

Novus Ordum Mundi

The Masters of the Great Game

Introduction

Contents of this eBook

This book is intended for Game Masters to give a background to the group known as Novus Ordum Mundi and information on using them in their campaigns. There is no information in this text for the use of players, excepting those that have an insatiable curiosity to learn about the true masters of Theah and so risk their terrible wrath. The book is split up into three main sections, the first details the history and structure of the group along with its main members, the second part details two major locations of the group and a few minor ones along with some sample plotlines, the third and final part is an essay detailing ways in which Novus Ordum Mundi can be used by Game Masters in their sessions. While a number of people appear in this book for the first time, many are old hands from the printed book line although most have had been advanced to reflect the time since their appearance.

History

The villainous organisation known as Novus Ordum Mundi dates from the Old Republic of the Numan Empire, like many of the secret societies that it has watched and manipulated for centuries. In AUC 385, thirteen Senators of the Numan Senate met to discuss the corruption that they observed in the government. Over a period of years, they slowly gained influence and control, for instance by having friends appointed to key positions in the government, priesthood and military. Even in almost full control of the Senate, they often were unable to stop the shifting of power back to a particular capable Imperator. This alternating state of affairs continued for centuries, with members of the group

becoming more and more arrogant in their right to rule.

Before the population reached breaking point something else

occurred, General Gaius Philippus Macer staged a brilliantly successful coup and took control of the entire Empire as one of the greatest Imperators in Numan history. His obvious first act was to reduce the power of the Senate down to an almost advisory body. The leader of NOM at the time was the devious Commodus Flavius, who railed against Macer and plotted countless assassination attempts. For nearly thirty years, the group opposed Macer, but the shrewd Imperator

deflected all their challenges. That is until a single action changed the balance of power and altered Theah in a way that reverberates to modern day. The Bargain for the sorcerous arts.

The Bargain made by Senator Octavus Montanus and the others not only overthrew the control of the Imperator, but it also turned the balance against the other Senators that did not enter into their pact with Legion. Montanus used his new found abilities to destroy any who opposed their new rule, one of the first of these being his long time nemesis Commodus Flavius who was thrown screaming into a rift on the very floor of the Senate. The surviving members withdrew to assess the situation and plot how they could regain their favoured positions of power. They knew from Flavius' example that it was almost impossible to go against the sorcerors directly, so they fell back on their considerable guile and intelligence. The Council of Thirteen was formed out of this to mark the thirteen Senators, and their positions have carried on down to the present day, although their exact tactics and drives have changed as new members came to the fore. Of course, the fall of Numa destroyed all chance of retaking control of the Empire, so the Council members moved further out into Theah and sought to control the



entire continent in its new constituent parts. As one fell to age or the plots of an adversary, another member was selected by the group from a list that had usually been groomed for years for such a role.

Philosophy

As mentioned above, the original purpose of NOM was to overthrow the rule of the Senators and retake control of the Numan Empire. This changed with the fall of the Empire, although even before that event the Council members had seen the decline of the power of the sprawling mass that it had become. From this point forward, the goals of the Council of Thirteen became split, some wanted to return to the central control of Empire while others felt that the rise of the new nation-states should be supported and each controlled separately. The proponents of the latter ideal could strongly point to the causes that lead to the fall of the Numan Empire and the difficulties in maintaining such tight control over a widely spaced and culturally disparate populace. While those that longed for the romanticised glory of the old Empire maintained a powerful hold on the Council for centuries, their failure to move towards this played into the hands of the more modern-thinking members who would eventually rise to dominance. Traditionally the organisation has maintained its influence on Theah through a three-fold method, with infiltration of the noble elite, the Church and the criminal underclass. This technique has proven to work over countless generations, although in the last century things have begun to change. The appearance of the idea of democracy and governance in a number of nations has upset the established orders of Theah and the Council of Thirteen have ensured that they are in a position to best use these changes. In the past when a single ruler proved impossible to manipulate, NOM simply waited for a new more pliable one to succeed him or took matters into their own hands and had the intransigent ruler eliminated. With the emergence of the idea of control of a nation in the hands of a body of people, be it a parlement such as in Avalon or an organisation like the Vendel League, there is always someone within the structure that can either be subverted or manipulated. The Council has therefore taken to the concept of these forms of government with a great deal of interest, since the network of control and influence they can create in them does not die

with the loss of a single figure. While some may see the promotion of democratic ideals by the Council as laudable, they are hardly doing it for humanitarian reasons and this subversion of the concept may in the end stagnate the development of true political freedoms across Theah for centuries to come.

