

THE
SECRET HISTORIES

RULEBOOK

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RULEBOOK

First Edition

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If you like the Secret Histories, you can find more of it in all these places:

Cultist Simulator, a BAFTA-nominated Lovecraftian strategy game

BOOK OF HOURS, an upcoming game about forbidden libraries and solitude

The Lady Afterwards, a Secret Histories scenario set in 1920s Alexandria

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INTRODUCING TRPGS

"Secret histories are layered beneath the one we know, like the notes in rare wine."

Imagine a group of people sitting around a table. One of them is the **Game Runner**. The others are all **players** trying to unravel a mystery through story-telling and dice-rolling. The Game Runner sets the scene, and the players each decide what they'd like to do. When everyone's had a turn, or when the situation changes, everyone gets another opportunity to take an action. Rinse and repeat!

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Okay, okay, the *ideal* experience is you have everything that we've included in *The Lady Afterwards* box. But if you don't have that, the basic requirements are:

- A set of seven polyhedral dice, including a D20, D12, D10, D8, D6, D4 and D% (see next column and overleaf)
- Character sheets, artefacts and *The Lady Afterwards Game Runner's Guide*
- This rulebook
- 2-8 friends!

It's even better if you have the following, too:

- The **Tarot of the Hours** or the **Lucid Tarot**. We'll be delighted to sell you a deck, or you can use a tarot deck you already own. The boxed edition of *The Lady Afterwards* includes an **Essential Hours** deck if you don't have anything else.

- Mood music, character pins, and a scented candle to set the olfactory tone. If you can't get your hands on a *Lady Afterwards* box, feel free to improvise.

A lot of people have a favourite set of dice. If you do, you do, great! Use one set for the players and the other for the **Regard of the Hours** (see 'Mechanics of the Invisible World' on page 10). If you don't have your own dice, don't worry - you'll just have to share with the Hours. What could possibly go wrong?

THE ROLE OF THE GAME RUNNER

The Game Runner sets the scene, manages players, roleplays non-player characters (NPCs) and directs the whole game. You want players to make progress - or everyone will be bored - but you also want to challenge them, provide obstacles and run an engaging, believable game in a frightening occult world.

Some players might fail to achieve their goals. Some might get hurt. Some might even die. They might not figure things out before it's too late, or they might never figure them out at all. It's up to you, the players and the dice.

The Game Runner can be as kind or as mean as they like. Tailor it to your players, and what's most fun for everyone.

THE ROLL OF THE DICE

Dice rolls - usually used for skill and attribute checks - determine the success or failure of certain actions. Usually it'll be the players rolling dice, though you might want to raise or lower the number they need to hit or roll beneath to succeed, depending on the situation.

Skill and attribute checks are rolled with two dice (the D% and the D10), giving you a number out of 100. You have to **roll on or under a specific number** - usually marked on a player's character sheet - to succeed. Generally speaking, the lower you roll, the better the outcome.

The D% die gives you the tens and the D10 die gives you the units of the number out of 100. So for a skill check against a Demolition skill of 60, the highest a successful roll could be is 60 on the D% and 0 on the D10.



D10

(0, 1, 2....)



D%

(00, 10, 20...)

Same shape, different numbers!



D4



D6



D8



D12



D20

Other events might require other dice. *The Game Runner's Guide* will tell you when dice other than the D% and D10 are relevant.

You don't have to roll dice for everything. People don't need to roll to determine if they put their trousers on properly in the morning or if they eat a sandwich without choking on it. But for more significant actions - whether they spot something glinting in the woods, or whether they hear the sound of distant footsteps in a seemingly-abandoned asylum - they'll need to roll against one of their skills or attributes to see whether that action is successful or not.

Success (or failure) is measured as follows.

- **Successes** happen when the player rolls a number that is **equal to or lower** than the skill in question.

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She rolls a 42. This means she's successfully improvised support and changed the wheel.

- **Failures** happen when the player rolls a number that's **higher** than the skill in question. Failures happen in a way that means you're stymied... until circumstances change. For example, failing a Bamboozle roll in a government office means you can't keep rolling until your listener is convinced, but you might be able to come back the next day with a different tack and try again.

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She rolls a 52. Her improvised support collapses! She's going to be walking from here.

- **Advantages** raise your chance of success. Helpful advice is an advantage. Taking all the time you need is an advantage. Trying to

persuade someone who's frightened of you or has a crush on you is an advantage. For every advantage that applies, your chance of success increases by 10%. So for every advantage that applies, **+10 to the number someone has to roll under** to succeed.

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She's in no hurry, though, so she works slowly and carefully. Her companions roll up their sleeves and help. That's two advantages, for +20% chance of success.

Anise's chance of success is now 65 (Handyman 45 + 10 + 10). She rolls a 52. Her improvised support wobbles, but she's ready for that, and she's asked a friend to keep an eye on it. Job done!

DESIGN NOTE

Advantages lend colour and flavour to dice rolls. They allow players to feel reflected in the narrative. And they address a long-standing issue with rating skills from 1 to 100. It's intuitive and it's simple, but 45 in Handyman means Anise will fail most of the time even though she's quite proficient. If you let players benefit from advantages, it feels interesting rather than unfair if they fail anyway.

- **Disadvantages** lower your chance of success. A kibitzing friend who won't shut up when you're trying to concentrate is a disadvantage. Working hastily against the clock is a disadvantage. Trying to persuade someone who doesn't trust you, or you've jilted, is a disadvantage. For every disadvantage that applies, your chance of success drops by 10%. So for every disadvantage that applies, **-10 to the number someone has to roll under** to succeed.

Each disadvantage cancels out one advantage.
-10 + 10 = 0!

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She's in a terrible hurry because a sandstorm's just hit. That's two disadvantages, but her companions roll up their sleeves and help - an advantage which cancels out one disadvantage. Her chance of success is 35% (45 - 10 - 10 + 10). She rolls a 42. Buffeted by the storm, she lurches against the car and her improvised support collapses! They're not going anywhere.

DESIGN NOTE

Don't get hung up on how big or small an individual disadvantage (or an advantage) is. Two people yelling at the player? -10 penalty. Four people yelling at a player? -10 penalty. Is a sandstorm or a monsoon or an earthquake more distracting? They're all -10 penalties, though if you're in a collapsing building, that's probably another penalty. This isn't a simulation. It's just a way to connect the system to player narrative.

- Astonishing successes happen when the player succeeds and *also* rolls a double (11, 22, 33...). It might be a moment of inspiration, or it might be a stroke of good fortune. It's always something unusually welcome.

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She rolls a 33. She not only succeeds, but a travelling car mechanic happens along the road just as she's fixed the problem and is so impressed he offers her a job on the spot.

- Dreadful failures happen when the player fails and *also* rolls a double. It might be a mistake, or it might be bad luck. It's always something dramatically awful.

Anise's car blows a tyre on a desert road. She has a spare wheel, but no jack, and a Handyman skill of 45. She rolls a 55. Her improvised support collapses at the worst moment, and the car falls on her leg. Her companions drag her out, but they're going to have to carry her from here.

- 01 ("God is Winking") is always an astonishing success. 1/100 (00 D% + 01 D10) is the best possible number you can roll.

