RECEIVE - the uninvited invited guest - GREETINGS - this time it's personnel - WITNESS - the door opens into our heart - QUERY - how many souls do you have? - DOWNLOAD - molecular apotheosis, blueprints to a new age - TRANSMIT - family reunions on vhs - JUMPCHAIN - enjoy your stay - ATTENTION ALL PASSENGERS - the eschaton is metastasizing - PLEASE REMAIN SEATED - the ride does not stop - WITNESS!

The Secret World

Welcome to a world not so different to the modern Earth, in 2012. At least, on the surface.

We see you strangely, sweetling-in-waiting. From an odd intersection, oh, a new protocol? A familiar engine, but a cute little format. You'll do nicely. Favours?

All conspiracies are true. Shadowy organisations vie against each other for power and prestige, while the supernatural dwells at the edges of society. Vampires lurk just outside streetlights, and fairies make funny faces at passing tourists. Wizards rub shoulders with accountants.

PLEASE WAIT ONE MOMENT WHILE YOUR NUMBER IS PROCESSED

Beneath the skin of what humanity thinks of as "the planet" lie the bones of an immaculate divine machine: Gaia. Rivers of sap comingle with branches that somehow feed into it's supernatural mechanisms. The Bees, mechanical yet insectile, have been released from it to choose agents from among humanity. Those with the skill and will to defend the world from all that lurks in the shadows.

It is their voice you now hear.

Agreed, with reservations. Welcome, please, make ourself your home. We're working hard for a glowing review.

But all is not well.

WIPE YOUR SHOES BEFO- NEVERMIND

In Gaia's prisons, vast and terrible **Dreamers** stir. Mouths like black holes lick at the moon's craters, and from them dribbles forth a black, corruptive **Filth** that stains this world. Their prisons are cracking. The world will not survive their release.

You can't leave traces in stardust. A broken moonbeam betrayed you instead. Keep three eyes open and close your ears. The pathogen might trickle in, and now we are your handler.

Dark days are coming. Take-

THE TASTE OF ONE-THOUSAND DROPS OF HONEY-or as you call it, 1000 CP.

Origins

Drop-In: Not friends with anyone, then? Best to keep a low profile. The other factions have their ambitions and dangers, their own little idiosyncratic priorities, but they won't hesitate to crush anything or anyone that rises up against them. A free agent is only as free as they can keep their noses out of other people's business.

Templars: They have roared their challenge down the ages since the time of Babel, where others skulk in the shadows. Least secret, most militarised, of the secret societies, they are soldiers that gun down the worst things that go bump in the night and they are the paladins that stain their hands with the blood of villages to keep cities safe. If you seek dignity and purpose, know that their zeal against the unnatural is matched only by their capacity for self-sacrifice. But honor and tradition can be shackles as much as they are armour for those who cannot adapt to apocalypses veiled in shadows.

You start in the Templars' luxurious London headquarters.

Illuminati: Sex, drugs and Rockefeller. Two of those things have been in style since at least ancient Egypt, and they had a hand in making the third as iconic as the Eye of Providence. Power is their currency, their DNA, their God. They may dress in business casual and work in a vaguely corporate structure, but they have stocks in Hell and compromising pictures of angels. But the Illuminati aren't as thoughtlessly depraved as their minions, simply committed to using any means necessary for total control in a world that shows know mercy. To them, you either do unto others or get done. And the Illuminati? They're not done.

You start in the Illuminati's glamorous American headquarters.

Dragon: Long ago-some say, in another Age of the world-a child looked into a pool of water and tried to catch a dragon by the tail. So it is said, only a child may lead those who seek to celebrate and bear witness to chaos in all its permutations, even if that child must be sacrificed for poor performance-and quickly replaced by another reincarnation. The Dragon are baristas told to give different people specific notes on certain days. The Dragon are homeless figures on the street setting off pipe bombs disguised as firecrackers. The Dragons are philosophical mathematicians-until they decide to be something else. So enigmatic and fickle are they, that it's hard to say if they want anything at all.

You start somewhere in Korea.

Perks

Discounted perks are 50% off for the background they're under. 100 CP perks become free.

Undiscounted

The Buzzing (Free Templars, Illuminati, Dragons/300 CP): You've got a Bee in your bonnet, and by Bee you mean one of the tiny biomechanical agents of Gaia, and by bonnet you mean body. This benevolent but alien little symbiote offers all sorts of benefits to its host. It grants you access to The Buzzing: Fragments of lore gleaned from multidimensional spectrum analyses of reality itself when you interact with interesting things. Some of this information even comes from times and places outside the history of the universe as currently comprehended by the modern world. Blips of information too overwhelming for a merely human mind to fully analyse. It also brings with it tremendous magical powers by infusing you with Anima, the pure essence of Gaia itself. What clans and cabals have taken generations to assemble by rite and sacrifice, you can unleash with a gesture-and your connection to Gaia grants you significant resistance to corruptive forces like the Filth, though you'll want training to master these abilities without accidentally blowing off your roof or randomly chucking hammers into the sky. One trick you pick up quickly is navigating between adjacent realms of existence such as Agartha, or spirit worlds by various means; with some experimentation, this can develop into teleportation. Last but not least, the Buzzing makes you *really* hard to kill. Oh, you can still bleed. Lose an arm. But you just keep coming back from headshots, death curses, magical explosions and just about everything short of slowly, meticulously grinding you to dust. Do be careful nonetheless. This world is full of those who are experts in inflicting fates worse than death.

Council of Venice (200 CP): The governing body once establish to prevent war between factions has grown stagnant. Held down by agendas and red tape. Cue the political squabbles and cumbersome bureaucracy that have long since left it a joke in the eyes of other movers and shakers. Whether or not you've been part of their implosion of self-governance, you've tried to learn from their mistakes. As bureaucrats go, your ability to multitask and learn the ins and outs of systems let you get things moving in even the oldest institutions. Your knack for learning about the clogs inherent in the system and who do bother to get them unstuck would give you a real chance at trying to make this once-distinguished institution functional again, and your personal professionalism earns you a measure of the respect it once commanded even from your enemies. Last but not least, despite the Council's ineffectiveness their agents are *very* well trained. You're sneaky enough to trail someone inventing and shedding disguises on the

fly, tactically skilled enough to establish safe zones even during a Filth outbreak and curiously are good enough with a sword to rival gunmen in close quarters.

Optionally, you may have some sort of connection to the Council in this world. Whether as a disillusioned burnout or a currently employed agent, in times this dark the Council welcomes all the friends it can get.

Brotherhood of Sailors (200 CP): There have always been those who allegiance is to the highest bidder instead of the highest cause. Knowledge is power, and from the hidden trading empire New Carthage somewhere on open waters the Phoenicians seek not power, but profit. Like them, you have a set of skills that make you very attractive to people that need rare things reliably delivered at a reasonable price. For one thing you've been trained in smuggling in soldiering about as well as you'd expect to have been by an organisation that built its name on profit at all costs. While few Phoenicians are superhuman, it's safe to say you're near the top end of black ops capabilities among humanity. Your investigative skills snoop out mystic artifacts and material goods like a trained detective, and organising plans to get hold of it is second nature. However, this organisation's greed will prove to be its downfall. Lucky for you though, the Secret World gives you a little more leeway than most. Normally cursed artifacts are significantly more stable and safe to use in your hands. That genie lamp won't suddenly activate in response to your intrusive thoughts. That divine sword won't sap your powers when it's passed on to another. And that cursed pile of gold won't turn you into a dragon.

As above, it's up to you if you are affiliated with the Phoenicians somehow or simply an independent party with similar capabilities.

