful each individual member needs to be.

If the PCs are in a nearby country, the threat is immediate and largely unavoidable. They can help refugees escape and smuggle important resources, aid defenses during the invasion and fight on as partisans after being conquered. If their nation is as powerful as the Thule Society’s, the war might drag out into a quagmire. For these PCs, it will likely become very important to quickly oppose the Thule Society. On the other hand, they may just run from the situation.

A nation more distant from the conflict is likely to send agents (read: the PCs), in an attempt to determine what’s going on and how to stop it. Party members can spy, infiltrate the society’s hierarchy, try to kill Thule members, smuggle in supplies, and generally try to keep the Thulists as far away from their homeland as possible. In a game containing magic, these agents may be at the forefront of a mystical war with the Thule Society. Even relatively untrained magi will be sent to the front to combat this sort of threat. Playing inside conquered territory will take the form of traditional guerilla warfare. The PCs are more likely to be able to study and access Thule members, but face a fight without the resources provided by another nation. Finding another nation that will provide arms and funding might be an important part of this game.

#### Rune Priests and Puppet Masters

In this interpretation, the Thule Society is attempting to bring back the ancient Aryan Odinst empire of Thule. It emerged from the multitudes of other orders with similar messages and keeps hatred as a propaganda tool only. The society’s true focus is on attaining enough power to recreate Thule, the order’s heaven on earth.

Members will do whatever necessary to get into power, then isolate their nation. They will try to resurrect the bloodlines of Thule through every method they can imagine. They probably won’t bother with war, but would invite promising Aryans to their nation and eject, sterilize, or kill individuals that don’t fit their criteria.

If the PCs live in the Thule Society’s country, they have their work cut out for them as rebels, especially once the society starts tilting the population numbers towards the society’s goals.



Without the nation attempting war on its neighbors, local rebels may not get any outside aid, making their jobs a lot harder.

On the other hand, if the party lives in another nation, it begs the question of what the PCs would do. If they get signs of these terrible things happening virtually next door, will they look past their local problems to try and help? This also works really well in especially dark settings, with everyone so tied up in their personal issues that they can't be bothered to help others unless an attack is in progress.

#### Anti-Secret Society

The original idea put forth for the Germanenorder was a secret society to counter the secret Judeo-Masonic society described in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (page 87). It was therefore constructed along Masonic lines and sought to destroy the organization it saw at its rival.

In a reality where one secret society or another actually is running things from behind the scenes, the Thule Society could be trying to do good from its insane point of view. Members would approach their task with great fervor, trying to destroy potential members of the enemy organization and utterly destroy the target's teachings to prevent its return.

How the PCs interact with this version of the Thule Society really depends on what the Society's opposition is up to and how righteous the PCs are. Regardless of how dangerous the other society is, some characters won't be willing to work with the Thule Society. Think about what will happen to your plot line if a character refuses, because it's not unlikely.

If the society that the Thule Society is targeting doesn't exist, the party will probably be very confused. Thule members will probably say that their enemies are ancient, devious, evil, and well-hidden. Initiates may even believe every word of it. But when the PCs try to verify the claims, they'll find no evidence of the opposing society. Now it's up to the players: is the society opposing the Germanenorder as devious as it's made out to be, or is it a figment of the society's imagination?

The targeted society might be fairly benevolent, in which case the party PCs may do everything in their power to defend it. Keep in mind that even if the targeted society has wonderful goals and practices, the party initially may not trust it, especially between its secrecy and Thule propaganda.

It becomes really interesting if the targeted society is just as bad or worse than the Thule Society. The party will probably try to play the societies off against each other, but some groups will stay aloof from the situation or simply attack both whenever possible. If the party has the opportunity to destroy one of the warring societies, leaving the other free to act, will they take it?

#### Hooks & Seeds

- ▶ A new wave of Thule propaganda hits the streets, advocating nationalism and racial solidarity in the face of oppression (real or imagined).
- ▶ In response to a powerful outside threat, the Thule Society arranges for a small army to be raised from other organizations

with itself at the lead. This army offers its services defending the country from all threats.

- ▶ Minorities and unpopular churches have been attacked in the area with increasing regularity. The authorities don't seem interested, but several distinct violent groups have formed in reaction to Thule propaganda.
- ▶ A scientist, not openly affiliated with the movement, produces several papers supporting the society's racial beliefs. This is a windfall for the Thule Society, and many members begin producing supporting papers. How much scientific validity the papers may have largely depends on the setting.
- ▶ Aryan children from local orphanages and the streets are going missing, smuggled out to some undisclosed location. Behind the scenes, the Thule Society is planning to raise them as breeding stock.
- ▶ Local gangs have begun using a variety of Thule symbols, possibly including runic tattoos. Although they still fight among themselves, the Thule Society plans to use them as the basis for a local army when the time comes.
- ▶ Thule weapons have been found at the scenes of several crimes recently, planted by another organization as part of a secret war. If this continues, the Thule Society will take drastic and open action unless it's destroyed or scattered first.
- ▶ While the PCs are planning an attack on a cult, church, minority group, or secret society, a rather pleasant, genteel man appears to make an honest offer of assistance. Digging into his past will result reveal that he is a fairly open member of the Thule Society.
- ▶ A reporter or other respected member of the community reveals a large collection of evidence that most of the local leadership belongs to the Thule Society. The Thule Society will attempt to destroy the evidence, but if it isn't successful the community will fall into complete chaos, possibly including deadly riots.
- ▶ A runestone is found near the PCs' town and several groups of mystics and scholars seek to buy or steal it. The Thule Society is chief among these and, in addition to trying to steal the stone, take it as a sign that the PCs' region was once part of the Aryan empire and step up operations in the area.

#### The Thule Society in Fantasy

In most fantasy settings, racial divisions are less a matter of skin color and more a matter of actually distinct species. The Thule Society will probably focus on a single game race, much like they did with Aryans in the real world. Some settings have bloodlines within various races that carry importance; these can be a natural jumping-off point for the society as well.

The Thule Society's hatreds and mythology will be molded around the race or bloodline they support. Its members will generally focus their hatred on a race that's begun mixing with theirs, either in society or through breeding.

Elves and humans, for example, are natural groups to hate each other. The elves can loathe humans for polluting their bloodlines, plotting against them, and generally being inferior. The humans can hate the elves for likewise polluting human bloodlines, spending their effectively immortal lives scheming, and trying to keep humans down.

Other races can also be involved, of course. Dwarves wouldn't necessarily hate other races for interbreeding, but humans provide a lot of opportunities for hatred. Orcs could see humans as oppressors, destroyers of the ancient orc empire, and many things else besides. Humans could likewise hate orcs, doppelgangers, or even stranger breeds. As an odd twist, the Thule Society can be formed of a monster race, like doppelgangers, lycanthropes, medusa, or dragons. The society members may need magic to pass among their enemies, but years of oppression by the more recognized races could easily boil up into a dangerous plot.

Something to consider is that, in a fantasy world, it's entirely possible the Thule Society has some reason behind their hatred. Its members could be persecuting a race that is entirely evil or plotting against the society. Many adventuring parties might persecute orcs and half-orcs from time to time, but the Thule Society may seek to eradicate the orc race entirely in order to protect the other races.

In the real world, the Thule Society rejected all current belief systems to return to the ways of Thule warrior-priests, generally seen as a worship of the Norse gods (Odin, Thor, etc.). The Thule Society in your game will probably look back to a god or pantheon from before its favored culture merged with others, a symbol of lost strength. It might even be an ancient god that was abandoned, and never spread outside the culture they strive to return to.

### The Thule Society in Modern Settings

It takes a lot of assuming for the Thule Society to have survived past World War II. Either the society existed within Nazi Germany and eventually fled along with other major figures, or some members fled from Nazi persecution and eventually reformed the society.

It's much easier to imagine a neo-Nazi group reconstructing the Thule Society's teachings and starting back down that path. The main difference is that the new group probably won't have the same level of power and scholarship among its members. If there is a group of neo-Thulists that shares the same sort of wealthy and educated background as the original society, they're a force to be reckoned with.

A modern version of the Thule Society would have to keep a much lower profile. Although some countries would let members spout their racist philosophy for the sake of free speech, few countries will willingly allow Nazi sympathizers into positions of power. They'd also be targeted by constant attention from the police or media, if not both. A society with less powerful members might operate openly and just take its lumps, but that tactic would be political suicide for powerful people in today's society.

A modern Thule Society would have its work cut out for it. If it acts like its pre-WWII counterpart, it would begin with propaganda trying to swing popular opinion in its direction. Once that's played out, the society will try to insert members into seats of power and arrange circumstances so that its accusations seem true, and then stage a political takeover.

If the society can't afford to be picky, it might relax its definition of Aryan to basically mean 'any Caucasian that agrees with us.' Another option would be to introduce a Thule-like group thinking the chosen few aren't Aryans, but some other racial group. This last option should be undertaken only after careful consideration of your players' opinions of racial groups, as the chosen group may be initiating atrocities up to and including genocide.

### The Thule Society in Science Fiction

The Thule Society of the future, be it near or distant, is even less likely to be a survivor of the original. If it is, the society was far more powerful and pervasive than history ever showed, or its members have managed to extend their lives to some amazing degree.

More likely, it's a new society based on the teachings or ideals of the Thule Society. The new society will focus on its chosen race and try to take over their nation, corporation, star system, or religious order. Depending on how the setting lines up, the members may be the richest of the rich or they might be people of more reasonable means. Bringing out the truly interesting aspects of the Thule Society would require at least some people in positions of power to share in its teachings.

The Thule Society may take either side of the pureblood human vs. modified human debate, either claiming to be pure or the next step in evolution. If humanity has encountered other species and begun cultural exchange, the Thule Society will probably oppose it. It could also still be going on about Aryans and the like, perhaps even as a strange sort of villain worship or simply copying proven methods of propaganda.

The society will probably claim the most advanced technology of the time and twist it to prove its own hypotheses. Genetic sequencing and similar arts will probably play a large part in both their initiation tests and their philosophies. Once the society has determined what the "Aryan" genetic sequence looks like, there could be a relatively simple test to see how closely people match it, replacing the Thule Society's pseudo-science with something more appropriate for a futuristic game.

Some Thule Society members believed that if they could return to racial purity, they would regain their telepathy and other racial powers. With genetic or chemical manipulation, the Thule Society might experiment endlessly until they got the answers they were looking for, ignoring all cost to life. If those sorts of powers are possible in your campaign, the Thule Society would probably have them through the foulest means imaginable.

### The Thule Society in d20

In d20, the Thule Society presents a fairly unique magical system. They believe in the power of runes, as many groups do, but focus more on gestures, words, and yoga poses representing those runes than scribing the runes on objects.

If you don't want to use any special prestige class for the Thule Society, wizards would represent them well. Sorcerers also work well from the society's point of view, given the explanation of

them unlocking the power within their bloodline. Other classes compliment the society, but few would advance to leadership roles without magic.

Taking the Thule Society as an Odin cult, or the cult of whatever gods they ascribe to the warrior-priests of Thule, they can also be cast as clerics. Their god would probably be lawful evil, with domains in Knowledge, Magic, Strength, and War. If you are using a supplemental ice, cold, frost or similar domain, it should also be included.

### THULE SORCERER

An aristocrat, scholar, and student of the teachings of a forgotten paradise, the Thule sorcerer has both power and a clear agenda. The race of Thule is superior and all others must be destroyed. The sorcerers focus on the runes of Thule, seeing them as a birthright, primal language, and a representation of the divine truth behind mundane reality.

Thule sorcerers can come from any class, but must meet exacting racial requirements. They tend to come from well-educated, wealthy backgrounds with a lot of free time to read the propaganda of the society and attend strange rites.

Among the Thule Society, the sorcerers are either in the inner circle or are going to be there soon. They always have aid, some from the rest of the society, but also from social contacts and members of other organizations that provide muscle for the Thule Society.

**Hit Die:** d6.

#### Requirements

To qualify to become a Thule sorcerer, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

**Skills:** Knowledge (arcana) 8 ranks, Decipher Script 5 ranks, Performance 1 rank.

**Language:** Ancient Thule.

**Special:** Must have been allowed into the Thule Society and have spent several months studying.

**Special:** Must meet the racial specifications of the society, including proving racial purity through several prior generations.

#### Class Skills

The Thule sorcerer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Spellcraft (Int), and Use Magical Device (Cha).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 4 + Int modifier.

#### Class Features

All the following are class features of the Thule sorcerer prestige class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** A Thule sorcerer is proficient with simple weapons, no armor, and no shields.

**Runes (Su):** The Thule sorcerer uses Armanen runes as spell-like effects (see below for a full listing of the runes and their

## Thule Tattoo Feat

If you're using the Thule Society as part of a wider group, you may want to use runic tattoos. Generally the only people who will get these tattoos are members of associated organizations: even the members of Thule find them lowbrow. However, there's no real reason members of outside organizations or even enemy groups couldn't get these tattoos.

### Thule Tattoo [General]

You have a tattoo representing one of the runes of the Armanen rune system, granting you power.

**Prerequisite:** Wisdom 13 or Charisma 13, tattoo of the appropriate rune at least six inches in length.

**Benefit:** The rune depicted on your body grants its power as though you were a Thule sorcerer using that rune as a gesture (see Armanen Runes, below). The caster level for using this rune is equal to your character level. This ability can be used once per day.