- 00 ("The Devil is Watching") is always a dreadful failure. This is true even for rolls on speciality skills (see 'Specialities' on page 9). 100/100 (00 D% + 00 D10) is the worst possible number you can roll.

CONTENDING WITH OTHERS

Don't worry about exact degrees of success. Successes and astonishing successes: that's all you need. But what if someone's in contention with another player, or another NPC? Arm-wrestling, perhaps, or chasing someone down a street?

Whoever would normally roll for each character rolls against the relevant skill (Physique for arm-wrestling, for example) and applies the following rules:

- A failure beats a dreadful failure
- A success beats a failure
- An astonishing success beats a success
- In tie-breakers, the lowest number always wins.

Anise is trying to score points in a conversation at a cocktail party about an obscure author. She has Widely-Read 40 and her rival has Widely-Read 30. She rolls 39. Her rival rolls 29. These are both successes, so it's a tie-break: her rival's 29 beats her 39 and wins. But if she'd rolled a 33, she'd have referenced an unpublished version of the text and said something truly groundbreaking.

What if both parties roll **God is Winking** or **The Devil is Watching**? This does happen one time in ten thousand, so it'll probably happen to at least one person who plays this game. We'd better make a rule for it.

In both these cases, something extraordinary should happen. In both cases, **the character with the higher skill or attribute should win.**

At the cocktail party, Anise rolls a 00, as does her rival. Anise's Widely-Read skill is higher than her rival's.

Her rival claims the author wrote his last work, set in Vienna, while he was living there. Anise scoffs: obvious nonsense! The author is painfully ignorant of the city. She becomes aware that her rival's gaze has strayed over her shoulder. The author is standing behind her with a martini and a rueful expression. "It's true," he admits, "Never been there." Anise has won the argument resoundingly, but now has to extricate herself from a ghastly scene.

RE-ROLLS

Players can choose to re-roll any skill check or dice roll using dice from the **Regard of the Hours** (see 'Mechanics of the Invisible World', page 10). The player chooses which rolled die they want to re-roll, then chooses which die they want to use from the available pool in the Regard.

You can re-roll a success hoping to get an astonishing success, but the die is removed from the Regard if you succeed (even if it's just another ordinary success).

You can re-roll a dreadful failure hoping to get a success, but if you get a second failure, nothing happens. **You can't turn a dreadful failure into a failure:** you can only turn it into a success or astonishing success. At least if you get a failure on a re-roll, the die is returned to the Regard.

A roll can only be re-rolled once. Otherwise, that would be a re-re-roll, or a re-re-re-roll, and that just sounds like mice.

VEILED ROLLS

Sometimes a player may need to make a roll but shouldn't immediately know if it's successful. If they're trying to translate a text whose exact meaning is important, perhaps, or performing a divination. On these occasions, use a **Veiled Roll**.

It works like this: the Game Runner secretly decides before the roll (on a whim, by rolling odds/evens, or by a coin toss) whether the roll should stand or whether its digits should be reversed. Then the player rolls as usual. If the Game Runner decided to reverse, they should mentally swap the player's tens and ones to determine the final result.

Anise is searching an office at night. Has the night-watchman spotted the glimmer of her lantern? She makes a veiled roll against Scoundrel 60 and gets a 19. But the Game Runner secretly decided the roll would be reversed, so it's actually a 91 - though Anise doesn't know that yet.

If the player rolls something where reversal wouldn't make much difference (e.g. 54), they can have some confidence in the result. If they roll a dreadful failure or astonishing success, then reversing it won't make any difference because it's a double number anyway. They know if they've succeeded or failed. (If they roll the best number possible, **God is Winking**, it can't be reversed. Let's not be needlessly unkind.)

Anise is searching an office at night. Has the night-watchman spotted the glimmer of her lantern? She makes a veiled roll against Scoundrel 60 and gets a 99. The Game Runner secretly decided the roll would be reversed, but that doesn't make any difference, because the 99 means she's looked out of the window and found the night-watchman staring right back at her.

HOW TO PLAY

Simply put: players pick a character, explore a situation, and roll dice when they do things. It works like this:

- The Game Runner tells players where they are and what's going on.
- Players tell the Game Runner what they want to do. They might describe their actions, or they might speak in character.
- The Game Runner determines what happens (often with the assistance of rules and dice rolls) and then tells players what happens.
- Repeat until you reach the end of the session!

THE MOST IMPORTANT RULES ARE...

The Law of CHANCE.

Use dice rolls to determine outcomes. **The higher the % roll, the worse for the person rolling. The lower, the better.** (If the person rolling is the Game Runner, that means the NPC or the player they're rolling for.)

A relaxed group can run the entire experience with 'low means good, high means bad'. (If you do that, though, you'll miss out on some of the flavour we've baked into these rules.)

DESIGN NOTE

Agree what the roll will mean before you roll the dice and the decision will feel fairer. Does the key fall in the well? 01 means no, 00 means yes, but what about 55? If you say '50% chance the key falls in the well' before you roll, everyone's happier. (If in doubt, pick a 50% chance.)

The Law of LICENSE.

The rules serve the group. The group doesn't serve the rules. If no one likes a rule, throw it away. If no one remembers a rule until later, that's okay. In case of dispute, use...

The Law of FATE.

The Game Runner's decision is final. This means YOU decide, using your own skill and judgement, these rules and sometimes the Regard of the Hours (see page 11).

DESIGN NOTE

The Law of Fate prevents some arguments and ends other, but different people have different opinions on what's 'fair' or 'interesting' or 'satisfying'. If you as a Game Runner aren't certain which way to go on a decision, here are a couple of tips.

First, use the cards in the Regard to guide your decision. Not sure whether a kicked-over oil lamp should set the curtains on fire? The player's Dexterity roll was a failure, but only just? If the Forge of Days is in the Regard, then let's have the curtains catch fire. If the Meniscate with all her water is there instead, then maybe not.

Second, if one player is inclined to quibble about the curtains catching fire, ask the player on their right. They might say 'Weren't the curtains lace? That's really flammable.' They might say 'The roll was really close, so maybe the curtains catch fire but we get one roll to beat the flames out in time?' It's still your decision, but you have a better idea of what the group thinks and you might get a new insight.

(Ask just one player so you don't get bogged down in discussion. Ask the person on the player's right to spread your questions among the group, encouraging quieter players to speak up. A final tip: going clockwise round a group is good luck.)

SETTING UP

The Lady Afterwards is designed to be a roughly three-session scenario, though you can break it up into shorter sessions or combine three sessions into one epic marathon if you and your group prefer.

There's a lot more detail and a full checklist in *The Game Runner's Guide*, but here's what you need to do just before you start playing a Secret Histories scenario.

- Everyone apart from the Game Runner picks a character and puts on the corresponding character pin. Start playing mood music! (If you own a copy of *The Lady Afterwards*, you have access to "Midnight in Alexandria", an excellent 1920s playlist on Spotify.)

- Everyone apart from the Game Runner fills in their character sheets. The Game Runner spreads all artefacts invitingly on the table, face down.

- Everyone - including the Game Runner! - builds the Regard of the Hours.