Citizen of the Secret World (100/200/300): The realities of the supernatural are as numerous as their misconceptions. Vampires burn in sunlight, but most of their other weaknesses are made up-and they're not strictly immortal, just very long lived. Fauns may be humans that wandered too deep into the forests or animals that wandered too close to civilisation, but whatever they were they are most certainly human now. If you've grown tired of your humanity, now's your chance to slough it off for something more…interesting. Whatever your choice, your options are varied; nearly every facet of human mythology is represented in this world. The only limit is that you are something more than human, but less than a god, and untouched by **Filth.**

For 100 CP you are a fledgling, a child by otherworldly being standards-or simply one of the less accomplished recluses. You may have claws that can cut through steel and you may be some kind of entity of pure fear that wears bodies like masks, but the scope of your existence is more or less that of a human being.

For 200 CP you are one of the greater figures among your kind. An oni lord or a duke of hell, with size and magical power befitting a creature of fable. You can be something on par with the Machine Tyrant: A group of Rakshasa stitched together into a juggernaut bigger than an elephant that could give even a seasoned Bee a hard fight. Even if you are something less horrific, you could the kind of fairy that only a fool would break his word to.

And for 300 CP you are one of the apexes of your kind. A first generation vampire like Mara, unhindered by the sun and capable of creating more of her kind simply by bathing others in her blood. Her blood magic so potent, nearly all lesser vampires are immediately subjugated by her presence. Or the Nameless, first and by far greatest of all djinn, who tore out its own name and ate it before the angels. With no name, no appellation, no *program override,* it is beyond conventional binding-and even heavily suppressed by Third Age technology, it's power over all the classical elements is incomparably deadly.

Dare to Dream (200/400/600): We see you reaching for more power! Take our hand. Take it! Do not fear the Filth. It is the catalyst for our freedom. Your freedom. Our mutual freedom from this Gaian prison. The eyes and maws and claws and writhing shapes that shamble forth from are clay to mould in our hands. Set forth enough upon it and we can raise the dead, or turn water into…something we promise is sufficiently wine-like for those with eyes to see. That black seeping stain the cowards fear can overlay our dreams upon reality! And our dreams can be your dreams. Wouldn't you like to be a mayor? Or a god? Of course, this can come with complimentary inclusion among our mortal worshippers' hierarchies! Do you want to be a leading light among Morninglight, or a neo-Atenist? How about a man of fear in the Fear Nothing Foundation? Just say the word, and we'll make you a star.

Our Filth is a truly special thing. Yes, you may see it as a black ooze-but it has so many more permutations! It can manifest as a viral meme. A city-smothering fog. Sigils that shatter the mind, viral music, or even infectious languages. The lovely dark ichor is merely it's most common manifestation. From its rank substrate also crawl flies that will serve you loyalty-and perhaps, bestow a few of our special gifts on hosts. Who knows? With some experimentation you might discover more vectors for our lovely gift to the world.

200 choice points. An aperitif. We will see to it you are outrageously fortunate in your personal ambitions. It does not matter if you want to be a pop star or a president, the stars will align and doors will open. We regret this does little against someone waving a gun in your face, but we can get you that promotion in the Templars' ranks in weeks rather than months. <u>If you wish</u>,

your blows and projectiles will scar foes with Filth. Twisting their forms apart with mutagenic force…or subjugating and remaking them into your minions.

400 steps closer to freedom. Soup! The Filth bends to your will, and comes when you call. Augmenting your magic, making it deeper and stranger. A human can quickly smear a room with Filth. Sacrifice and ritual to us-evoking our dreams, directing worship to us-can increase the flow. Or you can use it to reshape and remake your form. Give yourself a thousand eyes, twelve tentacles, an undying form and a claw bigger than you are-you deserve it! You can summon others touched by our eager hands through pits and geysers of the Filth too, from dozens of draugr to even the greater beasts that scatter our Filth far and wide. Integrity of free will guaranteed to be preserved. You're not a snack. You're a luminary.

600. The number of kingdoms we will heap at your feet when this world is ours again. Shed that mouldering flesh, and become a voracious abstract. A Black Signal. Now, you are truly one with our Filth. As a being of pure information you can cross cities in seconds along the information highway-the so-called internet. Other realms based on the mind are just as easy to infiltrate. Your ability to summon and wield our Filth is even greater, conjuring armies where once gangs stood. Design custom juggernauts of your own, talk technology into working with you as well as merging into greater forms, or build an army of Filth bodies to be your hands and legs. Your very communication can inflict nosebleeds, urges to self-immolate or other interesting little insanities on mortal. Shouldn't be too hard to talk most into self-destruction. But that's not the fun part. You're part of us now, becoming one of us-it's all the same in the end. Who knows how long it'll take? You've got front row seats to the apocalypse, just sit back and enjoy the ride.

Drop-In

The Truth Is Out There (100 CP): Surrounded by conspiracies and left out in the cold, what's a man to do? Just GIVE UP? Hell no. You're the kind of amateur detective that could give Nancy Drew a run for her money. You're no Sherlock Holmes but your ability to collect titbits of data from all sorts of media and spot the patterns in the chaos isn't something every man on the street can pick up, and you know how to burn a trail. Now if you could only discuss your discoveries without sounding like you wear a tinfoil hat.

My Neighbour Bigfoot (100 CP): Illuminati staff live among us, enjoying a game of D&D when they're not making or breaking the destiny of nations. So too do ghouls and living scarecrows need somewhere to hang their head when not on the prowl. There's something about you that erodes whatever prejudices

the supernatural may hold against you. Something that makes you likeable with a sincere effort at friendship, and letting their guard down to the extent a cat would around a mouse. A hungry beast will still hunt and a truly malicious being will still hate, but a vampire who doesn't know you and isn't starving could be talked out of killing you over a special order at Waffle House.

Between Two Worlds (200 CP): Theodore Wicker wasn't a wicked man. In fact, he was an overly idealistic one-so much so he sacrificed everything to get closer to Hell. His body scarred to inoculate it to Hell's caustic environs, his tongue cut out to better speak it's linguistics, his mind more demonic than human when it was all over. And while you may not be the greatest portal mage of the age, somehow your body, mind and soul have been altered to attain a similar level of closeness to a general type of supernatural being. Entities of the same general type in this world and others see you as a typical respectable member of their community, and you have the basic capacity to live and function as one of them. This comes with the *minimal* supernatural capabilities to function as one of them in their natural environment; you won't be noteworthy as vampires go, but you'll be able to suck blood and go into a healing torpor without worrying about sunlight. But perhaps Hell isn't your calling? Perhaps you've somehow become as undying as a mummy while technically alive, or awakened some fae blood in your veins.

"Reap what you sow" (200 CP): Shortly after your arrival, mysterious winged figures gathered around you. They looked upon your soul (or what passes for it) and endowed you with supernatural energies that coalesced as a functional set of energy wings you can summon and dismiss at will. Apart from being able to fly in a manner superficially resembling aerodynamic flight (but with much greater lift and thrust than your wingspan would suggest), the wings are infused with a powerful blessing that smites your foes and heals you in battle. Whether the healing comes first, simultaneously with the smiting or after the smiting depends on whether you're more altruistic and duty-driven or ambitious and individualistic.

If for whatever reason you already have wings, these extra ones somehow fit in seamlessly with your existing ones. Perhaps they coat your real wings like an aura. Perhaps they just manifest somewhere convenient.

Smiling Magus (400 CP): The Trickster King. The Sinner Prophet. King Solomon has had many names throughout the ages, and whether as a descendant or a dedicated scholar you've somehow obtained some of his legacy. You have become extremely powerful in the magic of synchronicity, being invisible to both the inevitabilities of fate and the tumult of arcane chaos. Even entities with powerful information-gathering capabilities like Bees find it extremely hard to

keep track of. And while this alone grants little in the way of throwing fireballs or tearing life from veins, it's esoteric powers are even more devastating from afar. With a figurative flap of a butterfly's wings, you can spark a hurricane across the world or twist fortune in your favours. Moreover there are few better than you at binding and manipulating the true names of entities in this world. It was with talents such as yours that Solomon bound the 72 demons of the Ars Goetia to his will, and even trapped and betrayed the Nameless when angelic forces could not. To get hold of someone's identity or some sort of symbolic extension of their identity is to gain the right to command, bind, banish or even potentially transform them as you please. The world can only hope you're as benevolent as your predecessor's reputation.