Also, displaying the tattoo gives a +2 circumstance to Diplomacy and Intimidation checks against members of organizations allied with the Thule Society (such as the DAP), but not members of the Thule Society itself.

**Special:** This feat can be taken multiple times, but it must be for a different rune each time and each must be tattooed. The bonus to Diplomacy and Intimidation checks does not stack.

associated abilities). Each sorcerer is restricted in the number of runes she is in tune with, a number which increases with her level as shown on Table 3-8. She is familiar with the other runes, but does not have enough connection with them to use their forms in powers.

She can use a certain number of gestures and names each day from any of the runes she knows. Each sorcerer can also maintain a number of stances, etchings, and crystals until she wishes to change them. The number of each of these she can use is increased as shown on Table 3-8 below.

The caster level for the Thule sorcerer's runes is her class level. Runes are highly resistant to being dispelled by non-rune magic and are considered to be cast by a spellcaster of twice the Thule sorcerer's level for the purpose of resisting *dispel magic* and similar effects cast by non-Thule sorcerers.

**Gesture:** Using a rune gesture is a standard action and can be interrupted as though it were a spell. Gestures with durations last one minute per caster level. The Thule sorcerer can use three gestures a day at 1st level.

**Etching:** The Thule sorcerer can inscribe one of the runes she knows on a non-magical item, a process which takes one hour. Someone bearing the item in the place of one normal magical item gains the effects of that rune. Only runes with durations can be etched into items, and the etching costs 1,000 XP.

The sorcerer can create one etching at 3rd level, and more thereafter according to Table 3-8. If she already has the



TABLE 3-8: RUNE ABILITIES PER DAY

Class Level	Runes Known	Gestures	Etchings	Crystals	Stances	Words
1st	3	3	—	—	—	—
2nd	5	4	—	—	—	—
3rd	7	5	1	—	—	—
4th	8	5	1	1	—	—
5th	9	6	1	1	1	—
6th	10	6	2	1	1	1
7th	11	7	2	2	1	1
8th	12	7	3	2	1	2
9th	13	8	3	2	2	2
10th	14	8	4	3	2	3

TABLE 3-9: THE THULE SORCERER

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	-
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	-
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	-
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	-
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	<i>Dispel Magic</i>
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	-
7th	+3	+2	+2	+5	-
8th	+4	+2	+2	+6	-
9th	+4	+3	+3	+6	-
10th	+5	+3	+3	+7	<i>Greater Dispel Magic</i>

maximum number of etchings when she creates a new one, one etching of the sorcerer's choice loses its power.

**Crystal:** After attuning a crystal to a certain rune, the sorcerer can draw more power through that rune. While carrying the crystal, the sorcerer's caster level is +2 for gestures and words of that rune.

Each crystal must be non-magical and worth at least 100 gp. The attunement requires a full day of meditation. A sorcerer cannot have more than one crystal attuned to the same rune.

The Thule sorcerer can attune her first crystal at 4th level. If she creates more than her limit while the others still exist, one crystal of the sorcerer's choice crumbles to dust.

**Stance:** Meditating while positioning the body in the shape of a rune allows one to become inseparably connected with that rune. Each hour of meditation in stance after waking allows the Thule sorcerer to gain the effects of one of her known runes. The rune's effects last for twenty-four hours after the meditation. Only rune effects with duration can be used as a stance.

The sorcerer can practice this meditation at 5th level, but can only spend one hour per day doing so. At 9th level, she can meditate on two different runes for one hour each, and gains the effects of both runes. She cannot meditate on the same rune twice in one day.

**Word:** The sorcerer can instantly call the power of a rune by speaking its true name. This functions as a quickened spell with a verbal component, but works in all other ways as a gesture. *Silence*, similar spells and other effects that interfere with verbal components will disrupt a Thule sorcerer's word.

**Dispel Magic (Sp):** At 5th level, the Thule sorcerer may sacrifice a gesture for the day to instead use *dispel magic* as a spell-like ability, with her class level as the caster level. This ability may be used until the Thule sorcerer has expended all of her gestures for the day.

A crystal can be attuned specifically to benefit this ability rather than a rune, increasing the ability's caster level by 2. Such a crystal will also provide the same benefit to the *Greater Dispel Magic* ability.

**Greater Dispel Magic (Sp):** A 10th level Thule sorcerer can sacrifice a word for the day to instead use *greater dispel magic* as a spell-like ability, with her class level as the caster level. This

ability may be used until the Thule sorcerer has expended all of her words for the day.

#### Thule Sorcerers in d20 Modern

The Thule sorcerers don't require much changing for *d20 Modern*, as they have little to do with the normal spell system.

**Requirements:** Knowledge (arcana) 8 ranks is Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 ranks.

#### Class Skills

The Thule sorcerer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), and Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int).

**Skill Points at Each Level:** 5 + Int modifier.

**Greater Dispel Magic (Sp):** Is as *dispel magic*, but +20 on the check.

#### Armanen Runes

This is the list of runes that Thule sorcerers (and recipients of the Thule Tattoo feat) can use. Listed with each rune is whether it has a duration (and thus is eligible for use as etchings and stances), its meanings, and its effects. If your version of the society is so focused on racism that even their magic is filled with hate, the *Fa* and *Laf* runes can target the society's chosen enemies rather than those of chaotic alignment. This is especially useful in settings without alignments.

#### Fa

Cleansing, New Beginnings, Fire

The *Fa* rune used by a Thule sorcerer conjures a handful of flame. The flame deals 1d4 fire damage per caster level (to a maximum of 5d4) on a successful ranged touch attack. This damage is increased to an equal number of d6s against creatures with the chaotic subtype. The attack may target anyone within short range and suffers no range penalties.

#### Ur [DURATION]

Permanency, Good Fortune, Health

With an invocation of the *Ur* rune, the sorcerer strengthens her



body against trauma. For the duration, this rune grants a +4 rune bonus to her Constitution.

*Thorn*

Willingness to Act, Formative Power, Lightning  
 Conjuring the power of lightning, the Thule sorcerer can stun a target within short range. The target must be Large or smaller and can make a Will save (DC 10 + the Thule sorcerer's caster level) to avoid being stunned. If the target fails the save, it is stunned for 1d4 rounds. Creatures immune to electrical damage are not stunned.

*Os* [DURATION]

Speech, Breath, Power of Speech  
 Calling on the power of *Os*, the sorcerer becomes a more eloquent and powerful speaker. For the duration, she has a +4 rune bonus to her Charisma.

**Norns**

The Norns are three crones from Norse mythology who weave the tapestry of reality. Each person and god is represented by a single thread, with length depending on that being's lifespan. Ultimately the Norns represent destiny, a force that even the Norse gods were bound to.

The Thule Society believed that the Aryan race was ultimately destined to return to power. Borrowing from Norse beliefs, the Norns would represent an inexorable force pushing towards that destiny.

*Rit* [DURATION]

Order, Original Law, The Cycle  
*Rit* grants the power of order over chaos, providing the sorcerer strength in battle against chaotic creatures. For the duration of the effect, this rune grants the user a +2 rune bonus to attack rolls targeting chaotic creatures and +2 rune bonus to AC and saving throws while being attacked by chaotic creatures.

*Ka* [DURATION]

Art, Genius, Child  
 This rune grants genius and insight to its invoker. This rune grants a +4 rune bonus to Intelligence for the duration.

*Hagal* [DURATION]

Protection, Wisdom, The Mother  
 Invoking *Hagal* brings wisdom beyond one's years. For the duration of the effect, this rune grants a +4 rune bonus to Wisdom.

*Nod* [DURATION]

Karma, Judgment, the Norns  
 The patterns that seem chaotic to the unenlightened can be invoked with the

*Nod* rune. Once during the duration of this effect, you may choose to reroll one roll you just made before the DM informs you of the results. If you use a crystal with this effect, you may reroll twice during the duration instead. If this rune is made into an etching, the bearer can reroll once per hour.

*Is* [DURATION]

Self-Domination, Personal Growth, Banish Evil  
 The rune *Is* can be invoked to maintain control over one's self, even when faced with dark magics. The invoker is granted a +4 rune bonus to all Will saves and Concentration checks for the duration.

*Ar* [DURATION]

Virtue, Light of the Sun, Banishes Darkness  
 With an invocation of this rune, ordinary darkness can be turned aside. For the duration of the effect, the rune creates a light without flame, hovering over the head or hand of the invoker, about equal to a torch light. This light may be called or dismissed as a move-equivalent action as often as the bearer wishes within the duration.

*Sig* [DURATION]

Victory, Soul, The Sun  
 Invoking this rune is a gathering of energy that carries the promise of victory. Any group the invoker leads has a +1 rune bonus to attack rolls, skill checks, and saving throws against fear for the duration.

### *Tyr* [DURATION]

Concealment, Turning Situations Around, Creation

Those invoking this rune become craftier and slip through combat more easily. During the duration, the invoker has a +4 rune bonus to Dexterity.

### *Bar*

Becoming, In This World, Rebirth

Using the *Bar* rune, a Thule sorcerer can heal herself. The invocation restores 2d8 hit points. It restores an additional hit point per caster level (to a maximum of 10 additional hit points).

### *Laf*

Primal Law

Calling upon the Primal Law, the Thule sorcerer can strike at chaos. They can deal 1d8 damage per caster level (up to 6d8) to a chaotic target within short range, and the target must make a Will save (DC 10 + the caster level) or be dazed for 1d3 rounds. If the target is not chaotic, this invocation of primal law deals no damage.

### *Man* [DURATION]

Humanity, Plenty, Magic

Calling upon this rune is generally helpful. The invoker of the *Man* rune chooses one skill. For the duration, she gains a +2 rune bonus to that skill.

### *Yr* [DURATION]

Passion, Falsehood, Error

Invoking the *Yr* rune allows even blatant falsehoods to fool the listeners. For the duration, the invoker is granted a +4 rune bonus to Bluff and Disguise checks. The invoker also gains a +2 rune bonus to saves against any effect that would reveal his lies.

### *Eh* [DURATION]

Marriage, Permanent Bond, Duality

The Thule sorcerer can invoke this rune in the presence of one that has previously broken a spoken or written agreement with the sorcerer. The target must make a Will save (DC 15 + the caster level) or be blighted for the duration of the power, suffering a -2 rune penalty to attack rolls, saves, and skill checks. The invoker must have proof that the target has broken an agreement; otherwise, the invocation has no effect.

### *Gibor* [DURATION]

Giver, Divine Sight, Divine Gift

Invoking this rune grants visions of the divine, but it comes at a price. The invoker of the rune is treated as though affected by a *true seeing* spell for the duration. The Thule sorcerer must sacrifice a living humanoid or some object she truly values (GM's discretion) before she can use this power again. This rune cannot be used for stances or etchings without some sort of massive sacrifice (again, GM's discretion).

## Thule Society Example - Children of Gaia

There are many veins of science fiction, but the Thule Society can find its home easily in all of them. As humanity changes itself, meets new races, or spreads itself among the stars, many new hatreds have a chance to fester. The Children of Gaia have

created their organization to meet these new perceived threats to human purity.

The Children are a group of wealthy and well-read individuals that have decided on a certain vision of human advancement. They desire a cerebral and scientific advancement unique to the human race without outside interference. Contact with other races or even with humans born off-world is considered contamination of the ideal. Cybernetic or, even worse, genetic modification is considered unspeakable. In addition to this basic agenda, members also feel they have access to certain ancient storehouses of knowledge from groups fighting the same war on a smaller scale in the past. They've developed a set of runes that they use for secret communication, which a handful of members claim have mystical abilities.

### History

The Children of Gaia were formed fairly recently, although the undercurrent that led to their movement has been around for quite some time. The Children are still mostly under their original leadership and haven't had any major internal struggles. They have kept contact with other groups with similar goals to a minimum, considering those groups to either be corrupted or simply too lowbrow to be of much use.

Although the Children have kept a low profile, they've begun publishing a periodical, several pamphlets, and even some books expounding their beliefs. Some of these publications have gained wide audiences, either among students looking for a cause or the lower class workers who will never be able to step onto another planet or afford modifications.

Recently, a sub-movement has started, claiming that the runes they use, taken from ancient texts, have powers beyond the realms of science. Members of the Children are desperate to keep this a secret from the wider populace, both fearing both ridicule and the possibility of a potential weapon falling into others' hands.

### Goals

The Children's overarching concern is purifying humanity and returning it to its rightful advancement. Individual members and small groups work independently towards this goal. Humankind's rightful advancement is seen as isolated on its native world, advancing science without modifying the human form. Space travel, genetic modification, cybernetics, contact with other races, and mutation are all seen as opposed to the natural advancement of mankind. Appropriate scientific pursuits include robotics, medicines, weapons, and planetary defenses.

The ultimate philosophy behind the Children is that humanity was created for some greater purpose. Although each member of the society has some thoughts on what that purpose will be, it's generally only spoken of in the broadest terms as humanity's rightful destiny.

### Methods

For now, the Children focus on propaganda. Their goals are so long-reaching and complex that their only path to success

appears to be a conversion of the masses to their cause. As such, wherever it's possible, the Children induce their pawns to form and lead political parties or movements.

The group has enough money, through its members, to support other organizations in their plans. This is as close as the Children get to direct action: sponsoring other groups in their assaults on the status quo. Groups that directly attack off-worlders, spaceports, or hospitals for human modifications are given the largest portion of the Children's support. These funds and resources are always given anonymously, even to organizations that respect the Children.