- The Game Runner lights the Serapeum candle and begins the game...

Feel free to be creative. The Secret Histories are much more about story and experience than following the letter of the law. There's a lot of lore and detail, but bend the game as much as you like so your specific group has fun.

CREATING CHARACTERS

"What we are is what we were, multiplied by what we've done. That's just mathematics."
— Christopher Illopoly

There are eight characters to choose from:



The **Aspirant**, a lonely, disenchanted academic



The **Bright Young Thing**, a charming and wealthy aristocrat



The **Physician**, a respectable doctor with a dream



The **Detective**, an inspector in the London Metropolitan Police



The **Dancer**, a beautiful but penniless performer



The **Priest**, a successful preacher with mystic tendencies



The **Medium**, a notorious spiritualist who may communicate with the dead



The **Exile**, a criminal trying to outrun their past

Every character has 400 points to distribute throughout their list of skills as they see fit. Encourage players to pick skills that are interesting or reflect the character they're building, rather than ones they think will be useful in a TRPG!

There's space on each character sheet for players to make up new skills if they really want them and the Game Runner agrees it makes sense (yes to 'Trombone', for example, but probably no to 'Laser Beam Death Dance' or 'Talking in Cat').

Skills and attributes are all out of 100. You can't change your attributes at the start of the game, and you can't raise a skill higher than 80. The only way to improve a skill higher than 80 is through playing the game (see 'Improving Skills and Attributes' on page 9).

DESIGN NOTE

A player is a real human who rolls polyhedral dice. A character is fictional, though usually also human, and doesn't roll dice. Players decide what their characters do. The Game Runner decides what non-player characters (NPCs) do. We've used the terms 'player' and 'character' very casually, though, and you'll find that you do, too.

ATTRIBUTES

- **Physique:** how strong you are, how far you can swim, how well you can climb, how far you can throw... Also used to determine injuries.

- **Dexterity:** how deft you are, how high you can jump, how easily you can dodge, how accurately you can throw... Also used to determine who goes first in combat.

- **Intelligence:** how clever you are, how quickly you read, how deductive your reasoning, and how much you observe.

- **Determination:** your grit, mental tenacity and resistance to the occult. Also used to determine your capacity to continue despite injury (though this comes at a cost).

- **Fascination:** exposure to the wonders of the occult world can brighten the mind and spirit. This road leads through illumination and inspiration to insanity. How far down this road are you?

- **Dread:** exposure to the horrors of the occult world can darken the mind and spirit. Brave souls can draw grim determination from this, but even the bravest eventually succumb to despair. How far down this road are you?

DESIGN NOTE

You'll find Intelligence ends up being the default roll for many actions. But it's dull using the same skill check over and over, so encourage players to use specific skills whenever if they can. Only resort to Intelligence if there's really nothing else to use!

Social skills.

- **Allure:** beauty is a weapon. How skilled are you at using it?

- **Bamboozle:** unleash a torrent of confident, vaguely coherent sentences, brook no interruption, and people will agree to anything just to make you stop!

- **Blend:** become part of the background and avoid suspicion by fitting in with groups and situations around you.

- **Negotiate:** coax a reasonable compromise out of any situation. Sometimes words are enough; sometimes money helps.

- **Stagecraft:** give 'em the old razzle dazzle! Command your audience, whether it's theatre-goers, a church congregation or astonished sunbathers watching you give the kiss of life to a near-drowned swimmer.

Practical skills.

- **Demolition:** knowledge of explosives, from fireworks to Orsini bombs, most likely from experience in the Great War. (NB: *this is not a combat skill. No lobbing Molotov cocktails at people! They haven't been invented yet, anyway.*)

- **Drive:** it's 1920-something, so most people don't have cars and driving tests don't exist. Most people don't know how to control these newfangled machines. Do you?

- **Handyman:** the ability to fix, alter or build things with limited resources. MacGyver, eat your heart out.

- **Horticulture:** knowledge of plants, whether that's propagating Venus fly traps,

cross-breeding poppies to make opium, or just growing really tasty carrots.

- **Knife-Fighting:** skill using knives and bladed weapons, like flick-knives, bayonets, machetes or the humble scalpel. Think Bishop from *Aliens*.

- **Languages:** in *The Lady Afterwards*, this is knowledge of Arabic, French or Greek. A skill of 20 means basic proficiency (you could order coffee without a skill check); 50 means intermediate (you could ask directions without a skill check); 80 means fluent (you could hold a whole conversation without a skill check).

- **Mariner:** sailing, rigging, navigation, vessel knowledge, swimming when you inevitably fall in... (*"There is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."*)

- **Medicine:** knowledge of early twentieth-century medical practice, from domestic poultices to groundbreaking clinical procedures.

- **Pharmacist:** knowledge of natural and chemical medicines and how to make them, from hot lemon and honey for sore throats to crushing pearls, ambergris and musk into home-brewed laudanum.

- **Scoundrel:** how skilled you are at lockpicking, pick-pocketing, sneaking and other dubious activities.

- **Scuffle:** the ability to brawl, manhandle or fight without weaponry. Not terribly gentlemanly, but who cares when it's the gentleman who gets the black eye?

- **Shooting:** skill with guns like pistols, rifles and shotguns. You might be a talented police marksman or just really good at hunting grouse.

- **Track:** the ability to find and trace objects, animals and people from the signs they leave behind.

- **Widely-Read:** you've acquired a broad swathe of general knowledge from being a decided bookworm. You're intellectually omnivorous, and you probably use your factoids and trivia to impress people at parties.

Occult skills.

- **Bright Arts:** knowledge of light, wisdom, dreams, higher states of being and illumination of the soul. Too much makes one see too clearly and forget the real world.

- **Night Arts:** knowledge of things in the world that should not be, and things beyond the world that should never, ever enter it. Too much oppresses the mind and haunts the soul, leaving only existential horror.

SPECIALITIES

Each character has three **specialities**, skills that are particularly important to them. These are marked with asterisks on their character sheets. Specialities can never be **dreadful failures** - if players roll one on a speciality, it's just a normal failure.

IMPROVING SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

The highest a skill or attribute can be before playing is 80 out of 100, but players will grow over each game.

At the end of a scenario, the Game Runner should ask each player to recall a time during the game where they did something particularly impressive (like rolling God is Winking under pressure) or when they felt they learnt something from an experience (like attempting to climb a roof after drinking too much, falling, and breaking both their legs). Identify the appropriate skill or attribute involved and add 5 to it, permanently.

CHARACTER POSSESSIONS

On the front of each character sheet is a list of personal **possessions**. Players can add to this list when creating their character, provided the Game Runner assents. They can also find or purchase items during a game which can be added to their list of possessions. Players should write anything down on their character sheet that they acquire.

CHARACTER QUESTIONNAIRES

On the back of each character sheet is a **character questionnaire**, encouraging players to flesh out their characters a little more than how clever they are or how many languages

they know. The questionnaire should form the backbone of players' roleplaying, and will hopefully make them laugh! Give everyone time to fill this in - it'll really help during the game, and get everyone in a 1920s mood.