Organisation

While NOM consists of a vast network of informants, contacts, killers and petty villains, its true core is the Council of Thirteen. These men would be power-brokers of Theah in their own right, without the resources and opportunities presented to them by the organisation. No doubt because of this fact, while other secretive groups may have internal squabbles, the Machiavellian plots of the Council members against each other can lay waste to entire regions and leave trails of bodies in their wake. The Espectro Acero, the 'Steel Spectors', act as a balance to the powers of the Council by preventing the members acting directly against each other and securing meetings between these dangerous men. Although they are meant to be impartial, a particular powerful Council leader has often used the Espectro Acero to their own ends, cowering the other Council members and even on occasion carrying out assassinations. Each Council member usually has a particular region of control from which they are based, although these regions often overlap and those involving the other societies of Theah can be wide ranging indeed. The Council members that survive the longest are those that know which fights to pick and with the expertise that makes them more useful to the other members alive, rather than floating facedown in one of Dionna's many canals. Strictly speaking each Council member has equal voice in the organisation, although one is considered the leader in order to chair the annual meetings of the entire Council and maintain their neutral holdings in Numa. If an issue comes to vote, each of the thirteen carries one vote. Since any Council member worth their seat usually knows exactly how each other member will vote, ties are very rare but when they happen the leader decides on the outcome.

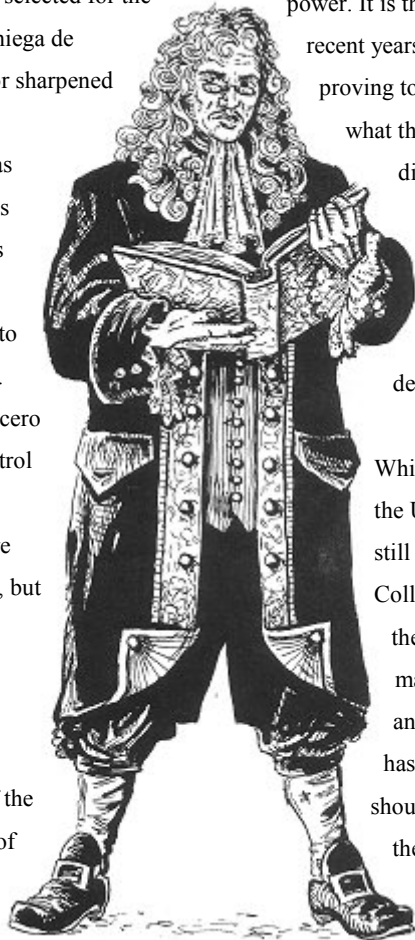
The structure underneath the Council of Thirteen depends very much on the particular Council member, as apart from the Espectro there is no other formal members or groups.



Most Council members retain their own selection of agents and informants, very few of which are usually aware of the existence of the group. A handful of incredibly skilled men have served a succession of Council members, such as the infamous assassin Quinn who served the previous Council leader before Alvara Archiniega. This secrecy has allowed such as powerful and manipulative group to survive so long, with very few outside of the circle ever aware of its existence. After centuries, the shadowy operations that saved the Senators from the sorcerers have become the very identity of the group. Thousands of people across Theah are involved in the activities of NOM in any month, almost all of them with no knowledge that their small actions have contributed to a wider event.

