

THE DEMON SEED COLLECTION



a player supplement for

DEMON

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THE DEMON SEED COLLECTION



Bill Bridges, Nathan Easton, Nathan Knaack

CREDITS

Authors: Bill Bridges, Nathan Easton, Nathan Knaack

Developer: Rose Bailey

Consulting Developer: Ryan Owens

Artist: Borja Puig Linares

Art Director & Designer: Michael Chaney

Creative Director: Richard Thomas

SPECIAL THANKS

Paul Ettin and Travis Dow for local city help.

DEDICATION

To Sally Voght. You're still missed.



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SEEDS

THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

Istanbul, Republic of Turkey

Due to its unique geographical position, Istanbul has held the East and West together for almost three thousand years and been the jewel of several empires in that time. It's the central conduit of the ancient world, a bridge along the Silk Road, and in the modern era, one of the busiest waterways on the planet.

Though its importance has waned, the city remains an important component of the Machine. Few regions have as much Infrastructure, built in layer upon layer over the millennia but if there's one advantage demons have there, it's that the foundation is crumbling. Slipping between the falling stones and angelic sentries, demons traverse the inter-dimensional nexus of Istanbul, the middle of everywhere.

SUB ROSA

The God-Machine simply could not let two of the largest human populations, Europe and Asia, connect into one world-spanning system without exerting its oversight. To that end, it had a presence in Byzantium even before it was Constantinople. And so it was, that incredible, horrifying beings from beyond their wildest nightmares appeared to the indigenous Greeks, demanding they begin preparations for a future they would not see.

After the Roman Empire relocated their capital to the city, the influx of population, influence, and wealth ushered in a wave of demonic rebellion. Centuries' worth of Unchained chiseled away at the Infrastructure they saw as crucial to the God-Machine's control, but were driven out when the city fell to the Turks. Throughout its history, the Machine has exploited each of the events during which the city changed hands as mass cleansings of cover identities; the God-Machine's predictable reaction to an overabundance of the Unchained.

In more recent history, Istanbul has served as a silent battleground between the God-Machine's dedicated curators and Agencies hell-bent on tearing it asunder. Though mortals rarely witness the physical battles or power shifts of the ongoing conflict, they suffer dearly whenever the internal workings of the Machine are interrupted, manifesting in the form of everything from severe weather to rare earthquakes. To the demons responsible, this is regarded as collateral damage on the way to bringing the whole system down.

A target of specific, repeated attacks is the Bosphorus Bridge, the primary route across the strait. Originally scheduled to open on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey, a clever ring of demons was able to subvert construction efforts to postpone the ceremony by one day, which was just enough to distract the God-Machine's loyalists from their true agenda. Whatever the goal of that plan was, it remains, as that Agency has long since dissolved. When the consequences of that act unravel, it's going to shake the foundations, maybe literally, as it has often in the past. The Machine has been a day behind for the last 40 years and aches to reconcile the gap in its schedule.

Widespread protests in the early twenty-first century have provided the Unchained with a powerful new advantage in their struggle. With so many moving parts to keep track of, it's much easier for a cautious demon to sidestep patrols, contact sympathizers, and carry out operations against the God-Machine.

AGENDAS

Inquisitors: The weight of the God-Machine's plans for Istanbul may be diminishing as the centuries roll by, but the residual effects of all those plots has left a virtual record for those clever enough to read it, like rings on a great oak tree. Inquisitors are the forensic historians of the city, deducing future initiatives based on their findings and using that knowledge as currency with other demons. Of particular interest to them is the exploration and documentation of the folded space in and around the Golden Gate, where legends foretell that Constantine XI Palaiologos waits to be reanimated by angels for some unknown purpose.

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Integrators: It's never too late to go back, and one is never too far gone to make amends. At least that's what the Integrators hope for when they converge on Istanbul, which they see as a magnet of sorts, one of the oldest and most established of the God-Machine's interfaces. But they are smarter than mere moths wandering reflexively into the flames; they maintain their anonymity by leaning on each other in small rings until they're able to negotiate amicable reintegration into the clockwork. They believe the God-Machine will only welcome them back into the system if they strive to repair its weathered and worn structure, which is an abnormally heroic task in Istanbul. Clustered around Internet cafes in packs, they scour the information network for opportunities, converging on hotspots of demonic activity like vigilante emergency responders.

Saboteurs: Digging through the strata of Istanbul's subcultures, Saboteurs are the primary source of friction in the city. They leap from the shifting shadows and faceless crowds to strike blows against the weakest points of its Infrastructure, then sink back into obscurity with the aid of a group called the Sodalitas Nea Roma, which serves as sponsor and benefactor for Saboteur operations in exchange for seemingly innocuous boons. Though it primarily employs mortals, the SNR is rumored to be led by a cabal of seers who share the demons' hatred of the strict Machine.

Tempters: The Tempters of Istanbul are usually in the Fatih or Beyoğlu districts, where they occasionally congregate to discuss their schemes in the back rooms of subterranean nightclubs or the upper floors of archaic stone buildings converted into bars. Relying on one another for perpetuation of Cover identities and access to escape routes when needed, their insular union has been surprisingly successful at warding off angelic reprisal. Meanwhile, they exploit their position of relative authority in the city to serve as organizers for other Agendas, even the Integrators, whom they try to steer toward harmless fulfillment of their goals rather than letting them interfere with the clandestine machinations of the Inquisitors and Saboteurs.

FACtIONS

Sodalitas Nea Roma: The New Rome Brotherhood is one of the oldest and most established underground groups in Istanbul. Demons working on their behalf have yet to reach the depths of their resources, financial or otherwise. Whoever is actually in charge works almost exclusively through human connections, using ordinary people to provide assistance, offer contracts, and collect information. Their primary goals seem to align with the more rebellious of the Unchained: stop the Machine, or at least slow it down by any means possible. They regard the other factions in the city not as rivals or competitors, but as a diverse selection of tools at their disposal. They've worked with each of them in the past and always leave the door open to do so again in the future.

The Runners: If getting weapons and vital information across the strait is challenging for mortal groups contending

with international law, it's even riskier when dealing with all of that plus the God-Machine's watchful agents. The Runners are a loose-knit band of daring couriers who thrive on adrenaline as they compete amongst each other for the riskiest contracts. They rarely refuse a job and have no qualms about which faction pays the fare, though if something is beyond their capacity, they've been known to reach out to the demon community for mercenary assistance. It's said that the average lifespan of a capable Runner is nine missions, which is usually enough to accumulate the wealth needed to retire into a life of comfort and, with any luck, anonymity.

Soul Providers: Just as the best way to get illegal commodities through customs is to disassemble them into component parts, the best way to transport targeted individuals through the God-Machine's territory is to separate the soul from the body and move each as a separate entity. The Soul Providers use the Underground to get people into and out of the city, but their services come at a terrible price: customers must be willing to have their souls torn from their physical bodies, and then have each one paired up with those of one or more strangers undergoing the same transition. The demons who run the Providers promise nothing more than sorting everyone out once they reach their destination, though the journey itself can take days or weeks, during which time, travelers must endure the otherworldly hazards involved. As their activities are always counter to the maneuverings of the God-Machine, the Providers are a paranoid lot, only trusting members of other factions when they have no other options.

The Light: What many demons have misinterpreted as the light of truth or wisdom, flocking to this Agency in hopes of gleaning some deeper understanding of their plight or uncovering information that could aid them in their rebellion, is actually the light at the end of the tunnel, in the literal sense. The demons who founded and continue to drive The Light are some of the most cunning Integrators in the world. Those who seek entrance into their cult face challenges seemingly designed to weed out the weak and undetermined, but these trials are nothing more than a smokescreen to protect the Agency's true goal: recapturing fallen angels. By the time applicants realize the Agency is compromised, it's usually far too late to escape.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

Emre Balci: Running an escort service to the Unchained might not seem like the best way to keep a low profile, as the necessity of creating and maintaining contacts tends to invite the attention of the God-Machine's agents, but Emre Balci seems to not only thrive, but revel in his status. Anyone who meets him in person, which is a surprisingly large demographic, is instantly aware of his uncanny ability to discern truth from lies, honest inquiries from underhanded subterfuge. Everyone has a different story of their experience, too; some describe him as a well-dressed, middle-aged Arab, while others swear he prefers casual attire and has a more Mediterranean complexion. While this is old hat for demons, it does keep mortal authorities chasing their own tails.

Varda Ayda: No one knows much about who she is or why she does what she does, but one thing is certain: when a demon is reckless or careless with his behavior, he can expect a visit from Varda Ayda. Ruthless, devious, and direct, she waits until the offending individual is at his most vulnerable, alone and afraid, before striking quickly and decisively. The few who have survived encounters with Varda paint the picture of a tall, thin Turk with tightly-spun black hair and pupils that are constantly dilated. Though she prefers to dispatch her targets with a simple kitchen knife, she has been known to make use of everything from assault rifles to sabotaged automobiles in her assassinations.

Spiridon Radomir: A visit to Molotov's will often begin with Spiridon Radomir introducing himself to any Unchained demon he doesn't recognize. While such an innocuous act might start with a simple drink, it could easily end with an invitation to a night out with the rest of the Tempters who frequent the nightlife district. Spiridon himself is so rarely seen during the day that a few demons like to speculate he might be a vampire, though most believe he's merely human.

LOCATIONS

The Golden Gate: Between the worn stone blocks of this sagging ruin, the cracks in the universe are beginning to show, manifesting as innumerable unintentional folds in space and time. The God-Machine is fully aware that the Gate is the weakest point in its Infrastructure in Istanbul, so the area is under constant surveillance by an angelic sentry. Getting through the Golden Gate requires equal parts ingenuity and recklessness, but the rewards can be great, as the corridors hidden throughout the structure lead to some of the Machine's most vulnerable points. The building itself is a probability a matrix, the point where all of the city's possible pasts and futures intersect, allowing brave visitors to glean hints of the city's history and destiny. Inquisitors often dare the Gate, continuing their perpetual search for Constantine XI Palaiologos among the twisting not-places.

Molotov's: On the main western peninsula of the city, in the heart of the nightlife district, there's a little restaurant accessible down a narrow pre-industrial street. A filthy street lamp shows the way around the corner, over aged cobblestones, leading to a thick wooden door secured by wide iron hinges. This is Molotov's, a speakeasy ostensibly run by locals rebelling against Istanbul's liquor laws. In reality, the politics clouding the issue are a smokescreen that distracts attention from the comings and goings of those who share the common goal of sabotaging the God-Machine. Newcomers are only allowed as far as the front room, though repeated visits and interactions with the establishment's regulars can earn them enough trust to be admitted to the back chambers, where interactions take on a much more serious tone.

The Network: A maze of tunnels twist and turn under the city, zigzagging through the substrata like a giant ant colony. Whoever first built these confusing hallways and massive chambers remains unknown, though they have been used

by everyone from crusaders on their way back from the Holy Land to refugees fleeing Europe during World War II. More recently, they have been occupied by protestors and refugees from the Middle East. Amid all this confusion, demons enjoy natural cover, like jungle cats prowling below tropical foliage. They aren't the only dangerous things down there either; a roving pack of cryptid dogs has grown into a significant threat over the last century, moving with eerie synchronicity and acting as though they share a hive mind.

SEED: DO UNTIL DEATH

The tactical layout of a chessboard isn't just a matter of where the pieces *are*, but of all the potential positions they *could* occupy on subsequent turns. While humans and demons alike struggle to predict and adapt to these movements, the God-Machine does not play dice. Seventeen years ago, a sequence of events was supposed to unfold that required a mobster to make a split second decision while overcome with grief, but the trigger was never completed. For seventeen years, the angel responsible has been caught in an infinite loop, but something is about to change that could shake the already unstable foundations of Istanbul.

ELEMENTS

At its heart, Do Until Death is a mystery about the space between heredity and consequence, inviting curious demons to delve into the history of the Tarkhan family. Haluk Tarkhan, a powerful mob boss in the region, has been a key player in local politics, extortion, and drugs for decades, but was never supposed to be. Something went wrong all those years ago, something that's left the angel responsible for toppling his organization caught in a recursive loop.

As they dig into the Tarkhan family tree, the characters begin to unravel a forgotten conspiracy from the last generation, one that's about to boil to the surface. During their investigation, it becomes obvious that forces beyond just the God-Machine are at work; it seems everyone has a vested interest in keeping the situation unresolved. Tarkhan family members are tight-lipped and most everyone else fears the reprisals of their vengeful patriarch.

Another key component of Do Until Death is the malleable time constraint. Whatever is about to happen, it's obviously tied to Suna Tarkhan giving birth to her daughter, and events build rapidly to that conclusion, though the event could happen anywhere from one to three weeks after the demons are first introduced. As such, no one can be exactly sure when time will be up, so the key actors are always in a desperate hurry.

The Truth: Seventeen years ago, Haluk Tarkhan solidified his power base in Istanbul by murdering his main rival, Ozan Acar, along with most of his family. However, Haluk couldn't bring himself to kill Ozan's newborn daughter, Zehra, and instead adopted and raised her as his own.

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The God-Machine, for reasons unknown, needed Haluk's reign of power to end shortly thereafter, so it sent Mr. Line to arrange his fall. After murdering his wife and daughter, Haluk would have flown into a grief-fueled rage and killed his lieutenant, who was in fact an undercover police officer. The resulting investigation would have put Haluk in prison for the rest of his life.

However, at the very moment Mr. Line was supposed to act, he hesitated. He was programmed to kill Haluk's daughter, but the child with him wasn't his. Haluk had no daughter, so the angel was caught in a loop, reliving the same day over and over again. Now that Haluk and his new wife have a biological daughter on the way, though, Mr. Line is about to complete his mission, though the potential consequences have changed dramatically in the last seventeen years.

INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

Local demons are at least tangentially familiar with the Tarkhan family, as their name comes up often in political conversations. Some of the characters might even have worked for or against them in their illicit activities, forming attachments or just using them as cover. Pulling them into the plot could be as easy as Mr. Patch approaching them with an irresistible offer in exchange for their help.

Foreigners are far less familiar with the Tarkhans, but their ignorance doesn't survive long after they visit Molotov's and meet Spiridon Radomir, who offers to introduce them to Mr. Patch. He finds a roundabout way of explaining that quick integration into the city's tangled web of relationships will be in their best interests, helping them establish the cover and connections needed to survive. Mr. Patch, he insists, is one of the few exiles who can be trusted.

BLUEPRINTS

The events that unfold during *Do Until Death* tie directly into the pregnancy of Suna Tarkhan, whose unborn daughter is the key to finally fulfilling or negating the God-Machine's purpose for Mr. Line. Though he hasn't connected all the dots yet, Mr. Patch knows Mr. Line has an unfinished assignment that's somehow connected to the Tarkhan family, but he's been unable to get close enough to them to fill in the blanks. However, Spiridon owes him a big favor for some unrevealed experience they share in the past; he's leveraged that favor to get the Tempter demon to recruit a ring of fellow Unchained to investigate the matter.

The story kicks off when Mr. Patch approaches Spiridon Radomir, who then begins his search for a ring of demons well-suited for the investigation. If the characters are predominately locals, he chooses them because of their knowledge of the city and familiarity with its factions and personalities. If the characters are foreigners, he decides to recruit them because all of the city's usual antagonists will be caught off guard by new faces.