The society, since its founding, has used rituals for initiation and advancement in ranks. A handful of members take these more seriously and have begun research into rune magics. They believe they are finding success so far, but other members are skeptical and wish to put the magics to scientific testing. If the society is going to break into factions, it will be because of this issue.

### **Membership**

The society requires its members to be "pure-born" humans. This generally means humans without any outstanding cybernetics, off-world heritage, sympathies with other species, or genetic defects (which, according to the society, includes genetic modification or even major positive mutations). The society engages in careful genetic screening and also looks back at the applicant's family to determine if her ancestors have had any genetic modification or defects. Minor positive mutations are allowed or rejected depending on a complex set of rules the society keeps.

That is the main hurdle to be crossed. Once a member has proven her heritage, she must provide an essay expounding on the group's goals and her thoughts on them. Most applicants come through the Children's propaganda or their related organizations. This test assures that members are well-read and generally fairly educated.

Members of the organization have obviously passed these tests. Most come from old-blood, wealthy families attached to earth-bound industries that don't modify the human form. The average member is actually fairly committed to the cause, but probably joined the group out of a kind of curiosity.

### **Adjusting Them to Fit Your Campaign**

The focus of the Children will change somewhat depending on the type of science fiction you're running. In space opera, they can hate other races or those born away from planet earth. For cyberpunk, hating modified humans, especially those with genetic modifications, is reasonable. In a post-apocalyptic setting, mutants are an obvious choice to despise.

Alien races that want humanity sitting quietly back on its home planet might covertly support the Children. This support will be careful and well-concealed, especially from the Children, but it will be there. If you wish the Children to be associated with a different race, or your humans aren't from Gaia, it's a simple matter of changing the name. Even if no one is certain of the

race's home planet, a mythical name for that planet will be inserted. Being an off-worlder obviously can't be considered a problem then, but the society would still reject anyone they feel has drifted too far from the ancient members of their race.





# Societies in Brief

The secret societies covered in this chapter will be touched on lightly, giving a general overview of their histories, practices, and use in games of various genres. For the GM using these societies, they will probably better serve as seeds that can grow when connected to your campaign world, rather than as the basis for a campaign right away.

## Ahnenerbe

Led by Heinrich Himmler, the Ahnenerbe was a special group within the Nazi SS and the home of most state-sponsored occultism and pseudo-science during that era. The organization consumed large amounts of funds and produced no real results, although that might change drastically in a setting with magic. This organization is unique in that it had the drive and the resources to pursue extremely bizarre theories without any scientific oversight. Such an organization within a powerful government could theoretically stumble onto secrets generations before other groups, although its failures would be more numerous and equally spectacular.

The Ahnenerbe's studies led to expeditions to Tibet, attempts to find Atlantis and the Holy Grail, and the construction of several theories that seemed poorly understood even by their creators. The world ice theory, supposing that all existence is formed of ice vibrating at different frequencies, was somewhat popular. The Ahnenerbe also had its own version of the hollow world theory, supposing that Earth is literally hollow and we live on the inside. On a far darker note, they used any means necessary to create evidence of Aryan superiority and were responsible for horrible medical experiments.

In a World War II era game, Ahnenerbe can serve as a force opposing the PCs in mystical endeavors or insane men with far too much power. Outside of that, the Ahnenerbe need to be attached to a powerful government with a social agenda they believe that transcends morality (at least according to the government). The society serves as an excellent foil for parties and can be unpredictable, with each member championing his own bizarre theories. The Ahnenerbe is closely related to the Thule Society, so many of the ideas from that society also apply to this one.

## Anunnaki

In mythology, the Anunnaki are Sumerian deities that came from heaven to earth. In the writings of certain conspiracy authors, primarily David Icke, they're a group of reptilian beings from another dimension that crossbred with humans in the distant past. Now, their shape-shifting spawn consume human flesh, form most of the prominent families of the western world, and generally feed on human misery. Other

## Anunnaki Feats

### Opened Eyes [General]

You can see through the guises of the Anunnaki with ease.

**Prerequisite:** Wis 15 and have seen through Anunnaki disguises before.

**Benefit:** You are completely immune to the Anunnaki illusionary shifting racial ability. You are +4 on all saves to resist other Anunnaki magic.

### Anunnaki Blood [General]

Your Anunnaki heritage has granted you minor illusionary powers. These powers can be increased through consuming human flesh or blood.

**Prerequisite:** Anunnaki or from an Anunnaki bloodline.

**Benefit:** You can make yourself either more nondescript or more memorable through minor application of illusion magic. When trying to stand out, you are +1 to Intimidation and Perform checks. When trying to blend in, you are at +1 to Disguise checks.

**Special:** After consuming a large amount of fresh blood or flesh from an intelligent humanoid, the bonuses from this feat are increased to +3 for one hour and +2 for one full day after that.

theories Icke has put forth have the Anunnaki themselves taking human form or possessing human hosts in positions of global power. Some versions of the theory have the world leaders not being Anunnaki themselves, but merely being mind-controlled through lifelong conditioning.

Whatever theory is correct in your game, the Anunnaki will engage in some sort of blood magic and are able to conceal their presence. Certain spiritually sensitive or drugged individuals can see the Anunnaki's actual form. This might play into their agenda for cultural warfare, destroying those groups that are capable of seeing them. It would certainly make sense for them to persecute fringe spiritual groups and drug users to protect their secret.

In game, the Anunnaki make for good, if somewhat over-the-top, villains. They individually have major political and economic power, have some basic magical or psionic abilities, and work as a vast network. It's important to determine exactly what origins and abilities you want to give the Anunnaki for your campaign.

### Anunnaki as Characters

Most Anunnaki are sorcerors, both through natural ability and racial inclination. They very rarely engage in physical combat, preferring to flee. This is obviously just one interpretation of the Anunnaki, but is a fitting one for d20 purposes.

Anunnaki characters have the following racial traits:

+4 Intelligence,  
-2 Charisma, -2  
Constitution; Anunnaki  
are very intelligent, but  
emotionally distant and  
susceptible to injury in  
their physical form.

Medium Size.

Anunnaki base speed is 30 feet.

**Racial Hit Dice:** Anunnaki begin with two levels of aberration, which provide 2d8 Hit Dice, a base attack bonus of +1, and base saving throw bonuses of Fort +0, Ref +0, and Will +3.

**Racial Skills:** Anunnaki gain 5 x (2 + Int modifier, minimum 1) skill points in their racial skills. Its class skills are Bluff, Concentration, Diplomacy, Disguise, Intimidate, Knowledge (any), and Spellcraft. Anunnaki also gain a +4 racial bonus to Intimidate due to their frightening aura.

**Racial Feat:** Anunnaki receive one feat from their racial levels.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Anunnaki are automatically proficient with their natural weapons and all simple weapons.

+5 natural armor bonus.

**Natural Weapons:** 2 claws (1d4) and bite (1d4).

**Special Qualities:** Darkvision 60 feet, illusionary shifting (below).

**Automatic Languages:** Common, Anunnaki. Bonus

**Languages:** Any local humanoid, Draconic, Infernal.

**Favored Class:** Sorcerer.

**Level Adjustment:** +1.

**Illusionary Shifting (Su):** Anunnaki can create an illusion of being a member of any Medium Humanoid race. They are +20 to Disguise checks to appear as that race, but only +10 on checks to appear as a specific member of that race. Can be penetrated with disbelief and a Will save (DC 20 + Anunnaki Charisma modifier).

### Bavarian Illuminati

Created by Adam Weishaupt in 1776, the Bavarian Illuminati are a well-remembered piece of conspiracy history. The Illuminati operated through the Masons in the area, recruiting from within their ranks and using their resources. Weishaupt's order sought to overthrow the conservative government of Bavaria at the time, which resulted in a sweeping law banning secret societies in 1784. In the meantime, though, the society drew in many great thinkers and influenced several others outside the ranks.



Modern theorists argue a great deal about the goals of the Illuminati and whether they still exist today. In broad strokes, two camps exist. One camp argues that the Illuminati were merely a revolutionary group with intellectual backing, striving for the Masonic ideals of freedom and enlightenment, but are now long gone. The other camp tends to see the Illuminati as a murderous group aiming for world domination, existing from the dim past to the present day.

The Bavarian Illuminati could not have existed outside the structure provided by Freemasonry and would need to be used alongside some other society in game. A group like the Illuminati, attracting the intelligent and rebellious, could easily form within other secret organizations to oppose local power. The PCs' relations with the local government will largely determine how well they get along with the Illuminati. If the order has survived to the present day, it would likely have become a global government or mystical society with its local roots left in the past.

### Bildebergers/The Bildeberg Group

The group is named for their first meeting place, the Bildeberg hotel in the Netherlands, where they were first called by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, David Rockefeller, and others. Every year, the group summons no more than one hundred influential people from Europe and North America to discuss increased cooperation between nations. The location, guest list,

and agenda is openly available, but what actually occurs remains absolutely secret.

Political leaders, powerful bankers, business leaders, royalty, defense experts, and government advisors generally make up the core of the group. They meet for a few days under heavy security, secretly discuss things, and then return to their jobs. Understandably, this has led the organization to be accused of being everything from neo-Nazis to the New World Order to a resurrection of the Bavarian Illuminati.

The Bildeberg Group serves as an excellent example of a group that could be running large portions of the planet by committee. In a setting with many powerful conspiracies, it could also be a sort of annual secret society playground with ranking members of different societies making alliances and jockeying for position. It also demonstrates how a group with incredible potential power can slip past the notice of the general populace.

### Carbonari

The Carbonari, or Charcoal Burners, made up a revolutionary secret society spread in small cells across Italy during the 19th century. It was extremely closely related to Freemasonry and was allied with several Lodges during its existence. However, where the Freemasons use stonework as their symbolic basis, the Carbonari used the creation of charcoal. Also unlike most Masonic lodges, the Carbonari respected only their own laws and spoke often of killing the tyrants that lorded over them.

When a government they respected appeared in Naples, the Carbonari appeared in great numbers to help keep order in the city, recruiting police officers into the order to lead their patrols. The society eventually seized control of the area, largely through force of arms, before being driven out with Austrian help. After that defeat, the Carbonari steadily weakened and eventually disappeared.

The society was able to rise to power quickly and secretly among an oppressed populace, then struck out through sheer force of arms once they gathered enough members. This tactic has worked for other organizations, but only when the populace is extremely unhappy with its situation. The society can promise a way out: first through spirituality, then through talk of revolution, and finally through actual revolution.

### Gnomes of Zurich

The term “gnomes in Zurich” was coined in 1956 by the British Prime Minister, claiming this mysterious group was undermining the pound. Many conspiracy theorists have used the term since then as a label for banking conspiracy in general and Swiss banks in particular. The label has also been used for the powerful Masonic Lodge, the Grand Lodge Alpina, which many powerful Swiss bankers and politicians belong to. This Lodge, in turn, has been accused of links with the P2 Lodge in Italy.

If the Gnomes exist as one powerful bloc, its motives are almost entirely unknown. They would certainly be interested in collecting more money and protecting their secrecy. Other possibilities suggested by different authors include supporting

fascism, running the global Masonic conspiracy, or being somehow involved in the global drug trade via money laundering.

Bankers and moneylenders are often implicated in conspiracy theories. They have access to vast sums of money and, especially in groups, can come to own many companies and anything else that can be bought. This makes anyone from those roles in your campaign very good conspiracy members. It also means that if any one race, religion, country, or faction has an advantage in these fields, they're likely to be targeted for hatred and counter-conspiracies.

### Golden Dawn

**See Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn**

### Greys

Many fringe conspiracy theories now invoke the Greys as being the puppet masters of the human race, or at least whichever governmental or religious group the theorists think runs things. The description of Greys was in flux for several decades, but has now settled on the large-headed, large-eyed, small-bodied, grey or green alien. Their main activities involve wandering around in flying saucers, abducting humans for experimentation, and meeting with powerful organizations or individuals.

Most serious conspiracy theorists won't touch aliens anymore, carefully providing human causes for their conspiracies. This doesn't mean that Greys are not handy for game purposes. Most modern games already have a take on the Greys, although the *d20 Modern* take is included separately in *d20 Future*. Greys can be challenging to use in game because they've been overused to the point of satire and cliché. If you need a threatening alien species for a modern game, you're probably better off looking elsewhere. However, if you want to have physical Greys as an explanation of their widespread sightings, that's another matter altogether.

In a modern game, the most important thing to decide is the Greys' agenda. Why are they here and why are they performing experiments? The PCs don't have to know immediately – or ever – but risking cliché by using Greys usually isn't worth it without some greater agenda. Consider how many other races the Greys have met and how intelligent they consider humans to be. What sort of society do they have and why haven't they revealed themselves? They stereotypically have advanced technology and psionics; is that the way you want them to appear in your campaign?

For games in future settings, the Greys can appear on more equal footing with mankind. Then it's more a question of how much humanity knows about Grey experimentation, whether it continues, and what role the Greys have had in humanity's development.

Fantasy games shouldn't use Greys as in their modern form, but a GM can consider similar beings from another plane, world, or even continent, behaving mysteriously and performing experiments on local intelligent life. This race would probably be especially confused and prone to experimentation and secrecy

if they came from a setting (plane, world, or continent) where they were the only intelligent race.

### Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Founded towards the end of the 19th century, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was a secret society of great import, and also made a notable impact on literature. It operated from London and had members including William Yeats, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, and Aleister Crowley. The order was formed around largely Masonic lines of initiation, but its mysticism went far deeper, including cabalism, the Tarot, astral projection, and identifying directly with mythical figures.