The Council of Thirteen

The current Council is lead by the charismatic and powerful Alvara Soldano de Archiniega, who was selected for the group by the previous leader, Iselo Archiniega de Aldana. The lessons of his former mentor sharpened an already brilliant mind into a deadly instrument. Over the last few years he has engineered the destruction of many of his rivals in the group and more recently has his own daughter, Monica Allias du Crieux, appointed as a Council member to replace the disgraced Jean Pierre du Lac. With Quinn and many of the Espectro Acero under his control, he exercises more control over the group than any one man in centuries. Many of the other members are very concerned about this shift in power, but as yet none of them have been able to counter it and by their very nature are unlikely to work together enough to succeed in such a task. The other eleven members of the group represent some of the most powerful people in Theah. A total of eleven of the Council are detailed here, the other two are left for the GM to use major villains from their campaign or to tailor to their players.



Alvara Soldano de Archiniega

The Castillian scholar centres his control of NOM from a massive fortress deep in the *Sierra de Hierro* mountains, especially after he engineered the Inquisition's purge on members of the Invisible College and was forced himself to flee. His power over the group is based on his incredible intellect and a willingness to use deadly force against those that oppose him. An extremely skilled duellist in his own right, it was this ability that saved him from the fires of the Inquisition after his publication of information of the spectrum of light. With the Invisible College now almost dependant on him as one of its most public figures, his access to technology and invention is incredible. His advances in Blood Alchemy, a field in which he is a leading researcher, also enhance his power. He is also by far its most vocal proponent on the Council, as he sees this new form of sorcery as a way to redress the balance of the Bargain and restore the members of NOM to a position of supreme power. It is this obsession that has split the Council in recent years, with a number of the other members proving to be strong and vocal opponents against what they see as an obnoxious and dangerous discovery. While Archiniega maintains his control and has enough of the other Council members either agreeing with him or afraid to act, significant resources of NOM will continue to be devoted to the study of Blood Alchemy.

While he has had to abandon his position at the Universidad de Altamira, Archiniega is still in effective control of the Invisible College through its network system known as the "Chain of Knowledge". The vast majority of his agents operate in Castille and Vodacce, although he make sure that he has resources available in other nations should he need them. His collaborators among the Blood Alchemists give him some leverage in Kirk, where the science is perhaps finding its strongest footing.

The ultimate goals of Archiniega are the realisation of the founding of NOM, to retake control of the continent from the

corrupted descendants of the sorcerous Senators. Secretly an atheist, he also seeks to undermine the Church, although he does certainly realise that it is a useful instrument for the control of the masses. The greatest weakness of the master manipulator is that his arrogance is starting to allow him to believe in his supposed invulnerability, leading over the last few years to his actions getting more blatant and his treatment of rivals more severe. While few could oppose his destruction of Jean Pierre du Lac, the treatment of another Council member in this way has galvanised quite a bit more opposition to him among the other members which may swing the balance of power should the opportunity present itself.

Allies and Enemies: Alvara Archiniega is the currently undisputed leader of the Council of Thirteen and so has quite an ability to shape the direction of the organisation to his goals. He is the foremost proponent of the pursuit of Blood Science, and counts Boli Kollsson and Aleksii v'Novgorov as supporters in this arena. With the succession of his daughter Monica to the Council, he can also count on her vote on all occasions so far where the Council has had call to debate.

Resources and Strongholds: Arciniega bases his work out of his hidden fortress in eastern Castille. His primary power-base is through the Invisible College and its wealth of knowledge and inventions, although this is also complimented by the extensive network of agents that Iselo left in his control and his influence over the Espectro Acero through Quinn.

Alvara Arciniega - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 4, *Finesse* 5, *Wits* 5, *Resolve* 4, *Panache* 4

Reputation: -61

Arcana: Overzealous

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Castillian Accent (Soldano), Alchemist, Castillian Education, Connections (many), Extended Family, Grandmaster, Linguist, Membership (Invisible College, NOM), Noble, Research Library, Secret Laboratory, Spark of Genius, Toughness, University

Scholar: Astronomy 5, History 3, Mathematics 5, Natural Philosophy 6, Occult 4, Philosophy 4, Research 5, Theology 4

Servant: Accounting 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Haggling 3,

Menial Tasks 3, Unobtrusive 5

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Disguise 3, Forgery 3, Poison 3, Shadowing 5, Sincerity 4, Stealth 4