Spiridon's offer should be tailored to fit the desires of the specific demons in the chronicle, based on their agenda. Spiridon could promise Inquisitors a detailed account of the latest and most thorough study of the pocket dimensions throughout the Golden Gate, maybe even the chance to accompany the next expedition into a recently discovered portal. Integrators will probably jump at the chance to help Mr. Patch repair the situation, but if they need more convincing, Spiridon will remind them that their decisions could shape the future of the city, affecting some of the oldest Infrastructure in the world. A Saboteur might sign on for exactly the opposite reason and nothing more, though skeptical soldiers could be tempted with offers of introductions and good words put in with the Sodalitas Nea Roma. Of all the Agendas, the Tempters should be the easiest to enthrall. Istanbul is a city of luxury and wonder, a place where any self-respecting Tempter could experience anything from a single night of light revelry to an extended campaign of unmitigated hedonism.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Unlike newer centers of modern civilization, places like New York and Shanghai, the Infrastructure of Istanbul is just the latest layer of generation upon generation of the Machine's engineering. Much of it relies on older systems that are worn down and rusty.

One of the most glaring errors in the God-Machine's architecture is the Bosphorus Bridge itself, or rather the gaps in its disguise. Those who have seen behind the curtain immediately notice that the bridge's reflection in the water reveals its underside doesn't look like the substructure of a bridge. Where there should be supports, struts, and crossbeams, there are instead twisting camshafts and undulating pistons, gigantic machinery struggling to remain concealed from one world even as it labors to keep its two halves shackled to one another. All of this is difficult to see, even for those who know where to look. Like piercing an optical illusion, it requires continuous effort. It is especially challenging for anyone attempting to get into that machinery, as they must leap from the guard rails and maintain their focus the entire way down, across the reflective barrier, and all the way back up. Due to the sleepless angels who vigilantly defend the bridge, crossing over often requires such a leap of faith in one direction or another to bypass their checkpoints.

The city's ailing structure manifests in more subtle ways too, such as the case of the East Istanbul Regional Customs Office, which not only isn't an actual branch location of any government agency, but also doesn't show up on any map, physical or electronic. Nonetheless, there it stands, its stones as weathered and worn as any others in the area, looking as though it's been there as long as the road before it. Most people wouldn't give it a second look when walking by; indeed, powerful deterrents are in place to ensure that most people can't give it a second look. Inside, a tight-knit cabal of brainwashed cultists toil night and day, stopping only long enough

to eat and sleep, continuously scraping away at painted murals covering the inside walls of the building, which rematerialize every sunrise. For the brief period during every morning when they're visible and recognizable, these works of classical art depict images of a woman holding a baby wrapped in blood-stained bandages; a man lies at their feet, his wounds exposed. If disturbed, the cultists fight to the death, only to be replaced in a day or two by freshly-shaved converts.

METHODS

Cool Heads Prevail: A crowd of protesters can often be helpful masking demonic activity, but in situations where it is more of a hindrance, such as when it causes excess traffic on already crowded roads, this Merit helps it disperse. Protesting crowds are considered to have Composure 4 for the purposes of this Embed, though it can affect an entire street, intersection, or small park when used.

Like I Built It: Activating this power when in or around the Golden Gate has two interesting effects. Immediately upon using the Embed, the character becomes Spooked. After that Condition is resolved, however, the character may freely navigate the substructure without further rolls.

Homogenous Memory: When attempting to affect the memory of a crowd, targets will always assume either the government or protesters (whoever's seen as the greater danger by the crowd) was responsible for any egregious action. For example, if one character punches another, then tries to convince a crowd of angry dissidents that the wounded target earned his black eye due to his own clumsiness, the protesters will instead assume that the policemen sitting in a nearby patrol car were responsible.

Eavesdrop: Any attempt to use this Embed fills the character's head with a cacophonous thunder of grinding machinery. She must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to avoid becoming Shaken.

Parkour: Over the years, the growth of Istanbul has come in spurts, with various styles of architecture being built right over the previous era's structures. This sporadic, uneven expansion has produced a cityscape optimized for free running. All bonuses granted by this Merit are treated as though the character had one additional dot, though no new abilities are granted.

Iron Will: Characters with this Merit need not succeed at any rolls to cross over to the Bosphorus Bridge's other side, which usually requires Resolve + Investigation.

Medium: Istanbul is so old and its history so full of conflict that mediums find it almost unbearable without steeling themselves against the overflow of negative resonance. Characters with this Merit may experience its drawback up to three times per game session.

Academics: Visiting any of the city's libraries and conducting research into the city's history is much easier than it would be in a city whose Infrastructure was better main-

tained, though it can attract more attention when unsuccessful. Academics rolls receive a +1 bonus, but a dramatic failure alerts Varda Ayda, who arrives at the location within minutes. Though she is not immediately aware of the offending demon's identity, she knows which library was used and what subject was studied.

ESCALATION

Without player intervention, Do Until Death will unfold as follows: Mr. Patch discovers that Mr. Line has an unresolved objective and sees it as his chance to get back into the God-Machine. He contacts Spiridon Radomir for assistance, calling in a favor owed. Spiridon hires a small team of local demon mercenaries, but they are unable to discover the angel's motives. Two weeks later, Mr. Line senses that Suna Tarkhan has given birth and arranges for the train he occupies to collide with her car on the way home from the hospital, killing her and her newborn daughter.

When Spiridon realizes that a capable new ring of demons is operating in the city, he actively seeks to introduce himself and recruit them. This scene could play out in several ways, from a quick negotiation to an all-night bender, with the socialite Tempter dragging the group from one bar to the next, taking every opportunity to show off his vast array of connections.

Spiridon arranges a meeting with Mr. Patch, which takes place the following day in the underground. On their way to their destination, the roving pack of cryptid dogs attacks the characters while on their routine patrol of the city. These are Varda Ayda's hunting dogs, created specifically to scour the streets for demons. Always wet, their fur shines like oil in water. Whether they've happened upon the characters by chance or because Varda is actively hunting them remains unclear. If it looks like they might not survive the encounter, Mr. Patch arrives just in time to turn the tide. When the danger has passed, the Exile will outline the situation: he wants to resolve Mr. Line's obligations in order to see him returned to the God-Machine, along with himself once the task is complete and he regains its trust. In his eyes, this is a mutually beneficial situation, though he rationalizes it for any characters who remain uncooperative. All he knows is that Mr. Line is somewhere on the Istanbul Metro and that his mission has something to do with the Tarkhan family.

The investigation could start in one of two locations. A savvy ear to the ground to get a read on local events reveals unusual activity aboard the Istanbul Metro, where Mr. Line refuses to answer any inquiries or even recognize the demons for who they are; he is clearly waiting for something to happen and has been for years. Across the strait sits the Tarkhan compound, diligently guarded and under constant surveillance; but access to its interior reveals details about the family, such as its illegal activities, existence of a 17-year-old daughter with little resemblance to her father, and that his new wife, Suna Tarkhan, is only weeks away from giving birth.

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Determining what Mr. Line is actually supposed to do, though, requires deeper study into the city's history. Any demon can tell that he is at least a generation old and his form seems ill suited for twenty-first century life, but understanding the extent of his disconnect entails the characters explore all of the real and potential histories of the city available within the Golden Gate. They must find a way into the building, which is heavily guarded, then navigate its labyrinthine passages to find a snapshot of what was supposed to happen seventeen years prior.

Whether they're tracking down leads, escaping blood-thirsty pursuit, or hastening toward denouement, sooner or later the characters must cross the Bosphorus Bridge. Doing so while escaping the notice of the angelic sentries posted there requires a feat of careful espionage; failure could result in anything from a simple firefight to an all-out battle that could severely damage the demons' Covers.

At some point, the characters realize that Mr. Line intends to kill Suna Tarkhan and her baby, and if they choose to intervene, must race across the city to stop him. Under normal traffic conditions, this would already be a herculean task. When the streets are packed with angry protesters, it's even more challenging, with or without the group being pursued by hunter angels from the Golden Gate, the Bosphorus Bridge, or Varda Ayda.

Once aboard the Metro, the characters find that Mr. Patch has arrived there as well. Maybe he conducted his own investigation, hired a backup group of demons, or has been shadowing the characters the entire time. However it happened, he's there and has decided to let Mr. Line kill the Tarkhan family. If the characters have other ideas, he immediately becomes hostile. Mr. Line could be overcome with physical violence as well, but his fragile mental state, having deteriorated over the years, makes him just as vulnerable to a convincing argument.

UP NEXT

The Affable Mr. Line: If the characters stop Mr. Line from killing the Tarkhan family without destroying him, he will Fall and lose the previous seventeen years of his memory. Thereafter, he regards them as allies who helped him break free from the God-Machine.

Matriarch Tarkhan: If Haluk is killed but Suna survives, she assumes control over the family's criminal empire and runs it with an iron fist, calling on the characters from time to time. If her baby also survives, she becomes a loyal contact in the region.

Constantine Stirs: If the characters are too curious or reckless during their time within the Golden Gate, they may encounter Constantine XI Palaiologos, an incredibly powerful angel from another era. This could result in anything from a brush with the divine to a painful disaster for the characters depending on how they approach such a potent entity.

The Hunt: If the characters arouse Varda Ayda's attention, but she is unable to track them down while they're in the city, they could encounter her at a later date anywhere in the world.

Emre Balci's Payment: Emre is a little short on available escorts. If the characters used his services and promised to repay him with a favor, he asks them to be escorts for one night to an important client, who turns out to be a hunter angel infiltrating Sodalitas Nea Roma.

THE RAZOR LABYRINTH

Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Baltimore is a city fractured by violent crime, poverty, and residents simply fleeing. Wide swaths of virtually abandoned urban landscape sprawl depressingly, broken up only by a multitude of small but vibrant neighborhoods. "Balmer" is a place where people simply disappear, never to be seen again. Conversely, it's a city in a state of rapid economic growth. Baltimore is home to Johns Hopkins University, and nearly a quarter of the city's jobs are in STEM fields.

The Machine is engaged in a phase of rapid consolidation within Baltimore, deploying experimental programs to more efficiently identify and eliminate Unchained influence. Some have already succeeded, and every pre-existing Agency in the city was shattered in the last six months. No one knows for certain how the angels hit them so thoroughly, and the most common assumption is massive betrayal. Complicating things even further, angels are in league with the city government's efforts to bring in new tech and medically oriented businesses. All new growth should be suspect, and a target for infiltration.

SUB ROSA

For the past hundred years, the Machine has used Baltimore as its experiment-ground and, to a lesser extent, its trash heap. Here demons can find copious amounts of abandoned infrastructure, spider holes, discarded devices, cryptids, and stigmatics simply left for later use and then abandoned. Baltimore is the place to watch if a demon wants to know what the God-Machine might be planning to do elsewhere in ten years, or to learn more about unusual or experimental occult matrices.

The construction of the Spiderweb started in the World War II era, when massive steelworks and shipyards were built in order to fulfill military demands. The Machine used this as helpful cover and obfuscation for its own large-scale projects. At this time, Baltimore was bound together by a network of secret passageways. A demon, angel, or stigmatic could duck into a concealed door in a broom closet in the opera house and come out in the boiler room of one of the city's colleges. Passageways led from only one specific point to another, but there were hundreds upon hundreds of them. Someone who knew enough of the ways could get anywhere in the city within minutes, without ever going outdoors. Newer, more secure passageways have left some parts of the Spiderweb unused, but senior angels and demons still remember the old ways. Any major building that dates from the 1930s to the 1950s probably has at least three or four connections tying it into the Spiderweb.

The late sixties and early seventies are when the disappearances started in earnest. It is now known that the Machine prepared for the municipal worker strikes of 1968 in advance, if not engineered by it in the first place. The Machine used these disruptions to rapidly put new systems in place, whether Infrastructure, angels, or tick-tock men. The purpose of these new programs was to provide new sources of human fodder, grist for the Machine's hidden mills. Ever since that time, hundreds of people per year go missing. Most are forgotten by their friends, families, and jobs just as quickly as an angel's Cover is inserted into people's memories. Demons, stigmatics, and a handful of seemingly random individuals are able to remember these people who suddenly fade away from photographs and contact lists alike.

The most recent major success by Baltimore's Unchained was a massive chemical fire in the tunnels under Howard Street. The Northeast Transit Solutions Agency (now defunct) arranged for the derailment and ignition of a freight train carrying flammable chemicals. The fires burned for days underground at temperatures over a thousand degrees. While it was a disaster for the city's human population, the fire destroyed at least one powerful angel, disrupted multiple occult matrices, and cut off several parts of the Machine's Infrastructure. The mop-up operation in the sewers resulted in explosions that were still being blamed on the fire weeks later. The fire disrupted parts of the Spiderweb, but it hasn't done anything to slow down the disappearances. Rumor among the city's older demons is that there's still a major piece of command and control Infrastructure down there that no one ever found and eliminated. If that's true, it may have been ticking away in isolation for over a decade, undefended and engaging in entirely rogue activities.

AGENDAS

Inquisitors: The Inquisitors are attempting to find out what went wrong, and how they can prevent it from happening again. They are the only Agenda not convinced that the purge was the result of traitors in the ranks. They are currently attempting to determine precisely who can be confirmed to have been taken or destroyed, and when. Several Inquisitors are attempting to identify and make contact with every Unchained in the city to confirm their identity, a prospect which most of their targets are opposed to.

Integrators: The Integrators are passing around a telephone number. Most demons in the city have seen it by now. If you call it from a pay phone, you can speak to a warbling electronic voice that claims to be an angel named Eremiel. Eremiel offers to negotiate terms to let demons come in from the cold if they prove their loyalty. Eremiel is always patient, never pushy. Customs is pushing rumors that most of the city's Integrators are already in contact with this entity, and are working with it. Up & Out repeats the equally-believable rumors that the line is a false flag operation set up by the city's Saboteurs to identify turncoats.

Saboteurs: Baltimore is a target-rich environment. Saboteurs who are inclined to identify the traitors and take revenge for their betrayal have a lot to keep them busy. Unfortunately, after the city's fracturing, many Unchained are hanging out in the wind, with entire rings of demons separated, and hesitant to check their dead-drops or make contact with their own cut-outs. Those Saboteurs who are sufficiently convinced of each other's true motivations are engaged in joint operations to ferret out turncoats. There is, at this point, almost no effective resistance against angels or Infrastructure.

Tempters: The Tempters are taking advantage of Baltimore's extreme wealth inequality to work their magic. An explosion in new economic activity has reversed the city's falling census figures. Tempters are trying to grab as much of the pie as they can while it's still fresh. However, some consider Baltimore as too hot for the comfort of an Agenda that is deeply concerned about comfort. Therefore, many of the "local" Tempters are in reality operating from offices outside the city, ranging from suburbs like Hunt Valley to cities like DC.

FACTIONS

Dokutsu: Behind the skin of Baltimore, there is a huge, cavernous space, a kind of meta-Infrastructure, glimpsed by stigmatics and demons alike through doorways hidden inside other Infrastructure. The doors that access this space open and close seemingly at random, but only existing at certain times and places, and always heavily patrolled by the enemy. While there is no longer much meaningful cooperation between the Unchained, a handful of Inquisitors work together charting the entrances. Dokutsu communicates almost entirely via handwritten messages, routed through the Baltimore City Archives. Dokutsu believes the tick-tock men are related to this meta-Infrastructure, and are looking for ways to identify them and monitor their movements.