The Game Runner should incorporate players' answers to their character questionnaires when roleplaying NPC conversation. It'll give the game flavour, and make each interaction feel unique.

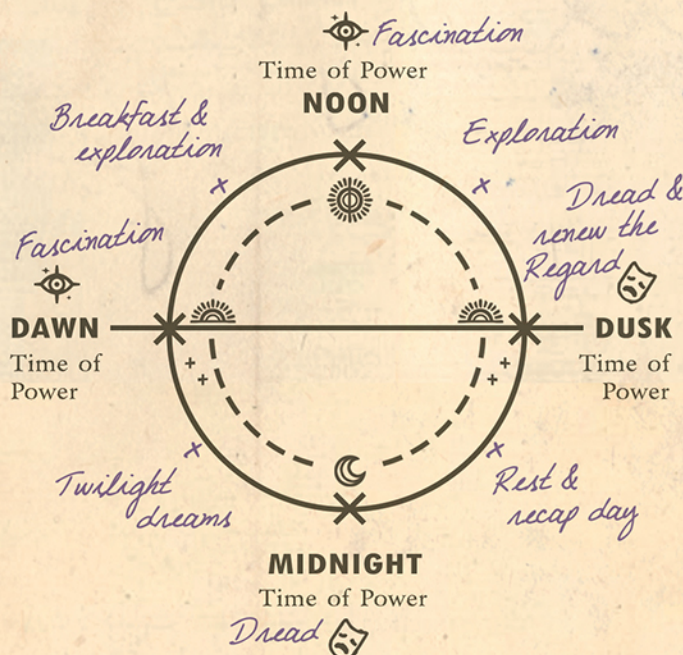
For *The Lady Afterwards*, the Game Runner should particularly note each player's greatest fear...

MECHANICS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD

"The invisible arts are as profitable as macramé, as ethical as tobacco-smuggling, and in general as beneficial as roulette. Still, there is always the Orchard of Lights."
— Christopher Illopoly

THE CHART OF DAYS

Every day has its rhythm: dawn, noon, sunset, midnight. But there are other rhythms, too. Every day there are **Times of Power**, hours when the skin of the world is thinnest and occult things are more likely to break through. Mapping Times of Power onto daily rhythms creates a **Chart of Days**, which looks like this:



The Lady Afterwards takes place over three full days, so there are three Charts of Days in the **Game Runner's Journal**. Use and annotate it to keep track of players' Fascination and Dread (see 'Perils Spiritual' on page 18), and to remind yourself to make time for players to plan, discuss the events of the day and dream their twilight sleep...

THE BRIGHT ARTS & THE NIGHT ARTS

The **Bright Arts** are knowledge of mysticism, alchemy, and the struggles and desires of the secret gods. They're linked to the character attribute of **Fascination**, an unhealthy fixation on the wonders of the occult world.

The **Night Arts** are knowledge of dream-

travel, death and silence and the Worms from Nowhere. They're linked to the character attribute of **Dread**, the terror and horror of the occult world.

The Bright Arts are more appealing - but not necessarily safer - than the Night Arts.

There are no rules here for summoning or curses or other full-on adepthy. We might publish some, some day. Until then - or unless you write your own - your players are dabblers and scholars. They can be Van Helsing's but not Jonathan Stranges or Morgan le Fays. So these skills represent general, scholarly and theoretical knowledge of the invisible world and its traditions. Players with these skills can:

- recognise an occult trace or sign
- understand an occult reference
- attempt a divination
- attempt protections against occult threats

Divination attempts - cards, mirror-trances, looking in the ink-bowl - need to be supported by character backgrounds. A totally prosaic plumber can't suddenly see their future in tea leaves, but a carnival tarot card reader who regularly dreams strange dreams probably can. Divination attempts should always be **Veiled Rolls**, and they should provide hints and clues, not outright truths. And beware: a successful divination attempt is always an advantage for anyone else looking for the player through occult means.

Protections against occult threats should also be veiled rolls. If a player's trying to set up protection against a sophisticated attacker, a success on a Bright Arts or Night Arts roll means a disadvantage on the attacker's roll.

If the player's trying to keep a summoning or a haunting spirit or a prowling night-beast away, make **contending rolls** (relevant Bright

Arts or Night Arts skill versus the spirit's Determination or relevant skill). If the player wins, the thing's kept out of the protected space for a day and a night. If the thing wins, the protection doesn't work. The player can try again tomorrow, but they won't know that the protection has failed ("Oops, missed a bit with the chalk circle!") until it's too late...

THE REGARD OF THE HOURS

The Secret Histories take place under the inscrutable gaze of the Hours, a loose pantheon of hidden gods who determine everything that occurs and exists. Game Runners would be wise to acknowledge them.

Building the Regard.

1. Place three Major Arcana cards face up on the table. Draw three cards at random from your deck, or select three that are relevant to the evening's entertainment. For *The Lady Afterwards*, we recommend picking the **Door in the Eye**, the **Lionsmith** and the **Sun-in-Rags** from the Tarot of the Hours.



2. In turn, each player puts one of the seven dice on one of the cards. The more dice on a card, the more engaged that Hour is. There must be at least one die on each card. A legitimate way - in fact, perhaps the best way - for players to decide how many dice to put on which card is: which illustrations look most fun?

3. The cards and the dice together are the **Regard**: the interest that these secret gods have taken in the players' business.

The Game Runner and the players can use this as theme and inspiration. If there's a die on the *Forge of Days* card, you might expect to run across a watchmaker, or an instance of arson. If there are two dice on the *Elegiast*,

players may decide to reminisce about their childhoods or visit graveyards. If there are five dice on the *Red Grail*, someone is probably getting laid - or murdered.

If you don't know much about the Hours, or if you're using a traditional tarot deck, that's fine. Decide what the illustrations mean to you and react to that. And if you have complicated esoteric opinions on tarot generally, go nuts!

The Operations of the Regard.

4. Sometimes, a player will roll a die and get a result they don't like (usually, a failure). If a Regard card looks related to what they were trying to do, they can re-roll, once per roll, using one of the dice from that card.

If you're trying to find your way out of the desert, the *Vagabond* card is relevant. If you're trying to unlock a door, the *Door in the Eye* is relevant. If you're trying not to drown, the *Meniscate* could be relevant - there's water on the card, after all.

Kenzo is looking after a rare orchid. His Horticulture is 70, but he rolls a 98. If he lets this stand he'll probably sit on it by accident or set it on fire. But the Mare-in-the-Tree is in the Regard, and she looks pretty plant-y. She'd probably have an interest in the orchid's survival.

The Game Runner agrees, so Kenzo takes one of the dice from that card and re-rolls his D%. He rolls a 3, making his final Horticulture roll 38. A success! He carefully waters the orchid, and it glistens happily in the sun.

If another player (or the Game Runner) thinks the connection looks too tenuous, a majority vote of the players determines whether it's allowed. Don't overrule this vote: let them have their fun.

5. If the roll is a success, the die is permanently removed from that card. If the roll is a failure, the die remains on the card and nothing happens. The attention of the Hour is waning.

If all dice are removed from a card, the card is removed from the Regard. The Hour has lost interest, and is no longer thematically relevant.