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 5, Leaping 3, Side-step 5, Sprinting 4, Throwing 3

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Soldano (Master): Double-parry 5, Exploit Weakness 5, Tagging 5, Whirl 5

Valroux (Journeyman): Double-parry 5, Exploit Weakness 4, Feint 4, Tagging 5

Knife: Attack 5, Parry 5, Throw 4

Alvaro Arciniega (d20™)

Castillian Male Wanderer 4 / Swashbuckler 1 / Blood

Scientist 5 / Soldano Swordsman 5 / Valroux Swordsman 3:

CR 18; HD 14d8+3d10+d6; hp 82; Init+6; Spd 30ft; AC 25; Atk: rapier +16/+11/+6 melee (d8+3; 18-20/x2); SA A Trail of Destruction, Knacks, Marshal the Strength, Raise the Stakes, The Unstopping Blades, Whirling Blades; SQ Brew Cordial, Evasion, Extracts, Fast Healing, Side Effects: 1-3, Uncanny Dodge, Ward of the Albatross; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +14, Will +11; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 12; *Skills:* Appraise+8, Bluff+7, Climb+13, Craft (alchemy)+22, Craft (poison)+8, Diplomacy+7, Disguise+12, Hide+21, Intimidate+10, Jump+13, Knowledge (arcana)+15, Knowledge (economics)+15, Knowledge (Mathematics)+22, Knowledge (natural sciences)+25, Knowledge (nobility)+10, Knowledge (philosophy)+17, Knowledge (religion)+18, Listen+5, Move Silently+21, Profession (housekeeping)+9, Sense Motive+7, Speak Language (Castillian, Montaigne, Thean, Vendel, Vodacce), Spot+5, Tumble+7; *Feats:* Castillian Education, Cleave, Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Parry, Power Attack, Run, Secret Society Membership (Invisible College, NOM), Tagging, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner), University, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (main gauche, rapier), Weapon Specialization (main gauche, rapier); Reputation 11; *Knacks* (6/4/4/2/2 save DC 12+level): 0-level: *detect illness, detect poison*; 1-level: *cure light wounds, endure poison*; 2-level: *delay poison, cat's grace*; 3-level: *contagion, remove disease*; 4-level: *inflict critical wounds, ignore injury*

Monica Allais du Crieux

While many of the other members have decried the appointment of Archiniega's daughter to the Council, her aptitude in politics and diplomacy cannot be denied. Growing up as the adoptive daughter of a cousin to the Duke of Crieux in Montaigne, she wanted for nothing and was trained by one of the harshest environments in Theah, the

Montaigne court of l'Empereur. Rescued by Quinn from the deprivations of the Revolution, she was united with her real father and since then has become his most loyal and able student. It remains to be seen if she will hold her own in such a powerful group and become more independent of her powerful father, or merely act as an extra vote for him in important matters.

Monica grew up a pampered life in Montaigne and demonstrates that most dangerous of combinations, a sharp mind and a striking appearance. Immediately following the Revolution, Monica shed the haute-couture style that was the lifeblood of the Montaigne courts for a more restrained appearance. However, over time and as she has become accustomed to the new level of power that her position allows, she has started to return to her more decadent ways. Her father's contacts allow her to buy expensive jewellery from exotic locations, although her style reflects a more mature and even sombre look than the gaudiness of the Montaigne court.

Although Monica was born into a minor branch of Montaigne nobility, her wit and intelligence allowed her to work the local courts as well as more powerful members of her family. The Revolution killed much of the former noble class, including the Duke of Crieux, which meant that many of her former rivals have been conveniently taken out of the picture. With the restoration of the monarchy under King Montegue, Montaigne is once again relatively safe for the gentry and she has taken full advantage of this fact. As one of a steady stream of emigrés returning to Charouse and the other main cities, she uses her adoptive name to restore and expand her power in the region. Her father encourages her actions, as they both consolidate her position on the Council but also expand his influence in an area in which he had little prior interest. However, Monica has learned from a master manipulator over the last few years and for every new contact that she discusses with her father, there are two more that do not get mentioned. While acting quiet and demure in most company, especially when in the presence of her father, Monica's upbringing has led her to be rather vindictive towards those that have hurt or annoyed her. This is not a new thing, one of the first acts in the Montaigne court during the height of the rule of l'Empereur was to utterly humiliate



a young noble who had spurned her for his betrothed at a dance. The young man seeing his future ruined by the fickle interests of the court took his own life, something that would have shocked many into reforming their actions, but to Monica only demonstrated the power that she had over those around her. Now with the resources and backing of NOM, Monica does not have to reign in these darker impulses and has taken to the lessons of her father with a zeal that has surprised even him.