Up and Out: A small association of a half-dozen Tempters who have latched onto the city's most desperate. They have cultists placed in halfway houses, AA meetings, homeless shelters, and other places where their clients congregate. There are a lot of three-time losers who would Pact away their criminal records for nothing, let alone for money and opportunity. Any Unchained who is willing to patch up a damaged Cover with unattractive options like abusive stalker exes and stints in the penitentiary can get them at bargain-basement prices from a contact with Up and Out. Rumors abound that U&O is selling the identities of their customers to the Machine, of course.

Customs: "Customs" refers to the loose collection Unchained who spend a lot of time around the port. There's a lot of abandoned Infrastructure out there, largely suborned. Most of it is nonfunctional now, good for little beyond producing a dribble of Aether and providing a place to hide. However, Customs also controls a facility called the Smugglers' Corridor. If you're being hunted, have something to trade, and no other options, the Corridor can give you an instant one-way ticket to another city, to shake the heat off.



Vendetta: A group of demons, mostly Saboteurs, who have decided to counter the purge through raw violence. Vendetta has plants in Customs and Dokutsu who feed them information, but hasn't managed to penetrate U&O. U&O is a priority for them due to their belief that U&O is concealing God-Machine informants, or else is totally subverted. Vendetta claims that the tick-tock men are tools of a hostile demonic group rather than agents of the God-Machine, and have supposedly destroyed a few of them. Dokutsu is aware of Vendetta's mole. They are trying to influence Vendetta to pursue other targets, so they can observe the Tick-Tock Men without their masters being alerted.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

The Tick-Tock Men: Expressionless and disinterested, the Tick-Tock Men operate taxi cabs during the quiet hours. The taxi doors lock and cannot be opened from the inside, there is armored glass both in the partition between the driver and passenger, and the external windows are unbreakable as well. A jammer in the trunk blocks cellular phone signals while the vehicle is in motion. If you listen closely in the presence of a tick-tock man, you can hear a faint sound of clockwork coming from inside their head. Nobody knows what happens to people taken by the tick-tock men, but diligent observation will reveal that they sometimes kidnap mortals in the employ of the God-Machine, as well.

The Janitor: The janitor is an angel that works the hours between midnight and three A.M. at several local hospitals, simultaneously. He appears as an elderly man with a nametag (appropriate to whatever hospital he is encountered at) listing his name as Rosewood. Rosewood is affable and has no particular interest in capturing Unchained who don't interfere in his work, which is to collect patients who won't be missed and take them away... somewhere. Rosewood has been working in Baltimore since at least the 1800s, and could be a font of useful information if a demon found a way to bribe him.

Mr. Burn: Burn was the city's foremost saboteur, now presumed dead. He was a legend, said to have fought and beaten almost anything a demon can fight. He escaped the purge and went underground. Burn has two uncompromised Covers: one is a black high-school student with a promising future as a ballerina; the other is a homeless veteran. Burn is on the lookout for demons that are new or from outside Baltimore. He wants resources that his current Covers can't obtain, and he's willing to trade information or even carry out a hit for the right price.

Deputy Commissioner Caroline Bellamy: Bellamy is an angel tasked with ensuring Baltimore law enforcement works according to the God-Machine's plans. She has a large number of cultists and a few stigmatic officers under her command, and she deploys them to investigate any apparently supernatural activity. A few are dangerously skilled in forensics.

Bellamy is literally never without an espantoon, although she carries ceremonial models depending on the circumstances. She claims it's good for morale. Bellamy is an extraordinarily dangerous adversary, but she has also recently learned to enjoy certain aspects of corporeal existence, making her vulnerable to a Fall.

Morgan Holmes: Ms. Holmes is an attractive woman with a very expensive office in the Baltimore World Trade Center. She sits at a heavy antique desk behind several layers of security, and she brokers information. Holmes is a powerful seer, and has access to methods that demons don't. For the right price she'll use them on objects, places, or even people. Demons won't even get in to see her if they don't look like money, and the price she demands is likely to include sensitive information. She knows that demons are perfect liars, and will ask questions that she already knows the answer to in order to gauge a new client's credibility.

Mr. Frame: Mr. Frame is a demon who is still reachable via cut-out and dead-drop. He has to be, since his business model rests on dealing with other Unchained. Frame controls a network of dealers, addicts, homeless, and hustlers that work out of Baltimore's abandoned neighborhoods. Give one of his agents an item charged with Aether, with your email written on it, and he'll get in touch with you. He provides temporary services of all kinds through his operatives, none of which can be connected to the client. If you want a building watched (or torched), someone followed, drugs, muscle, or similar low-grade criminal activity, he can arrange it.

LOCATIONS

Abandoned Row Houses, Pennsylvania Avenue: Long stretches of decaying, empty buildings make ideal locations for clandestine meetings. With no nearby security cameras, no easy access to electricity, and no neighbors likely to call the police, this area offers a quick way to drop off the grid without leaving the city limits. Many demons have dead drops here, and it was customary before the purge to use graffiti as a kind of improvised bulletin board service. Many consider the area ideal because the rat's-nest of crumbling buildings provides several avenues for escape if a meet goes bad.

North Avenue Pain Clinic: Operated by disgraced medical doctors who lost their positions at Johns Hopkins, the clinic is where you go for shadowy or outright illegal medical services. They'll treat a gunshot wound in the back without calling the police, write prescriptions for anything you think you need, and provide consultation services on strange and unusual maladies. The doctors at the pain clinic can, for the right price, give you the correct amount of anesthetic drugs for any given bodyweight, perform autopsies, and sometimes access confidential medical records from other area hospitals. The staff is human, but they have seen some strange things over the years.

Frank's Irish Pub: A literal underground restaurant, you can find Frank's by going down brickwork steps to the base-

ment level of an office building just a hundred yards from the Inner Harbor. The food is mediocre and the service is worse, but Frank's exists at a nexus of seemingly dozens of unsecured wireless access points. It is usually filled with downtown professionals tapping away at phones, tablets, and laptops. Most of them have an ironically lax attitude towards their own electronic security. A demon with the right computer skills can do all kinds of things at Frank's and not have to worry about being traced.

Enoch Pratt Free Library, Central Branch: Counterpart to the demon-controlled City Archives, the angels control the central branch of the library, and they watch it heavily. They use the building for unknown information or organizational tasks on behalf of the Machine. Inquisitor attempts to determine exactly what Infrastructure is hidden inside it have ended badly. That hasn't kept them from continuing to try. Stigmatic and regular dupes are sent in at least a couple times a year by hopeful demons, but those who return haven't brought anything of value. Many demons consider long-distance surveillance of the library a useful hobby for cultists with nothing more pressing to do.

Pratt Street Power Plant: A century-old structure that has been renovated more frequently than used, the power plant is currently marketed as a shopping area and "nightlife complex." The plant is a hive of both active and disused Infrastructure, so full of discordant influences that most supernatural sensing methods fail outright. It's safe for mortals who can't see the gears, but stigmatics and demons risk wandering into places that they shouldn't be able to see, let alone access. Any demon who is willing to be a wage-slave in one of the most watched places in the city can probably find Infrastructure to suborn.

SEED: BINDING WIRES

Everything happening on the surface is a distraction. The frayed connections and conflict between factions, the opportunities to grab suborned Infrastructure and reap a wealth of Aether, the stigmatics and cryptids and whatever else vying for the attention of the city's demons is nothing but a smokescreen. The most relevant issue in Baltimore is how the Machine cracked the city's Agencies open and hollowed them out. If Baltimore's demons can't find out what happened, it's going to happen to them next. Binding Wires is about connections and what happens when they break. If a demon disappears and nobody sees it happen, how do you tell whether she went willingly or not?

ELEMENTS

Binding Wires presents a maze of practical problems and traps for the unwary. Baltimore has been turned into a nest of snares and diversions, and dealing with one may lead the players to stumble into another. The characters should tease out what connections have been compromised and which are still safe, because even an organized ring can't do everything

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without help. They must always be concerned about which, if any, of their contacts may be gathering information on them for the agents of the Machine.

Contacts, cultists, and allies who are overexposed should occasionally disappear, and unknown figures claiming to be old demons in new Covers will try to contact the circle. Campaigns of police harassment and other mortal difficulties are the first signs that the Machine's agents are on to someone, making it hard to strike back without stirring the hornet's nest. And with several easy exits, Baltimore offers a great temptation to simply cut ties and disappear yourself. Eventually, the ring will have enough information to understand what's happening and start fighting back.

The Truth: The God-Machine's new system is a three-legged stool designed to wipe out demonic influence. The first leg is online: Deputy Commissioner Bellamy has subverted enough of the police force to use it as an effective tool for investigation and harassment. The second leg is half-functional, and is already responsible for ripping apart Baltimore's Agencies. It is a piece of Infrastructure designed to filter all calls and text messages within the city limits, and flag any that are suspicious. It doesn't track e-mail yet. The third leg of the system is still in its infancy. Information from this Infrastructure is fed to Bellamy for use in police operations. Demons or stigmatics that are flagged and confirmed will not be picked up or terminated immediately. They'll be observed to discover the identities of their associates.

INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

At least half of the players' characters should have lived in Baltimore for a while, and all of them should have had at least some interpersonal ties there until recently. Make sure that every player's character has lost contact with at least one different Storyteller character demon in the purge. It's preferable if at least a few of the ring were members of one of Baltimore's Agencies. Characters who recently arrived from outside Baltimore should have specific reasons for being here and an investment in the city. For example, they might be here to farm Aether from the myriad pieces of abandoned Infrastructure and ship it to an Agency in another city.

The ring's primary Covers should be from a mix of different socio-economic strata in order to give them access to different parts of the city. There are places that middle-class or above Covers can't go safely, and places that visibly lower-class covers can't go at all. At least some player characters should have cars or other assets that can be threatened by purely mundane harassment. As much as possible, every player character should have at least one social Merit involving ties to people outside the ring, such as contacts, allies, mentor, staff, etc.

Investigative and technical skills will usually be more helpful than combat ability. At least a few of the player characters should be able to bug a phone or shadow an unsuspecting target.

BLUEPRINTS

The Agencies that used to run Baltimore were destroyed because they got complacent. They were on guard for the supernatural threats of angels and cryptids, but their purely mundane opsec was sloppy. The Machine works to use the modern-day surveillance state against demons, in order to conserve limited angelic resources. Conversations via telephone or text message that speak too directly about angels, demons, or the God-Machine are flagged, as are conversations that switch rapidly between different languages, or use languages so obscure that they should not be heard on a Baltimore phone at all.

Flagged conversations will be recorded and reviewed by a cultist police officer. If that agent confirms that something unusual is going on, the telephone records for that number will be reviewed. Phone numbers that they have called will be put on observation, text messages sent within the last thirty days will be recovered for review. The agents of the God-Machine will begin building a web tracking where information is coming and going, and the approximate location of any calls made.

If a person appears to be a demon or associated with demons based on the content of their telephone conversations, the Baltimore police show up to observe or harass them. The initial purpose of this harassment is simply to see who the target reaches out to for assistance. This way, their allies can be added to the list of people being tracked, flagged, and harassed. The targets won't be set for termination or kidnapping until the agents of the God-Machine have thoroughly mapped their relationships.

As the system becomes more developed, the God-Machine kidnaps more and more humans to power the flagging and identification Infrastructure, and build new Infrastructure intended to make future kidnappings easier. Soon, apparently random people begin disappearing from other high-traffic and anonymous areas, such as public restroom stalls or elevators. The lights go out for a second, and suddenly the person who was next to you is gone.

If these programs are successful, they will be expanded into other cities across the globe and used to crush conventional demonic resistance.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Infrastructure that Dokutsu is investigating really does exist. There are two components: the recycling center and the switchboard. Neither exists in normal space. If the ring can destroy either of these, or sabotage the program so badly that the Machine decides they are failures, then the new system will be scrapped. The recycling center is where people are taken after they've been kidnapped. It's a room of sterile and clinical horror, where people in white rubber aprons use razor-sharp hooks on stainless steel chains to flense the lives of the victims. The operators of this system are mostly human

monsters, stigmatics, or cultists who the God-Machine has indoctrinated sufficiently so that they will perform any atrocity. The flensing is shockingly free of blood and gore: it is pieces of the victim's life that are cut away. This process is an involuntary version of how demons pact away portions of a human's life and used for the same purpose. It's a cheaper and easier method of piecing together angelic Cover identities.

Many people end up in the recycling center. The people that Rosewood wheels away from hospitals in his creaking, rusty wheelchair; undesirables taken by the police under Deputy Commissioner Bellamy's command; the victims of the Tick-Tock Men, and anyone caught up by any other snares and traps the Storyteller wants to devise. Unknown to the Machine or its angels, though, the Tick-Tock Men have been partially subverted. An Inquisitor named Mr. Street has learned to redirect calls from real taxi companies to the Tick-Tock Men, and occasionally turns the system against the God-Machine's own cultists. If any player characters manage to penetrate the Infrastructure, they should see at least one person being hauled to the conveyor belt while screaming that he serves the Machine, identifying himself and all his associates, and that they're on the same side. The butchers will not listen.

After the victims of the recycling center are lobotomized and relieved of all extraneous components of their biography, they're sent to the switchboard and plugged into a large array of other semi-vegetative people. This collective mass of repurposed brainpower is used to monitor the city's telecommunications grid. The room is much like a stadium, with each component of the system whispering along with every conversation they "hear." In the center of the stadium is the angel Ambriel, whose task is to pass along to Bellamy all those flagged messages, as well as those it considers suspicious. Ambriel will happily converse with the characters for as long as they wish, and will not attempt to harm them so long as they behave themselves. It will, however, pay careful attention for any information they may let slip that will allow it to flag them so that they can be tracked down later. It will at minimum memorize their appearances and forward them to the police.

METHODS

Allies, Contacts, or Similar: Player characters who take these Merits should be offered a free extra dot in them, taking the rating no higher than five. This is in return for an understanding that some of their associates may be used against them in ways appropriate to an espionage campaign. The Sanctity of Merits still applies, although the character doesn't "lose" the dot until they identify who the leak is and cut ties.

Bolthole and Suborned Infrastructure: At the option of the player, the location of these Merits may have a second entrance somewhere else in the city. It isn't conventionally possible to change the locations of these entrances once they're selected, but they do allow nearly instantaneous transportation between two defined points. This effectively makes the Merit a part of the Spiderweb.

Contacts or Status (Police): Any demon who is hooked into the Baltimore Police Department will eventually recognize the telltale signs of an angelic cult among the officers. Diligent and surreptitious detective work reveals that Deputy Commissioner Bellamy is not what she seems.

Contacts or Status (Higher Education): Demons familiar with the university scene will realize that professors and graduate students from linguistics departments have recently disappeared – and that the normal mortals around them forgot they existed. This is because the switchboard needed people able to understand multiple languages in order to properly analyze demonic conversations.

Professional Training (Accountant): Characters with this or similar expertise will eventually realize that there is something wrong with U&O's purported business model. They can't possibly have enough demonic customers to justify their pact-farming operation.

Crack Driver: Characters with this merit should be allowed to follow cabs driven by the Tick-Tock Men without any roll being necessary, once they are spotted. The Tick-Tock Men are not particularly energetic drivers, and a skilled tail could track them to an underground parking garage or other concealment Infrastructure leading to the recycling center (see above).