This does mean that a single greedy player could burn through all dice in the Regard. This is ill-mannered, and it would be perfectly reasonable to vote down their more tenuous attempts at connection. But we imagine you and your group have the wisdom and restraint not to let it get that far.

6. The player can choose which dice to use and which roll to replace. This applies even if the roll was originally made with a different kind of die.

Say you're making a roll against a skill of 50 and you roll 51. It's entirely legitimate to re-roll the tens die with a D4, in which case the highest you can roll would be 41 and you can't fail. That would mean the D4 is removed, of course, and when you really need a roll to succeed you might be stuck re-rolling the D20.

If you re-roll a different kind of die and get an absurdly high result - for example, you roll a 61 on a skill check, re-roll the tens die with a D20 and get an 18 for a final result of 181 - then that result should stand, and the Game Runner can interpret it as something *godawful*.

Renewing the Regard.

7. Every day at dusk you can draw and place a new card in the Regard. Populate it with any dice that have been removed from the Regard.

If there haven't been any re-rolls, take a die off the card with the highest numerical value.

This means there can be more than three cards in the Regard, though there can never be a card with zero dice on it.

The newcomer affects the theme in the same way that the existing cards did. The Game Runner may also decide that something specific happens when a particular card is drawn. The landlord drops by for their rent, for example - or someone has a heart attack.

If it's nearly dusk and there are lots of dice left in the Regard, now might be the time to use those re-rolls so you get them back when the next card arrives. On the other hand, if the next card turns out to be the Lionsmith and you need re-rolls for stealth or etiquette, you might regret it.



PERILS MARTIAL, OR 'COMBAT'

We encourage a light-touch approach with game rules, and if you've read this far, you're probably into that. But what do you do when players start falling off things or getting shot? Systems support the Game Runner in making decisions that everyone enjoys and understands. But we don't want to ossify the exciting stuff under a thick coating of rules. So these rules are minimal and designed to work quickly.

The Secret Histories are not combat-oriented. But now and then, someone will misbehave.

WHO GOES FIRST?

Once people start misbehaving, everyone acts in order of **Dexterity**, highest first. (Though if someone, or a group of someones, gets the drop on someone else, they all get to act once before the ambushees react. They also get an advantage on their rolls.)

HURTING SOMEONE

If you want to hurt someone, roll against a relevant skill: that's **Shooting** for guns, **Knife-Fighting** for sharp things and **Scuffle** if you're punching someone. Or trying to hit them with a table.

Advantages and disadvantages apply. If your target's at point-blank range, that's an advantage. If your target's standing stock still, that's another advantage. If they're hiding behind a bar or falling off a cliff, that's a disadvantage. Here's how it works:



Success: you injure your target. See 'Injuries' (overleaf).



Failure: you haven't injured your target.



Astonishing Success: you injure your target, and you can immediately take another action against them (as long as it's plausible). Perhaps they've dropped their guard, or panicked, or rolled out of cover.



Dreadful Failure: something bad has happened and you *can't attack until*

you fix it. You've dropped your knife and need to snatch it up. Or you've caromed into a wall and need to get your breath back. You can take a defensive action if there's a reasonable way you could combine that with fixing the problem - like a dive and grab to get your knife back - but that will always need a roll. See below.

AVOIDING GETTING HURT

If someone's throwing bottles at you, what do you do? Hide behind the bar, or fling yourself to the floor, or shout at them?

You can use your action to defend yourself. This is at least one disadvantage to assailants, and might be more than one.

You can always give your attacker one disadvantage by simply making a nuisance of yourself. But if you want to give your foe more than one disadvantage, you'll need to suggest what you're trying to do to the Game Runner and then roll against **Dexterity** or a relevant skill. Here's what can happen:



S: your attacker suffers whatever disadvantages agreed with the Game Runner. (Some of these may last beyond your next action - for example, if you've dived behind cover.)



F: something's gone wrong. The bar was further away than you thought, or you've tripped. But your attacker keeps the one disadvantage they had before.



AS: the same outcome as a normal success, but you can also use this action to attack someone. Dive through the air guns blazing, that sort of thing.



DF: something bad has happened and you *can't attack until you fix it.* This is the same outcome as a dreadful failure when attacking, though when avoiding getting hurt your attacker still keeps the one disadvantage they had before.

DESIGN NOTE

In practice, this will usually mean that a defensive action is worth two disadvantages if successful and one if not. This should discourage players from simply standing in front of something and shooting, and encourage interesting choices and combos, like diving out of the way and cutting a nearby rope to bring the curtain down on someone.

Who doesn't want to do that?

STOPPING SOMEONE ELSE GETTING HURT

You can also take a **defensive action** to protect someone else - usually a distraction ("OVER HERE, CHUMP!"). The attacker gets a single disadvantage automatically. Any additional disadvantages have to be specific: Anise sings tauntingly; Freddie tries to snatch the gun; Colchis yanks the rug. Those could be another three disadvantages.

CONTENDING WITH AN OPPONENT

If you've squared up against someone in a straightforward test of skill - fencing or boxing, perhaps - it'll be simpler and quicker to use the rules for **Contending with Others** (page 3). The loser in each paired roll takes an injury, unless both parties fail on their rolls. Then nobody gets injured, because both parties basically fell over.

PASS!

Keep the tempo up! If players aren't sure what's going on or who's where - whether because the Game Runner has been vague or because players were thinking about tea when the situation was described - players should just say 'Pass!' when their turn comes.

'Pass!' reserves your action and allows you to act defensively at any point before your next turn. If someone goes after you with a cudgel, you can use your passed action to act defensively against them, there and then. (You can *only* act defensively, though. You can't attack anyone.)

INJURIES

When someone hurts you, roll **Physique**. Advantages and disadvantages apply. Armour isn't really a thing in the 1920s, but if you're wearing a tin helmet or a bucket while peeking out of a window, that's an advantage. If you've come off a motorbike wearing leathers, that's also an advantage.

Here's what can happen:



S: you suffer an **injury**. The Game Runner suggests something appropriate and players write it on their character sheet.



F: you suffer an **injury**, and are **downed** (see next page).



AS: the injury is **superficial** ("Just a flesh wound!"). It doesn't have any mechanical effects, and doesn't need to be written down on your character sheet.



DF: you suffer an **injury** and are **downed**, but nothing else happens. You're having a bad enough day already. If an NPC gets a dreadful failure, they suffer death, paralysis or something else disastrous. (This is the scene in the film where someone trips backward and bangs their head lethally on the coffee table.)

Every untreated injury is an automatic disadvantage on every roll you make. If the injury is particularly relevant to something you're doing, that's an extra disadvantage.

Anise has a Gashed Hand and a Twisted Ankle. That's two disadvantages to every roll she makes. If she tries to pick a lock, that's three disadvantages (she really needs a good hand). If she tries to climb a tree, that's four disadvantages (she really needs her hand and ankle).

The Game Runner decides on the specific injury gained. If you're peering out of a window and get shot, that's probably a Wounded Arm. If the answer isn't obvious, look at the Regard and see if any relevant body

parts are prominent. The Wolf-Divided might mean a chest wound and the Vagabond might mean a hand wound. (If you use a Regard card to help determine a wound, start with the leftmost card and use the next along each time. That'll make sure not everyone gets the same injury.)