In the recent months, with the gentle murmurings of her advisors, Monica has come to realise that the other Council members are becoming more and more opposed to the rule and actions of her father. While for the moment she is completely devoted to him, she is quietly deciding whether it is worth lending some assistance to one of the other powerful Council members in order to secure her position following what she sees as her father's unavoidable fall. Of all the other men, she is the most attracted to her fellow countryman Hughes Sices du Sices or the dangerous beauty of Giovanni Villanova. Time will tell if she is able to exert any influence on these men and will go through with the betrayal of her father. If Alvara had any concept of what his daughter is thinking, it is likely that she would not survive although she might take comfort that it would be the first killing that he would regret.

Allies and Enemies: As the newest member of the Council of Thirteen, Monica would be expected to have her abilities

and competence tested by the other members to see that she deserves to be among them. Her position as the daughter of Alvara Arciniega has so far limited this trial, as the others are unwilling to risk the reprisals of the leader of the Council. That said, Monica has so far shown herself to meekly follow the agenda of her father more than use his patronage to further her own goals. Seen as a puppet, she is looked upon with veiled revulsion by Serk Markstrom, although her countryman Hughes Sices du Sices has spoken on her behalf to deflect some of the Eisen's more vitriolic rants.

Resources and Strongholds: With the return of the monarchy under King Montegue, Monica has finally returned to Montaigne and is slowly rebuilding her network of contacts and associates in both Paix and Charouse. Demonstrating an ability to adapt to the new situation in the nation more than many of the old guard, she is making progress and so eventually warrant the position given to her.

Monica Allais du Crioux - Scoundrel (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Panache 4

Reputation: -10

Background: True Identity

Arcana: Willful

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Dangerous Beauty, Grandmaster, Half-blooded, Indomiable Will, Membership (NOM), Montaigne (R/W), Noble, Patron (Arciniega), Small, Thean (R/W)

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 4, Side-step 3, Sprinting 2, Throwing 1

Artist: Musician (Piano) 4, Singing 4

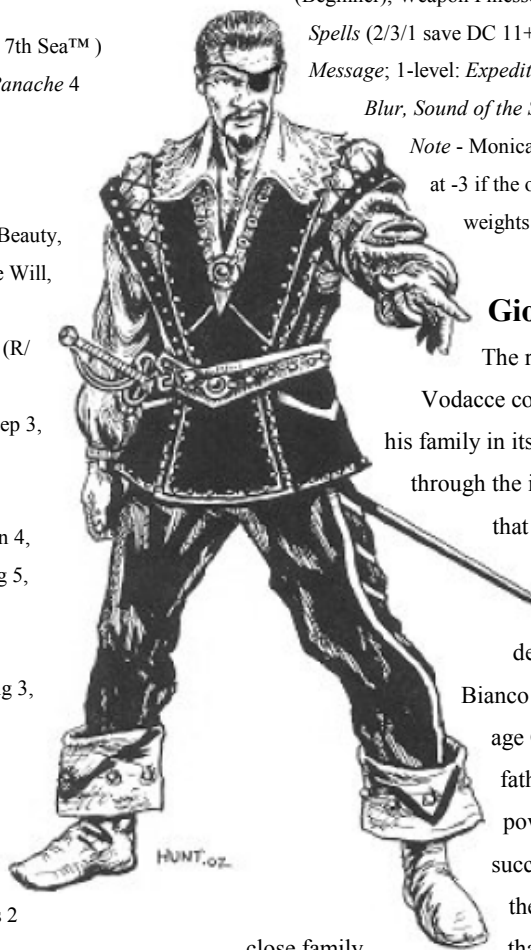
Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Gossip 6, Oratory 3, Politics 2, Scheming 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 4