Retired God (400 CP): Once, you might have been forged in the laboratories of those who wielded Anima as more science than magic. Once, you might have been the incarnation of an idea in flesh. Once. But the minds of men have turned away from those who once guarded them. Whatever the true nature of your origins, you are something remembered as a deity in this world. You may have inhuman physiology like flesh of bark or a deer's head-it matters little compared to the magical powers at your fingertips. Your magical power rivals an entire magical community's worth of protections-and in one broadly defined area, your finesse with that power surpasses mortal understanding. A trickster god might be able to create weaker but fully functional duplicates of himself, while a god of the forest able to make the trees rise up and form impenetrable barriers-or turn a man into a tree. Just don't get too arrogant. Even gods aren't that much greater than Bees and their hosts. You may be immortal, but many have proven your kind are far from eternal.

Anima (600 CP): There is one other like you in the world. To say your powers are like those of Bee's host writ large limits the scope of your potential, but is not incorrect. Even an untrained child could accidentally burn down her house and read minds, while scrying past and future. Such is the strength of your mind that you can leave psychic recordings for specific people at certain locations, or imbue your power into an item to make others ally with you. Flight, teleportation, healing, traversing different realms of reality-normally complex spells come naturally to you. And all those are parlour tricks compared to your real purpose: A living antibody of Anima, created by Gaia to repel the Filth in all its forms. You can unleash blasts of Anima powerful enough to erase and cleanse the Filth from city blocks, or even stagger some of the more powerful beings in this world. With time and practice, you may be able to gain control of the Gaian Engines in this world. Who knows what else is possible with time and practice? Anima is the fundamental energy of magic after all, the force that Gaia used to build all worlds and possibilities-and that her builders used to uplift some of those worlds into paradises. As it's steward, little but your imagination

bars what is truly possible as long as the flow of Anima is not somehow disrupted or corrupted.

Of Another Age (600 CP): The past being another country is more than just another saying. The First Age of this world was a true paradise, the Second one of equal wonder as well as savagery, and in the Third Age magic was as one with science. Many beings have a claim to immortality in this world, but you are unique in that like the forest guardian Cucuvea, you have somehow retained your personhood throughout the ages of the world. When others speak of magic and science, you are capable of adapting one to interface with another by using higher order precepts of reality. This is different from *innovating* on magic and/or technology; you can make a TV run on fairy blessings or ensure a death curse is passed through the internet, but reality has changed so much it's not as easy to figure out how to make a gun *more* efficient at shooting plagues. This naturally comes with a reserve of and control over magic rivalling the gods themselves, but more importantly you can actualise different facets of yourself from past lives to attain different specialities and exert power through the idea of yourself as if it were an extension of your body. Broadly speaking, you're a shapeshifting master of magic and mayhem, able to turn yourself into something like a bird of prey powerful enough to carry away a car or an advanced scientist with the knowledge to create powered craft capable of advanced spaceflight. And you can combine those aspects-or your other altforms-into a singular entity to increase your overall power. As the idea of you is an extension of your being, you can communicate and cast spells on those who look up complex information about you, or tear apart their minds if you dislike prolonged observation.

Templars

Batter Up (100 CP): A flash of silver, a storm, a deadly kiss-that's how your skill with a weapon from before gunpowder in your hand looks like to most. Be it with a graceful blade arcing for the perfect chink in your foes' armour or a mighty hammer cracking the earth, you've been honed by a martial tradition millennia in the making. Moreover you know how to channel magic through your weapons so blunt ones strike like thunder, or blades crackle with mystic energies. Things that go bump in the night fear your sword more than most bullets.

Adventures in Scholastics (100 CP): Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it. None take these lessons more seriously than the Templars. You're a skilled and experienced scholar, as familiar with cross-referencing old tomes and writing monograms on them as you are on the battlefield. Your education is broader by far than its deep, but your familiarity

with both history and mystic symbolism will give you a crumb of insight in all but the most unusual incidents, and make solving all manner of occult puzzles easier.

Necessary Evils (200 CP): Behind the silk of the Templars' honor lies a clenched fist of steel. Whether you're the unofficial third member of Pit and Pendulum's dreaded duo or not, you've received significant organisational leeway wherever you're employed proportionate to how violent it is. In a typical office job you can slash jobs and budgets with little complaint from oversight. In a group like the Templars, you can have operatives with poor performance beaten up or potentially even killed-and receive extra compensation for your "special operations". As a designated troubleshooter, you yourself also tend to be above recrimination for your dark deeds. Just try not to overstep. You probably can't get away with slamming someone's face down on a hot grill while working a fast food joint.

(Unless it's Waffle House)

Elementalism (200 CP): As much fringe science as arcane tradition, you've been taught how to manipulate and exploit elemental forces to punishing effect. Blasting your foes with lightning bolts, cones of cold or weakening the molecular structure of their hide and armour are old hat. For more advanced efforts creating miniature storms, setting off elemental chain reactions or unleashing blasts of pure force rivalling the hammer of the gods is possible. This also covers mystic techniques to empower the raw power of your anima temporarily and tricks to strip your foes of their defences, but it's primary focus is simple and direct: Blasting things to high heaven.

Ancient Tradition (400 CP): There is no replacement for constant diligence. The secret societies may have plentiful knowledge written down, but there are groups out in the world that have honed their skills against the darkness and all that dwells within it for generations. Groups such as the Wabanaki, who use talisman and ritual to keep a great evil sealed. Or the Jingu Clan, demon hunters that have honed their blades against the oni. You are now part of one such legacy. The mystical techniques and fighting skills you hone are particularly unique and battle-tested by this world's standards, but more importantly against one particular type of supernatural being-oni, vampires, even gods-your tradition is particularly lethal, honed to perfection by generations of training and study. Even if you personally could not lay a god low, you could empower one who falls short to be able to.

Comrades In Arms (400 CP): The old may differ with the young on how to conduct war, but when the enemy is at the gates few close ranks as tightly as the Templars. You're no footsoldier anymore-you're a battlefield tactician and

strategist trained not only in taking command, but devising plans to lay waste to everything from rampaging titanic horrors to armies of the undead. More importantly, those you fight alongside have their loyalty strengthened and their coordination improved. Dereliction and desertion are shunted aside by righteous purpose, and betrayal unheard of unless it was planned far ahead in advanced and by a truly diabolical mind. Even against overwhelming odds, you can count on those you stand alongside.

Die in the Dark (600 CP): This is a bleak world to fight for. But you'll sell your blood to the cause dearly. A lot of people will tell you that you have to play the long game to get anything done in this world. *Not so.* As long as you have sufficient firepower, fortitude and will to keep up the good fight you could take on an entire military as one man. They can see you coming. They can bewitch you, trick you, attempt to blackmail you. But like the protagonist in an action movie, unerringly you find that fortune favours the bold and that the fastest way through a web of lies is to start blasting and never stop. The best way to defeat you is to do so head on. Furthermore, some powerful magic prevents wounds dealt by you from healing properly without significant supernatural assistance, whether by fist, blade, bullet or more esoteric means. Perhaps wounds you inflict burn with holy fire, or are ripped apart by shockwaves of force. Whatever force empowers you lets your attacks do disproportionate damage too; just watch their faces when you shoot a fat hole through solid steel with a handgun, or slice an incoming car cleanly in half.