Pusher: Any character with this merit who has peaceful interactions with Deputy Commissioner Bellamy, and knows that she is an angel, likely realizes that she has learned to enjoy worship and could be pushed to Fall. It's up to them to figure out how to make it happen.

ESCALATION

If the ring inadvertently follows Rosewood or the Tick-Tock Men, they might find themselves suddenly wandering into the recycling center. This is extremely dangerous for characters who can't deflect the attention of the normal, but vicious mortals who staff the disassembly line. If this happens early in the chronicle, then it very quickly becomes more action-oriented, as any members of the ring who were in the area are marked as priority targets.

If the characters simply have inadvertent telephone conversations, or contact with double agents who report them to the angels, they still have to deal with mundane harassment. The first few contacts are with mundane, but brutal, corrupt members of the Baltimore police department. While a plainclothes detective loyal to Bellamy stands somewhere in the background, uniformed officers attempt to arrest the character, under false pretenses if necessary. If they take the character in, they beat her with fists, doors, and telephone books unless she uses supernatural means to escape or resist. They will not inflict life-threatening injury unless the encounter turns suddenly and violently against them, and then dump the character unceremoniously several miles outside the city limits with all her possessions within 24 hours. All calls from the dump site's nearest cell towers are monitored, and if the

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character calls or texts her friends they flag their identities (or at least their burner phones) immediately.

The police may also engage in more low-level harassment, such as shattering the character's headlights with a baton and then writing them a ticket for it. If the player characters resist via supernatural or violent means, they bring them to Bellamy's attention, who may deploy stronger measures or deal with them herself.

If the characters are absolutely lost, throw them a bone. Have one of their human contacts go missing. That contact is gone forever, hauled off to the recycling center. However, a new low-level angel shows up with a portion of that lost contact's life woven into their Cover. Suddenly, the contact's distraught fiancée has always been dating someone else and has completely forgotten the ring's contact. Your players now have something to investigate.

The climax of the story can go down in a lot of ways. Do they throw explosives into the switchboard, find a way to destroy Bellamy or push her over the edge, or get their Covers blown and use the smuggler's corridor to flee to London? If they don't act quickly enough, then increase the pressure on the characters, kidnapping or chasing away their contacts, and messing with their normal lives until they snap and do something.

UP NEXT

Ringing the Bell: Deputy Commissioner Bellamy will not go out quietly. If the God-Machine shuts down her program, or if the player characters manage to find a way to tempt her, she will Fall and become a Tempter. While she isn't particularly interested in turning on her former master herself, she happily spills her guts as to the location and function of any Infrastructure or the identity of any hunter angels that she knows about.

Rolling Up the Network: If the ring realizes a demon has compromised the Tick-Tock Men, and they are able to track down the source, they may find Mr. Street. Street might be the most paranoid Inquisitor that anyone has ever met. He has determined the identity of the stigmatic cultists that are guarding the Central Branch of the library. These are mortals with apartments, something resembling normal lives, and an unparalleled ability to sniff out demonic influence. The ring could kill or subvert them and wreck the Machine's security, giving them at least one good chance to find out what's going on in the library. Street gives the player characters this information in an attempt to distract them from investigating him further, while he covers his tracks and disappears.

Gentrification: If the ring has made contact with enough other demons and successfully stopped the Machine's spy program, then someone might mention to them the possibility of forging a new Agency. Vetting the local demons who want to join, especially convincing those who still believe the city is full of turncoats, could fill an entire Chronicle.

Patch Jobs: Even if the ring succeeds, the demonic ranks of Baltimore are dangerously depleted. There simply aren't enough demons around to keep track of what the Machine is doing, let alone oppose it. If the player characters investigate U&O, they may find evidence that they are feeding information on their clients to the Machine, a list of what pacts were sold to which demon, and where that demon went. Careful investigation could allow the ring to track down those demons who fled the city, and convince them to come back.

Cold Calls: If the ring manages to disrupt the Machine's plans, but doesn't hide their Covers or shed them quickly enough, they may start to get calls from Eremiel looking to negotiate. Eremiel doesn't seem to have any physical ability to track or monitor people, but he can make the nearest landline or mobile telephone to a known human (or human cover identity) ring without needing to know where that telephone is. Eremiel offers demons the ability to come back to the God-Machine on their own terms, and can be very understanding about any concerns they have.

THE DREAM FACTORY

Los Angeles, California, United States

Los Angeles is a deeply weird place. Hollywood, America's movie-making capital certainly sets the stage for the city's most obvious oddities, but their roots go deeper. The very atmosphere of the sprawling city and its suburbs exists in a dream logic, where time seems to move differently, nostalgia reigns, and people hold outrageous religious ideas as gospel. L.A. is the literary and cinematic birthplace of the Private Eye archetype. Here, everybody is a detective, and their dreams are the cases they're each trying to solve.

Little wonder that L.A. is a popular haven for demons, especially Tempters and Inquisitors. The constant current of young stars and stars seeking entry into the golden gate of fame and fortune provides a multitude of opportunities to form Pacts with healthy young bodies, and the perfect Covers — Hollywood producers and directors — from which to pick and choose the cream of the crop.

The city's moniker — the City of Angels — rings true in that, yes, there are angels here, but they are working at projects that even experienced demons are hard-pressed to decipher. The strangeness of the city may not have been caused by the God-Machine's machinations, but it certainly facilitates them. All of its programs seem to be aimed towards a goal that the city's demons are desperately curious to uncover.

SUB ROSA

The birth of Hollywood and the movie business marked a key point in developing the technologies of propaganda. A small number of individuals could manufacture dreams and sell them to a desperate and willing public, hypnotized by the

big screen visions of heroes and villains, glitter and grandeur, comedy and tragedy. Little wonder that the God-Machine was there from the start.

While Hollywood is a place where imagination flowers, it's also channeled into profit and restricted by genre conventions, strict scriptwriting rules (three acts, one page equals one minute of screen time, etc.), and guided by impersonal mass opinion polls designed to make the product palatable to the widest demographic. Behind this shallow spectacle, churn the gears of the God-Machine. Movies, as the twentieth century's main form of mass entertainment were an important arm of influence over humanity, a subtle but important means of directing people how to think, behave, and perform its mysterious objectives.

With the advent of the Internet and video gaming in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the locus of American dreams has seemingly moved elsewhere, making the greater L.A. area a fading power, a *Sunset Boulevard* of the soul, where the city sits alone in the dark and continually replays past glories. The angels are still here, but there are fewer of them. Once-important Infrastructure now stands abandoned, often claimed by demons, and the ongoing operations are even more enigmatic than before.

Demons came early to Hollywood to exploit its potential for Covers, Pacts, infiltration and sabotage. A very perceptive stigmatic cineaste might be able to chart the secret war between demons and angels through the movies produced by Hollywood from the 1920s through the present, but it's nearly impossible to say who won or lost with any given film. For instance, *The Wizard of Oz* was not a huge success when it was first released. It only gained its hold on the hearts and minds of a generation once it began playing on television. Curious then, that it was that generation that started "looking behind the curtain" to see who was really running things, a mode of anti-authoritarianism and deep questioning culminating in the Watergate scandal that brought down a President. But whose victory was it? Demons or angels? The end result is a deep cynicism about politics and an inability to change anything. Is this the liberating road to Hell or a circular prison of the God-Machine's making?

Los Angeles is more than just Hollywood, of course. Other parts of the city have also had a huge impact on the national psyche by way of entertainment. More than one demon has tried to claim credit for the west coast rap scene; although those demons also have to admit that corporations free from Unchained influence have sponsored the acts that have had the biggest global impact. Is this cultural appropriation on an industrial scale a program of the God-Machine, or are human beings just becoming sufficiently advanced to look like it?

AGENDAS

Inquisitors: The puzzle of Los Angeles and its complex cultural and subcultural makeup has drawn many Inquisitors over the years... but many have been distracted by the bright

lights and the cameras. How does mass entertainment seed the behaviors desired by the God Machine? How does the God Machine plan out the intricate chains of causality that turn a piece of schlock filmmaking into a template for a complacent population? L.A.'s Inquisitors are deeply involved in deciphering the cultural codes that program humankind.

Integrators: The romance of L.A., as depicted in movies and even detective novels, is a place where, no matter how down you are, no matter how deep in the gutter you've fallen, you can "be discovered" and raised up to the ranks of the Elect (i.e., movie stars or the incorruptible shining knight detectives). Perhaps these stories are also the God Machine's way of offering amnesty to those who wish to redeem their errant ways.

Saboteurs: While Inquisitors wrack their brains trying to decode the God Machine's mysterious ways amidst L.A., Saboteurs get their hands dirty by making movies — competing on the God Machine's own turf. They're the directors, screenwriters, actors, and even special-effects geniuses who fight the system from within to derail it.

Tempters: L.A. attracts more Tempters than any other Agenda. The place is thick with them: Hollywood producers, rap stars, YouTube sketch groups — anyone who builds an entourage and millions of fans. It's so damn easy to attract and manipulate the legions of wannabes who come to L.A. that the Tempters easily become the *tempted*, so eager to build their entourage they fail to miss the operatives who infiltrate them. It's not a leaked sex tape that will take them down, but that single angel who shows up one night amidst their crew.

FACTIONS

Arcturus Ascendant: Begun in the 1950s by the stigmatic Norman Castle as a UFO cult based on revelations he claimed to receive from "intelligences from Arcturus," this religious group, ARC, has survived long past its founder, some still listen to his audio tapes as holy scripture. His wife led the ARC into the acid-drenched '60s and beyond, building a large following; helped in no small part by the fact that she was a Psychopomp. Although Shirley Castle eventually chose her own successors and passed away, every single one of them has been a Cover identity of the Psychopomp who calls herself (among demons) the Starchild.

ARC has many human members, but the inner circle consists of stigmatics and demons. Norman Castle was himself a stigmatic who had somehow received a vision of the God-Machine's long-range plans for the city and the world. He did not fully understand these and mistook them for Arcturan space transmissions. The Starchild has spent years wrestling with the recordings of these visions, trying to interpret them and figure out how they pertain to local Infrastructure. Her demon allies use her gleanings to identify and sabotage a number of angelic operations.

The Arcturans believe that L.A. is the epicenter of a master operation that is a linchpin for a multitude of God-Ma-

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chine plots. If they can decipher it, they can hijack it for their own ends. This isn't sabotage, inquisition or integration – it's co-optation. Their aim is to supplant the God-Machine.

The ARC temple is headquartered in an old mansion high in the Hollywood Hills above Franklin Canyon Park.

The Moguls: Perhaps the most temporally ambitious demons in L.A. are a group of demon movie producers who influence movie studios in order to marshal their vast resources for their own ends. They tend to be mostly Tempters, many of whom are also Messengers. They have huge portfolios of Pacts and Covers waiting for them in case they are found out.

They each follow their own individual goals, working together only to combat common enemies or resistance to their collective power. They often clash with one another, especially when their pet projects are at odds. Instead of overt violence, they orchestrate minions to move against each other's interests until one side cries "uncle." They use much the same tactics on each other that their human competitors use against them – drawing away talent, undercutting funding, and so on.

But when angels are on the move or key Infrastructure is identified, grudges are put aside to deal with the more important threat. If need be, the producers temporarily flee town to "visit a location shoot" somewhere else, or to spend time on their yacht in an undisclosed locale, or to wine and dine at Cannes.

An honor code among them demands that when one of them has to forego her Cover and replace it with a new identity, her empire still remains in her hands. While thrusts can still be made against rivals at such weak moments, it is considered bad form to try to crumble a rival's assets until her new Cover can reconsolidate them.

Discreet Distance, LLC: D.D. is a demon-run private eye firm that caters to entertainment companies and other large, entrenched businesses. That however, is only its public front. Its real goal is identifying Infrastructure and selling that information to demons in a position to do something about it, such as sabotage or infiltration. With offices in the famous Bradbury Building in downtown Los Angeles (most well-known for its appearance in *Blade Runner*), D.D. hires freelance demons to run down leads and spend tedious hours spying on targets.

Most of its detectives are humans who believe they are being hired to spy on Hollywood stars or to collect blackmail on executives. And they are. Their demon bosses – mostly Inquisitors – then sift through their findings and flag whatever catches their eye, whatever stinks of the God-Machine. Most of D.D.'s work is dull and never leads anywhere, like most detective work. Still, its demon owners feel it is necessary. So many false leads and dead-ends, and yet, sometimes, pay dirt: secret Infrastructure, and even a revealed linchpin now and then.

Surviving as long as it has by keeping a "discreet distance" from its own demon detectives, should an angel or other agent of the Machine catch one of their freelancers, they are difficult to tie back to the agency. Still, it has happened. The former offices were destroyed when an angel, pretending to be a free-

lance demon, traced back his employers. The firm changed its name (to its present D.D. configuration), moved to the Bradbury Building, and started over.

The Freaks: The Freaks, a hot rod club curated by demons, often face shunning for their flashy "hobby." They specialize in truly bizarre tricked-up cars with paint styles inspired by Ed "Big Daddy" Roth. Their racing feats have become legendary to a degree where everybody thinks they're just telling impossible tall tales. These stories actually record the weird capabilities of hot rods made from discarded Infrastructure: bursts of jet-engine speed, leaping low-riders, stop-on-a-dime brakes, lightning bolt-casters, and arrays of almost cartoonish weaponry.

The Freaks dare to recover abandoned Infrastructure and repurpose it for use in their custom cars – even though they often can't predict the results. These are usually one-use vehicles. The club goes for a wild night out, engages the Infrastructure, and then abandons it as the angels come winging in to eradicate it.

It should come as no surprise that most of the Freaks are Psychopomps and Destroyers.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

The Pool Man: An angel disguised as a pool cleaner to the stars, he dutifully and diligently cleans the pools of actors, producers, rock stars, and studio execs, although they all ignore him. He's strictly background material, set dressing. Many a demon has fallen prey to the trap of ignoring the pool man while they've talked openly about demon matters, and then couldn't figure out later how the God-Machine was able to find them.

Subrufa: A demon member of Arcturus Ascendant and a true believer in the visions of that Agency's human founder, she has spent as much time as the Starchild deciphering their meaning. She can be found in odd places at odd times, confirming strange premonitions or intuitions she's received from her study of the cult's prophecies. She sometimes shows up just in time to save a demon from an angel, but has also attracted angels at inconvenient times for those demons she interacts with. She's a synchronicity magnet, attracting meaningful coincidences.

The Silent: This unnerving entity was once an angel but was somehow left behind when an operation reached its completion in the 1920s. Not Fallen, he simply remains, discarded, forgotten by the God-Machine, and trapped in the Cover role he once played, a silent film star. He cannot speak, he wears a 1920s style suit, and his face is covered in white pancake makeup. He still tries to sabotage demons, but cannot summon help from angels. A demon once realized that damaging or trying to destroy the Silent draws the attention of angels (although they ignore the Silent), so word has gotten out: avoid him and do not engage. Some have speculated that loneliness drives the Silent, and that just the right amount of attention at just the right time might be enough to make him Fall.

Edith Stone: A Hollywood stuntwoman and a Destroyer demon, she likes trouble and thinks she's invulnerable. That means she can be hired freelance by just about any demon to help them in dangerous situations. She acts like she's got a death wish, but has no actual desire to die. Her risky lifestyle enhances her sense of being alive, of her disconnection from the damnable Machine, but to keep that going, she now has to keep chasing the next high of near-death experiences.

