

**Theosophy** (Gr., the wisdom of God). The name adopted by the Theosophical Society to define their religious or philosophical system, which aims at the knowledge of God by means of intuition and contemplative illumination, or by direct communion. *Esoteric Buddhism* is another name for it; and its adherents claim that the doctrines of the great world religions are merely the *exoteric* expressions of their own *esoteric* traditions.

—*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*

# OCCULT ORGANIZATIONS of the 1920's



By Richard Kaczynski

CHAOSIUM'S *CALL Of Cthulhu* role-playing game, based on H.P. Lovecraft's macabre fiction, is set in the 1920's, the heyday of occult organizations in Europe and America. These groups were so popular that many of them exist to the present day. Since rules and play in *Call Of Cthulhu* are based in fact, and since the game often involves encounters with various secret societies, it behooves the Keeper to be aware of the history of the many real 1920's movements. Familiarity with such organizations and their more illustrious members offers the Keeper great potential. He may incorporate them into a 20th-century campaign, either as centers of Mythos worship, a source of sages, or assistance against the minions of Cthulhu. One of these societies may be included as background information, possibly the parent body of some renegade cult, or even just a wild goose chase. The Keeper may permit a player-character to become a member of one such organization. At the very least, the groups described in this article may serve as a model for the creation of a fictitious occult organization.

## THE ROSICRUCIAN SOCIETY

Legend has it that Christian Rosenkreuz (ca. 1373-1479), during his life-long travels in Europe, Arabia, and Egypt, learned great secrets of mathematics, science, philosophy, and magic and, based upon this, founded the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross. The exact date of Rosenkreuz's death at age 106 is unknown, but the fraternity continued to flourish for generations.

One day, a member of the fraternity, Frater N., decided to make alterations in the architecture of the Rosicrucian Sanctus Spiritus. In the course of this work he uncovered a bronze tablet inscribed with the names of the eldest members in the order. Behind this was a door inscribed with the words "Post

Centum Viginti Annos Patebo" ("After 120 years I will reappear"), followed by a date . . . 120 years earlier. The door opened into a self-illuminated seven-sided vault with a circular altar in the center. Concealed within each wall was a chest containing rare objects, such as copies of the order's books, the diary of Christian Rosenkreuz, magical mirrors, bells, and lamps. Beneath the altar was a bronze plate which covered the body of Christian Rosenkreuz, perfectly preserved after 120 years.

Interest in Rosicrucianism dropped off around 1620, but a German society calling itself the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross regenerated interest in the Christian Rosenkreuz legend and

his secret teachings in 1710. Much of Rosicrucianism was integrated into Freemasonry in the 1770's, including an initiation rite which re-enacted the discovery of Rosenkreuz's body. Rosicrucianism also continued to exist as an independent organization, with branches appearing worldwide—the Societas Rosicruciana in England, the Ancient and Mystic Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC) in America, and as a society within the Golden Dawn (q.v.). (See also the article "The Rosicrucians" in *Different Worlds* 38.)

## FREEMASONRY

The largest and most common secret society in the west is Freemasonry. Today one can see Masonic temples in most cities, Masonic decals on occasional automobiles, and even Masonic tie-clips on respectable gentlemen. In fact, the United States was founded by Freemasons. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Masons, as was Thomas Jefferson himself. Benjamin Franklin was a member since 1731, and George Washington, when he became America's first president in 1789, was Grand Master of his lodge.

Freemasonry as we know it today was developed in 16th-century London, although the tradition traces back to ancient Egypt. The organization consists of various grades or degrees (typically 33, but variations exist; the Rites of Memphis have 95 degrees, and the Rites of Misraim have 90 degrees), and everything is surrounded by the utmost secrecy. There are passwords, secret handshakes, and signs to weed out imposters, and this tradition has passed into many other secret societies. The various districts of Masonry are presided over by a Grand Lodge. Because of the size of the United States, each state has its own Grand Lodge, and its subsidiary temples may have memberships ranging from a couple hundred to several thousand. In Europe, jurisdiction is wider and lodges have smaller, more intimate membership (about 50-70).

Masonry is not a religion, but a conception of God as a Divine Architect who created the earth on certain geometric principles. *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Rite of Freemasonry* details in 32 chapters (one for each degree, with the 33rd being honorary) the beliefs taught to the initiates. Theirs is an eclectic mix

of Qaballah, Greek philosophy, Egyptian religion, and other beliefs combined into a single doctrine. Its meetings are conducted by various officers with such colorful titles as Recording Secretary, Guardian, Warden, and Noble Grand.

### THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Helena Petrova Blavatsky, in conjunction with Henry S. Olcott and W.Q. Judge, founded the Theosophical Society on 17 November 1875 upon the philosophy later expounded in Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). This book comments on *The Stanzas of Dzyan*, an esoteric tome the original copy of which she claimed to possess on "a collection of palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire, and air, by some specific unknown process." These stanzas were written in some hitherto unknown language (supposed by some to be Atlantean), and represented the oldest known religious tradition which underlies every belief system in the world. It discusses the evolution of the cosmos, and speaks of a time before the dawn of man when the world was inhabited by monstrous primeval races.

Theosophy is an ancient belief system embracing the highest ideas of the godhead known to man, and the goals of the Theosophical Society are:

- [1] To form the nucleus of a brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.
- [2] To study comparative religion, philosophy, and science.
- [3] To investigate the unexplained laws of nature, and man's latent powers.

Theosophy was a popular movement around the turn of the century, and it counted Rudolph Steiner, William Butler Yeats, and Thomas Edison among its members. In addition, theosophy greatly influenced the thoughts of Lord Tennyson and Mahatma Gandhi. The society has branches in Britain, America, and India.

Blavatsky died in 1891, and was succeeded by Annie Besant, a trailblazing woman who advocated birth control, preached atheism, and fought for women's emancipation. In 1908, she and C.W. Leadbeater (another Theosophist) discovered a Brahmin youth Jeddu Krishnamurti who they believed to be an avatar (incarnation) of the Hindu god Vishnu; suspecting him to

be the new messiah, they adopted the boy and, much to the chagrin of his father, trained him in spiritual leadership. This move outraged many members, including Steiner who left in 1912 to form his Anthroposophical Society. Ultimately, in 1929, the boy renounced his messiahship and all claims of spiritual leadership. Besant died in 1933, but the society has been succeeded by other presidents, and still operates widely today.

### THE GOLDEN DAWN

In 1887, a cipher manuscript came into the possession of three London Rosicrucians: Dr. William Wynn Westcott, Dr. W.R. Woodman, and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. It was supposedly discovered in a London bookstall. This manuscript, once decoded, contained the outlines of five pseudo-Masonic rituals and the German address of Fraulein Sprengel, an eminent Rosicrucian Adept. A brief correspondence ensued, with Sprengel instructing the London occultists to expand the rituals for performance, and authorizing them to found "Die

came the *Argentum Astrum* of three grades. In addition, there was a probationary period preceding neophyte initiation. The members were admitted into each grade by an elaborate ceremonial ritual, at which point the initiate would choose a code-name (typically in Latin) to represent his/her aspirations in this grade. Advancement to the higher grades was permitted only after passing examinations on erudite magical lore and displaying mastery of various spiritual disciplines.

Although the Golden Dawn contained eleven grades, nobody ever reached the *Argentum Astrum*; this sub-order consisted of the Secret Chiefs, powerful disembodied adepts who oversaw not only the order, but the spiritual direction of mankind itself. Nobody ever saw these Secret Chiefs, but Mathers claimed to have contacted them and to have received from them command of the Golden Dawn.

Since its inception, the Golden Dawn attained notoriety as the most prestigious secret society in its time, attracting members such as William Butler Yeats (the great mystic poet), Sax Rohmer (author of the immensely popular Fu Manchu novels), Annie Horniman (the post-Freudian psychoanalyst), Algernon Blackwood (one of Lovecraft's correspondents), Arthur Machen (another of Lovecraft's friends), Bram Stoker (author of *Dracula*), as well as the occult authorities Edward Arthur Waite, Dion Fortune, and Israel Regardie. Some authors have even suggested Robert Louis Stevenson (creator of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) was tangentially associated with the order.

Not the least of its members was the infamous and flamboyant Aleister Crowley, who joined the order in 1898 and, within two years, advanced to the grade of Adeptus Minor under Mathers's own tutelage. This was a time of great political turmoil within the organization, and Crowley was more than willing to contribute to the confusion. He claimed to have contacted the Secret Chiefs and learned that Mathers no longer had any authority over the Golden Dawn; in fact, the Secret Chiefs had given authority over to Crowley himself! Naturally, Mathers was less than pleased, and a much-publicized (and probably over-exaggerated) magical battle ensued between the two.

Despite the best efforts to keep the

#### The Hierarchy of the Golden Dawn

From lowest to highest

##### *Golden Dawn in the Outer*

Neophyte  
Zealater  
Theoricus  
Practicus  
Philosophus

##### *Rosea Rubiae et Aurea Crucis*

Adeptus Minor  
Adeptus Major  
Adeptus Exemptus

##### *Argentum Astrum*

Magister Templi  
Magus  
Ipsissimus

Goldene Dammerung." In 1888, these men founded the Isis-Urania branch of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a semi-secret society teaching the "magic of Hermes" and claiming direct lineal descent from the oldest Rosicrucian society of all.