Live in the Light (600 CP): Of course, what's the point in fighting for a better world if the world won't better itself? And the world has let the Templars down almost as much as thy have themselves. Not with you around, though. The efforts you take to make the world a better place are never in vain, even if the odds are truly bleak and the silver lining is minimal. Those you do a good turn are prone to paying you back down the line somehow. The people you save from the brink of death find that extra push they need to beat the heroin addiction, or demonic taint on their souls. Even the collateral damage of fights is minimised. The less you, personally, had to do with saving something the lesser this effect. But even at many removes, it's possible to make this world a more optimistic place with a good faith effort to clean it up. As if sensing what you represent, you command respect and honesty from the inhuman and the irredeemable that transcends factional or even racial boundaries so long as you deal with them in good faith.

Illuminati

Packed Heat (100 CP): Magical gunplay is about more than leading foes or aiming for the centre of mass, both things that are old hat to you with this. It's

about siphoning their lifeforce with every Anima-infused shot. It's about accuracy so unerring, you can curve bullets around obstacles. And it's about the sharing the thrill of the firefight with your allies, empowering them for the fight ahead. You've been trained in how to mix magic and firearms, a formidable combination of efficiency and power. That werewolf has more to fear than silver from your bullets.

Party Like It's The Apocalypse (100 CP): The Illuminati motto is to work hard yes, but play HARDER. You've developed a strong stomach for pills, powders and liquors of the mundane world-enough to go to one of their parties and wake up the next day bright as a daisy. Furthermore, you're slick but slimy. You're professional without being a party pooper. You have that corporate confidence and talent for convincing doublespeak that lets you talk someone into handing over their credit card and social security number over a cup of coffee. You can keep that salesman pitch going even when face to face with a snarling otherworldly beast.

Blood Magic (200 CP): This magic is the realm of sickness and prevention-but always, of life that devours other life to live. You can boil blood, form it into deadly weapons, wrack it with supernatural disease, rip it out of someone's body or simply stop a heart from afar. Or else make of it a healing barrier, protective aegis or bodysculpting catalyst for yourself and those around you. Those unfamiliar with this art are sometimes surprised there are almost as many ways to keep you and those you care for alive at a distance with it, as there are to unleash dark forces on your enemies and tear their flesh apart. Even golems can "bleed" Anima of a sort. If something lives, this magic can mess with it.

Morality Valium (200 CP): You handshake Hell long enough, you expose your microchips to blasphemous tongues again and again, you start to pick up a trick or two. You're not just good looking or a people person. You're *striking* in a way that projects confidence, danger and a taste of the forbidden even while dressed for the office. Talking to you brings out the vice and vigour in those around you. The offers you make are unnaturally enticing, the trust you invoke hits as hard as heroin and bad ideas sound good when they're from your mouth. Obedience becomes tempting even to those with greater power, and after spending enough time around you a rejection hits as bad as withdrawal.

Team of One (400 CP): They say there's no "I" in tea, but hey. There is a Me. It's hard to say if you're a good luck charm, or just that good. On the one hand, your manipulative and analytic talents are extraordinary. You can keep four simultaneously networks of agents running precise schemes without knowing about each other's ultimate employer, while accurately assessing the portfolio performance of a large corporation and rigging the election of another country.

On the other hand, complex things you set in motion just run more smoothly. Reports can filled in and processed on time, recruits or even rivals open up to you quickly, experiments yield results and even inhuman beings don't dare call your bluffs. This is effective on everything *less* urgent than pitched combat or a magical disaster. People like you are the reason why the Illuminati rule America coldly but efficiently while the Templar rule a tiny island nation, while Orochi can't seem to conduct a single experiment without it breaking out and murdering the scientists every Tuesday.

Professional Mad Scientist (400 CP): Here's something else the Illuminati have a grip on better than the other two great powers of the world-innovation. You're an intellectual equal to Dr. Charles Zurn, their in-house mad scientist and ironically the great mind given the most freedom among the three conspiracies' resident brains trusts. From grafting microchips safely to spinal columns that can create personality backups in others, to biologically grafting organisms in impossible yet viable configurations, to enhancing mystical powers with psychoactive chemicals there's few better out there at combining modern science with the mystic arts. A morse code that can bind an elemental into it? That's old hat. Now, figuring out the biological interface between a Bee, it's host and the Anima they share-as well as how to manipulate it? *That's* an ambition worthy of a mind like yours. As a final benefit, you're a natural at wielding any of the more complex pieces of technology you can understand, such as the force-projecting quantum brace.

All-Seeing Eye (600 CP): Got your eye on the top job? You may be human, but you've set your sights on being a real eye in the sky. You can manipulate any electronic information storage system system less defended than those in Agartha as if it were an extension of your body, effortlessly scouring the internet for any information you want or tracking people with CCTV cameras. Wiping records of data or digging up blackmail is like blinking for you. You can even interrupt communications systems, wipe data drives in the blink of an eye or take control of satellites and drones. Now, here comes the really fun part. The more organisational authority you have, the more unnaturally commanding and persuasive you are. Even a new recruit to the Illuminati with this will be able to sweet talk their stone cold bosses into showing off a wilder side, or make fellow recruits follow their lead. By the time you've crawled your way to the top of the pyramid, who knows? Perhaps like a certain reclusive CEO, as long as people are willing to listen you'll be able to talk molecules into letting go and Bees into betraying Gaia.

Brains Trust Fund Baby (600 CP): …hey. You didn't think all this talk about *power* was in the abstract, right? Meet Carter. As a student at the Illuminati's Innsmouth Academy, Carter is a prodigy of elementalism, blood magic and

chaos magic at an age when most sorcerers are still figuring out which demon to sacrifice to. So great are her powers that, even with scant control, she can blast away whole rooms and even Bees require specialised wards to survive her presence for long. Theoretically, the misapplication of such powers could result in a magical nuke. You now possess a similar level of raw magical power, enough to be evaluated as more superweapon than agent. Be careful not to bring about what you can't stop, because without adequate training your powers could be as harmful to you as anyone else.

Dragon

Way of the Fist (100 CP): What is this, a wuxia movie? You better believe it, because you're about to live out at least some of your Naruto fantasies. From conjuring up smoke and mirrors, to pulling enemies from afar into punching range, to a limited form of life-preserving immutability, you've got the training to mix up magic with martial arts. Don't misunderstand, you've still been trained to fight with skill and poise against both armed forces and supernatural invaders. But those fists of fury are hitting all the harder when they're backed by Anima surging through your veins.

Mysterious Ways (100 CP): The Dragon don't necessarily require discipline or even confidence. What the Dragon do require is the ability to be interesting. Part of being interesting is knowing how to avoid the public eye. You're good at slipping into other identities-grad student, assassin, part time teacher, sweeper-with relatively few skill differences. A change of clothes and body language, and you can look like someone else. The best way to stand up from the crowd is to show you can blend into it anytime you like. Confused? The Dragon's been waiting to take you on a ride.

Memo from the Universe (200 CP): You've learned to master the Dragon's unique ways of communication. From hijacking random people on the street magically so their eyes glow green when they encounter a preset person, to leaving strange strings of cut out letters and numbers in the mail, they have one thing in common: They are extremely difficult to detect conventionally, and utterly bizarre. As long as someone is in the same city, you can send them a message on short notice. Tracking it back to you is hard enough the Illuminati have basically given up, and the Templars aren't fool enough to even try.

Chaos Magic (200 CP): Chaos is more than a philosophy. It's also a volatile magic that can turn the fortune of the battlefield and create weapons from thought. With short range bursts of telekinetic force, reality-shaking schisms and illusions you'll be able to turn any firefight with you into a sanity-shaking experience. As you push the limits of the human mind's grasp on the fundamentally knowable you'll be able to doom others to fall at your fist, send

rippling bursts of paradox to take out whole groups at once and conjure the dreaded Eye of Pandemonium: A localised magical black hole. You've seen the butterfly, now here comes the hurricane.