LOCATIONS

4 Clover Lanes: An old bowling alley that serves as a watering hole and meeting place for independent demons. L.A.'s true sport isn't football or baseball but bowling. There are much higher-class bowling lanes than the 4 Clover, but few with as much nostalgic flavor. It is a relic from the 1950s, not a recreation. It was once angelic Infrastructure in the '50s but sat abandoned through the '70s and 80s. Demons claimed it in the '90s before the city could tear it down. It still slowly leaks Aether, so there is always the danger of angels coming back to reclaim it, but that risk attracts the particular kind of demonic clientele who hang out here, looking for a righteous fight.

Chupacabra: A trendy nightclub with a seedy atmosphere – the spiritual heir to the Viper Room. Recording artists and movie stars mix with L.A.'s underground, as well as with the demons who call this place their home away from home. It's a

good place to hear rumors from across the class spectrum and from all over the map; parties begun here might adjourn to a star's mansion in the Hills, where the night can get really wild.

The Home of the Unknown Star: An example of just how strange L.A. can get without setting off anybody's weirdness alarm. This house on N. Roxbury Dr. is from the era when many famous stars lived along this street. The house is now vacant but somehow always looks well kept, even though nobody ever sees anyone go in or out. It appears on many Maps of the Stars and on star-gawker tours, but the celebrity who once is lived here is never named. And yet, nobody seems to notice this absence. They "ooh" and "ahh" just the same as they pass by, feeling like they've brushed against past glory as they move on to the next home of the stars. So, just what is this place? Old Infrastructure? A glitch in reality? Was the movie star the Cover for an unremembered angel or demon? The mystery has yet to be solved.

The Lesser Wall of L.A.: A counterpoint to the Great Wall of L.A., the famed citizen mural that illustrates the history of the city. The Lesser Wall is an urban legend, with most people who mention it never exactly sure where it is. It seems to change locations, sometimes in a dry culvert of the L.A. river, sometimes on the side of a building in Venice Beach, and then on a sidewalk in Monterrey. Its murals change with each appearance, and demons believe they convey coded messages about God-Machine Infrastructure and operations. Some



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have opined that it is the work of urban spirits, trying to warn others about God-Machine infiltration, and one demon even claimed it is a rogue intelligence created by the God-Machine but never released into the world; it has nonetheless figured out a way to bleed its code into reality.

Mt. Wilson Observatory: The observatory in the San Gabriel Mountains and the nearby antenna farm are both active — although aging — Infrastructure. The antenna farm beams much of the city's radio and television entertainment out into SoCal and beyond. Either the broadcasts or the antennae array itself are important to the Machine, and an angel called Gnomon is on constant guard to ensure no malefactor tries to interfere with the flow of communications.

There are conflicting demonic urban legends about the antennae farm. Some say that the farm is somehow tied into a global communications Infrastructure and that a successful hack here could affect worldwide operations. Others say that, with the rise of the Internet and satellite communications, these old broadcast arrays are nearly irrelevant. And yet, the angel remains. Is he just biding time, waiting for a new mission elsewhere, or is there still a purpose at play amidst the antennae and microwave transmitters?

SEED: THE BIG-BUDGET DISASTER

A never-ending film shoot keeps racking up expenses and changing locations, ruining the lives and careers of its revolving cast and crewmembers as it continues under the tyrannical control of its eccentric director.

ELEMENTS

Simon Ballard is one of the last of the old-style maverick directors who gets whatever he wants. His legend is so large, his Oscars so numerous, and his profits so massive, that his films are his own personal demesnes, where such modern innovations as “studio notes” from producers are forbidden. What Ballard asks for, Ballard gets.

When he began what he claims to be his final film, *Heartbreaker*, his swan song in cinema, featuring the legendary and reclusive Golden Age actress, Rhonda Marlow, producers lined up to fund it. Crafting a co-funding agreement from multiple studios, Ballard essentially dragged everyone into his film so that no single party can take control and no one person can halt it. It ends only when Ballard calls the final shot — and he’s nowhere near that point. The film shoot has already gone on an agonizing five months and it shows no sign of stopping anytime soon. Nobody seems to be able to stop the runaway train, pulling more and more people along with it, and running over anyone in its way.

Actors have been hired and fired (all except Marlow), crewmembers run ragged, and two stunt performers died during filming. However, the film goes on, as if the universe itself demands it.

To those demons who have investigated the famed train-wreck of a film shoot, it is clearly Infrastructure. That is, the film shoot itself is one interlocking machine-in-the-making. The cameras, the lights, the sets, the props — everything is there to play a role in the operation. Even the interchangeable and expendable Hollywood stars fulfill a function, being let go when that function is complete.

The unstoppable film shoot is a temporal operation designed to achieve a goal. Only when that goal is attained can the big-budget disaster be put to rest.

The Truth: Rhonda Marlow is an angel who’s been around a long time. Her classic beauty and uncanny effect on audiences come from her inhuman connection to the God Machine. Unfortunately, she is teetering on the edge of a Fall. The God-Machine has run multiple projections and Marlow has Fallen in every single one of them — except for one. In the sole successful simulation, a perfect moment during the filming of *Heartbreaker*, an acting take as sublime as to make even angels weep, she steps back from the brink and resumes her duty to the God-Machine. The present never-ending film shoot is all designed to achieve that single shot, the linchpin of the operation whose occult matrix will save an angel from Falling. While Marlow’s Cover is aging, her fame and connections yet have a role to play in the Machine’s plans.

INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

The film shoot needs a revolving supply of cast and crew the way a war needs an endless supply of soldiers to send into the meat grinder. Some few crewmembers have managed to survive since nearly the start of production, although only because they’ve filled roles distant from the director: second-unit camera operators, grips, caterers, and location scouts. They’ve got some real war stories to tell to any newbie who joins the crew.

There are a number of open positions that demons can fill to infiltrate the set. At this point in the shoot, with so many guild members afraid to go anywhere near it, the unions have relaxed their rules on hiring, so that almost anybody can get a job on the set — until Ballard decides he doesn’t like the looks of them and fires them. The shoot is especially desperate for new stunt people. Demons with Covers that prove their acting chops can even get speaking roles in the film, although with the way Ballard keeps reshooting scenes over and over, they shouldn’t expect to make the final cut.

So long as they are discreet and steer clear of Rhonda Marlow, who usually stays ensconced in her trailer, they can probably avoid angelic detection. For some reason, the God-Machine has sent no other angels to watch over the operation. Perhaps the projections showed that their presence would interfere with the desired result.

BLUEPRINTS

Although it is unusual to shoot a film these days on location in L.A. — there are many other places offering more alluring tax incentives to offset costs — Ballard prefers to shoot in and

around the city where he lives. The production moves around between studio sets and locations throughout the city and its surrounding area, even into the mountains now and then. Demons can encounter the film just about anywhere at any time.

The Arcturus Ascendant Agency is actively trying to recruit demons to infiltrate the set and report on its Infrastructure. The Starchild demon leader of the Agency was initially convinced that the film itself, the end product, was the point of the operation, that it was designed to be some form of mass hypnosis for audiences worldwide. She has since come to realize, through the reports of her allies and some clues she thinks she perceives in Norman Castle's prophecies (see the Agency description, above), that the filming itself is the operation. She wants it sabotaged.

Discreet Distance, LLC, the demon private eye faction, has also become involved, thinking that any intelligence gained from on the film set can be sold to Arcturus Ascendant and any other demon who will pay in Aether or favors for the valuable intel.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In reading the film script, the Starchild has identified a number of scenes in the movie that could serve as the linchpin. If any of these were disrupted, it might end the operation. But which scene? It could be any of the following:

- Rhonda Marlow's character, Evette, drives her car over a cliff on Mulholland Drive. This is a dangerous stunt that involves swapping out Marlow with a stunt double mid-scene. A demon stuntwoman could take the role of the double and royally screw up the scene. The difficulty is in doing so while getting that close to the angel.
- A scene where masked terrorists crash a dinner party in an attempt to kidnap Marlow's character, only to have three of her former lovers thwart them, sacrificing themselves in a hail of bullets. Could one of the gun props be rigged to cause a real death and so halt the filming?
- Marlow's love interest – played by a series of actors as Ballard continues to replace them – lies dying from a snakebite. The Angel of Death (a fictional one, not a God-Machine angel) arrives to take him away. Marlow, in an epic speech, berates him for the terror he has wrought upon all humankind. This is the true linchpin. If Rhonda Marlow nails this scene, it will prevent her Fall. Anything that prevents her from delivering her best performance will disrupt the operation and cause her Fall.

METHODS

Athletics: A necessary skill for anyone attempting to perform the rigorous physical stunts required in the film.

Drive: Some of the stunts require some pretty crazy driving on night roads.

Expression: Perhaps the most consistent way to disrupt any shot in the film is to be an actor in it, one capable of both

convincing the director of one's talent and then botching it at just the right moment.

Investigation: Weeding through all the tales of the cast and crew with a Manipulation + Investigation roll can yield clues about methods for sabotaging future shots.

Larceny: Skillful hands can replace props with more dangerous versions without anyone noticing.

Muse (Embed): Using this Embed, Simon Ballard can be given a new idea for the linchpin scene in his movie, so that he rewrites it in such a way that it cannot prevent Rhonda Marlow from Falling when she performs the new scene.

ESCALATION

The film set isn't just a piece of clockwork that has been wound and now ticks down to its linchpin shot. It is an organic mess, full of the foibles of all its human actors, requiring the God-Machine to put in place a number of agents who can steer the operation through its chaos.

Since simulations have warned against placing other angels nearby, there are a number of human operatives in place in the crew to protect the operation from demonic interference. However, if demons clearly threaten the film's purpose (such as by the use of Exploits), the angel that guards the Mt. Wilson Infrastructure arrives to clear up the trouble. If he can't handle it and the situation gets too out-of-control, the Machine diverts a host of angels from their normal operations in a theme park to the south to wrap up the operation – including "retiring" Rhonda Marlow before she can Fall.

Demons who wish to help Rhonda Fall must disrupt her linchpin scene, *without* drawing too much attention from the God-Machine's other forces in the area.

As an additional hurdle, **Batik** is a demon Integrator who sees the film as a way for her to reintegrate with the God-Machine. She might not understand the purpose and goal of the operation, but she can stand in the way of any other demon who tries to sabotage it. This might (she hopes) even win her the respect of Rhonda Marlow. She uses a Cover identity as a hair-dresser to get close to the set so she can foil demonic infiltration.

Should the day of filming the linchpin scene finally come and the characters actually manage to disrupt it so that Rhonda Marlow Falls, they are faced with what to do next with the newly Fallen demon, as other angels arrive to deal with her themselves.

If they fail to disrupt the scene properly, allowing her even a single take where she completes her speech against the Angel of Death, she will not Fall, instead snapping back fully into her designated role –seeking out and destroying any demons she can identify.

UP NEXT

Catch A Falling Star: If Rhonda Marlow Falls, the characters are in the best position to catch her, before angels can

arrive to destroy or recycle her. Her Cover is, unfortunately at this point, all too recognizable: she's Rhonda Marlow, film star from a greater age. The first thing she'll need to evade angelic retribution is a new Cover identity, something the characters can help her find. If they're tied into Arcturus Ascendant, they can provide a temporary cult member Cover until they develop something more enduring.

Rhonda, like most of the newly Fallen, doesn't understand her original purpose. Why was she placed as a famous actress? What purpose did her roles achieve? Or were her former movies just preparation for the final act in *Heartbreaker*? If so, what in the world was that meant to achieve for the God-Machine?

Anti-cult Crusade: Arcturus Ascendant has been able to avoid angelic attention so far, but its role in disrupting (or attempting the disruption of) the *Heartbreaker* film shoot flushes them out into the open. The God-Machine's retribution comes in the form of a citywide anti-cult crusade run by the L.A. police, where officers infiltrate and arrest cult members after uncovering evidence of various alleged crimes, from drug use to kidnapping. This dragnet runs against all manner of crazy California cults, but its ultimate target is Arcturus Ascendant and its inner circle of demons. This effectively destroys the usefulness of many cult-related Covers, as well as scattering the members of ARC and forcing its leader, the Starchild, to go underground with a new Cover herself.

THE CROSSING

Prague, Czech Republic

For centuries, Prague has been the heart and soul of Central Europe, an epicenter of politics and art, and a prize lusted after by every conqueror seeking to claim the whole of the continent as his own. Now the capital of the Czech Republic, its diplomatic clout has waned, yet it remains an important economic and cultural landmark. Physically, the city has two clearly visible strata, with modern, stylized architecture rising up above worn cobblestone lanes that still bear the scars of horse-drawn carriages. Prague's skyline alternates between the ornate gothic spires of ageless cathedrals and the shimmering glass walls of boxy skyscrapers.

Whether due to its historical importance, position in global affairs, or simple proximity to some all-important linchpin, Prague sees more angels Fall and awaken somewhere in the city than most anywhere else in Europe. The crossing works just as well in the other direction, though. Rings of Integrators and angelic agents have turned the city into a battleground, waging an invisible war against demonic elements as they seek to bring one of the God-Machine's most sensitive pieces of Infrastructure online: a gateway to the divine.

SUB ROSA

Some of the God-Machine's most important Infrastructure throughout Europe is located in, around, or beneath the

castles that dot the countryside. Medieval fortifications provided an easy means of concealing the evenly distributed hubs of complex machinery. Prague's location on the continent resulted in it serving as a major cornerstone of that Infrastructure, but for all the strength it provided to the mechanisms it supported, it was also a prime target. As a result, few places in the world are better defended against demonic insurrection.

When Charles IV ordered the construction of the bridge that would bear his name, one of his court advisors suggested the exact time to begin. That simple confluence of time, place, and mathematics resulted in a blind spot in the universe, a dead zone where some angels lost their connection to the God-Machine and others, who had Fallen, picked up the signal once again.

In the wake of WWI, the newly formed Czechoslovakia chose Prague as its new capital, bringing an influx of new citizens. The masses brought with them a variety of new Covers for the Unchained, but also a surge of potential vassals for angels to recruit in their operations against them. During this era, the God-Machine made sizeable investments in the city's core components, using fringe political groups as faces for maintenance cults and strike teams sent on missions to scour the underworld for demonic activity. Judging by the dated fonts on their aging fleet of vehicles, this is around the time the Masaryk Tours taxi service began operating.

During the Cold War, Prague entered an age of constant, clandestine warfare between agents struggling for and against the God-Machine. The city turned into a maze of double agents, information trading, and targeted assassinations. This proved to be the optimal environment for the Golems to begin offering their services as unquestioning mercenaries.

AGENDAS

Inquisitors: Prague attracts an ample population of Inquisitors, lured to the historic location by the promise of long-forgotten secrets tucked away in the area's ancient Infrastructure. As one of the major European centers of God-Machine attention, they also regard the city as a prime location for information exchange, where they can put their training to work with the greatest effect. Due to the caustic nature of the city's heated rivalries and all-out warfare, local Inquisitors usually prefer to shield themselves with a thick layer of blackmail material on as many contacts as possible, ammunition they can use to deflect attention or set themselves up as being too valuable to harass.