Fencing: Attack 4, Parry 4

Porté (Apprentice): Attunement 3, Bring 3, Bleeding 3, Catch 2, Pocket 2

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 3, Law 2, Mathematics 2, Natural Philosophy 3, Occult 2, Philosophy 2, Research 4

Soldano (Apprentice): Double-parry 3, Tagging 2, Whirl 3, Exploit Weakness 2



Montaigne Female Courtier 2 / Fighter 1 / Noble 2 / Porté Mage 4 / Wanderer 2 / Soldano Swordsman 2: CR 13; HD 6d6+6d8+d10; hp 53; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); AC 19; Atks: rapier +12/+7 melee (d6; 18-20/x2); SA Spells, The Unstopping Blades, Whirling Blades; SQ Apprentice Porté, Attunement 1 mile, Bleeding 2, Bring, Commanding Presence+1, Evasion, Friends in High Places Pocket 20lb., Porté Checks+2, Style and Grace, Talent, Ward of the Albatross, Wealth 2; AL LE; SV Fort+3, Ref+9, Will+11; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 16; *Skills:* Bluff+18, Climb+5, Diplomacy+11, Disguise+8, Gather Information+9, Hide+5, Knowledge (arcana)+9, Knowledge (astronomy)+11, Knowledge (law)+9, Knowledge (mathematics) +9, Knowledge (nature science)+14, Knowledge (nobility)+14, Knowledge (philosophy)+8, Knowledge (tactics)+7, Perform (dance)+12, Perform (oratory)+12, Perform (piano)+15, Perform (singing)+15, Search+10, Sense Motive+4, Speak Language (Castillian, Montaigne, Théan), Tumble+11; Cleave, Dangerous Beauty, Envious, Great Cleave, Half-blooded (Porté), Improved Initiative, Membership (NOM), Parry, Power Attack, Scheming, Small, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (rapier), Willful;

Spells (2/3/1 save DC 11+spell level): 0-level: *Mage Hand, Message*; 1-level: *Expeditious Retreat, Feather Fall*; 2-level: *Blur, Sound of the Succubus*

Note - Monica makes Hide and Tumble checks at -3 if the opponent is less than 5' 2'' tall or weights less than 100 lbs.

Giovanni Villanova

The ruthless Merchant Prince of Vodacce continues the long tradition of his family in its involvement with NOM. It is through the information and plots of NOM, that the family forced the Caligara to change their name, and even before that aided the destruction of the sorcerous Bianco family. Although from a young age Giovanni was aware that his father was involved with other powerful men, it was not until his succession as Merchant Prince, and the unfortunate death of his other close family, that he was invited to become a member of the Council of Thirteen. Having worked briefly under the leadership of Iselo, Villanova has become one of

the most vocal opponents of Archiniega in Council meetings, although he is very careful not to challenge him directly or act against him outside of Council. The betrayal of his wife and lover has taken up a lot of his attention of late, although he ensures as much for his own safety that he keeps informed on the activities of the other members. It is thought that he also opposes the growing interest in Blood Alchemy, although he has not spoken in Council strongly on this matter.

There must be few people in western Theah that are unaware of the reputation of Giovanni Villanova and his appearance is familiar to most of the social elite. Over the last few years, events have taken a distinct toll on his appearance especially with the eye patch he now wears to cover the eye destroyed in the betrayal of his courtesan Juliette. Although he is still young, small streaks of grey are starting to appear in his hair although his good eye will give its dangerous glaring attention to anyone who mentions it in his presence. His endless practice in duelling to perfect the family school keeps him lean and shows in the calluses of the palms of his hands.