The Golden Dawn was a strange mix of Freemasonry, hermeticism, and Qaballah. It consisted of eleven grades, divided into three sub-societies. First, there was the Golden Dawn in the Outer, consisting of five grades; next came the *Rosea Rubiae et Aurea Crucis* of three grades; and finally

order intact, the Golden Dawn eventually splintered apart in the 1900's, with its more ambitious members founding organizations of their own. Most of these were short-lived. For instance, Waite took the rituals and rewrote them along more Christian lines. These he used to found the Stella Matutina, one of the more hearty successors of the Golden Dawn. In 1922, Dion Fortune founded the Society of the Inner Light, a type of correspondence-course equivalent to a mystical society, which claimed no physical headquarters but a substantial organization in the astral realm. And Aleister Crowley went on to leave a legacy unparalleled in the history of magic. Regardless, various temples of the Golden Dawn were always (and doubtlessly will continue to be) around.

#### ALEISTER CROWLEY'S GROUPS

Claiming that the old Golden Dawn had been abandoned by the Secret Chiefs (and, hence, was powerless) and that he himself had been entrusted with reorganizing the order along a new form of "magick" delivered to him, Crowley proceeded to publish all the secrets of the Golden Dawn in a series of ten lavishly bound periodicals entitled *The Equinox* (1909-14). His intent was to disseminate this obsolete knowledge and advertise his new organization (known variously as the AA and Great White Brotherhood). *The Equinox* also contained the basic instructions of his society, and among them is a very excellent description of its hierarchy, entitled "One Star in Sight" (reprinted in his *Magick in Theory and Practice*). The organization's grades are virtually identical to that of the Golden Dawn, including title and general curriculum.

This "new" Golden Dawn did not attract the prestigious bunch of people the way its predecessor had, but it did include individuals who would prove to have a profound impact on the occult. These members included Charles Stansfield Jones, Austin Osman Spare, and Victor Neuburg.

During his publication spree (Crowley's corpus of material—though partly pirated from Golden Dawn manuscripts—is one of the largest contributions in the occult), Crowley was approached by Theodore Reuss, a German adept who accused Crowley of publishing the secrets of his Society,

*Ordo Templi Orientis*. (The OTO claims descent from the Christian Knights Templar, whose members, in 1303, were forced to confess under inhuman torture to spitting on the cross, indulging in obscene orgies, and worshipping a horned idol named Baphomet. This organization also claims to be able to bestow all the grades of Freemasonry in nine grades, and teaches a potent system of magic which uses sex as its impetus). Crowley pleaded ignorance to the charge, and the confrontation ended amicably, with Crowley being appointed head of the English OTO. In 1922, Reuss resigned from the OTO shortly following a stroke, and, in 1925, Crowley was named his successor. He claimed that the OTO's lineage traced not only to the Rosicrucians, but was so ancient

#### "ONE STAR IN SIGHT"

##### *The Order of the S. S.*

Ipsissimus .....	10° =	1□
Magus .....	9° =	2□
Magister Templi .....	8° =	3□

##### *The Order of the R. C.*

(Babe of the Abyss — the link)

Adeptus Exemptus .....	7° =	4□
Adeptus Major .....	6° =	5□
Adeptus Minor .....	5° =	6□

##### *The Order of the G. D.*

(Dominus Liminis — the link)

Philosophus .....	4° =	7□
Practicus .....	3° =	8□
Zelator .....	2° =	9□
Neophyte .....	1° =	10□
Probationer .....	0° =	0□

as to count among its members, Merlin, Hercules, Odysseus, Dionysus, Osiris, and Pan!

All of Crowley's organizations have endured into the present day, although they are divided as to who is Crowley's true successor and which OTO and AA is the real McCoy.

#### CONCLUSION

After reading about these groups, several striking points should be noted: These societies, while calling themselves secret, were quite ubiquitous. Adding to this their seeming interconnection, their famous members, and their political involvement, a conspiracy useful for campaign design is easy to invent. In fact, many people believe they have uncovered true conspiracies. For examples, consult Robert Anton Wilson's books *Cosmic Trigger* and

*The Illuminatus Trilogy*, Neal Wilgus's *The Illuminoids*, *Light Bearers of Darkness* (anonymous), and anything by Constance Cumbeys. However, it is seriously recommended all these books be taken with a grain of salt.

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