Integrators: More than any other Agenda, Integrators see Prague as a proving ground, a place to come out of the shadows and act on their objectives. Whereas they would typically cower together in tiny rings, conducting operations only under optimal conditions, they can instead declare their allegiance openly, move en masse, and claim full responsibility for their achievements. Prague has no shortage of willing converts either; sometimes it seems like every agent in the city can easily scrounge up a private army of zealous humans, even on short notice and with minimal contractual investment.

Saboteurs: Saboteurs treat Prague as a front line in the struggle against the God-Machine, a hotspot of all-out battle around the caldera of an open, volatile rift in the fabric of the universe. No enemy is spared, no location is off-limits, and no tactic is barred. Acting alone or as part of a group, they rarely miss an opportunity to strike out against an angelic agent or adherent, whether or not a linchpin is at stake. Even during the calm periods between missions, Saboteurs can find temporary employment as mercenaries working for the Golems.

Tempters: Above the battlegrounds and bloodstained alleyways, beyond the war between the God-Machine's agents and its enemies, Prague remains a cultural marvel. Though Tempters will participate in the struggle and do their part, they never forget that they live in an artistic and musical paradise. They immerse themselves in the nightlife and, through their intricate connections to the underworld, enjoy the respect and affluence resulting from their positions as providers of luxury and comfort to their compatriots.

FACTIONS

The Bohemian Defenestration: The loosely organized, highly motivated, and amply supplied resistance against the God-Machine's agents in Prague has begrudgingly accepted name Bohemian Defenestration, referring to the city's past rebellious events. In modern times, this cell-based group conducts disparate initiatives, maintaining tenuous communication through occasional meetings by temporary intermediates, often complete strangers hired to pass single messages along. In effect, they have outsourced their organizational structure to outsiders, which allows each cell to focus more directly on its operations. Though the organization has frequently professed its neutrality, the Bohemian Defenestration harbors a severe distrust of Vltava Holdings, attempting numerous covert activities to infiltrate their vaults.

Masaryk Tours: Masquerading as a normal taxi service, passengers can access a secret array of features if they know the right things to say to any of the drivers working for Masaryk Tours. In addition to offering quick, easy transportation around the city, they're also willing to participate in chases or escapes, overt or covert, if their fare is accepted. For a hefty price, they can also guarantee one or more clients the ability to step out of time for a set duration, spending a split second in a pocket universe where time does not pass, emerging to see the world around them has gone on for hours, days, or even longer, depending on how much they're willing to pay.

Slavic School of Calligraphy: Sometimes a demon needs a contract in a hurry, securing a bit of Cover or an advantage in an upcoming operation, and at other times, that demon might be in possession of more than is needed. Luckily, the SSoC functions as an exchange for such commodities. Once potential shoppers pass a rigorous background check and validation of at least one notable referral, they are permitted into the compound's inner chambers, a series of interconnected rooms inside a converted cathedral. An SSoC faculty member who

is equal parts bouncer and merchant accompanies newcomers at all times. The school maintains an exclusive relationship with Masaryk Tours, who provide anonymous transportation for its faculty in exchange for occasional access to the school's records.

Golems: At least one group of demons has figured out a way to turn the constant fear and violence of the perpetual battle fought on the streets of Prague into a steady income. What most humans regard as gang warfare or Eastern European mafia activity has effectively been turned into a business model. By recruiting the most talented infiltrators, bodyguards, and assassins in the region, the Golems have built a reputation on getting jobs done quickly and efficiently. One feature that sets them apart from similar groups is their unnerving ability to show up when and where they're needed even before they're hired. Rumors tell of an revered oracle among their ranks, able to reach into the future with his mind, pinpoint confluences of critical events between opposing factions, and arrange to have squads on site, standing by to provide assistance if their offer is accepted.

Vltava Holdings: The secure facility at Vltava Holdings, on the southern part of the city in a modern but otherwise nondescript building, is one of the most heavily fortified locations in the country. While they cater to high-end mortal customers, their primary concern is with various supernatural elements throughout the World of Darkness. Clients are never aware of one another, in records or in person, and are only allowed on the premises during scheduled appointments with Vltava representatives. Any item or investment entrusted to their care gets locked away, perhaps not even in a physical location. Vltava is usually more than capable of defending itself under normal circumstances, although, they have from time to time, employed the Golems while in possession of something extremely valuable.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

Jasna Reese: How the powers-that-be have yet to get their hands on Jasna Reese, an unassuming little woman with a squeamish disposition and abundant phobias, is a mystery to everyone. For someone who knows far more than she should about a wide range of sensitive topics, yet seemingly possesses no ability to provide for her own survival or defense, she truly is an enigma. Some of the Unchained of Prague rely on her as a constant source of damaging gossip, pinpoint accurate predictions, and baffling leaps of logic. Others regard her as a crackpot mystic; better to ignore and avoid her lest they find themselves caught in the crossfire of whatever angelic faction gets her first.

Viktor Brandt: Unabashed by his German accent, Viktor Brandt makes no excuses for his activities in Prague, restlessly stalking any careless or reckless demons. Though an intimidating presence, he rarely wades into combat himself, preferring to conduct investigations and arrange for the God-Machine's foot soldiers to carry out the final acts instead. If forced into



an altercation, Brandt relies on a well-worn Luger pistol, which he uses with practiced precision instead of fire-at-will panic. Known for pursuing his targets with narrow-minded focus, some receive the occasional offer of respite in exchange for information leading to the apprehension of more important targets.

Bohdan Stanko: Never missing an opportunity to mess with angels or demons, Bohdan Stanko styles himself as a trickster, but also as an ally to those who have the best interests of humanity in mind. He has a tendency to show up where he is either a welcome distraction or a confusing complication to a critical situation, offering assistance to anyone who can answer his riddles or penetrate his doublespeak. Interestingly, he never exerts his will over humans, always treating them with dignity and respect. He saves those antics for tormenting supernatural beings, sidestepping any repercussions with cleverly-worded escape clauses and optical illusions.

Eva Melenkova: Merchants like Eva Melenkova are rare, for better or worse. She has the skill and resources to make just about anything a demon could need in his struggle against the God-Machine's plans, from handy trinkets to powerful weapons, all available for sale through a variety of currencies, mortal or supernatural. For anyone desperately in need of her creations but without the means to pay for them, Eva offers what she calls a "prototype plan." Anyone willing to provide ample documentation on how a device functions during live fire field tests can use it, free of charge, for a set amount of time. The results of such activities range from miraculous to disastrous.

Honza Perun: Mr. Perun, as he insists on being called, is ironically on a first name basis with just about every other notable figure in Prague. Though some of his relationships are of questionable or even illicit origin, he nonetheless maintains an intricate network of contacts throughout all levels of society at significant personal expense. Anyone he meets is drawn into that web, whether they want to be or not, and may soon find themselves mingling in the wrong circles, glad-handing with the privileged and powerful, or caught up in a dangerous escapade with someone who had been a stranger only hours before. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Perun's currency is favors, though unlike most of the other factions in the city, he is more than willing to offer them first and call them in later.

LOCATIONS

The Lesser Quarter Theatre: Nestled among the archaic buildings of a previous era, one structure stands out as bearing the hallmarks of recent repair and renovation. Stone and mortar support a restored wooden roof, freshly painted and adorned with modern amenities like electricity, plumbing, and lighting. The Lesser Quarter Theatre is one of the city's more obscure venues, though its modest accommodations are filled almost every night for the evening performance. Even after the finale of the Secondhand Souls story arc, the theatre remains a prominent point of interest for demons, as the cult responsible for the events that unfold there is never fully vanquished.

Olga's: Located just off of the Old Town Square in the historic district of the city, Olga's is a predominately outdoor restaurant that prides itself on the quality of its bramboracka, its 24-hour schedule, and the fact that its proximity to near-constant human activity makes it an ideal place for angels and demons to meet for civil discourse. Run by an eccentric old woman who enjoys referring to everyone as her children and feeding them until they can't bear to eat any more, the establishment has a well-earned reputation as being clean, efficient, and friendly.

Marousek and Associates: Though demons rarely approach the building, it is widely known that one of the tallest skyscrapers in Prague is a hive of angelic activity. Marousek and Associates is the only name on the lease, despite the tower being far larger than any law firm would require. The humans who work inside hold only low-level mundane positions, with the upper management seen as powerful men and women of unquestionable stature. What actually goes on in the building is anyone's guess, but one thing is certain: there is no place in the city that sees more angelic traffic than the front doors of Marousek and Associates.

The Sinkhole: On the outskirts of the city, where the forest begins reclaiming the land from the asphalt and concrete, a subtle depression in the earth is detectable only by the odd angle of the buildings surrounding it. This remote section of abandoned suburbs was never repaired after a sinkhole almost swallowed up several houses and a corner market decades ago, though it remains one of the most important locations in Prague to its local demons. For reasons unknown, the entire area, just over four square kilometers, acts as a blind spot in the God-Machine's surveillance. Angels are never found in or around the area, though they move around its edges like insects avoiding an obstacle, aware of it but unconcerned with what it actually is. As such, the demonic agents at work in Prague have adopted the sinkhole as the optimal location to dispose of unwanted evidence.

SEED: SECONDHAND SOULS

Whether they want to or not, some demons eventually make it back into the God-Machine to be repurposed or destroyed. No one really knows what the deciding factors are, since the Machine's motives are beyond all rational understanding. Or perhaps it is a construct of pure rationalism and all of the independent instruments, the angels and demons who are aware of its existence, are merely too irrational to comprehend how its decisions are made. Secondhand Souls is a story that forces characters to confront that dichotomy.

ELEMENTS

As the coldest of wars rages across Prague, along its twisting avenues and shadowed alleyways, the God-Machine has set in motion a series of events bridging the gap between its heart and the living, breathing realm of mortals. This conduit crosses the gulf between one reality and another, allowing desper-

ate exiles and captured demonic agents to be reabsorbed into the background fabric. While the major Agencies of the city are busy holding the front lines of the never-ending conflict, it's up to a small ring of demons to unravel the God-Machine's latest plot and stop it however they can.

What seemed at first like a simple recycling program – after all, the God-Machine was merely collecting its wayward angels – has been twisted into something more sinister by the cult responsible for its maintenance. Now they have begun tracking down and capturing demons, sacrificing them on stage and sending them back to the God-Machine to endure whatever punishment it has in store for them.

While a means of disrupting their operation is presented to the characters, it is by no means the only possible way to defeat the cult. After they are drawn into the plot by the events of the first scene, it is entirely up to them how they go about foiling the God-Machine's plans, if they even decide to at all. Cynics could easily adopt the attitude that the God-Machine is actually doing them a favor, filtering exiles out of their way and culling the weaker, slower demons from the herd.

The Truth: When an angelic cult carries out their instructions to build a conduit through which willing exiles and captured demons alike can transition back into the God-Machine's embrace, the various Agencies at work in Prague spring into action to spoil their plans. Using their Cover as actors, they perform the ritual in broad view of the public by setting it up as the finale of their performance of Doctor Faustus. One member of the Bohemian Defenestration has stumbled upon their plot and even figured out how to sabotage their operation. A powerful disrupting gadget crafted using a human skull, capable of ruining their plans without exposing the angels for what they are and affecting any humans nearby.

INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

Any demons who claim Prague as their home will be intimately familiar with the city's internal strife, but might only be aware of the Bohemian Defenestration as the Agency leading the charge on their behalf. As they get more and more involved in the conflict, they might be surprised by all of the ancillary groups and relevant individuals who also have stakes in the situation. Alternately, characters could already have declared allegiances to one of the various Agencies and perhaps even have been part of operations undertaken against the God-Machine, earning them advanced knowledge of the city, but marking them as priority targets during any conflicts with angelic forces.

Demons visiting Prague for the first time will have either heard about the city's reputation as a constant battleground or not have to wait long until they're pulled into the fray in one way or another. Whether they're simply passing through the city or relocating there to join one of the local Agencies, the God-Machine's all-encompassing plots have a way of lashing out and dragging people in. Characters might have heard of Marousek and Associates through their clandestine dealings

THE DEMON SEED COLLECTION

with other European elements or have business with Vltava Holdings for reasons completely unrelated to Secondhand Souls. Regardless, foreigners should be thrown into the mix of competing Agencies and ongoing warfare as soon as possible.

BLUEPRINTS

Since they were given the directive of building a conduit to the God-Machine, through which malfunctioning or obsolete angels could be brought back in for decommissioning or repurposing, the Lesser Quarter cult has pursued their goal with zeal and efficiency. However, in recent months, they have begun to branch out from their initial purpose, taking it upon themselves to seek out and capture demons as well, forcing them through the ritual that will send them back to the God-Machine.

In the first scene of Secondhand Souls, the cult chases an unnamed demon through the streets, culminating in a shootout near Olga's restaurant, where the characters happen to be visiting individually or as part of an organized ring. After the fight, the wounded demon offers tidbits of information as well as a fragile parcel she seems reluctant to part with, even in light of her imminent demise. She identifies his attackers, then, just before she expires, produces an armored and securely locked metal briefcase, informing them that a cult has been abducting demons. Though they may not notice, the characters are being observed as they interact with the doomed woman and accept her parcel. Whether they realize it or not, they have just entered the battle of Prague.

From there, the mystery unfolds. Once the case is opened, they might be confused and surprised to see that, among an abundance of packaging materials, it contains a human skull. Naturally, a deeper inspection will reveal that it is, in fact, a powerful gadget more akin to a key than anything else. But what does it open – or, more accurately, what does it lock? Their investigation leads them to several locations throughout Prague and requires dealings with some of its most infamous and dangerous individuals on their way to unraveling the plot of the Lesser Quarter cult.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The pillars holding up the Infrastructure of Prague are ancient but solid. The God-Machine has invested an enormous amount of effort in maintaining all of this with a steady stream of sentinel and maintenance angels, but there are always gaps in the design, moments between patrols, and cracks in the armor.

At the core of the city, in its most modern district, the monolithic Marousek and Associates building stands as the cornerstone of the God-Machine's influence. From there, legions of angels fan out through the internal and external channels, expanding its capacity and purging its system of errors and interference. No single structure is better defended or more closely watched; any incursion into the actual building is regarded as a suicide mission, even for groups as wily and reck-

less as the Bohemian Defenestration. For those operations, they prefer to recruit freelance agents, preferably those from outside the city who will have the advantage of anonymity.

From that central point, arrayed around Prague in a semi-geometric pattern, are numerous other hotspots of expansion and control. It's no surprise that the God-Machine often relies upon mortal authoritarian institutions to enforce its draconian rules. By reinforcing the local law enforcement departments, investigative elements, and military, the God-Machine has built a virtual police state. Day by day, more and more of these unwitting mortals are thrown into the battle against the Unchained, serving as scouts and cannon fodder while angels wade in behind them to handle anything they can't overcome through traditional means.

Though the God-Machine has exerted its authority in almost every part of the city, the demons of Prague thrive in an underground society. The Bohemian Defenestration, ever vigilant and vigorous in their resistance, dutifully maintains their front lines. Meanwhile, magnetic personalities like Honza Pe-run ensure that local Agencies receive a steady influx of fresh recruits at considerable personal risk to his own wellbeing.

METHODS

Politics: Not just anyone can earn an audience or a contract to work with the Bohemian Defenestration. Prospects must succeed on a Politics Skill roll to convince the organization that potential assets are sincere and not infiltrators seeking to corrupt it from the inside.