The Golden Dawn only existed under that name for a short time, but its traditions continued in several splinter orders. A number of conspiracy theorists place some of the offshoots along with Aleister Crowley, opposing the Thule Society and later Ahnenerbe (page 82). The Golden Dawn created a new line of occult thinking, which survives to this day, by blending several existing schools of thought.

In modern settings, the Golden Dawn's teachings have been widely spread through Western Culture, and almost any group of modern mystics could have some link back to them. An organization of forward-thinking magicians can exist in any setting, but may still serve just as well to provide a backstory for other magic, societies, and strange activities.

When the PCs are able to trace veins of mysticism, literature and culture back to one organization, it adds a sense of overall consistency to the game world. Even if that order is long dead, dropping small hints of it in the forms of texts or even inscriptions on relics can make your world feel much more alive.

### The Holy Vehm

The Holy Vehm, also known as the League of the Holy Court or the Vehmgericht, was a powerful organization in medieval Germany. It formed numerous independent judicial courts, primarily in Westphalia (a region that now forms part of Germany's western border), and tried people according to its own laws. The courts were formed of freemen of all sorts, and served as the primary law in many regions.

Some of these trials were held in secret and, if the accused was found guilty, he would be executed by the accuser and other members of the Vehm. In this case, if the accused was a member of the Vehm, he could swear an oath that he did not commit the crime; otherwise, the accused would not be informed of the proceedings until after the decision was reached. More often, however, trials were open to the public, providing a relatively fair system compared to others of their time. As time passed and the Vehm became more corrupt, secret trials became more common.

Organizations like the Holy Vehm show up in regions that have no law to call their own, but still expect some sort of judicial process. The players can, of course, fall victim to a secret trial or be friends with someone who is found guilty. On the other hand, maybe the Vehm in their area is righteous and the party serves as its enforcement arm.

### Illuminati

**See the Bavarian Illuminati**

### Knights of Malta

The modern descendant of the Knights Hospitaller (an order of knights contemporary to and rivals of the Templars), the Knights of Malta were created in 1530 by papal decree and given the island of Malta. They eventually lost control of Malta to Napoleon, but to this day they maintain their own sovereignty and claim independent observer status in the United Nations. They have embassies in many countries, but no actual territory. Despite this, they issue their own postage stamps and currency (the Scudo). The order is predominantly a relief organization, using its peculiar status to work in countries that aren't comfortable with other nations interfering.

However, due to their strange status, the Knights of Malta are also featured prominently in many conspiracy tales. Several views place them as puppets of the Vatican or part of the overarching conspiracy that runs the world. Others place them as a force of tyranny and superstition opposite the surviving Knights Templar (or the Freemasons, as the Templars' spiritual descendants). This particular theory is based on the Templars' poor relationships with the Hospitallers, ancestors of the Knights of Malta.

The Knights of Malta, with their strange status, can serve a number of interesting roles in a campaign. They can be part of an overarching conspiracy, working as field agents in dark corners of the world. The Knights could also have their own reason to seek out isolated nations. They might be interested in looting ancient ruins, selling weapons, or collecting parts of reclusive beasts. Alternately, in a conspiracy-heavy game, the order could be looking for recruits in locations that other conspiracies fear to tread.

### Lizards

**See Anunnaki**

### Mafia

The Mafia is a series of organizations and families with loose ties, often thought of as one overarching secret society. Spread across many countries, the Mafia has operations including extortion, drug running, prostitution, gambling and murder, but also more respectable activities. Its initiation rites, like many long-lasting criminal organizations, have a religious edge to them. In the Mafia's case, the rite has some Roman Catholic overtones, as almost all of its members belong to that faith.

In many ways, the Mafia is the criminal organization against which others are measured. Its power was incredible at the organization's height, and still is in some areas. In the United States, the Mafia came into its own during the Prohibition period through alcohol smuggling, gaining the vast part of its power and fame there. Smuggling illicit goods is a ready-made source of income, motivation (to protect the trade), and conflict for any secret society or criminal organization.

An interesting thing to consider is that many Mafia families also had good relations with intelligence agencies. This alliance

would be extremely helpful for any international criminal organization, and provides the intelligence community with information and freedom of action it wouldn't normally have. In game, it also provides a ready-made point of conflict between the intelligence services and law enforcement in your setting.

For an organization like the Mafia to exist in a campaign, it will need a strong identity and some lucrative criminal trade. The Mafia's members had both ethnic and religious identity in addition to their membership in the society. This can easily be integrated into a fantasy setting with professional criminal families from a certain race or region. In modern settings, the Mafia still has some power, although it generally seems to be moving into more non-criminal ventures and waning compared to its history. It will probably still exist in near-future settings, but some other society having the same sort of structure will likely replace them further into the future.

### Majestic-12

Supposedly formed in 1952 to investigate possible extraterrestrial activity, Majestic-12 is an important part of the UFO cosmology. The documents describing Majestic-12's formation have been widely distributed and are considered to be fraudulent in many circles. Of those who believe the organization exists, most suspect that its members are in league with one or more groups of extraterrestrials, including the Greys (page 83).

In theory, the society is controlled by the current President of the United States (referred to as "Majestic") with MJ-1 through MJ-12 serving as advisors. Below that, the organization is broken into Projects. Project Garnet is one of the best known of these, working as security and protecting Majestic-12's secrecy. Another commonly referenced project is Project Zeus, the Strategic Defense Initiative, which in the Majestic-12 worldview was intended as defense against potential hostile aliens.

Majestic-12 as an organization is great for modern campaigns in the United States that want a traditional "government and aliens" organization. It becomes even more interesting if the aliens they're dealing with aren't traditional space aliens, but from some other source. Fantasy settings could have organizations like this, seeking meetings with beings from other planes, and science-fiction settings from other times or dimensions. In

any setting, it serves as a good example of a government-military investigation that is extremely important but must be kept secret. Any country that can win alliance with an advanced species has a potentially huge advantage, thus driving nations to great lengths to win that alliance.

### Men in Black

The Men in Black have been a staple of conspiracy since the 1950s. They appear as large, imposing men in black suits and dark sunglasses claiming to be government agents. Most reports indicate them seeming a little "off," either appearing, acting, or speaking in a slightly inhuman way. This has led to several side theories of the Men being aliens, alien-human crossbreeds, automatons, or demons. Many conspiracy theorists simply assume they are, in fact, government agents, working for the NSA (page 86) or Majestic-12.

Most appearances of the Men in Black follow UFO sightings by reliable witnesses, or sightings that produce evidence. They generally request silence and any and all evidence, obliquely threatening the target if he resists. Some individuals report being chased or harassed by the Men after run-ins, but the threats seem generally ineffective.

The Men in Black generally serve as servants of another conspiracy. Most dedicated modern conspiracy games will probably include several flavors of Men in Black. Government investigators, even PCs, will often seem to be Men in Black to the people they're questioning. Other groups, especially ones that aren't capable of normal manipulation, may also use



human-seeming agents as Men in Black. Most science fiction governments outside of post-apocalyptic settings have some sort of Men in Black, usually with biological or cybernetic augmentations. Fantasy settings will have Men that serve the same role, but hopefully will have a more setting-appropriate uniform than a black suit and sunglasses.

### Merovingians

The Merovingian Dynasty stretched from the 5th to 8th centuries in parts of what is now France and Germany. The dynasty would probably be entirely ignored in the modern day if not for the legends of its heritage. One claim is that its founder, Merovech, sprang from the union of a woman with a sea creature, taken by many to mean the family has extraterrestrial blood. The other major claim is that they are descended from the offspring of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene.

The Merovingian bloodline shows up in many conspiracies for these reasons, although the dynasty itself is only rarely accused of still ruling the world. Some theories see the bloodline as an undiluted source of extraterrestrial or Christian wisdom. A handful of theorists accuse members of the bloodline of having supernatural powers due to their heritage. An order known as the Priory of Sion (page 87), although largely considered to be a hoax, is said to fight for the return of the Merovingian dynasty.

Bloodlines from other races or mystical figures play a part in most settings. The Merovingians definitely have the advantage of being attributed to both, providing an interesting body of contradiction and myth to root a character or family in. Certain groups would be very interested if someone could prove her lineage back to the dynasty, although not necessarily interested in a good way. One downside of using the Merovingians right now is that many people will associate them with *The Matrix* and its trilogy. But if you're running a modern campaign that directly involves the origins of Christianity or some type of sea creatures, the Merovingians are too perfect to resist.

### MK-ULTRA

A CIA program in the 1950s through 70s under several different names, MK-ULTRA was a study in combining techniques for interrogation, psychological warfare, and creation of operatives immune to interrogation and torture. It was created in response to alleged use of these techniques by communist forces in Korea. The project was revealed to the public in 1974, but most records had been destroyed two years previously. Many conspiracy theorists argue that the organization has merely changed its name again and continues its experiments.

MK-ULTRA performed experiments on American and Canadian soil, mostly on unsuspecting civilians, to perfect its techniques. Experiments involved a wide range of drugs, especially LSD, and often used multi-drug cocktails or experimental truth serums that never seemed to work quite as well as intended. Sensory deprivation, replaying the subject's recorded voice, electrical shocks, and many other techniques were also used. The project's greatest advances were using multiple techniques together to completely break down a subject, leading to confession, insanity, and potentially brainwashing.

If you need an evil government conspiracy in the United States, MK-ULTRA certainly fits the bill. Assuming it still exists in modern times, it would have access to even more advanced interrogation techniques. If psionics exist in your campaign, MK-ULTRA could easily have access to that field as well. Programs like this would be even more valuable in fantasy and science fiction settings as methods of interrogation and concealment constantly advance. In a situation like these, countries may need to perform horrible experiments just to keep up to speed.

### National Security Agency

The National Security Agency (more commonly known as the NSA) in the United States is generally cast in a dismal light by conspiracy theories. It is responsible for communications intelligence for the federal government, which largely amounts to intercepting signals and the constant race of cryptography and cipher breaking. It is not so much a secret society in the traditional sense as a closely-guarded government operation.

Most people who consider the NSA threatening focus on the ECHELON system, an immense computer system spread across the United States and its English-speaking allies, monitoring billions of electronic communications a day. Several governments have acknowledged the system, but the full range of its capacities is still a closely-guarded secret. As with any source gathering that much information, the main limitation is choosing who and what to focus on. It can therefore be defeated by avoiding the government's attention in the first place.

In a modern conspiracy game, the NSA can be a great tool for any organization within the U.S. government. Electronic communication, especially unencrypted, made by watched groups can grant government agents huge amounts of information. Should the PCs attract ECHELON's attention, a GM should keep careful track of their in-character communications and consider how the NSA (and its masters) could use that information.

Any science fiction government worth its salt will have an ECHELON-like system watching over communications, likely with an advanced AI to help clear up some of the data mining problems. Fantasy governments probably don't have need for such a system, unless there's some way they can tap into sources like the *sending* spell, and only then as long as that system remains a closely guarded secret.

### Ordo Templi Orientis

Theodore Reuss formed the Ordo Templi Orientis, often just called the OTO, in an attempt to merge the many Masonic and mystical organizations he led into one society. It came into the public eye largely because Reuss initiated Aleister Crowley, insisting that Crowley already knew the secrets of the order and therefore had to join. Crowley eventually took control of the order, but it divided into many, many orders shortly after his death. For a time, there were over a thousand individuals claiming to be Outer Head of the order.

The organization featured eleven degrees of initiation and generally sought spiritual enlightenment. They assumed many

of Crowley's beliefs regarding magic (or magick, as they prefer), Thelema (will as law), and the like. The order survives in fair numbers to the modern day, but even with court rulings declaring the leader of the order, there are still many factions.

In modern settings, the OTO provides a good source of random mystical training. Need an NPC or group with basic mystical training? Make them members of some branch of the Ordo Templi Orientis. For other settings, the order's history mostly serves to point out that mystics tend to be fairly individualistic and, unless bound strongly by some mission, they'll fragment quickly without a strong leader.

### P2 Lodge

Properly known as Propaganda Due (from the Italian, "Second Propaganda" or "Propaganda II"), the P2 Lodge provides much of the evidence behind modern Masonic conspiracy theories. P2 at its height had over nine hundred members in Italy and the Holy See, including the heads of each branch of military and intelligence, leading bankers, members of parliament, and leaders of the state broadcasting company. Like the Bavarian Illuminati (page 84), it operated as a secret society within Freemasonry. It controlled large parts of the Italian government and economy, with connections to several murders, drug running, extensive money laundering, the Mafia, the United States' CIA and the Vatican Bank.

The Lodge membership was revealed when its Grand Master Licio Gelli, also a member of the Knights of Malta (page 84) and a former liaison between the Italian fascist government and the Third Reich, fled the country to avoid arrest. A list of members was found in his home and soon the whole organization came tumbling down. He fled to South America and, although he was eventually captured by the Swiss on a trip to retrieve funds, he vanished from prison within three days under the noses of supposedly incorruptible Swiss police.

The P2 Lodge, if nothing else, shows how a powerful Masonic organization can exist. Its power came from its membership, and the personal power and connections members could bring to bear. It worked between other organizations, achieving almost total control of the country.