If you're **downed**, you can't do anything until the fight is over. But every time your turn to act comes round, you *can* roll **Determination** to act anyway - with a disadvantage for each injury. Here's what could happen if you choose to do this:



S: you can take an action, but you suffer *another injury*, which you need to roll **Physique** for (with a disadvantage for each existing injury). These secondary injuries will be things like Blood Loss or Wound Torn Open.



F: you suffer another **injury**, as above, and can't act this time.



AS: you can act this time, and don't take another injury.



DF: you suffer another injury, as above, and can't act for the rest of the fight.

In short, if you **succeed**, you **can act**. But unless you roll an astonishing success, you **get another injury**.

GETTING FIXED UP

Once the fight is over - permanently or temporarily, like if everyone's crouched behind an overturned car ducking occasional potshots - injured characters can benefit from medical attention.

At this point, an injured player should agree with the Game Runner whether any of their injuries are **minor**, like Bruised, or Blow to the Head, or Thorn-Scratched. Minor injuries are always successfully treated, and always disappear entirely the following morning. You don't need to roll. Minor injuries are never fatal.

For serious, non-minor injuries, roll **Medicine** once per injury. Advantages and disadvantages apply. Peace and quiet is an

advantage. Old equipment is a disadvantage.

Here's what can happen:



S: if the injured character was **downed**, they can act again. The injury is successfully **treated** and no longer counts as a general disadvantage. But it's still a disadvantage if the injured character uses that body part.



F: if the injured character was **downed**, they can act again. But the effects of injuries are **unchanged**. Someone can roll Medical on the same injury again if the situation changes (like better supplies, or you arrive at a hospital).



AS: if the injured character was **downed**, they can act again. The injury no longer applies any penalties, even when using that body part! Perhaps it wasn't as bad as it looked.



DF: if the injured character was **downed**, they're *still* downed. All untreated injuries are **unchanged** as if you'd failed a roll for each of them. (So if you roll a success for one injury and then a dreadful failure on another, the first injury remains treated and the injured player is no longer downed - but all other injuries and associated disadvantages remain.)

DESIGN NOTE

This is not a realistic system and not medical advice. If someone kicks you in the head, for god's sake go to a hospital!

HEALING

Every morning after you were injured, roll **Physique**. Bed rest is an advantage. An uninterrupted night's sleep with no bad dreams is another advantage. A helpful friend nursing you is an advantage. Good medical supplies are another advantage.

Injuries do not count as disadvantages when rolling Physique to heal. Here's what can happen:



S: remove one injury of your choice. Cross it off your character sheet.



F: nothing happens.



AS: remove two injuries of your choice. Cross them off your character sheet.



DF: one of your injuries has a **permanent effect**: a scar, for example, or a limp. Permanently reduce an attribute or skill by 5: Shooting for an injured gun hand, Allure for a facial scar, Physique for a damaged lung. This injury no longer applies a general disadvantage on rolls, but will remain on your character sheet for good.

DESIGN NOTE

These healing rules are intentionally unrealistic, especially if you have some re-rolls banked. They're designed to keep injuries narratively relevant but also to justify characters getting out of bed and getting on with it. Even then, it won't hurt for the Game Runner to be generous: "We forgot to roll, but it's been a few days and you're basically all right now." No-one hates hearing that.

DEATH

There are three ways to die in the Secret Histories system.

1. If an NPC suffers a **dreadful failure** on a Physique roll when injured, they die.

2. If a player character has injuries that aren't successfully treated and they **exert themselves dangerously**, the Game Runner should warn them. If they don't heed the warning, the Game Runner should have them make a Physique roll (without penalties). If that fails, they're downed and will die unless they get immediate successful medical attention.

3. If an NPC or player character has an experience that would **unequivocally** kill them - someone cuts off their head, or they're fed to some hungry sharks.

In all other circumstances, player characters and NPCs should live. There's enough death in the world without manufacturing more.

EXAMPLE OF COMBAT

Freddie, second trombonist for the London Symphony Orchestra, is rehearsing for The Magic Flute when a cheetah inexplicably falls into the orchestra pit immediately next to him.

The cheetah would have the drop on everyone, but she's fallen from a sufficient height that she's initially stunned. She spends her first action getting over that, but she still has a Dexterity of 90 and Freddie's is only 40 - so she'll get to act before he does.

Fortunately, the orchestra is reacting by erupting into screams and throwing down their instruments. The cheetah is unnerved. (Practical narrative overrides rules. No-one in the orchestra has a Dexterity better than 90, but they're not standing around waiting for the cheetah to act.) Tail lashing, the unnerved cheetah chooses: Pass!

Freddie acts. He has enough presence of mind to thwop the cheetah on the head with his trombone. The cheetah uses its reserved action to scramble backwards behind the percussion section. It rolls 89 against its Dexterity of 90, so Freddie has two disadvantages on his attack roll: the standard one for the cheetah making a nuisance of herself, and a second one for the intervening kettle drum. The Game Runner adds a third disadvantage for all the running and screaming happening around him.

The Game Runner does, however, allow Freddie to use his Trombone skill of 72 for the attack roll, as long as he takes a fourth disadvantage for using an improvised weapon. With four disadvantages (4 x -10), he needs to roll a 32 or under. He rolls a 34...

...but there's a D4 sitting on the Forge of Days in the Regard of the Hours.

Freddie points out that the Forge would probably take an interest in brass instruments, and the Game Runner agrees. Freddie re-rolls the 4 from his 34 and gets a 2, for a final result of 32. As the roll was successful, the D4 is removed from the Regard.

Freddie's hit the cheetah, which now needs to make a roll against its Physique of 90. Fortunately, it's already Dazed from the fall - one disadvantage to its roll - and the Game Runner agrees with Freddie that Dazed is specifically relevant to the cheetah's Physique because Freddie's just thwopped it on the head. That's two disadvantages (2 x -10) so the cheetah needs to roll 70 or under. It rolls an 87: a failure. The cheetah collapses, injured and incapacitated.

If the cheetah had rolled an 88, that would have been a dreadful failure and the poor beast would have been killed stone dead. But it's survived, and its injuries are minor. It'll come round with a headache.

(For everyone's peace of mind, the cheetah is immediately revived by its owner, given a big hug and fed Delecto Cheetah Tasties™, its favourite treat.)

FINAL GUIDANCE

The Law of LIGHTNING.

Keep the tempo up! Don't let conversation get bogged down into discussions about tactics. If something's unclear, roll the dice, move on, and make it clear next time. The Pass! rule is designed to keep play flowing without disadvantaging players who panic or lose track of what's going on.

The Law of PRACTICALITY.

Narrative specifics override rules. The rules are only there to help resolve borderline cases. If you're trying to shoot someone in an army tank, stop it. That's just silly. If someone's trying to thump you and they climb into a wardrobe and lock the door from the inside,

that's not a disadvantage on your attacker's Scuffle roll - they simply can't punch you anymore. (They *could* tip the wardrobe over on top of you, though, if they're Pyrrhic enough.)