Drive: Some of Prague's more modern districts have normal roads, conducive to everyday traffic, but navigating the narrow cobblestone lanes in the city's older areas requires a Drive check to safely travel at any respectable speed.

Expression: Audience members aware of the inner workings of the universe, who also succeed on Expression Skill rolls, recognize the final act of the performance for what it is: the sacrifice of a captured demon.

Streetwise: Unless they receive specific instructions from a knowledgeable local, finding the sinkhole on the outskirts of town can't be done without a successful Streetwise Skill roll. For demons who haven't spent very long in the area, finding their way back to civilization might even require a second roll.

Terrible Form: It's entirely possible to use the cultists' reverence of the supernatural against them. Each dot a character has in Terrible Form earns them an additional die in all social Skill rolls made against the Lesser Quarter cult. The demon need not actually be in her alternate form to receive these benefits; the cultists are indoctrinated enough to sense their power, even when restrained.

ESCALATION

The first scene of Secondhand Souls takes place at Olga's restaurant, when a windowless van crashes into a roadside barricade nearby. As onlookers gawk at the spectacle, the van's driver

emerges, mortally wounded. Though she may or may not recognize the characters for what they are, she desperately approaches them with what's left of her strength. Having only a few moments to pass on her information, she informs them that the Lesser Quarter cult has been abducting people all across Prague. She produces a locked briefcase and insists that it's the key to thwarting their efforts, then dies. At that point, several unmarked cars arrive and cultists pour out, guns blazing.

After the battle, the characters are most likely confused and on edge. When the case is opened to reveal a human skull, they will most likely be even more perplexed, but the importance of their cargo and the gravity of the situation should keep them moving. Prague has several viable information outlets, including well-known personalities like Honza Perun, a well-connected deal-maker, and Jasna Reese, an eccentric mystic.

At some point, the characters will discover that the epicenter for the cult is the theatre that bears their name, located in the Lesser Quarter of the city. Their weekly performance of Doctor Faustus serves as a cover for a ritual that opens a temporary conduit to the other side of reality. Through this rift, angels and demons alike can be reabsorbed into the God-Machine. If the characters actually take in a performance as spectators, they will recognize the horrific act for what it is, while the clueless mortals around them shower the actors with applause.

The denouement of the Secondhand Souls comes about when one of the characters interrupts the performance, which can be done in any one of a number ways. They could storm the stage, cause other disturbances in the building, or even infiltrate the cult to sabotage their plans. However, the most direct and dramatic method is to activate the skull, unleashing the gadget's power and forever sealing the rift. The cultists become enraged, but clever use of the mortal audience could alleviate the need for further bloodshed.

UP NEXT

Under the Sinkhole: After years of absorbing all sorts of unwanted refuse, incriminating evidence, and dangerous artifacts, the sinkhole overflows with potential value to scavengers. Exceptionally cunning or reckless demons could arrange excursions into the mysterious site, unearthing who knows what from its depths. Beneath the surface, twisting corridors of folded space lead to other times and places, all dead ends and all packed with unstable relics, embarrassing secrets, bound entities, or worse.

Eva Melenkova's Prototype Plan: Long after the events of Secondhand Souls have concluded, Eva still needs willing test subjects for her latest contraptions. Whether they solicit her services for another mission or volunteer to field test her gadgets for purely scientific reasons, she is always willing to equip trusted agents with whatever she has laying around.

Brandt versus Reese: Depending on how they interact with the city's residents and what sorts of plots they get involved in, demons in Prague could find themselves associated

with either Viktor Brandt or Jasna Reese. As their perpetual game of cat and mouse continues, they could find themselves employed by the former or indebted to the latter for information she provides. In effect, the characters must choose between being hunted by a merciless villain or lose access to the arcane wisdom of a noted mystic.

Stanko's Riddle: Bohdan Stanko tends to show up in the wrong place at the wrong time, but demons who understand his goals can use that to their advantage. As a self-styled protector of humanity, he is always interested in pushing back the God-Machine's influence, but also shielding humans from being exploited by demons as well. When he initiates contact with demonic agents, he presents opportunities to interfere with the God-Machine where it threatens average humans, though for him, each situation must be resolved without the use of any human-affecting power.

Permanent Residents: After the characters have destroyed or dispersed the Lesser Quarter cult, all of their imprisoned demons are grateful for their freedom, becoming potential allies. However, the cult also had a waiting list of exiled angels eager to return to the God-Machine's embrace. Like it or not, the characters have become important figureheads in the battle of Prague, respected by one side and bitterly despised by the other.

EARTH ALEMBIC

Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Sydney, the largest city in Australia, is arguably the South Pacific region's foremost modern mecca of finance and culture, although Melburnians might dispute this. It long ago outgrew its disreputable (by colonialist standards) origins as a penal colony for the British Empire and is now a thriving, sprawling metropolis setting the beat for a nation. Sydneysiders don't even notice the bars of their cage.

Demons do see the bars, the strands of Infrastructure originally designed to confine humans who proved inconvenient to the God-Machine's operations in the Northern Hemisphere. The cage is still being built, reinforced by angels, but its primary purpose is no longer to keep malcontents in – it's trying to keep out the unfortunate and unpredictable side-effects of the God-Machine's operations in the stifling, record-breaking heat of the Outback. The clank and whir of the God-Machine's worldwide climate engineering keeps creating menageries of cryptids, bizarre creatures drawn one by one or in packs to Aether-saturated Sydney.

SUB ROSA

Thanks to the American Revolution, the British could no longer dump their criminals on North American shores. Luckily, Captain Cook had claimed New South Wales, Australia, for the Crown, and Botany Bay and its environs became its new dumping ground, eventually growing into the city of Sydney.



The God-Machine's operations were in effect even then. It used the mass transportation of criminals and malcontents to remove humans, stigmatics, and suspected demon Cover identities away from its key operations in the North, sequestering them in the far less populated and less developed South. Of course, the God Machine is not synonymous with the British Empire; it uses any and all civilizations and cultures towards its enigmatic ends. In this instance, its purposes happened to be aligned with the British penal colony, and demons ever since have made the mistake of equating the God Machine with prisoner importation, leading them to miss noticing its more subtle operations in the southern hemisphere.

Sydney's early Infrastructure did seem to serve mainly to prevent the penal colonists from escaping the continent and region. Over time, however, it became clear that this array was also in place to block out certain foreign influences on the continent, to allow the "experiment" that was Australia to develop relatively untainted by other projects, as if the God Machine wanted to run this program in isolation.

Demons took advantage of the seemingly lax oversight and small population of angel overseers, playing key roles in such tumultuous events as the Rum Rebellion, where the army staged a coup against Governor Bligh and ran the settlement for a time. Later, the Crown halted the importation of convicts, but their influx was soon replaced by a wave of immi-

grants seeking gold, which set off the explosive growth and industrialization of Sydney. With Australia's increasing role as an independent power, culminating in its recognition as a Commonwealth at the very turn of the twentieth century, came a new phase in the God-Machine's operations.

Demons had become too used to the relative freedom they had from adverse scrutiny. Now, with more Infrastructure and more angels, they felt increasingly boxed in. That's when they realized that this wasn't just a vague feeling – they were indeed being caged in. No demon ever managed to dismantle the old Infrastructure that had been put in place to keep convicts from washing back up on their home shores. It wasn't worth the trouble and risk. Why try to escape paradise, anyway? Australia promised prime ground for a Hell of the demons' own making.

But as the century marched on, the Infrastructure was strengthened, such that it became difficult for demons to even leave the city, let alone the continent. It wasn't impossible, just harder to do without setting off some kind of alert, and endangering their Covers.

As the twenty-first century dawned, it became clear to the local demons that the cage of Infrastructure only kept them in as a secondary effect. Its primary purpose was to keep away a strange new phenomenon: cryptids from the Outback. Ini-

tially, just a few came now and then, more urban legend than confirmed sighting. However, as time passed, more and more appeared, animals warped into strange forms by exposure to the God-Machine Infrastructure being built in the desert to somehow, for some purpose, capture or possibly perpetuate the unprecedented heat that climate change now inflicts on the interior of the continent.

These cryptids are proving increasingly devious and capable of outsmarting the angel's "dingo fence" of invisible Infrastructure, slipping between its bars no matter how quickly or efficiently they erected new ones to keep them out. Many of them seek Aether, but some seem intelligent and even devious, in search of...what? Communion with their inadvertent maker? Or maybe revenge against the God-Machine?

It has long been a point of pride among many Australians that their home can kill them at any minute, whether through agonizing maiming or painful death by snake venom, spider bite, crocodile attack, or what have you. Perhaps it is this perverse pride that has somehow influenced the nature of the cryptid wave. In any other place, it might instead have manifested as religious cultists or serial killers or heavily armed patriot militias. But here, it's strange animals, as if Australia's own legends about itself are being fulfilled in the most literal way.

Demons are stirring, recognizing a chance to move against the machine using tools, or even allies unknown in other regions of the world. Revolution won't come from the top down. It'll come from Down Under.

AGENDAS

Inquisitors: The enigmas of Sydney are tied up with the God-Machine's operation elsewhere on the continent. They cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of what else is going on, but it's not easy investigating into the Outback or across a vast, still largely under-populated continent. Sydney's Inquisitors are often obsessed with collecting intelligence from all over the region, placing themselves in media outlets or even among the park services, where they can investigate Infrastructure in remote sites.

Integrators: Sydney does not seem to offer a particularly opportune locale for those who wish to get back into the good graces of their former cold, unfeeling master. Those who are here often fall back on joining other demons, watching them, and waiting for the express purpose not of furthering demonic goals, but in the wan hope that their position and information will someday prove pivotal to their redemption.

Saboteurs: Perhaps the most popular Agenda in town. Saboteurs test the bars of the cage that is Sydney with every weapon and tactic they can dream up. Flush with the same limit-breaking philosophy that infects many Australians, they intend nothing short of breaking the city's Infrastructure apart, piece-by-piece or in one blow, whatever it takes. The other Agendas tend to consider them the *bogans* (uncouth thugs) of the Sydney demon scene.

Tempters: Sydney is not, at first, an ideal place in which to tempt humans into one's schemes. Other cities like Melbourne seem to have a more cutting-edge party scene and Perth has the more famous beaches. But Sydney does have a constant wave of immigrants, people ready to trade anything for a chance at a new life in the thriving city. Demonic Sydney-siders are there to take them up on the deal.

FACTIONS

This-Placed People is an Aboriginal rights organization serving as a front for demons trying to dismantle existing Infrastructure and foil future Infrastructure using legal challenges. If those don't work, they use anarchist Black Bloc-style tactics in the name of the regions' First Peoples. The latter separates them from most indigenous rights groups. The front group's name is meant to evoke the Aboriginal word *ora* — "this place" — and the term "displaced peoples," since Aborigines often feel like refugees in their own lands.

The Agency attracts Destroyers and Messengers. The moral force behind their Aboriginal rights front gives them a lot of leeway in the public's eyes for their support of violent actions. To ensure their Covers are airtight, the Agency does actually do most of its work in support of Aboriginal land rights claims and in legal aid to the poor. Most of its demon principals use Aboriginal Covers and some of them have even come to identify emotionally with the plights of the Aborigines, especially the Stolen Generation, removed from their traditional families and ways.

They have forged connections with Aboriginal tribes across the nation, as well as with demons in different cities who also use Aboriginal identities as Covers. This gives the Agency a broad network of spies on the ground, in the underbelly of the culture as well as in the Outback, where invisible God-Machine Infrastructure churns away at what a number of demon Inquisitors have figured out is some form of climate change operation. Although whether it is at cause or only reaping the harvest is unknown and probably impossible to fully divine.

The **Hellbound** is a gang of bikers, or "bikies" as they're known Down Under. They're mostly Destroyer demons, although they'll take anyone who wants to screw over the God-Machine and its minions. They sport a conscious *Mad Max* vibe, although even they have come to realize as of late that it's gotten old. Their newer recruits look more traditional biker, resembling gangs like the Hell's Angels or the Mongols.

Like other biker outfits, the Hellbound are also heavily involved in the construction business. A recent scandal has filled the headlines with the role of bikies in a corrupt construction firm, but the Hellbound are better hidden than most. They don't use a false firm from which to operate — they simply threaten the owners of various firms with dire consequences to life and limb should they not kick back cash, as well as allow the Hellbound free access to construction sites — places that are often the loci of new Infrastructure.

THE DEMON SEED COLLECTION

The **Bohemians** are a group of three demons who band together to support opera. If this sounds a bit odd, it is. But each of them are demons (two Messengers, one Psychopomp) whose Fall in some way is due to or connected with the beauty revealed in opera. The group's founder, Rodolfo, Fell during the final act of *La Bohème* at the Sydney Opera House (see below), when the character of Mimi dies and is mourned heartbreakingly by her lover. Rodolfo gathered around him two other former angels who also Fell when confronted with the drama and exaltation of the opera. They aim to rescue their beloved art form from the God-Machine's machinations in the Sydney Opera House.

The **Mozzies** are violent and racist football hooligans, exulting in showing up at any event to turn against the fans of whichever team is winning. They are led by a gang of demons, who themselves don't care either way about the club's ethnic issues, but they certainly use them to unify and direct the ragtag band of working class yobbos to cause mayhem. Their main aim is to create distractions against mild Infrastructure timed to coincide with assaults on major Infrastructure.

NOTABLE CHARACTERS

Alkina Kincaid is an Aboriginal rights lawyer and activist. Her mother was an Aborigine and her father a British diplomat. Alkina is a stigmatic who is Pacted with Valmont, a demon involved with the This-Placed People agency (see above). She knows she will eventually give up her life and identity for this demon to inhabit, but in the meantime, her deal allows her to call upon the Agency when she needs it. She has become very curious about the recent sightings of strange, mythical animals in the city, which she now knows to be cryptids. She, unlike her demon partners, believes there is a supernatural element behind this influx, a spirit-based power not associated with the God-Machine.

Ripper is a surfing champion from Perth, now ensconced in Sydney to party hard. He is a demon Tempter who has encountered God-Machine Infrastructure in the Outback. He knows more about it than he is telling his fellow demons. His partying isn't just a typical Tempter trait — he's trying to forget the implications of what he's seen: vast machines acting as global heat sinks, working to cool the rest of the earth by dumping the heat into Australia's interior.

Slagfest is a demon Destroyer whose Cover is a female punk singer in a Sydney band. She's sort of a one-woman Pussy Riot, railing against the political order with her music. Her bandmates are humans, who have no idea of the danger they're in just being in Slagfest's proximity. She is an adventurous soul, willing to join other demons on any thrilling mission, but she's likely to be more liability than asset — unless the aim is to use her for bait or as a distraction.

The 10,000 Things is a Messenger demon obsessed with Hong Kong-style medieval martial arts movies — *wuxia*. He uses a Cover named Yi Wan, a Chinese resident of Ashfield (also known as "Little Shanghai") who makes short Internet

kung-fu videos with amazing wire and stunt work, actually shot using Embeds and occasional Exploits. These videos have become an Internet sensation, turning Yi Wan into an underground celebrity. Other demons have tried to recruit The 10,000 Things into various anti-God-Machine schemes, from information gathering to sabotage, but he prefers to make his movies instead. Unfortunately, the increased spotlight might have drawn the notice of the Barrister, a Sydney angel. Yi Wan might find himself actually fighting for his life, and wishing he hadn't rebuffed potential demon allies.