### Priory of Sion

The Priory of Sion, alternately said to be named after Zion or a mountain in France, is an organization surrounded by a very confusing group of claims and counter-claims. The basic premise is that the Priory seeks the return of the Merovingian dynasty to power. The multiple interpretations of the Merovingians (page 86) only confuse the matter further. The society's history and power are now thought to be hoaxes, although that hasn't stopped the theorizing.

One common interpretation is that the Priory was closely related to the Knights Templar, and seeks to restore the bloodline of Jesus as heads of state and religious life. In that version, its members are opposed to both democracy and modern Christianity as derived from Paul. They seek a return of Jesus' direct descendants, who – according to the Priory – have passed down his true word of God through the ages. Other

interpretations put the True Word of God actively in the hands of the society's leader, with him passing down proto-Christian or alien wisdom. It's worth pointing out that the founder of the Priory in modern times sometimes claims Merovingian heritage, providing an interesting link between these two societies.

The Priory can exist in any game setting as long as it has a bloodline to restore. Fantasy settings are usually replete with bloodlines and pretenders to those bloodlines, making the Priory an easy fit. Science fiction settings usually care slightly less about bloodlines, which may help the Priory by making it more unexpected. Modern settings can use the actual Priory itself or a different order dedicated to the same ends: bringing a given bloodline to universal dominance.

### Protocols of the Elders of Zion

One of the most significant pieces of modern conspiracy literature is *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It makes a claim now familiar to conspiracy theorists: that a Jewish order is controlling the world through the Freemasons and monetary manipulation. Fortunately, the document's history is more interesting than the society it depicts.

The text is now known to be cobbled together from several sources, including a novel about Jesuit conspirators and a pamphlet mocking Napoleonic politics. Tsarist Russian agents first used it in 1903 as propaganda against communist rebels, which lead to some popularity later among American anti-communist conspiracy theories. It was also considered literally true by many anti-Semites in pre-Nazi Germany, and was a major inspiration to form the Germanenorder, which created the Thule Society. During the 1920s, Henry Ford was inspired by the Protocols to write several articles and a book on the subject. Many other individuals and groups use the Protocols to support anti-Semitic, anti-banking, anti-communist, and anti-liberal agendas to this day.

This text itself, in modern and future games, can be used as an NPC prop. For example, if the PCs are breaking into someone's house and find a copy of the Protocols, it implies either an interest in conspiracy theory or flat-out anti-Semitism. In a broader sense, the book gives some indication of how ideas and texts can take on a life of their own. A plagiarized mess claiming to be evidence of the most extraordinary sort will convince people over the course of decades if it says something they want to believe.

### Reptoids

See Anunnaki

### Rosicrucians

The Rosicrucians came onto the public scene in the early 17th century, with the publication of three manuscripts on the society's beliefs and alchemy. Various theories exist to explain the Rosicrucians' origins, and several organizations sprang up claiming to be Rosicrucians. The organization actually described in the manuscripts was never uncovered, if it ever existed to begin with. Many modern orders, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (page 84), are traced back to the Rosicrucians, and certain Rosicrucian symbols (such as the Rose

Cross and the Eye in the Pyramid) have been since claimed by Freemasonry.

The order claimed ownership of vast amounts of scientific and mystical knowledge, but seemed mostly focused on alchemy and hermetic traditions. Its members aimed to lead humanity into a new age of learning, health, and long life in the fashion of their founder, Christian Rosenkruetz. Some authors have claimed that the Rosicrucians, or those influenced by them, are responsible for many of the advances in science and the arts in the last centuries. It was implied in the manuscripts that their society was large, but completely secret and that only worthy applicants would be able to find it. If that is true, there either weren't any worthy or the worthy never broke their vows of secrecy.

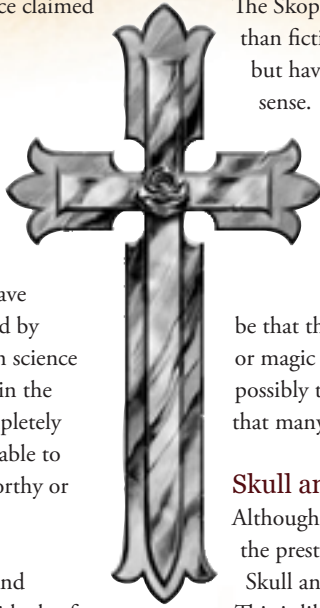
The Rosicrucian phenomena was rather unique and could be used in many games and settings. Individuals of all sorts will support or condemn the writers. New societies, however false, will spring up to claim those seeking the organization. If the order itself does exist, it has managed to maintain perfect secrecy, perhaps through magical means.

### Skoptsi

The Skoptsi formed a strange branch of Christianity found in Russia, first revealed in the waning part of the 18th century. Their name translates roughly into "The Castrated," a term that only rightly applies to the roughly fifteen percent of their members who chose to go through the "Baptism of Fire." Regardless of their physical status, the members were expected to abstain from carnal activities and generally lead virtuous lives. Unlike most secret societies, both genders were freely allowed to participate, although the rites for the "Baptism of Fire" were obviously different based on gender.

Beyond the Baptism of Fire, most of the order's rites centered around hymns, invocations, and a large amount of ecstatic dancing. Members were expected to protect other initiates of the order and recruit at every possibility. Their leader, Kondratji Selivanov, claimed to be both Tsar Peter III and the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Selivanov, having performed the Baptism of Fire on himself at an early age, was said to be capable of miracles and lived to approximately a hundred years of age. Throughout his life, his cult kept him well provided for during the periods he was not imprisoned, banished to Siberia, or in an asylum.

The cult, like many others, surprised commentators with the number of wealthy, well-educated members it drew in. This was especially true during the reign of Tsar Alexander I, who respected Selivanov for a time and granted him access to many noble houses. During some investigations it was found that the Skoptsi had access to enormous sums of money, which they repeatedly used to bribe officials. Thousands of members joined the organization. Some saw this as an attempt to place Selivanov on the throne as Peter III, claiming that the tsar had in fact not died, but had merely vanished and now returned.



The Skoptsi are a case where truth is substantially stranger than fiction. They can easily be dropped into any setting, but have to be handled in a certain way for them to make sense. The society believed completely in what they were doing, from new recruits right up to Selivanov himself. They were willing to withstand persecution, death, torture, and Baptism of Fire for what they believed in, because they believed it absolutely and without faltering. They weren't openly insane or wide-eyed fanatics. It might be that the Skoptsi provided them with their only hope or magic in an otherwise hopelessly mundane life. Or, possibly the Skoptsi provided the mix of religious beliefs that many people in Russia saw as their own.

### Skull and Bones

Although there are several secret and semi-secret societies at the prestigious Yale University (some with better funding) Skull and Bones attracts the vast majority of the attention. This is likely because many of its members have risen to prominence in the political or intelligence arenas, including three U.S. Presidents. The society puts forth an image of malice and death-worship, but whether that's reality or mere bravado is hard to say.

Each year, fifteen junior-year students are chosen to replace the graduating membership. The members are generally chosen from elite families and are generally promising in other regards. The society's ceremony and rituals are thought to be loosely Masonic, but contain more death symbolism. Initiates are expected to keep their membership completely secret until they leave the university, but afterwards can proclaim it openly. The other oaths of secrecy still hold, however, so discovering more about the society can be challenging.

Universities are prime recruiting grounds for secret societies of all types in all genres. Choosing members from powerful families at a prestigious university is one very good way to create a powerful organization with a constant flow of new members. The Bonesmen, as they are called, form a powerful, but small, corrupt group for modern games. Other settings can easily take the society whole cloth. The organization can serve as a country's puppet masters or as the recruiting arm for an even more powerful organization.

### Tongs

The Tongs (from the Chinese T'ang, meaning "hall") are Chinese organizations serving mostly as community centers, support networks, and protectors. They occasionally delve into organized crime or suffer from turf wars, but for the most part are harmless. Many Tongs were created, and many still survive, to support their members chosen from a family, neighborhood, or philosophy. In many places, the Tongs serve as support networks for those without families.

Unlike many secret societies, the Tongs don't have set agendas or methodologies, aside from protecting their members. Their agendas change with their membership. A Tong could be an organization caring for the sick and elderly, but after a change in leadership might become involved in gambling, opium



dealing, and gang warfare. Some see the Tongs as fronts for the Triads (below). If that is the case, the Tongs would provide the Triads with a vast support network of their own.

The Tongs can be used pretty easily in any modern campaign. Using them in another setting just requires changing the name. The trick to using them is remembering that the label is applied equally to organizations only concerned in taking care of their families, small-time criminals involved in gambling and the like, and major criminal networks in the opium trade. This is a great way of encouraging players to actually do their investigative work, as it would leave much innocent blood on their hands if they just burst into every Tong meeting hall with guns blazing.

### Triads

The Triads are strongest in Hong Kong, although they exist in many large cities elsewhere. Like most criminal secret societies, they are actually a number of different organizations with a common background, lumped together for classification. The membership of each sect ranges from a few dozen to tens of thousands. Although more powerful Triads have some hold over the smaller ones, there is no overarching structure. The Triads are no longer at their strongest but still have substantial criminal and legitimate holdings.

Originally formed in China, allegedly by rebels seeking the return of the Ming dynasty, the Triads are still closely connected to the Chinese culture and heritage. They were forced out of their native country by Mao Tse Tung and fled to anywhere they could fit in, largely Hong Kong and Macao. Their rites demonstrate a complex, tiered initiation system; a massive body of symbolism; and reverence towards the hero Guan Yu from the era of the Three Kingdoms. Of late, the Triads have been releasing some of their mystical aspirations and heading towards a more pragmatic approach. In addition to traditional drug running and extortion, members have also been gathering substantial profits through software, video, and music piracy.

The Triads are an excellent choice for a campaign that needs a criminal organization with a magical background. They mix the old and new world to a degree that will help them deal with both, but will likely cause internal problems under pressure. The old guard, clinging to the precepts brought from their home country, would come into conflict with their younger and more cosmopolitan members. Quick-thinking PCs can ally with or avoid at least one side of the conflict.

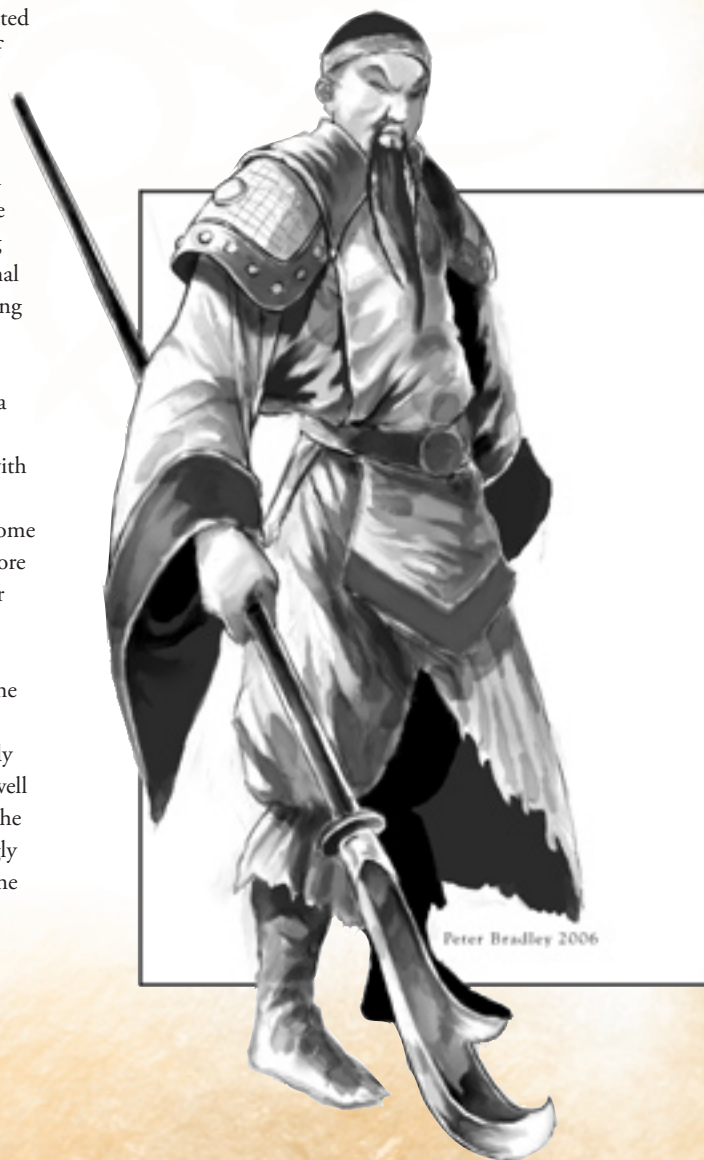
In fantasy campaigns, a conspiracy like the older version of the Triads could easily emerge. They would still be close to their roots, acting as both rebels and criminals, while having a body of ritual based on legendary heroes for mystical purposes as well as a source of passwords. Science fiction societies could use the Triads themselves, with the society having become increasingly high tech, or instead utilize a group of mystical rebels from the more recent past.

### Guan Yu

Born around 160 AD, Guan Yu was a general during the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history. He is now a legendary figure, owing largely to his portrayal in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and later works. Guan Yu is worshipped by some as a god and respected by Chinese Buddhist and Taoist sects. He is commonly portrayed as a warrior with a red face, flowing black beard, and a guandao (a heavy and impressive polearm).

Although Guan Yu is remembered as a general, he is associated most strongly with honor and brotherhood. This is most strongly represented in the peach blossom oath, which bound Guan Yu to his compatriots as brothers and allies. This oath is reflected in Triad initiation rites, marking the new entrant as a brother within the organization.