Organised Disorder (400 CP): Making sense of the fundamentally nonsensical has the Dragon's hat in trade since time immemorial. You possess their formidable capacity to predict and manipulate the outcomes of situations by correctly inputting all causal factors into their models and equations. Everything from the rise and fall of politicians, to who needs to drink chocolate milk on a Tuesday in order to make sure a man is born, join the Templars, induce him to turn traitor-all so he brings a certain magical artifact to the Dragon. It's no exaggeration that with this, you can make your own luck only limited to the scope of your understanding about the universe. You do need the data to get to grips with modelled chaos, though-and be careful with variables that have no predictable course of action. That magical artifact the Dragon stole? Not only did the Dragon never figure out what it do, but it ended up throwing off many of their models simply by existing.

The Dragon's Wake (400 CP): Here comes the curse of Cassandra, the fault in the tea leaves, the smudge on the crystal ball. Whether by mundane analysis or supernatural precognition, you're nigh-impossible to fully predict by analytical models. Oh, they can get your social security number and passport for all the good it'll do them. Your actions still screw up best-laid plans and destinies woven by the Fates themselves like nobody's business. What's inevitable because uncertain in your presence, and what's uncertain unlikely unless it has already come to pass. Even in firefights, car accidents, gambling and other matters where chance plays a key role, others tend to have trouble getting a handle on your position and reading your moves amidst the chaos.

Chaos Is A Pachinko Machine (600 CP): Have you noticed that everything is going to Hell in a handbasket and nobody knows what's going on, the Dragon seem to just land on their feet? That's in large part to the fact that after a certain incident in Tokyo, they've chosen to discard their models and embrace elemental audacity. You're a little ahead of the curve. As an agent of chaos, when you decide things should escalate *things fucking escalate*. Gunfights spiral out of control into something like a Jackie Chan movie. Once icy relations between conspiracies are pushed to the brink where old alliances have to be renewed-or severed entirely. You could act insane and end up outbluffing supernatural horrors and trained agents alike. Amidst all this, you yourself are nigh-unkillable by stray shrapnel, unscathed by financial collapse or the other undirected consequences of everything going to hell in a handbasket. In fact, throwing everything into disarray opens up perfect opportunities for promotion,

getting your hands on power artifacts, catching your foes off-guard or all other things that advance your personal ambitions.

Childlike Wonder (600 CP): Here is an interesting fact: You cannot die permanently, from *any* mundane force. Or rather, while you do you're immediately reborn as a random child somewhere in the world. You retain your memories. Let those out to get you grind you up into dust, you'll just come back again somehow. You also have a deep and piercing insight into the movements of the universe, enough to command the respect of the Dragon. Your wisdom doesn't fare anywhere near as well as a supercomputer when it comes to fine detail, but when it comes to sensing the trends of great change and tumult you have an unerring sense for figuring out-say-where the next avatar of Anima will manifest, who she is and what to say to curry favour with her. Your insights will always allow you a chance of taking advantage of some facet of the oncoming change. Simply by meditating, you can obtain similar inexplicable into various facets of reality. Your final gift is this: The Dragon do not know about this gift of yours, and therefore do not feel obliged to keep killing you when you're overage as they do their personal child-messiah

Items

Discounted items are 50% off for the background they're under. 100 CP items become free.

Undiscounted

Eldritch Closet (50 CP): Your sleek blue Illuminati uniform (or your dignified Templar uniform, or your worn Dragon uniform) can be found in this mysterious mahogany chest, freshly laundered every time you put it back in and shut the door. The closet's interior appears to defy the laws of time and space, handing you an outfit you want when you reach into it (or one you'd look good in if you have no specific one in mind). Even if you're not part of a significant faction, the closet seems to generate outfits suited to your character and exploits. A gi for a martial artist, or a stylish coat for an outdoorsman. It doesn't do much for subtlety, but you'll always be accomplishing your secret missions with *style.*

Arcane Food District (50 CP): There's a stall here selling ambrosia. A kiosk there where you can get a haunch of fae-roasted boar. And right there in the middle, an inexplicable taco cart run by a man inexplicably unphased by the supernatural. This mysterious district warded from the sights of mundane men is full of food and drink from this world, sold by enterprising restaurateurs of all kinds. In future worlds with supernatural beings, they'll have a tendency to come here (under flag of truce if applicable) and enjoy having a snack too.

Talismania (100 CP): If old superstitions are true, so must too be the means to ward them off. This crate contains a massive stock of talismans, rings and circlets that can be worn around the head, neck, wrists, waist and finger. The blessings they provide are subtle but persistent-raising the damage of a weapon for example, or making you a better healer. One might call them "stat boosts" if one had no appreciation for the mystic arts.

Some Assembly Required (100 CP): …speaking of statboosts. This collection of crates contains a great trove of glyphs and a cauldron. Assembling the glyphs allows you to create large glyphs or signets, which when engraved into your clothing offer similarly versatile but minor improvements to your offence and defence that resemble. Well. Statboosting.

Modern Armoury (50/200 CP): Shotguns on the right, hammers on the left. Assault rifles next to the elemental foci. No faction worth their salt wouldn't have a few modern and not-so-modern weapons lying around; even if it's the wielder that gives them their real power, these weapons are specially tempered to conduct or defeat magical energies in subtle but decisive ways. You find rack after rack of them in this warehouse-which can be a room attached to your Cosmic Warehouse, if you wish. Comes with several crates' worth of ammunition. Everything used up or damaged is repaired every week by mysterious agents-possibly those of a faction you joined.

Alternatively for only 50 CP, you may acquire a *single* modern weapon (and a crate of ammunition for it if applicable, that's restocked similarly)

Agartha (600 CP, free/discounted for The Buzzing): Beneath this word lies one of tangled, impossibly vast wooden pillars and inscrutable brass mechanisms. Automatons patrol rivers of pure Anima, and beings mankind might designate godlike and demonic roam the more distant corridors. But that's all speculation. The important thing is that for you, even if you're not a Bee-enhanced host (you've been installed with the right frequencies), this place is a convenient means of fast travel to anywhere within reality. By following the right corridors and pathways you can cross anywhere on the planet or even enter other realms of reality such as Hell or Heaven (if it exists) as long as you can find the way through.

Bee hosts gain access to Agartha for free in this jump, but by paying the price here what may be considered an extension of Gaia continues to follow you into other worlds. Just find a suitable leyline nexus somewhere where you start, and you can descend into a suddenly-hollow expanse where the world tree that burrows into all possibilities sends you on your merry way.

If you bought **Dare to Dream** you instead gain access to Dark Agartha, a much more menacing, shadowy and mushroom-overgrown version of Agartha from a potential future where the **Filth** appears to have won that works just as well. Without trying to actively destroy you as an aberration against Gaia.

Drop-In

P. R. O. D. (100 CP): This mechanical marvel is a notable breakthrough of science for one reason: It can detect magical artifacts. Simply plant it into the ground, and using soundwaves it can somehow determine and pinpoint to you any nearby cursed swords, talking skulls or other objects touched by anima. Unfortunately its ability to differentiate the cursed from the blessed is rather limited.

The Sunken Library (200 CP): This underground library represents one of the biggest troves of knowledge in the Secret World, containing information both mundane and magical in nature. Not only scholarly tomes and grimoires, but also scrolls and even stone tablets, all of them drawn from various authors and cultures. Easily on par with both the Templars' archives and the Council of Venice's sunken library, everything from the weakness of a djinn to legends of the world's creation can be found somewhere here. And speaking of the Council, it seems someone forward-thinking has installed a sophisticated VR simulation machine in it. The perfect place to get some combat training in after doing your book learning.