The Law of RESOLUTION.

Fights should escalate and then resolve a tense situation. End them as soon as you can. Have enemies negotiate or jump through windows. Have nuns or taxi drivers wander in. Have something catch fire - that tends to focus minds.

PERILS SPIRITUAL, OR 'THE OCCULT'

The invisible world has its own spiritual equivalent of injuries. **Fascination** is the obsession that arises from exposure to wonders, visions and the invisible light of the Mansus. **Dread** is the deadening effect of exposure to the horrors of the world, the flesh and the night.

GAINING FASCINATION AND DREAD


Certain experiences can put you **At Risk of Fascination** or **At Risk of Dread**.


- **Fascination:** dreams of the Mansus, profound experiences of beauty or art, certain occult aggressions, *successful* use of the Bright Arts in waking life...


- **Dread:** dreams of the Wood, profound experiences of horror or ugliness, certain occult aggressions, *successful* use of the Night Arts in waking life...


When a player's experienced something that risks them gaining either, the Game Runner should write their name next to the upcoming relevant **Time of Power** on the current **Chart of Days** in the **Game Runner's Journal**. Only some Times of Power give Fascination; others give Dread.

When a Time of Power comes around, At Risk players roll **Determination** to resolve their situations. Here's what can happen:

 **S:** you don't gain Fascination or Dread, and you're **no longer At Risk**.

 **F:** you **gain** one point of Fascination or Dread (as appropriate), but you're **no longer At Risk**.

 **AS:** you don't gain Fascination or Dread, and you're **no longer At Risk** of gaining either.

 **DF:** you **gain** one point of Fascination or Dread, and you're **still At Risk**. This risk will trigger at the next Time of Power - not this one!

You can be At Risk of both Fascination and Dread at the same time, but you can't build up

more than one risk of the same type. If you have an afternoon of horrible, miserable experiences, that's still only one Dread risk at dusk.

Every point of Fascination cancels out one point of Dread and vice versa. If you have 2 Fascination and 0 Dread and gain 1 Dread, you're actually left with 1 Fascination and *still* 0 Dread.

If you pick up Fascination or Dread during a relevant Time of Power, then the risk can trigger immediately. (For our purposes, that's about a five-minute stretch - about the time it takes for the sun to rise in Europe, or a couple of minutes before and after the stroke of midnight.)

EFFECTS

Every time a player gets a point of Fascination or Dread, they pick an effect to go with it and write it down in the 'Fascination' or 'Dread' columns on their character sheet. They should pick an effect based on the circumstances, their character's personality and the cards in the Regard. The Game Runner can override if necessary.

Here are some examples - but you're not limited to these!

Fascination Effects.

Effect	Description
Otherworldly Air	Distracted? Or different?
Shining Eyes	It's thrilling to meet your eyes
Haunted by Inspiration	Always scribbling in a notebook
A Future in Mirrors	Your reflection's other, future selves
Rapturous Light	Candle-flames cause happy reveries

Dread Effects.

Effect	Description
Grim Air	Flat, matter-of-fact voice
Dead Gaze	It's difficult to meet your eyes
A Mouthful of Ashes	Food lacks taste; music is noise
The Skull Beneath the Skin	People are bones, machines of meat
The World is Grey	It's hard to tell colours apart

When an effect is cancelled out - either by gaining a point of the opposite attribute or losing it naturally (see 'Losing Fascination and Dread' overleaf) - players simply cross off the relevant effect on their character sheets and consider the line blank again.

But it's not all bad! For every point of Fascination or Dread, players get an advantage on some rolls... though also a disadvantage on others.

	Fascination	Dread
Intelligence	+10	-10
Determination	-10	+10
Bright Arts	+10	-10
Night Arts	-10	+10
Allure	+10	-10
Negotiate	-10	+10

The Game Runner may want to apply other advantages or disadvantages from Fascination and Dread. Dread is a disadvantage to an antagonist's attempt to find a Dread-affected character in dreams, for example. Fascination is an advantage for someone looking for the Invisible Serapeum.

Anise has 2 Dread. She needs help from an old flame. Her Allure is 50, her Negotiate only 30, and their old connection would give her an advantage if she flirted with him. Normally, then, she'd roll for Allure. But her two points of Dread infuse her with grim resignation. Her effective Allure would be 40 (2 x -10 for each Dread, but +10 for their romantic history). Her effective Negotiation would be 50 (2 x +10 for each Dread), so she puts aside memories of happier times. "This is business."

DESIGN NOTE

Alert readers will notice that the Dread bonus to Determination means you're more likely to resist both Fascination and Dread if you're affected by Dread. The reverse is true for Fascination.

OBSESSIONS

If a player ever gets to 3 Fascination or 3 Dread, they'll be overwhelmed by an **obsession**. This will usually be some sort of enthusiastic obsession in the case of Fascination and some sort of destructive obsession in the case of Dread. It'll relate to their personality, and to whatever experience tipped them over the edge.

Here are some examples of Fascination obsessions:

In-game experience	Resulting obsession
Used the Bright Arts to find a protective rite against a summoning	Perform the rite obsessively! Mark every door! Mark every window! Don't stop!
Saw the sea for the first time	Paint it, obsessively, until you have a half-dozen paintings and you can't bend your fingers

Here are some examples of Dread obsessions:

In-game experience	Resulting obsession
Used the Night Arts to find a protective rite against a summoning	Find and defeat the summoning, at any cost
Was buried alive	Dig up every grave in that cemetery - someone might still be in there

If Fascination or Dread was inflicted upon a player through occult assault - for example, if someone curses them - their attacker (via the Game Runner) can choose a suitable obsession.

DESIGN NOTE

This system is designed to simulate narratively interesting states of occult confusion and spiritual injury, not actual mental illness. In particular, we'd urge you not to allow suicidal obsessions. One, it's a quick way to put a character out of commission without many countermeasures. Two, it can really upset people.

Obsession ends if:

- the player's **Fascination or Dread** drops below 3, OR
- **it stops being relevant.** If a player's obsession insisted they burned down a particular house and they did, for instance. At this point they'll also lose a point of Fascination or Dread (whichever was causing their particular obsession).

If you've played *Cultist Simulator*, you'll know that getting to 3 Dread or Fascination is GAME OVER. We're more generous here because it's not an experimental quasi-roguelike video game. But here's an optional rule if you want to play more like *Cultist Simulator*: at 4, obsessions become something more general that can't be

completed. At 5, the character becomes incapable of rational action for at least a year and a day.

LOSING FASCINATION AND DREAD

A **suitable, meaningful and distinctive experience** will allow players to lose a point of Fascination or Dread.

Suitable might mean something cheering or uplifting for Dread, and something practical or sobering for Fascination. Worldly or sybaritic experiences are usually good for both.

Meaningful means not just 'dinner', but 'a really good dinner in a welcoming place you'll remember'. Or not just 'a chat with a friend', but 'a friend rolled Widely-Read to find a poem that specifically addressed your fears'.

Distinctive means you can't do the same thing over and over. Maybe that bottle of Montrachet '67 qualified as a suitable and powerfully worldly experience once, but you can't keep a case of it in your cellar and use it as an anti-Fascination potion.