In a setting where Guan Yu is worshipped as a god, he can certainly have clerics. Some appropriate domains include Good, Law, Protection, Strength, and War. His favored weapon is certainly the guandao (which can be considered a halberd for game purposes).



### Trilateral Commission

Founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller, the Trilateral Commission is a non-government organization intended to bring closer cooperation between North America, Western Europe, and Japan. It has several hundred members, all rich and influential. Many conspiracy theorists still see the Commission as serving solely the interests of the international bankers. Rockefeller also helped create the similarly-themed Bildebergers, probably linking the organizations to some degree.

The Trilateral Commission is mostly accused of working towards the self-interest of its own members at the expense of others. More rarely, they are suspected of being Satanists, drug traffickers, or shape-shifting lizards (See Annunaki, page 82). Anyone who was somehow able to gain control of the organization, steering it to ends other than just reducing trade restrictions and increasing cooperation, would have a tremendous amount of power in her hands.

The Trilateral Commission can be used in many of the same ways as the Bildebergers, although it does include Japan to keep up with the times. If its members worked towards a single goal, there would be very little anyone could do to stop them, which is where most of the concern comes from. Alternately, the society can be portrayed as a group honestly striving for greater cooperation between nations, perhaps to fill the members' own pockets, but not intending to hurt anyone else. Similar commissions could easily be created in other settings as well, being more influential in settings where power is concentrated in few hands.

### UMMO

UMMO is either an organization of aliens living on Earth or an amazingly well-executed prank. It began around Madrid, Spain, with sightings of a UFO bearing a symbol described as )( or similar to the letter H. Later, documents bearing the symbol were mailed from several continents to scientists and other experts, detailing a number of topics. Unlike the vast majority of such messages, containing little verifiable evidence, the letters included advanced work on a number of fields. However, most professionals examining the documents agree that bright students in those fields could have reached the conclusions without any need for extraterrestrial intervention.

A psychologist has come forward, with his assistant, claiming that he faked the whole thing to demonstrate the abiding paranoia of the human mind. The dual questions of how he created the UFO sightings and the information needed for the letters haven't been answered, leading some to point fingers back at aliens and others to various secret organizations.

Probably the most interesting way to use UMMO in a campaign is integrating the original happenings into the game over several sessions. The first sighting can be a curious occurrence, followed by others to cement the PCs' interest; then the letters begin appearing and are slowly made public. Eventually it can be revealed as either a hoax or an alien manipulation, but it's interesting either way. Another option is to use documents sent by UMMO but never revealed to the public as the explanation for science-fiction technology in your modern game. The whole

setup can still be used fairly effectively for a science fiction game, possibly adding the option of UMMO being an AI. In a fantasy game, UMMO could herald an era of magical or technological advancement, most likely either directly passed down by the gods or harshly opposed by them.

### Yakuza

The Yakuza is a distinctly Japanese organization, being formed from several different groups over time. Some influences include the armed militias of certain towns, runners of illicit gambling dens, peddlers with their own internal protection racket, and, more recently, armed mercenary gangs who assisted in breaking up labor organizations. Unlike many organizations of the same type, the Yakuza will admit some members that are not Japanese by blood. Also unlike other organizations, many Yakuza members are open with their membership, even in public. They wear garish clothing, have tattoos declaring their affiliation, and usually have open offices. Each member of the organization is expected to sever ties with his family and transfer those ties to his new Yakuza family. Members will likewise refer to each other by family titles.

The majority of Yakuza funding comes through various sorts of protection operations, as mentioned above. Some of the operations, especially those involving corporations, are more akin to blackmail. However, the money Yakuza members take from their local district will be used to protect the area if the need arises. Other activities such as drug running, gun smuggling, loan-sharking, running gambling houses, and the sex industry are directly part of the Yakuza's network or performed by outsiders who pay a fee to the Yakuza.

Unfortunately for most campaigns, the Yakuza are fairly unique to Japan. For other modern and cyberpunk settings, the Yakuza's strength would be felt through its connection to Japanese corporations. In other settings, similar organizations can spring up in nations that accept the fact that they're going to have a criminal element and integrate those elements into society.



# Creating Secret Societies

Sometimes there just isn't a real world society that fits what you need in a game setting, or you're looking for a change of pace. Creating your own secret society is fairly easy in the grand scheme of things, especially with the detailed templates of real world societies from previous chapters, and a few charts to help open up the creative process.

## Customizing Real World Societies

The quickest and easiest way to create a society for your campaign is by deciding what you need, then picking a real world secret society and modifying it to fit those needs. Think about what role the society is supposed to play in the campaign and see if any of the organizations in Chapters 3 or 4 can fit that role if tweaked a bit.

Let's go through an example of creating a secret society for a generic fantasy setting. If you wanted a secret society with fairly open control of a small, fantasy village, the Freemasons, the Thule Society, and the Knights Templar are pretty appropriate choices. The Assassins and Aum Shinrikyo could work with a bit more modification. Mossad, however, isn't the sort of organization likely to be controlling a village without a lot of explanation. Many of the societies described in Chapter 4 could also fill the role of our society.

Once you've decided what you need and what society is going to fill the role, flesh out the details of its members as a whole. For the example, why are they in the village? What sort of activities are they engaging in nearby? How large is their membership? Do they control the village because their members are in positions of power or are they exerting a more open influence? Could anyone the PCs already know be a member?

With its motivations and activities fleshed out, the society needs a couple of named NPCs or figureheads. Think about who the PCs are likely to meet during their interaction with the society. Give those people names and reasons to be in the society. Once you know why they're in the society and what society they're part of, their personal motivations will usually become clear.

Are there any changes needed to bring the society into your game world? Obviously, any technological differences will need to be worked out. Additionally, many societies are attached to deities, which can change from world to world. Others have ideals that might match up with or clash with an important group in the area. Make a point to consider these. It's probably a good idea to look at the section for that society in your genre, or read over the brief description and decide if there are any changes necessary.

Now it should be ready to drop into your game world. Once the society is sketched out like this, it's usually more a matter of revealing the society in a convincing matter and using it in your game. Chapter 2 deals more specifically with these details.

## Handcrafting a Secret Society

Some cultures, religions, or plot twists just demand a secret society. And sometimes there isn't a real world society that fills the role, or the players have gotten used to the archetypes and you need to throw the party for a loop. In this situation, you can either handcraft a society to fit your exact needs, or you can randomly generate one in the next section.

Handcrafting a society is a fair bit more work-intensive than just tweaking an existing society. You also have to be a bit more careful to think through all the interactions and potential inconsistencies. Real-world societies do have the advantage of having existed, or at least having caught the public's eye, and have already done the work of creating themselves for you.

Depending on your personal style, you may want to use the tables provided in the next section while handcrafting the society. There's no need to slavishly adhere to the tables, though, even if you're randomly generating the society. Just look for patterns and ideas. Read the society descriptions and table entries to get some good bits and pieces to help make your society unique.

Like tweaking a society, creating one from scratch begins with deciding how it can relate to the PCs and what sort of control level it has. Unless your party specifically needs more enemies or allies, it's best to assume the society will be neutral until the party's actions change the society's perception of them. Similarly, most campaigns assume that secret societies have partial control, but not full control. Chapter 2 contains more information on how these roles and control levels can be handled in your game.

Then, once you've decided on the role for your society, determine aspects of the society that will be necessary for that role. If you're planning on running an adventure about a murderous cult, you obviously need a cult that's willing and capable of murder. A society that controls the nation from a secret mountain fortress obviously needs a great deal of power, some means of keeping secret, and a mountain to build the fortress on.

Motivations can be a bit harder to pin down with created societies. Try to keep an open mind about why the society might be doing things. Just because the cult has murdered a

group of people doesn't necessarily mean that they're performing some blood sacrifice or arranging to steal some mystical artifact. They could just feel threatened for some other reason, or perhaps the artifact they're after has been stolen from them and they're concerned that it's being used for nefarious purposes.

The cult with a heart of gold may get trite after a while, but when it comes down to it, cult members are either doing what they think is right or acting in their own best interests. Unless you run a very strictly moralistic game, conflicts tend to come down to people believing that different things are right or one person's best interest interfering with another's. Secret societies in gaming often lack realistic motivations, so it's worth making a point to ensure that your society does have them.

Choosing what methods the society uses is the next important decision. You must consider how willing the society is to use criminal means and what special tools it has at its disposal (such as magic, psionics, or advanced technology). Even powerful societies often want to avoid the scrutiny of the authorities and avoid criminal means of solving problems.

It is worth including a few methods the society uses as part of its tradition, to provide clues for the PCs. For example, the society might be inclined towards a particular type of magic or technology, such as fire magics or viral weapons. The society's rituals may also require certain very specific punishments for offenders, like hanging them or burying them alive, which may serve as a sort of calling card for PCs investigating the situation.

Having determined the society's motivations and what methods it uses to reach those goals, you can now decide how it is organized. It can be a traditional initiation society, such as the Freemasons; a criminal organization like the Mafia; Mossad-like government agents; a cult existing at the donations of its members, much as Aum Shinrikyo existed; a loose affiliation of peers; or any other arrangement you can imagine.

It's worthwhile at this step to consider how the society gets its money. Most societies have some form of dues or donations that keep them running. The most powerful societies have members so powerful that their annual donations could buy entire cities. Even criminal societies are usually funded by profits sent up the chain of command. What does the society offer that convinces people to pay them? Or does it have some other source of income?

The internal power structure of the society is also fairly important. Small societies can exist easily with one leader and her followers, but larger societies need officers or middle tiers of some nature. Are there other branches of the society? Is there an overarching organization that can issue orders to the various branches? What sort of ranks are there? Knowing the ranks and assigning names to them lets you portray the society as a more realistic entity and give your players some idea of what they're up against.

Now take a little time and flesh out the plot elements for the first story you're using the society in. Are there any other societies it may interact with? What is the society's motivation

behind its actions in the story? How large and powerful is the local branch? Is there anyone the PCs already know that might be a member?

With everything fleshed out, it should be fairly easy to create a few NPCs from the organization for the party to interact with at first. Assign them rough places in the hierarchy and statistics, but most importantly a reason for them to be in the society. Once you have that reason, you can start playing the NPCs as actual characters rather than creatures in funny outfits.

It probably took a while, but now you should be ready to drop the society into your campaign world. Think some about what sort of reactions your PCs might have to the society and how you want to first present the society to get the reaction you want. Chapter 2 has more information on introducing a society and using it throughout the game.

## Randomly Generating a Society

Generating content randomly can result in some very interesting and sometimes contradictory results. That's the fun of it, really: to take the framework provided by the dice and bring it together into a coherent whole. The tables can be used for that, for simple ideas, or even for generating backstory for a local branch of a real world society. All you'll need is one d12 and the charts below. The definitions for the terms used within, and examples of those sorts of societies, are provided following the charts.

If results come up that you feel are blatantly contradictory, consider how they might have worked together. Societies with contradictions and complexities are often the most interesting. However, if you hate what comes up or it just won't work for what you need right now, feel free to roll again.

Sometimes the tables are best used to flesh out ideas you already have, filling in background or providing inspiration for more complex motivations. For example, if you're using or converting a real world society you can just skip the first two tables, unless you want to see what comes up and weave that into the story.

The first table decides the society's complexity at founding. Some societies are founded with a clear intent and purpose, but most are complex creatures, bringing together some mix of political, religious, mystical, economic, racial, and other aspects. The level of complexity (that is, the number of different aspects) is rolled on the first table, while the actual aspects are rolled on the second table, describing the individual facets of the society's goals and origins.

The second table describes what those aspects were. Once you get those results, it's a good option to stop and consider what the society looked like at its creation. This will give some insight into its myths and legends.

The third table describes the age of the society in both years and number of major events. If you already have something in mind, by all means pick something off the list.

The year lengths for this table are intentionally vague, instead defined in terms of society-altering events. Societies can

**TABLE 5-1: SOCIETY COMPLEXITY**

d12	Complexity
1	Single-Minded: One Aspect rolled on Table 5-2
2-5	Simple: Two Aspects rolled on Table 5-2
6-9	Complex: Three Aspects rolled on Table 5-2
10-11	Byzantine: Four Aspects rolled on Table 5-2
12	Created From Another Society: Roll on Table 5-4 to see what event tipped this off, then roll again on this table for number of Aspects

**TABLE 5-2: SOCIETY ASPECTS**

d12	Aspect
1	Centered Around a Bloodline
2	Club of the Affluent
3	Criminal
4	Displaced People/Philosophy
5	Government-Created
6	Hate Group
7	Mutual Protection
8	Mystical
9	New Religion
10	Revolutionary
11	Within Another Society
12	Within Established Religion

**TABLE 5-3: SOCIETY AGE**

d12	Age
1-3	Recent: Two Events rolled on Table 5-4
4-8	Generations: Three Events rolled on Table 5-4
9-10	Dynastic: Four Events rolled on Table 5-4
11	Ancient: Six Events rolled on Table 5-4
12	Eons: Eight Events rolled on Table 5-4

**TABLE 5-4: SOCIETY EVENTS**

d12	Event
1	Alliance
2	Crack Down
3	Disintegration
4	Division
5	Great Leader
6	New Ideas
7	Powerful Recruit
8	Revealed to Outsiders
9	Society War
10	Take Control of Another Society
11	Totally Concealed
12	Traitor

develop faster with better communication technology or in circumstances of unrest. On the other hand, there are also long, quiet periods in which societies grow and change little. Generation length also plays a role, with long-lived species often taking longer for their societies to develop. A “Recent” elven society, for example, might have been founded four hundred years ago.