Excalibur (400 CP): Once wielded by Odin, once wielded by a devotee of his who defeated those Mayans that had succumbed to the Filth's whisper, this sword is a blessed treasure of the gods. It's radiant light can erase the Filth itself and seal rifts in reality. But above all, it is an amplifier. In the wrong hands, it could potentially be used to slash holes in reality and unleash sealed horrors too-and be they malign or benevolent, when held it amplifies the bearer's powers with its hallowed shine-allowing whoever holds it to unleash blasts of energy from its blade, and strengthening them in battle such that even a god would obtain noticeable benefits. Also by purchasing here, it's implied power to sap the abilities of those who wielded it after it is passed on or taken from them will find no purchase on you. You may will these feature to take hold on those you allow to wield the sword but deem unworthy, though.

Backup Engine (600 CP): An incomprehensible construct of stone with too many angles, this subsystem is identical yet separate to many others found in strange corners of the world. Its purpose? As far can be determined, to generate Anima for you. On a scale great enough to keep an entire secret society happy, and now it's all yours-trundling away in your Warehouse if you want to keep it safe from prying eyes. With so much pure Anima at your disposal, it is a

veritable invitation to experimentation. Just don't get too close without protection, or you might mutate into a faun or something. There's one more thing about this great device: It's a seal, capable of binding an otherwise vast and powerful cosmic being such as a Dreamer within it. You know the spell/activation code that must be spoken for this to happen. The question is: Are you really going to tempt fate enough to need it?

Templars

Concealed and Consecrated (100 CP): The more forward-thinking Templars have long since decided that carrying a broadsword in public is just not the way to bring the fight to the enemy anymore. With the help of certain twins, this discrete but uniquely potent item has been given to you in the hopes that you'll never need it. A pair of glasses that can unleash a torrent of holy light, a pen that doubles as an extremely lethal poison dispenser, a walking stick that can send a truck flying with a flick. Whatever it is, it's a magical artifact designed in a way Q would be proud of.

The Horned God (200 CP): Not to be confused with the sad dear-headed fellow. No, this bar represents the preferred hangout for both disillusioned veterans among the Templars as well as their up and coming youngsters. You just happen to own the premises, and whether or not they know have been around long enough to have quite a bit of unofficial clout. The clientele is generally dissatisfied with the Templar leadership's ruthlessness but committed to the Templar organisation's ideals, and also very good at killing creatures of the night. The drinks are of the highest quality in London too, and ingredients for them are restocked weekly. In future world, monster hunters (or at least, would-be monster hunting enthusiasts) of all kinds tend to congregate at this bar. It would be quite easy to organise a hunt with a few drinks on the house.

The Old Guard (400 CP): The Grand Master. The Force-Marshal. Are…not relevant at all in recent developments, but now that you're enough of a mover and shaker among the Templar to have some serious authority too, maybe you can change that? You're in touch not just with enough paramilitary assets to wage wars on small countries and win, but hold the esteem of families that have been fighting creatures that go bump in the night for generations. It would be churlish to rely on such contacts for *wealth* rather than might, but many have considerable old-fashioned financial assets too befitting the upper class. Still, the best thing this network brings is the capacity to wage war on the supernatural en masse-and the grit, discipline and fealty needed to commit to it. Even in future worlds, you'll find yourself in touch with similar resources.

Nuclear Option (600 CP): Picture the level of ordinance it would take to defeat a monster whose peers could devour reality, banishing it back to its prison if not

destroying the vile thing. Would a tactical nuclear weapon powerful enough to destroy the moons Phobos and Deimos do the trick? Not even that might be enough, unless the missile had some metal wrung from Gaia's frame built into it like holy shrapnel. You now own the launch codes and access to the prototype for one such missile, *merely* about a hundred times as powerful as the greatest nuclear weapon of the modern age. Whether it can actually slay or merely banish a Dreamer, the satellite it's attached to is magically self-sustaining and can fire it with pinpoint accuracy at whatever you want. May you never have to use it. And may you use it without hesitation should circumstances demand you have to anyway.

As well as a new missile restocked every month by the grace of divine machinery, the blueprints for how the missiles were so weaponised were provided. Perhaps in time, you can design smaller scale weapons capable of inflicting devastating damage on the Filth-and anything else unlucky to get in the way of a smaller scale holy nuclear weapon.

Illuminati

Miscredited Card (100 CP): The Eye of Provenance on this credit card gives you the uncanny feeling of being watched. But the line of credit it provides you is more than enough to sustain the lavish Illuminati lifestyle. Buy a yacht, a senator or a pet pop star-the money just keeps flowing, and while accepted by all electronic payment services appears utterly untraceable to you. *Theoretically* there should be an upper limit of some kind. But you'll probably have to start buying small countries to hit it.

Quantum Brace (200 CP): When worn, this grey blocky device demonstrates how the limit between magic and science-while tangible-is largely a matter of perspective. Quantum fluctuations generated by it let you bend the laws of reality in localised but useful ways in combat. Warp the folds of space to add impact to your shots or blows, fracture time to make attacks hit twice, bend probability so your enemies shoot themselves and heal yourself and your friends by strengthening your molecular bonds. Applications for this tool are limited only by your imagination and knowledge of physics.

New Money (400 CP): The Illuminati are happy to admit that as secret societies go, they're the new kids on the block. That's why they're the ones setting trends while the others are playing catch-up. The intricate network of blackmailed stooges, bribed flunkies and core network of fanatically loyal troubleshooters would make many conspiracy theorists burst a blood vessel. You've got everything from senators on speed dial, to secret government departments ready and willing to start experiments that make MKULTRA look like a warm-up, to celebrities that turn out to be indoctrinated agents waiting for their orders.

Enough cultural influence over the dominant nation on this planet to control vast swathes of its socio-political landscape, though mostly leaning more towards the domestic side of things rather than the military. *Mostly*. And in future worlds, you'll enjoy a similar web of machinations waiting for your guiding hand.

Ring of Power (600 CP): Lilith bore a ring that transcended the boundaries of magic and science, forming forcefields that left her impervious to human magic and capable of imprisoning even Bee agents or compressing torrents of Filth. Solomon's own was reputed to bend the wills of humans, animals and jinn alike. And now, somehow you too have acquired a ring of similar power. It need not be one of the former examples, but it's magical power is not merely that of a weapon of legend. It is a means of *control* on a scale that mundane influence and politicking simply cannot match. Whether yours can drain electrical grids to conjure storms sculpted by your will or tear open portals to Hell and other, stranger realms it is the gateway to unimaginable danger. And endless opportunity.

Dragon

Thirty Pieces of Yen (100 CP): The White Christ may not have been part of the Dragon (as far as anyone knows), but these coppery Asian coins must have been made by a powerful chaos mage who appreciated the irony of a god forsaken for material wealth. Toss one at a crowd, and everyone who sees it will drop everything they're doing to get their hands on one-a spell that can only be broken by the threat of violence or danger. The coin brings the bearer boundless optimism for an hour, then creeping anxiety for a full day. At the end of that day, it ends up back near it's true owner: You.

Games of the Gods (200 CP): Not a fan of pachinko? Understandable. How about a dartboard, a Street Fighter arcade machine or really any other form of game? That isn't it's true purpose, of course. It's an artifact from a different age that by playing, can let you catch uncannily accurate glimpses of the future. You won't need magical energy, chants or incense to use this strange oracle, just the patience to battle Ryu again or play through another round of Time Crisis.