You can use a suitable, meaningful and distinctive experience to annul your At Risk status, too. If you've just been rescued from a live burial in the morning and don't want to worry about Dread risk at sunset, feel free to go to Mass now to remove the risk.

Remember the **Law of LICENSE**: 'The rules serve the group. The group doesn't serve the rules.' The Perils Spiritual system is intended to make contact with the invisible world feel meaningful and perilous, but to minimise the amount of time characters actually get out of control.

If you don't want to get into details, the key thing is: **give people Fascination for some kinds of experience, Dread for others, and have it bake their noodles if either hits 3.**

THE INVISIBLE WORLD: A GLOSSARY

"Nothing is true. Everything is permitted." — Hasan-i-Sabbah

"Nothing is a place. Everything ends." — Solomon Husher

"Nothing is certain. Everything is useful." — Arabella Dusk

*"It is permitted for us to know; it is not permitted for you. Don't write that down."
— Inspector Zachary Wakefield*

"Everything, no Doubt, is true in some History somewhere. This is a Matter of Interest to Scholars, but at this Moment hath Brandy its Price, as Tea, and I have learnt not to raise Scholarly Matters with Tradesmen in Practical Discussion." — Lord Franklin Bancroft

ALUKITE

Debased (a few would say 'ascended') **Long** driven by cannibalistic appetites. Alukites are said not to blink; to have monstrous shapes concealed by the arts of the skin; to be able to fly; to have a strength unmatched by all but Forge-long. This may not be universally true, but they're universally bad news.

Also called *soucouyants*, or *empousai*.

"Hokobald complains of his condemnation by the Ordo Limiae. He acknowledges that he has 'undergone alterations' after the 'consummation of that particular delight', but insists that these changes are both elegant and inevitable. 'Who is the fire, and who the fuel?' he asks, rhetorically."

ASPECTS

The most fundamental elements of reality; or, the various natures of the **Hours**; or, a post-facto invention of scholars of the invisible arts.

"Each Hour has its colour. Each flame has its fuel."

THE BOUNDS

Those places that are not exactly in the world nor out of it. The Invisible Serapeum is arguably in the Bounds, but it depends on who you ask.

"Here in the high dry byways of the Bounds are the intricate fissures and snares of ten thousand years of time."

THE CRIME OF THE SKY

When a **Long** becomes pregnant by another Long, then father and mother are both seized by a desire to devour the child once it's born. If this happens, they turn **alukite**.

"Damaon speculates on the horrifying possibility of Hours turned alukite. 'What then would they devour?'"

EDGE

The **aspect** of battle, struggle, strength, cunning. "All conquest occurs at the Edge."

"These are the arts that ensure an ending."

FORGE

The **aspect** of transformation, destruction, strength, ingenuity.

"Fire is the winter that warms and the spring that consumes."

THE GLORY

A source of something like light, somewhere above the **Mansus**. The source of all thought? A blazing cosmic wound? God? A door from somewhere else? It engenders inspiration and Fascination. It makes the Mansus visible. It's probably very dangerous, but the Mansus is so dangerous, especially high up, that this is generally beside the point.

"It's always possible to be deader. The Watchman goes before; none but seven may go after. Yet surely we are born to the Glory, as the sparks fly upwards."

GRAIL

The **aspect** of hunger, lust, the drowning waters; the birth and the feast.

"Some words are spelt correctly only when the proper ink is used."

HEART

The **aspect** of life, preservation, protection and the drumbeat and dance that must never cease.

"There are common sentiments in every thunderclap."

HOURS

The secret gods who live behind the world; said to be thirty in number. Their decisions shape the world and its histories. Some rose through the ranks of **Know** and **Long** and **Names**. Some came by their estate in a different way entirely. All are perilous, sublime, and inclined to suppress competition.

"The seasons of famine and plenty, the turn of the Earth, the transformations of the furnace - all these are only the results of the enactment of the lesser passions of the Hours."

THE INVISIBLE ARTS

Knowledge of practices that shouldn't work if the world was actually how it seemed. But they do.

"We don't say 'magic'. Magic is a story. Or that thing people do in public, for people, with rabbits."

KNOCK

The **aspect** of wounds and openings, of locksmiths, burglars and oracles.

"Sooner or later, every locksmith has the Dream."

KNOW

Mortals who've answered a dream-riddle and entered the **Mansus** through the Stag Door. (And returned: otherwise they probably don't count as mortal any more.) Initiation into the ranks of the Know allows them to learn further knowledge usually kept from mortals by the **Hours**.

"The Stag Door is the Adept's Gate. To pass it is to be initiated into the first true mystery of the House of the Sun."

LANTERN

The **aspect** of light, knowledge, and the secret place sometimes called the House of the Sun.

"Each Hour has its colour, but colour exists only in light."

LONG

Mortals turned immortal through devotion to an **Hour**. Most were formerly counted among the **Know**. Possibly some were never mortal.

"Hours don't dream. Long try not to."

THE MANSUS

The dwelling-place of (most of) the **Hours** (and the **Names**, many inhuman spirits, and some among the Dead).

Accessible in dreams to sufficiently knowledgeable mortals, and to very unlucky ones.

"Behind the world is the Mansus, the fortress of the Hours, the house of the Sun. Its walls are the size of starlight. Its corridors are the angles of time. Life begins in the Mansus, and memory ends there."

MOTH

The **aspect** of change, whimsy, unreason, secrecy, nature and the **Wood**.

"These are the roads that chaos ride."

NAMES

Major servants, aspects or emanations of the **Hours**. Some, perhaps all, Names were previously **Long**. Many Mansus-spirits claim to be Names but probably aren't: true Names are the rarest and most powerful.

"When the Sun-in-Splendour was divided, its Names fractured too."

NOWHERE

The place most Dead go, and only very bad things come from. Perhaps it's below the **Mansus**.

"Shohei's preferred theories are that we are the children of apes who walked upright... or that we consumed not only our parents, 'which is not the Crime of the Sky', but also our origin, so that we came from Nowhere."

PORT NOON

A tropical sea-side resort where **Long** drink "from the Spring that makes them forgotten".

"Port Noon is where the Long go to stay, mostly, out of trouble."

REAL

Scholars of the **Invisible Arts** mean something different from the usual meaning of this word. The **Mansus** is not physical, but it's very real.

"The wine is imaginary, but the cup is not. To navigate the Mansus one must understand the distinction."

SECRET HISTORIES

The **aspect** of alternate realities that have been suppressed, forgotten or erased.

"There is never only one history."

THE WAKE

If it exists, and you can see it while you're not asleep, then it's in the Wake.

"The Nameless Name has been known to hunt secrets in the Wake."

WINTER

The **aspect** of death, remembrance, unlife, debilitation and beauty.

"This invokes, acknowledges and welcomes the passage to silence."

THE WOOD

A tangled and primordial place where the **Glory's** light does not reach. Accessible to those who follow instinct and passion through dark dreams. The most savage and Dionysiac of the **Hours** are said to dwell in the Wood rather than in the **Mansus** itself.

"The Wood grows about the walls of the Mansus. As any student of Histories knows, the Mansus has no walls."

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