Use the fourth table to determine the events referenced on the third table. Consider these as taking place one at a time, so there are no truly contradictory results. The events are fairly vague, however, so consider each of them in terms of the society itself and the region it’s found in to determine exactly what happened. For example, if the society forms an alliance, consider that society’s agenda and the agendas of other forces in the area to see who they might have allied with.

Once you’re done with the tables and have considered what the results mean, you should have a narrative of sorts for your society. You’ll know how it started, why it started, and all the major events between that point and the present day. The last of the events can be happening during your campaign, but it’s usually best to also mix in something from your campaign’s existing plot line.

### Description of Random Generation Terms

Sometimes its best to just roll on the charts and let the words form their own impressions in your mind. If you’re looking for a bit more guidance, though, each term used on the charts is discussed below with some examples on how they have appeared in the real world.

Terms from Table 5-1: Complexity

#### Single-Minded

*One Aspect rolled on Table 5-2*

A single-minded society can be truly terrifying. Its members don’t have anything to distract them and they pursue their goal with absolute fervor. They can be easy to predict or not, depending on their methods.

Single-minded societies run the risk of becoming very boring. They are, by definition, one-dimensional. They can be extremely effective, however, when cast against a background of more complex activity. A setting with several complex or byzantine societies and one single-minded society will make the single-minded society suddenly much more interesting.

Another interpretation of this result is that the society is huge and involved in everything, but has one common thread that flows through all its operations. This can mask the raw single-mindedness for a while and gives the PCs something to discover. Once they’ve discovered it, there’s not much else to the society’s agenda, so you should encourage the PCs to delve into its history or relations with other societies. Mossad is probably best cast as a single-minded society, with its one trait being government created. The Rosicrucians could also be described as a single-minded group involved only with the mystical.

#### Simple

*Two Aspects rolled on Table 5-2*

Simple societies are, as the name implies, fairly straightforward. They very rarely have internal divisions, but if they do, those divisions will tear the society apart. It can be very hard to find common ground with so few concerns. Simple societies run the risk of becoming bland more quickly than more complex societies, so be sure to put thought into both aspects of the society, how they interact and what the society does in the wider world.

Aum Shinrikyo is a good example of a simple society. It didn’t have much going on in the way of conflicting loyalties or other complexities. The easiest way to describe Aum from the chart would be a mystical new religion.

#### Complex

*Three Aspects rolled on Table 5-2*

Complex societies are fairly common and are usually the result of complicated circumstances surrounding their creation. Societies at this level can have major internal divisions, but it’s not terribly common. Most societies at this level usually just have fully-formed agendas rather than a few issues that they go after regardless of complications.

The Assassins could be considered a complex society, with mystical and revolutionary aspects, along with being formed within an existing religion. Another good example is the P2 Lodge, which is a society within another society, a club of the affluent, and criminal.

#### Byzantine

*Four Aspects rolled on Table 5-2*

A byzantine secret society is likely so convoluted that it has conflicting loyalties within itself or multiple factions. Some societies of this type are created by merging other societies, while others are simply too open to accepting new ideas or try to take on too many issues at once.

The Freemasons can be described in this way with mystical, revolutionary, club of the affluent, and mutual protection as its aspects. At first glance, revolutionary and club of the affluent conflict. Indeed, even within the society, there has been tension over that issue. However, it could just as easily mean that the affluent are trying to make a change in society for their own benefit or the benefit of the populace as a whole.

At other times, the society’s many interests line up into one whole. The Thule Society can be described as a byzantine society in this way, taking on traits of a hate group, a revolutionary society, a mystical society, and a club of the affluent. In this case, the affluent had lost much of their power and were seeking to regain it through revolution.

#### Created From Another Society

*Roll on Table 5-4 to see what event tipped this off, then roll again on this table for number of Aspects*

This sort of society can be especially interesting. It was created from another society by splitting off from it. It may be that the parent society divided or disintegrated, this being the simplest option.

It's also possible that the old society changed entirely after developing new ideas or taking control of another society. An alliance, great leader, or powerful recruit could have steered the society in a new direction, either making a new society or causing the old society's loyal members to leave and form their own branch. After a crack down, being revealed to outsiders, a society war, or a period where the original society is totally concealed, there is likely to be a major shift in tactics or leadership. A traitor could have founded the new society, destroyed the old one, or taken control of the old one and forced out the loyalists.

There are many more interpretations beyond these, but any major change or event can result in a new society being born. If you have some time, it may be interesting to generate the history of the old society as well, a secret of the better-learned members of the present society.

Many mystical societies are created from the ashes of other organizations of their type, such as the various factions of the Ordo Templi Orientis. Government agencies are also created in this way, as old organizations are destroyed to make room for new organizations, or branches are renamed and reorganized. Mossad and most other modern intelligence agencies were born in this way.

Terms from Table 5-2: Aspects

### Centered Around a Bloodline

Bloodlines hold a great deal of importance even in the modern day, and will likely continue to do so into the future. A society centered around a bloodline can be interested in that bloodline for any number of reasons. Perhaps all its members or all its leaders are descendents of that bloodline. The society might be interested in raising that bloodline to power or dragging it down. Some societies may simply be interested in finding the bloodline or proving that it exists.

Although the interplay of families and state are all very interesting and good fodder for a conspiracy game, bloodlines take on a totally different light in a fantasy game. The bloodline can very easily have mystical powers or be the offspring of a god or other extremely powerful being. Even in modern or science fiction settings, the bloodline could be important because of some special power or trait; it just fits exceptionally well in a fantasy game.

The Priory of Sion is probably the real-world society most directly centered around a bloodline. The Thule Society, or at least their descendants in Ahnenerbe, were interested in finding a pure bloodline from Thule (which they called the Holy Grail). Some conspiracy theorists say the Knights Templar and even the Freemasons are centered around the same bloodline the Priory of Sion protects.

### Club of the Affluent

Many secret societies go through a phase where they are a playground for the extremely wealthy. Some societies are created for that purpose (like the Bildebergers, P2 Lodge, and Trilateral Commission) while others simply turn out that way (like the Thule Society, the later Knights Templar, and some lodges of Freemasons).

Societies with this trait are more likely to be very powerful and able to exert control over large areas. They will, after all, have access to large amounts of influence and money through their members. A society that has taken over a region of the world through traditional means will probably acquire this trait rapidly if it didn't begin with it. The Assassins are a notable exception to this rule.

### Criminal

This society was created as part of organized crime. If this aspect shows up, it means that the society uses crime as a means of profit, instead of as a means towards its other goals. Many societies that aren't strictly criminal-for-profit are still involved in crimes.

Societies with this trait are likely to be extremely secretive until they become powerful enough to openly resist the authorities. They will also have access to large amounts of money, illegal arms, and street operatives as they grow in power. The Mafia, Triads, and Yakuza are good examples of different societies in this mold. The P2 Lodge can also fit for a slightly different take on the criminal society.

A criminal aspect paired with government-created can seem like a contradiction. However, the society can easily be a corrupt government agency or one assigned to pursuing criminal activities. The society can also be a government-sponsored criminal organization, like some believe the Yakuza to be.

### Displaced People/Philosophy

Displaced people often create secret societies to protect themselves and continue practicing their native beliefs without interference. Who exactly was displaced and why depends largely on the campaign, but will probably define what groups the society recruits from.

Societies of this type tend to be very close-knit and have a common bond that both goes outside and reinforces the society boundaries. Most societies with this aspect end when the group they represent is fully integrated into society. If the group is never integrated, the society is likely to be around for a long time.

The Tongs are examples of this sort of society, in both the community and criminal aspects. Many people have pointed to the Templars as a repository for displaced philosophy, accusing the knights of spreading Islamic or mystical teachings through Europe. Mossad can also easily be put into this category, representing an entire country made up of displaced people trying to carve out their place in a foreign region.

### **Government-Created**

Forged by the government, often as an intelligence agency or secret research project, a government-created secret society can hold great power. It can generally call on the power of its government in times of need, having extensive if not limitless funding and access to equipment outside the civilian domain.

When creating this society, consider why the government created the agency and what could have happened to it since its creation. Don't throw away the result because it doesn't immediately make sense. Perhaps the apocalyptic cult you were planning on is actually a government front to catch potential dissidents; a propaganda tool, led by powerful members of the government; or the results of an experiment run out of control.

Mossad is an obvious example of this sort of agency. MK-ULTRA, the NSA, and Majestic-12 are also all firmly in this aspect. The most common tools of this sort of agency are the Men in Black.

### **Hate Group**

Hate groups often have reason to keep themselves secret, at least from the authorities. Most hate groups, for whatever reason, pick one main enemy group and hate it the most, then continue to hate everyone else that isn't part of their culture. It's important to consider who the hate group's original members and enemy group were, as that will shape the society throughout its life.

If you need a friendly or neutral society, "hate group" can be a difficult aspect to work with. It's possible that the society has shaken its past or keeps its biases well-hidden. It's also an option to have it hate a group the party also hates, such as an opposing race or nation. A friendly hate group can make for an interesting dilemma when the party realizes why the group has been helping them. The Thule Society is obviously a hate group, but some other groups could fall into the category with a second look. Many criminal societies, although not technically hate groups, may consider members of other races to be inferior.

### **Mutual Protection**

All societies have some degree of mutual help and protection within the group, but this society makes it a major point. A society with this as part of its reason for existence will probably have powerful outside enemies to defend itself against or some agenda of strengthening its members. Truly benign societies with this aspect will simply help its members due to genuine concern.

The Freemasons are the prime example for this type of society. Small or even unconscious conspiracies, such as those inside companies or between members of the same collegiate social fraternity, also often fall into this category but usually aren't full-blown secret societies. The Skull and Bones is one example that definitely is.

### **Mystical**

It's uncommon for a secret society to have absolutely no rites or philosophy, but even fewer focus on the mystic as a goal in itself. These societies usually seek enlightenment or, in settings where

magic functions, incredible power. Many such societies will be called cults or religions even if they fall into neither category.

Aum Shinrikyo, the Freemasons, and the Thule Society are obvious examples of this type. Many interpretations of the Knights Templar and Assassins also put them in this category. Older philosophical texts, such as the Elysian mysteries, could be considered secret societies of this type, along with the Skoptsi, Rosicrucians, Ordo Templi Orientis, and others.

### **New Religion**

Many religions and sects begin as secret societies. A new religion in this sense is one that has removed itself far enough from current religions that neither the new nor the original are capable of making a connection. The religion probably has some fairly divergent ideas or an entirely new belief system.

New religions are often run by a charismatic leader in the form of a cult. Cults are typically cast as evil secret societies as they fit that role rather well. Their leaders are generally different to the point of seeming insane, and members follow orders from him or her without question.

Keep in mind, however, that the religion could just as easily be benevolent or help the PCs' cause, even if the group is a cult fanatically devoted to an insane leader. PCs, especially those fighting the established order, can find stalwart friends among new religions. It is worth considering, before you cast all cults and new religions in your game as villains, that most religions begin with a single charismatic leader claiming divine inspiration. Mixing in benevolent, mysterious religions with the more dangerous ones will also make your world and its secret societies seem more real to the players.

Aum Shinrikyo is a great example of a new religion. It's far enough from each mainstream religion it draws from that none of them would consider accepting it, and Asahara claims direct inspiration without the need for support from other religions.

### **Revolutionary**

The society was founded on ideals of social change and possibly violent revolution. Some fight for a new freedoms or personal power, while others may be trying to return to the old ways. Revolutions are actually one of the few times that secret societies appear in history texts as such, marking several of the high points of secret societies' power.

Two important decisions face you when using a revolutionary society. The first decision is what change the society wanted. The second is where they wanted that change to take place. "Why?" is also a note-worthy consideration, with the answer generally mixing moral and economic reasons.

The Freemasons served the role of a revolutionary society, though whether they were formed for that purpose or not is still unknown. The Thule Society was definitely a reactionary society, trying to change society to model mythical Thule. The Triads, Mafia, and several other criminal organizations are said to have originally been revolutionary societies as well.



**Within Another Society**

The society in this case is nested within another secret society which may or may not know of the inner society's existence. The nested society leeches off the other organization, recruiting from within its ranks, using its power structure, and usurping its resources. In this way, some secret societies can take over others much as they would take over mundane organizations. For some advice on handling these, refer to the section "Wheels within Wheels" in Chapter 2.

All the best examples of this sort of activity relate back to Freemasonry, with the P2 Lodge and Bavarian Illuminati standing out. The Ordo Templi Orientis was also founded partially within Freemasonry, although it incorporated other organizations as well. Some say the Knights Templar are now a secret organization within Freemasonry, along with the order depicted in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

**Within Established Religion**

Sometimes a new religious movement doesn't stray far enough to be disowned entirely by its parent. And sometimes religions create their own organizations for the purposes of charity, investigation, or war. Both of these fall under this category in that they're still technically part of a larger faith, however tenuous the link may be.

An organization of this type can usually call on the power of its parent and, in many situations, can get away with far more than a secular organization. As a rule, people are less likely to pry into sacred matters, especially if they are members of that religion.