Friends Wherever You Need Them (400 CP): This is by far the most disparate of connections, representing a broad swathe of people from random walks of life covering a population demographic roughly large enough to keep Seoul under observation. From janitors to schoolteachers to bankers to the homeless, all of them are either enchanted Sleeper agents that when activated by your command will perform any one task before forgetting about it and returning smoothly to their everyday life, or fellow students of chaos happy to take your

orders when it comes to fomenting change and conducting the affairs of your organisation. It also comes with some sort of core religious order dedicated to looking out for you-not necessarily to kill you once you come of age, either. They neither have nor need any kind of base, but seem to have no trouble keeping in touch and can direct the sleeper agents skilfully too at your behest. And in future worlds, you can rely on many others awakening to the mystery of the Dragon too.

Puzzle Box (600 CP): Don't listen to the myths. Pandora was an inspiration, an *icon.* This ornate Japanese puzzle box is much more complex than it appears, rotating at unseen angles and slotting unseen facets of itself around and around again to be solved. Why bothers? Well, because something about its rippling glyphs and the mastery of its motion lets it transmit the magic of this world to a sentient being who actually solves it. Fundamentally all magic is simply an insufficiently advanced grasp of channelling Anima, but the initial magic they acquire will be based on their preconceived ideas about it-after which the box immediately resets. They may have only a novice's skill, but once they have magic they can hone and develop it like any other magician. As for what happens when an already supernaturally adept being solves the box? They get sealed into the box instead, and bound like a jinn to whoever takes hold of it. The box giveth, and the box taketh away

Companions

Agents (50+ CP): Need a hand navigating this web of lies and deceit? For 50 CP you may import a companion into any background. They gain 600 CP to spend on anything except more companions.

Targets (50 CP): Initiate: Friendship. Begin the relationship cascade. By the grace of anima one stranger|boon companion can be arranged/guided into a BEAUTIFUL HEARTWARMING HALLMARK MOMENT with you. Result: GOOD, STRONG HANDSHAKE and the start of a promising friendship. Consent will catalyse their transition from this Age to being a companion at your side when you leave this world.

Tiny Helper (50 CP): What's this? It seems a small creature from this world has taken to following you around-and it can even pitch in during battle. A brave dog. A canny cat. Or even something more exotic like a tiny version of the golems patrolling Agartha, an undead Draugr puppy or even stranger things. Whatever it is it's scrappy and intelligent for its kind. Be a kind pet owner.

You may repurchase this option to get a whole menagerie of tiny helpers.

Yatagarasu-EXA-1 [50 CP, free/optional Drop-In] - A blood-red sun forms the heart of this winged gynoid, mounted on an extensible taloned arm that can reach out to share its magnificence with gentle and incandescent strokes, or beams of primal fire. When in combat, it wears a suit of scaled arcanopolymers harvested from the deep-sea titans - each with a digital rune that describes its invincibility - that creeps out of compartments under its wings to wrap the soft and perfect skin that was flensed from the then-last living descendent of Amaterasu. Its wings are a vast razor sweep of night-black pinions, the greatest hell ravens plucked of their most perfect feathers. Woven throughout is a robotic skeleton that mounts needle-guns, flamethrowers and yet more exotic weapons, combined with the most potent AEGIS shield technology of next year's production run. Forming its semi-intelligent gestalt mind is a mish- mash of scavenged neural implants from fallen veterans, the lingering scraps of influence from its profane ingredients, stripped down nuclear simulation cores, and chips from the containment sarcophagus of the Unit 4 Reactor, Chernobyl. The project was mothballed after creating this singular prototype - even Orochi are not in the business of mass destruction.

Versucher Geist [50 CP, free/optional Templar] - The one who attends here has, in life, done nothing other than to reflect upon himself: as a philosopher and a hermit by instinct, who found his advantage in withdrawing to the side, in standing outside, in patience, in hesitation, in lagging behind. In death, one who has already lost himself once in every labyrinth of the future; as the spirit of the bird of prophecy who looks back, now narrates what is to come. In every vision you might conjure of past, present or future, this spirit is there awaiting you - explaining and guiding, with great humour and great cynicism. Being aware of every possibility does not equate to perfect precognition, but it is able to articulate great events of the ages in broad strokes - fine details invariably being misleading - and detect other temporal effects with good accuracy. In addition, this shade possesses in great breadth and depth the classical powers of a ghost - telekinesis, intangibility, possession and spooky action.

The Zwack Cipher [50 CP, free/optional Illuminati] - The Zwack Cipher is living code in the form of roiling lightning, a vague man-shape encircled by drifting rune-sparks, a fateful bolt that struck down a Illuminati courier bearing secret messages and arcane lore - whose death ultimately brought the hammer of the Church down upon them. This sapient, but uncaring elemental has a dozen secret tomes encoded within it, and its metaphysical presence has made the code something more than it was before - now only an elementalist who can wield living lightning may have any chance of understanding these crackling runes. By owning its allegiance, this by default includes you. Aside from hitting like a thunderbolt where you command, it may devour any written or digital materials and instantly learn their contents - overwhelming all but the most

potent supernatural codes - and while it may not cast magic in the traditional sense, any effects of lightning, fire or magnetic force come easily to it. Via telepathic link, you may command it to inscribe its charged runes onto any surface or the air with a bright filament - when used to create enchantments or cast spells this imbues them with an additional quality of Essential Lightning, to varying and spectacular effect.

The Cinnabar Sage [50 CP, free/optional Dragon] - Her scarlet lips and eyes, her rosy cheeks - no blood creates her illusion. A heart of cinnabar weeps red mercury through ancient veins, at dawn and dusk Taoist incantations quicken her marble flesh to living softness. Immortality did much for her temperament, yet she taught those disciples who sought her out that it was no prize - to keep it all to herself. When the Cultural Revolution came to the gates of her temple, her rituals were disrupted and she was caught, frozen mid-sentence as a perfect pale statue of surpassing loveliness. Passed from collection to collection, her release came when a flare of anima and powerful dream let the last syllables slip from stone lips. In a time that has changed so quickly, in a land so far from that which betrayed her, she has dispensed with the trappings of master and disciple and wishes to simply learn again. She is stronger than stone and faster than water, may ride the winds and commune with nature, and the red mercury that flows through her is an incredibly powerful explosive. Her presence calms the world around her, weather becoming even, harvests rich, disease and accidents fading away.

Drawbacks

Dark Days Are Here (0 CP): From a glimpse into the future, things are remarkably stable-be it because of, or despite, the efforts of those empowered by Gaia. Almost a decade ahead of time and many of the old power players are either still around, or making a resurgence from certain defeat. Almost half a century from that the future, and it appears Orochi's efforts into spaceflight have uncovered a new Gaia Engine on Mars. But what are centuries and decades to immortals? The future is mutable. The present is what matters.

You may extend your stay here, be it by decades, centuries-or up to five Ages' worth of time. An Age representing the reset of the universe by Gaia's engines.

Legends of the Secret World (0 CP): So much has been lost to time. So many mysteries, and so few chances to dig them all up. Would you like to start earlier? You may begin your entry into this world at any point of history before the present day, including the mysterious time before time when the Builders built Gaia and through her, the rest of known existence. Alternatively you may start up to 63 years in the future, if you would like to be involved in the events of Moons of Madness instead. Naturally, this leaves you largely free to designate a starting location.

Needs (preferred beverage) NOW (+100 CP): Like a certain otherwise competent Illuminati handler, you've become critically dependent on a certain beverage. It doesn't have to be as rarefied and expensive as civet cat coffee, but whether it's Fanta or human blood the side effects are what matter. If you don't start your day with a cup of it and preferably have regular access from lunch till dinner too, your competence drastically goes down as every cell in your body craves that sweet release. This is the difference between someone competent enough to work her way up the Illuminati's rungs, and that same person but drunk, disorderly and in desperate need of coffee.

Left Out of the Loop (+100 CP): Like a certain otherwise confident, assured Dragon handler, unfortunately it seems the world is constantly a step ahead of you. Important decisions affecting you get made by made by channels that humans and even most supernatural beings find it hard to get a handle on. Seemingly innocuous conversations can set in motion drastic changes where your role and position are at risk. It's not impossible to find out what's really going on and adapt appropriately, but you better be prepared to do some serious digging.