Father Lamb is a demon Inquisitor who masquerades as a preacher in the King's Cross district, ostensibly trying to convert the red-light district's transients. He's actually always seeking intelligence on God-Machine operations, and the criminals in King's Cross are his network of spies, bringing him word on strange doings from all over their trade routes. His Cover is a fundamentalist preacher who likes to tell everyone that the existence of bananas proves that evolution is a lie, but since this is just a ruse, Father Lamb isn't very good at arguing his point.

LOCATIONS

Needle Haven is a safe injection site in Kings Cross ("The Cross"), where junkies can come to get clean needles and use drugs in a safe, clean atmosphere. It's actually Infrastructure. Demons suspect that the needles and the drugs aren't entirely "clean" — junkies who use here are injecting themselves with some as-yet undetected and unidentified angel-engineered chemical. Regardless of what drug they're actually taking, the site itself is Infrastructure designed to perpetuate feelings of despair, even though on the surface their message is to tell junkies that the government cares about them.

The world-famous **Sydney Opera House** is no surprise, a giant mass of Infrastructure. The Bohemian faction of demons (see above) believes it somehow channels human emotions into energies or fuel that used to power the city's outer cage Infrastructure, the barrier that tries to keep out undue influences, and is failing, as exhibited by the cryptid invasion. Or maybe it's just soaking the rich for season tickets and donations to the arts, money that could conceivably be diverted to charities for the downtrodden. The structure's unique architecture does seem to resemble sails. Real sails catch wind and pull a ship along. What wind are these architectural sails catching, and where is it taking the city?

The **Taronga Zoo** has had trouble of late. Some of the exotic animals there have become even more exotic, turning into cryptids, then breaking out and running wild. It is a tribute to angelic power and God-Machine propaganda that nobody knows about this. Even the zookeepers are largely unaware of the animal menace all around them. These animals have not proven to be as outright dangerous to demons or angels as the cryptids creeping in from the Outback, but they're drawing a lot of attention, pulled as they are to demons and their Aether, which acts as a bull's-eye for angels who otherwise have overlooked these demons.

SEED: BETWEEN A ROCK AND...

There is a concatenation of cryptids showing up in Sydney. Most of them are native animals, acting strangely and with more cunning than they should have. But some of them are... well, right out of legend: giant kangaroos, flying snakes, even a Kinie-Ger (a marsupial cat-man). Clearly, the God-Machine is aware of this infestation, since its agents are running about and covering up sightings and explaining them away. But the creatures keep coming back, despite the Infrastructure outside the city designed to keep them out. It seems that these latest waves are coming from *within* the fence.

Demons who investigate the matter can figure out, by tracing the trail of sightings, that many of these cryptids are coming from out west of the city, from an area abutting the Blue Mountains, but still within the God-Machine's "cryptid fence" perimeter.

One sighting in particular keeps cropping up: the Yowie, the Bigfoot of Australia. Is this creature real and is it orchestrating the cryptids?

ELEMENTS

Somatix Pharmaceuticals is an animal research company that works with a number of Australia's university labs to develop and test new pharmaceutical medicines. It hides a "dark lab" on the outskirts of Penrith, in Greater Western Sydney, at the feet of the Blue Mountain range, with close access to numerous nature reserves. Locals don't suspect that the lonely facility, fenced in and patrolled by armed guards, is anything more than Gunyah, a political think tank.

That is, most locals don't know it's a cruel animal research lab – but rumor gets out and urban legends have grown up around the facility – stories about monsters that have escaped from the compound and eaten local pets. If the stories are true, hey even killed and ate a missing boy.

Somatix uses the Gunyah lab to perform its most gruesome tests, not because they are sadists (not primarily) but because these operations would result in truly bad PR if the public knew them. While the main aim is to test medicines, they also engage in military R&D, exposing animals to new gases, from riot-control aerosols to mass-kill nerve gases. This research is unknown to the Australian government and would be shut down if proof were leaked. Alas, Somatix has a fleet of detectives and paramilitary mercs to deal with would-be activists. Troublemakers have a tendency to be found dead of "dehydration" or "heat stroke," having "gotten lost" while hiking in the mountains.

The recent influx of cryptids into Sydney can be partly laid at the feet of Gunyah, for the first wave of the creatures escaped from this facility, and some successive waves either came from here or were affected by Gunyah's field teams, which scour the Outback for test subjects.

The Truth: The Gunyah facility is a glitch in the system. Director Rodney Diggle – a sociopathic stigmatic – exposes wild-caught animals to a captured piece of God-Machine Infrastructure. Due to some as-yet-unaccounted-for anomaly, the God-Machine does not seem to be aware of it. No angel has yet appeared to shut down the rogue operation.

Or is it all a Venus Fly Trap to lure in demons? Legends among demons speak of a demon ring that broke into Gunyah, only to be captured and experimented upon, becoming strange creatures neither demon nor human.

INTERCHANGEABLE PARTS

Demons can be drawn to the Gunyah facility in a number of ways:

- A cryptid encounter leaves a trail that can be traced back to Gunyah. See below for some sample Gunyah cryptids that could fit the bill.
- This-Placed People has flagged Gunyah as something more than it seems. Its think tank façade has at various times pretended to address Aboriginal rights issues, but to the expert activists it's clearly a smoke screen. In addition, homeless and downtrodden Aborigines are beginning to whisper about the weird creatures that come from this place. Alkina Kincaid might directly ask the players' characters to investigate.
- The security forces of Gunyah kidnap a demon known to the players' characters. Rodney Diggle, the Gunyah head, ordered the kidnapping because the demon either knew too much or in some way displayed powers that fascinated Diggle.
- Somatix has worldwide connections, including facilities in other countries. While these are ignorant of what's going on at Gunyah, Diggle can use these distant places as bases for capturing odd animals – or even Infrastructure – and transporting them Down Under.

BLUEPRINTS

The Gunyah facility is under assault. Diggle has amped up security of late and sent out his field teams with more frequency, all in search of the enemy: a wretched creature escaped from the lab. It is this monster that is causing the Yowie sightings.

The giant, hairy and immensely strong creature can move silently and attack from nowhere at great speed. It has twice tried to enter the facility, each time decimating a number of guards before it was chased away.

The Yowie is proof of the truth of the rumor about the captured and experimented upon demon ring. He is – or *was* – a Saboteur demon named the Antibody. He and his ring broke into Gunyah expecting to find God-Machine Infrastructure. They did, but not in the manner they expected. Diggle exposed him and his two comrades to his strange Infrastructure

CALL OF THE YOWIE

The World of the Darkness is a weird place with room for a lot of different yet similar creatures. It's quite possible that the Yowie legend is based on an actual being, and that the demon-cryptid hybrid harrying Gunyah is just an imitation.

For this story, it's possible that the demon-cryptid hybrid Yowie's activities are drawing the attention of one or more *actual* Yowies, opening the door to some strange new mysteries for demons to explore outside of the direct influence of the God-Machine. If so, what is a Yowie, really? There are a number of possible answers:

- It's Fae. It's a creature from beyond the Brambles, from the realm of Faerie. This explains why it can come and go into and out of this world. (**Changeling: the Lost.**)
- It's Something Unknown. Many entities in the World of Darkness defy easy categorization, and some are unique and singular.

(see below), and it changed them. The other two died soon after, but the Antibody survived – not as demon but as a cryptid-demon hybrid. His form had been atavistically regressed to a primate state, wiping out much of his memory and his advanced intellect. He – it – is now a creature of instinct and raw anger, directed against Gunyah and Diggle.

This Yowie-of-sorts hides out in the mountains near Gunyah, plotting new assaults. It can phase in and out of material reality, becoming invisible and insubstantial, and lending credence to the Yowie's ability to appear and disappear without a trace.

If demons arrive in the area to scout out an infiltration of Gunyah, the Yowie shows itself to them, trying to gain their help, although it can no longer speak. It knows that demons are somehow kin, and will try to lead them to Gunyah, where it can reveal a secret underground passage that is unknown even to most of the Gunyah staff and security. It's Diggle's emergency escape route – he has no idea that anybody, much less the Yowie, is aware of it.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The labs are in two locations: in a converted barn (large animals) and underground (smaller animals, with some exceptions, and the Rainbow Serpent Stone). Cryptids can be found in cages in both labs.

The heart of Diggle's operation is the Rainbow Serpent Stone – his piece of Infrastructure. He found the old stone with Aboriginal paintings deep in the Outback, when he was accompanying a field team looking for test subjects. As a stigmatic, he immediately sensed that it wasn't merely an archaeological artifact, it was God-Machine Infrastructure. The "x-ray" style painting of a rainbow serpent was a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional structure hidden just outside of material reality. Diggle had no idea what its purpose was or how old it was. He just knew he wanted it.

He had it taken back to Gunyah, where its very presence began affecting the test animals, turning them into cryptids. Realizing what an opportunity he now had to really unlock the secrets of the universe, Diggle began his experiments in earnest.

As God-Machine Infrastructure, the Rainbow Serpent Stone should always remain somewhat mysterious, but intrepid demons who study it can surmise that it is machinery designed to siphon spirit energy (Essence) and transforms it into Aether, which is meant to power climate-control Infrastructure in the Outback. Now disconnected to its related Infrastructure, it's malfunctioning and producing cryptids.

Academics: Those versed in scholarly pursuits might be able to finagle their way onto the Gunyah campus, under the cover of finding out more about its think tank. Manipulation + Academics.

Animal Communication (Embed): This power might work on cryptids (Storyteller willing), allowing a demon to free and then manipulate the Gunyah cryptids to wreak whatever havoc he chooses.

Animal Ken: This Skill can help determine just what sort of creature a given cryptid might once have been as it's not always obvious, as well as some idea of how one might manipulate it. There is but it's no guarantee. Cryptids aren't exactly animals anymore. Wits + Animal Ken.

Animal Messenger (Embed): One manner in which a demon can alert other demons (or anyone, really) to the facility is by freeing a cryptid and turning it into a messenger, seeking out a chosen target to deliver a message.

Brawl/Firearms/Weaponry: Characters could try an all-out assault on the security forces, but they're probably outnumbered. Also, multiple gunshots might cause the local police to come running.

Computer: Hacking the Gunyah system might be able to reveal that its think tank façade is false, and might even lead

CRYPTID CONFIDENTIAL

Some of the creatures that might be found here (and in the Sydney area, escaped and wild):

- Drop Bears: The joke legend about killer koalas has become real. While koalas can be dangerous on their own, these strains are especially aggressive and possess extra sharp claws, teeth, and powerful leaping and climbing abilities.
- Psycho Toad: Cane toads are a problem in the ecosystem, since they aren't native and they're poisonous to the creatures that have hunted and tried to eat them. These cryptid toads aren't just poisonous to eat; they can spit poison that acts as a psychoactive hallucinogen upon contact.
- Goanna Goons: These large lizards, similar to komodo dragons, are featured in many Aboriginal legends. These particular cryptid varieties are large and strong enough to be behind the local horror stories about child-snatching.
- The Shimmer: It's not only animals caught up in the experiments. Sometimes a lab assistant forgets protocol and gets too close. Poor Angus is just such a casualty. His exposure to the Stone turned him into an insubstantial being who resembles a human shape seen through heat haze on the horizon. He can be heard, but not touched, and he is desperate for human contact. Unfortunately, close proximity to his shimmering body can cause third-degree burns, boiling the fat beneath the skin without effecting the epidermis or even muscles.

METHODS

to hard information about their pharmaceutical tests on animals (but not any information about cryptids). Intelligence + Computer.

Investigation: Asking around among the locals can reveal many of the urban legends of strange creatures and the suspected connection to Gunyah. Presence or Manipulation + Investigation.

Stealth: Sneaking onto the campus is probably not possible, considering all the security. However, if a character can gain admittance through a Cover identity, such as a visiting scientist, etc., or by way of an Embed, then the character can use the Stealth Skill to move around from building to building unnoticed. Intelligence + Stealth.

Tag and Release (Embed): Some of the cryptids that have escaped from Gunyah try to get back in, to get at the Aether emanating from the Infrastructure. Encountering one of these outside the facility, even as far away as Sydney proper, one can tag it; if it later returns to its origin point, the demon can trace it here.

ESCALATION

It's really only a matter of time until an angel comes looking for the lost Infrastructure, the Rainbow Serpent Stone. When it does, it might be possible to repel its initial foray by using cryptids to distract it. Although it needs to prevent mortals from witnessing too many of these, but it will return with backup — one or more other angels drawn from other area operations. The goal is the Rainbow Serpent Stone, but the chance to recycle one or more demons will certainly cause it to veer from its goal temporarily.

But that's the looming threat. The more immediate threat is Rodney Diggle, who has been experimenting with the Rainbow Serpent Stone (the Essence-Aether Transformer) and will, if threatened with life and limb, use it upon himself. He has actually done this before, but only in short doses, but he now knows how to engage it fully, just as he did against the Antibody, the demon who became the Yowie now harassing Gunyah.

The Rainbow Serpent Stone's connection to the local spirit world somehow affects its transformations, making the cryptids and hybrids it creates somewhat resemble beings from Aboriginal legend. Diggle is transformed into a *Yara-may-ha-who*, a vicious monster from legend. He shrinks in stature, but his head grows, as does his now-toothless mouth. His hands and feet develop suckers, which he can use to drain both blood and Aether from victims. He flees and tries to find a vantage point from where he can drop down on his victims. Once he latches on with his suckers, he can automatically drain blood and Aether until he is forcibly dislodged.

Unfortunately, the stone cannot be used to undo any of its transformations. Antibody is trapped in his Yowie form, doomed to forget his demonic life, and Diggle will be likewise doomed to slowly lose what elements of his psychology made him human. In the reverse, though, some of the cryptids might well have gained intelligence and might even be talked into allying with demons for mutual benefit.

UP NEXT

Clean Slate: The Gunyah facility is far enough removed from the bustle of the city that things can get pretty wild out there without attracting undue notice, at least initially. A

THE DEMON SEED COLLECTION

mass release of cryptids will bring in God-Machine attention in the form of cogs who can weave false Cover stories and help clean up the infestation (probably by starting a brush fire that rages, causing a temporary evacuation of the area). If things are truly serious, an angel arrives, tasked with the clean up, especially if there was demons involvement. The hunt is on.

Secret Ops: If the demons are careful enough in their operation, they might be able to handle Diggle without anyone ever noticing. They might even get away with the Rainbow Serpent Stone, or use their Embeds and Exploits to take over the Gunyah facility so they can use it for their own experiments. This is a risky operation, since it's very hard to keep all the cryptids penned up, and weird animals running lose attracts attention from many, and eventually from angels.

The Dreaming Desert: The Rainbow Serpent Stone was one piece of Infrastructure in a larger machine somewhere out there in the Outback. A dig through Gunyah's computer records can reveal the area from which it came, but it will require an expedition and an on-the-ground search to find out more. The exact spot from which it came was once a sacred spot and hosts other examples of Aboriginal art, many of it suborned and tasked now with providing hidden machinery that interacts with the spirit world. But why? There are no apparent angels here. If there were, the missing stone could have been recovered sooner, so what's really going on? Further inspection over time will reveal that this seems to be the main source of the cryptid outbreak, with creatures manifesting from out of the spirit world and being transformed by the machinery. And how is it all connected to rumors of climate-change machinery that is really turning up the heat in the Outback to record-breaking levels?



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