The Knights Templar obviously fall into this category, or at least they did until their persecution. Some conspiracy theorists place the Mafia and the P2 Lodge here as tools of the Catholic Church as well. Of all the organizations here, the Knights of Malta are most certainly still in this category. The Assassins, on the other hand, began firmly in this aspect, moved to a new religion, and then moved back.

Terms from Table 5-3: Age

**Recent**

*Two Events rolled on Table 5-4*

This society was founded within living memory and may even still have its first leader. The group is probably still close to its original members and beliefs, although those beliefs are fairly malleable at this stage. Whatever event sparked the creation of the group, if it was ever public knowledge, will still be remembered by some individuals.

It's worth mentioning that societies of this type will often claim some link to the ancient past. Sometimes they claim to be part of a larger, ancient secret society. Other times they claim that they are founded on ancient ideals or their leader is part of some ancient bloodline.

Every order goes through this phase, obviously, but this is the time when societies tend to be more willing to make radical

changes. Aum Shinrikyo is an excellent example of this sort of order.

Being a recent creation doesn't necessarily preclude being powerful. The P2 Lodge is a good example of that, being powerful basically from the beginning and growing in power as it gathered more members.

**Generations**

*Three Events rolled on Table 5-4*

Societies in this group are still fairly recent. Members' parents or grandparents may have been members. The society won't have a long and colored history by this point. They will have some stories of older members and a sense of common past.

There will have been several changes in power, unless their leader has managed to cling to life for many years. Different leaders can take the order in different directions. Changes in philosophy are not as easy at this point as when the society is first founded, but a leader exerting pressure can change the underpinnings of the society. Action like that will usually create counter-groups within the society wanting to return to the old ways.

Mossad could be said to fall into this category. Its constant changes in leadership make it older than its years in society terms, since most societies tend to have one leader that controls the society until he's deposed or dies. The Thule Society would probably also fall into this age group if it still existed today.

**Dynastic**

*Four Events rolled on Table 5-4*

This group has been around long enough to settle in and detail out its belief systems and rituals. By this point in the cycle, most societies will have at least some branches in other locations or members that have come to great power. The society can be said to have a real history at this point, although they probably haven't bothered to write it down or review it in a scholarly manner.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn would fall neatly into this group if it were still around. Many other societies that would fall into this category use the passage of time as a cover for making more extravagant claims about their past. The Assassins were near the height of their power at this point, marking the level of control other societies can aspire to after a century.

**Ancient**

*Six Events rolled on Table 5-4*

This group has been around for all of recent history and a fair bit more than that. It has probably lost some connection with the original and has probably gone through several major changes. Some societies at this phase start to look back and catalogue their pasts, usually without much success. At this point, the necessity of lying about claims of antiquity fades, but it's usually continued for the sake of tradition.

The Freemasons are firmly in this category, as would be the Knights Templar if they have survived. Societies at this level tend to be rare in the extreme, having gone public, faded completely into obscurity, or been destroyed.

**Eons**

*Eight Events rolled on Table 5-4*

There is a certain point where the age of the society ceases to matter. A society of this age has passed that point. Societies tracing themselves back through hundreds of generations and major changes to the society can easily lose sight of the original objectives or even its origin. The average member probably only has a vague idea of where the society comes from.

A society this old has almost certainly made an attempt to control the world. Over a long enough time span, someone is bound to have tried. So consider what might have happened, as it might be the cause or effect of one of the events you roll.

This age category is mostly the realm of the most extreme conspiracy theorists. Some say the Freemasons and Rosicrucians can trace themselves back to ancient Egypt, putting them in this category. The Anunnaki and Greys, if they exist, would certainly fall into this category as well. Other races that have become secret societies for one reason or another are likely to fall into this age. Some races from fantasy games that might fall into this category include doppelgangers, intelligent undead, outsiders, dragons, and certain intelligent aberrations.

Terms from Table 5-4 Events

**Alliance**

The society has forged an alliance with another secret society or a powerful open organization. This alliance is certainly known to the leadership on both sides, but may not be known to the common members.

Obvious considerations for this situation are who the society allied with and the terms of the alliance. There were probably at least a few possibilities in the region at this point in the society's history. Consider each possible ally: does it match the society's views, and what can it offer the society? Additionally, what does the society have to offer its ally?

Perhaps the most important consideration, however, is how long the alliance survives. If there was a falling out, it likely led to some bitterness, providing an enemy or rival. If the alliance survived, the society is that much more powerful. An example of this is the NSA's ECHELON project, which is largely controlled by an alliance between the NSA and similar agencies in other English-speaking allied nations. The Ordo Templi Orientis was formed out of an alliance of the organizations its founder controlled. The Assassins and the Knights Templar had enough relations so that the Assassins paid yearly tribute, but a deeper alliance was often suspected.

**Crack Down**

Some public organization, most likely the local government, has discovered the society and declared it a threat. The usual process

is to legally ban the organization and arrest known members. Sometimes these steps are taken in the opposite order. After that, if the society survives, it will sink underground and keep itself well-hidden.

Another possibility is mob justice or an attack by a small public group (like a band of PCs). In that case, it's far more likely that members will be killed and kill in return. A society targeted by these means will become more insular and defensive. Members may start stockpiling weapons or even perform preemptive strikes against groups they fear may attack them in the future.

The fall of the Knights Templar represents the epic side of this event, while other societies like the Bavarian Illuminati and P2 have been dismantled by governments. Most criminal organizations have been subject to a crack down at one point or another. Even the Thule Society, powerful as it was, was being actively hunted during the socialist government of Munich, and with good reason.

**Disintegration**

The society comes apart at the seams. Some major shake-up or philosophical dispute has resulted in dozens, if not hundreds of splinter organizations, some with only a few members. Although the society as a cohesive unit will probably not survive an event like this, individual splinters may do so.

Given time, the society may reunite under a new powerful leader or create a network of mutual alliances. In the beginning, though, tensions are likely to run high and many parts of the main organization will likely be revealed to the public, especially as they attempt to gain new members.

This event is one way for a powerful secret organization to exist within a semi-public organization like the Freemasons. After the disintegration, people are far less likely to look for truly secret organizations that are similar to the newly open societies. The Ordo Templi Orientis provides a great example of this. The Freemasons look as though they went through this process, although they may never have had the hidden internal society. The history that the Triads have laid out for themselves implies that this sort of shake-up has occurred, leading to the many Triads of today.

**Division**

The society splits into two or three pieces. In many ways, this can be more traumatic for the organization than an out-and-out disintegration and is likely to create hard feelings or lasting rivalries. A very powerful organization divided can be a great storyline point, and most societies split at some point or another.

Splits like this usually occur because of leadership disputes or, more rarely, philosophical differences. Whereas disintegration occurs due to a lack of central authority, divisions usually come about because there are several central authorities.

Most real-world secret societies have divided at one point or another, usually ending with one or both groups making some slight name change and moving on with business. The Grand

Lodge vs. Grand Orient division in the Freemasons could fall under this category, a conflict revolving largely around the admission of atheists.

### Great Leader

A powerful new voice rose in the ranks, calling for change in the society and motivating its members to new heights. This could be a time of great change or returning to the old ways. It's almost always a time of expansion and new power. If the society is still run by its first leader, that leader may have suddenly had a revelation leading to her newfound fervor. Or she could have simply improved her leadership skills over time.

Hasan II of the Assassins is an example of a leader of this type. Several Mossad heads also definitely fall into this category, taking the agency in different directions and becoming near-legends in their own right.

### New Ideas

A new set of beliefs has been introduced to the society, probably from the outside or a very insightful member. The society is likely to change direction at this point, or at least appear rather different to those studying it. Individuals studying the society's past will probably notice the change in philosophy, but the reason the change came about may not be apparent.

If you're having trouble coming up with what sort of ideas may have been introduced, look at the nearby regions and ask if any of them have interesting ideas. If not, you can always take a roll at Table 5-2 and see if that gives any inspiration.

The Knights Templar are said to have taken ideas from their contact with the Assassins and other Islamic organizations. The Freemasons have gone through several periods in which they've taken in and integrated new ideas. Virtually every society gets new ideas at some point, as it's one of the few ways societies change their basic rituals and philosophy.

### Powerful Recruit

At this point in its history, the society recruited some sort of very important individual. In most cases, it's a political or military leader that provides other recruits in his field and gives the society a good recruiting tool years down the road.

Powerful recruits aren't limited to those with raw political power. Authors, artists, and poets can serve to spread the society's message, to say nothing of media barons. Recruits with huge amounts of raw wealth are always welcome and can offer access to some of the same circles. In some settings, recruits with magical potential or from certain bloodlines could be even more important.

The Templars' history is filled with powerful recruits, and the Freemasons aren't far behind. The P2 Lodge, specifically, provides a good example of how a handful of powerful recruits can recruit other powerful members in turn. Aum Shinrikyo had several prime recruits in the form of promising or even well-respected scientists. Even the Skoptsi recruited a woman at the ear of the tsar, which resulted in the group's access to many noble houses.

### Revealed to Outsiders

The society has been revealed in some exceptionally public manner. It may be intentional, like the Rosicrucian manuscripts, or unintentional, like the Skull and Bones being featured very negatively in a major movie. Either way, the society isn't likely to completely escape public notice without faking its own destruction or actually being destroyed.

Even after being revealed, many societies are able to keep their actual activities and even membership secret. However, some members of the public will always be watching. After the society has been revealed, public interest will ebb and flow with the occasional shocking new rumor, action, book, or news coverage bringing the society into the light again. If a society appears in this book, it was obviously revealed to outsiders at some point. Some societies never really bothered to conceal their existence, like the Assassins, whereas others just didn't do a particularly thorough job, such as the Thule Society. Some societies remained secret for many years before the first revelations and continued to operate for many years after the revelation, so this event is by no means a death knell.

### Society War

This secret society has become embroiled in a major conflict with another society. Like real wars, it probably involves conflict over resources, but may also play into ideology. Some society wars, usually those fought between criminal societies, can spill into the public eye, but most societies would rather that didn't happen. More open society wars are sometimes fought alongside mundane wars between countries.

Society wars are a fantastic plot point in a conspiracy game. It's sometimes not even apparent what originally tipped the war off, but it's rare for societies or their members to back down once things start moving. However, most societies will stop short of revealing themselves or their opponents. Revealing another society is not only exceptionally cruel, it's also fairly suicidal, as the other society probably has enough evidence to reveal its attacker in turn.

This sort of thing happens all the time between criminal organizations, but examples are a bit more scarce for other secret societies. The Thule Society sought to destroy Freemasonry, although they obviously failed in the long run. During the crusades, although the Knights Templar weren't a properly secret society, they were involved in conflict with the Assassins. It's also said that during World War II, certain British societies such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were involved in a mystical war with the Ahnenerbe. Many of the Mossad's operations against terrorist organizations could also be considered society wars. Even the newcomer Aum Shinrikyo made war on other new religions in Japan.

### Take Control of Another Society

One of the easiest ways for a society to grow is by absorbing another society. Most often, a member of one society becomes the leader of another society. This can happen due to chance, but more often is the result of one society forcibly taking over the other. This is not as hard as it would seem, as powerful secret society members often belong to multiple societies.

Typically the conquered society's new leader will cement control by appointing co-conspirators to positions of power. If this cycle continues, the control can stretch on for generations. The main threat at this point is lower-ranking members of the controlled society discovering that they're being manipulated.

Freemasons lead many companies and other secret societies, making it a possibility that those organizations are controlled by a larger Masonic conspiracy. The Thule Society controlled several other anti-Semitic organizations through its members.

### **Totally Concealed**

This society went through a period where it hid itself completely from the public, drawing members from certain families or not recruiting at all. This event is useful when pulling societies from the distant past, explaining how certain organizations have survived their apparent destructions.

During periods like this, the society is likely to develop its philosophy more carefully and identify possible inconsistencies. The society will also wane in strength, not interacting with the outside world enough to maintain its old power. Membership will also decline.

Some societies may be able to gather certain, powerful new members to support their declining power. The best way for them to do this is probably to focus on certain families, using their collective power to maintain control over the long run and perhaps even grow in strength.

If the Knights Templar or Thule Society existed today, they'd be superb examples of this event extended over many years. The Bavarian Illuminati are also used as an example of this technique, with some theorists saying that the Illuminati exist to the present day. The Rosicrucians, if they existed in the first place, only ever left this state of concealment to publish their manuscripts. The best example of this effect, however, is the Assassins. They went through several periods of near-total concealment where they escaped public notice, and appeared many years after their destruction under the leadership of Aga Khan.

### **Traitor**

Societies often have members that aren't entirely honest with their masters. It's less common that a member actively betrays the society to the authorities or another society. Some traitors have revealed the society to the public through books, and others have split off to form their own societies.

A complete betrayal is likely to notably sting the society. A higher paranoia within the society is likely to cause problems for years to come with secret plans, questioning of authority, and suspicion of other members. Some societies handle betrayal better, punishing the traitor in some way and using the event as a learning tool for initiates.

Consider what rank the traitor was and what he did. A high-ranking traitor can deal a huge amount of damage, whereas a lower ranked one will likely just explain the society's rituals to the public or turn himself over to the police.

Many organizations have had their rites brought to the public as the result of traitors. Other organizations, like Aum, have had members bring them to police attention, although in many cases for good reason. Aleister Crowley could be thought to have betrayed the Ordo Templi Orientis, having seized control rather than accepting the reins of power. The origin story of the Freemasons involves three traitors killing the Master Mason, forcing the creation of Freemasonry.

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