Heavy Handed (+100 CP): Like a certain Templar handler who really didn't deserve this treatment, the secret society you're part of has put you under much stricter scrutiny than usual. Some agents get second chances. You, on the other

hand, can expect physical punishment for a noticeable screwup. Let down the team too many times, and termination may even be considered-but keep winning and the powers that be will have no room to complain about your performance. Perhaps with great effort, you might even be able to win them around. If you're not part of a secret society, agents from various ones (including some not from Earth) have started tailing you-and are prone to starting a fight if you seem like you're about to become a threat to their organisation.

The Greatest Lie The Devil Told (+200 CP): …is that YOU, personally, were responsible for a public disaster that makes 9/11 look like amateur hour. You've been framed as public enemy number one wherever you start, and now your deeds are entered into the system it's best if you don't show your face in mundane society for a long while. Get off the grid if you can. Oh, and as to whether it was *Samael* or *Eblis* who framed you: It might be either. It might be both. It might be a much more figurative devil. But whoever it was has no further interest in coming after you-unless of course, you track them down and decide to get even.

Special Acquisition (+200 CP): Someone paid the Phoenicians a lot of money to bring them your head. And the Phoenicians (or as they were called in other times, the Canaanites) always get the job done, even at a net detriment to the rest of the world. Expect trained operatives with cutting edge military tech and experience (if not faculty) with the supernatural coming at you with lethal force at all times. Prove difficult to subdue, and they won't hesitate to break out the powerful artifacts in their vaults.

Cold War Heating Up (+200 CP): At some point, one of the factions will gain a significant tactical advantage that becomes widely known. Maybe the Dragon starts mass recruitment. Maybe information about the Illuminati's secret killsat gets leaked. Maybe a miracle happened, and the Council of Venice somehow got its act together. Whatever the case, if it's your faction tensions with others will quickly rise. And if it's not, well-that powerful new faction is keen to throw its weight around and push its advantage. Either way, the tenuous cold war for this planet is quickly spinning out of control unless someone does something soon.

YOU LET THEM IN (+300 CP): First the darkness. Then the trauma and the brutal pain. ***IS IT FAIR?*** Whether you were an escaped Orochi test subject or a Morninglight cell's victim, you've suffered serious scars both mental and physical. ***YOU'VE PAID YOUR PRICE. NOW MAKE THEM ALL PAY.*** Those physical, while severe enough to stand out in public even if your looks aren't wholly ruined, at least leave you able to fight. ***BUT THE MEMORY OF***

BEING TRAPPED AND BETRAYED WILL NEVER GO AWAY. Those mental are much more severe***NLIGHTENING.*** You see, at some point you were infected by the **Filth** causing your body to mutate unstably, and your mind to be open to the Dreamers' threats, pleas and assorted ramblings. ***WE ONLY WANT THE BEST FOR YOU.*** It'll be a constant struggle to avoid becoming just another pawn in their bids for freedom, unless you can somehow exorcise the **Filth** from your ravaged body. ***DON'T YOU DARE.***

Masquerade Breach (+300 CP): A few months into your stay here, a supernatural force on par with the oni clans if they ever united into one disciplined military force invades wherever you start. They have declared open warfare with one purpose: To seize you and use you as an Anima battery, for rejuvenating their dying world. For most of human history, this is a massive panic moment for the secret societies. Hope you've made some good friends here, lest they throw you under the bus to negotiate with them.

Angelic Inquisition (+300 CP): Beings who laid the foundations of reality itself and have remained discrete throughout the change of ages, the Grigori and Nephilim have taken a sudden interest in something outside their machinations: You. They are keeping tabs. Trying to see whether you prioritise Gaia's stability, or it's revolution in the name of a better world. Not now, not tomorrow but soon one will approach you to propose alliance. To join one faction is to become the enemy of another, and rare are those who can contest even a single Builder. Rarer still, those who can survive the attention of their massed numbers. Your new allies can't be everywhere at once, and you'll have to watch your back from those who created practically all of the entities in this world. And if you reject them both? While depending on the tactical value you represent they may leave you alone to pursue their own goals, extremists on both sides may decide to punish you for your hubris.

Moment of Madness (+600 CP): The moment you enter this world, the dimensional anomaly that transported you here inadvertently shatters the bounds on a single Gaia Engine. A small one. One Dreamer. One single reality-warping, world-destroying monster is now free to gorge itself on reality. If nobody hurries to stop it, it's kin will likely soon be free too.

THANK YOU, FRIEND!

Go Home

Stay

Move on

Notes

We never found out about how valid the implications of Lorraine's comments on Bees possibly draining something *vital* from their hosts were. If you don't feel like hedging your bets, you can waive The Buzzing and still be part of one of the Big Three factions.

Of Another Age and the highest tier of Dare to Dream **does not make you a fully-fledged Dreamer**-but it does bring you *significantly* closer to that state than John is during Tokyo. Reality is still *around* after four whole Ages after all. Perhaps you obtained your Filth infusion relatively recently. Perhaps the complex mechanisms of Gaia's safeguards have arrested it's development in you. Having said that, it does make you a terrifying apocalyptic threat-just not on an immediately cosmic scale. Creating regions of influence like the Red Sargassum Dream is easy, you can survive the void of space with little issue and you can gather enough Filth to lay waste to a city as a grand yet hideous mass. It might still be possible to end the world, whether by focusing your power through a complex rite, somehow gathering the power to unleash your "mature" form, but you will at least definitely survive in some fashion the return of your bigger cousins.

What the hell is going on?

An inconceivably long time ago, before existence as currently understood, angels built a god-machine with lots of tree parts called Gaia that created reality. How did the angels exist before anything else? Nobody knows. During the First Age (the first version of reality), existence was more or less a paradise with Biblical motifs. The angels proceeded to enter a civil war broadly split into the factions of the Grigori, the angels that advocated maintaining and repairing Gaia, and the Nephilim, the angels that advocated jerryrigging Gaia to make reality even more suited to their whims. If it's not clear, the Nephilim are the faction that has not one, but *two* Satan-analogues.

The Nephilim lost. The pattern of powerful individuals' grasp exceeding their reach caused two more apocalypses. Cue the modern age, and human history as it's currently understood. The vast majority of supernatural beings are beings created by the Builders for various purposes. They created Hell and every demon in it, for example. Magic can be analysed like a science at a sufficiently advanced level, and based on circumstantial evidence it's likely the Builders accomplished this with unimaginably advanced tools such as Gaia rather than personal power.

The current situation where Gaia is releasing Bees to inhabit people is the result of reality reaching a breaking point where the next reset threatens to end it all,

as her systems reach their breaking point and the Dreamers threaten to break free. She's basically Mother Earth as a feat of magic so sufficiently analysed that it's indistinguishable from science.

What are the Dreamers? What is the Filth?

The Dreamers are immensely powerful cosmic entities that exert power on a celestial scale somehow trapped within some of Gaia's engines. They've been compared to both hungry, massive ideas and giant cephalopodic monstrosities that wouldn't look out of place in the Lovecraft mythos but their true forms have never been shown. The Filth is an extension of their will: A seething black mutagenic ooze that induces madness and mutation in small quantities, and outright warp reality to their whims in large ones. The ending of an Age has generally been preceded by them breaking free and threatening to devour reality, only for Gaia to hit a metaphysical "snooze button" and seal them away/trick them back into going to sleep and recreating reality/it's really, really vague. According to them, they're actually misunderstood sweethearts that have been unjustly imprisoned and have forgotten how to relate to mortals. According to literally every other being including some that have dealt directly with them, they are hungry predators desperate to get back to treating the universe like their personal buffet table. Trust them at your own peril.