To list all the plots and resources of a member of the Villanova family would keep a Vatacine scribe employed for life, needless to say the ancient family and its position in Vodacce makes Villanova one of the most publicly powerful men on the Council. However, a great amount of these resources are devoted to staving off the plots not only of the other Council members but also his fellow Merchant Princes, most of which would dearly love to live to see the fall of the Villanova. This event may be more likely than anyone could have imagined, not through any action of an outside body but at the hand of Villanova himself. With the death of his two sons and the betrayal of his wife, Giovanni now stands without an heir. The deception of his wife and courtesan fills his every waking moment, his revenge against them being the one thing that can break his usual calm demeanour. Threats also come from his own family, as they now potentially stand to gain control and Giovanni has been forced to quietly eliminate a number of troublesome cousins and so weaken the family resources. One potential solution that he sees is to take a new wife and quickly sire a new heir, the powerful sorceress daughters of the late Merchant Prince

Lucani seem perfect for this role and he has sent a number of emissaries to try and make such arrangements. So far, the widow Lucani has shown interest in marrying in to such a powerful family line but has not agreed to a date for fear of the actions of one of the other Princes against her. However, Villanova is not someone who takes no easily for an answer and does not suffer stalling tactics, so once he has resolved the situation with Valentina he is likely to give this plan his full attention.

While the destruction of two of the seven Merchant Princes in the recent conflicts in Vodacce did not greatly benefit the Villanova line as much as some others, it has reduced the number of powerful players in the Great Game. The Council look on this situation with interest since the unification of Vodacce under a single NOM member would be one of the first steps in realising their ancient goal. Some of the Council warn against this as they say that a single leader would be a target for all the plans and machinations of the other Vodacce patrician families, where as a divided nation is easier to manipulate. Villanova usually replies to such debates with the tale of the last failed assassination attempt on his life and a few quotes from Scarovese.

Allies and Enemies: Few of the other Council members willingly choose to make themselves enemies of Giovanni, for the notable observation that most enemies of the Merchant Prince have life-spans somewhere comparable to the average mayfly. That said, Giovanni can also consider few members are true allies due to a lack of trust on both sides. As one of the opponents to the Blood Science agenda, he has often voted with Serk or Hughes, but has also sided with Arciniega when the occasion suits his own plans.

Resources and Strongholds: The resources of any Merchant Prince make them a powerful player in Theah, but the Villanova have always been more successful than most. Dionna is notably Giovanni's city and few things happen within its bounds that do not come to his attention. The family has extensive estates throughout the city and also on the mainland, these include the House of Silent Anguish (Strongholds and Hideouts p29).



Giovanni Villanova - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, Finesse 3, Wits 5, Resolve 4, Panache 5

Reputation: -130

Background: Hunting

Arcana: Willful

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Combat Reflexes, Dangerous Beauty, Evil Reputation, Grandmaster, Left-handed, Noble, Scarovese, Servants, Membership (Swordsman's Guild, Merchant's Guild, NOM).

Poison Immunity

Courtier: Dancing 4, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Scheming 6, Seduction 5, Sincerity 5

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 4, Research 2

Spy: Bribery 4, Conceal 4, Interrogation 4, Poison 5, Shadowing 5, Stealth 5

Ambrogia (Master): Feint 5, Pommel Strike 5, Riposte 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 5, Leaping 4, Side-step 5, Sprinting 3, Swinging 4, Throwing 4

Dirty Fighting: Attack 5, Eye-gouge 5, Kick 4, Throat Strike 5

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Knife: Attack 5, Parry 5, Throw 5

Villanova (Master): Double-parry 5, Feint 5, Stop-thrust 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Giovanni Villanova, Merchant Prince (d20™)

Vodacce Male Noble 5 / Fighter 2 / Spy 2 / Ambrogia 5 /

Villanova 5: CR 19; HD 7d10+7 plus 2d6+2 plus 10d8+10; hp 98; Init+4 (Dex); AC 29 (+4 Dex; +15 UDP); Atks: rapier +18/+13/+8/+3 melee (1d6+1), dagger +18/+13/+8/+3 melee (1d4+1); SA: Ride the Blade, Stop Thrust, Unexpected Strike; SQ: Feinting, Invite the Attack, Off-handed Fighting, Pull Them In, Taunt, Alias, Contacts, Sneak Attack+1d6; SV Fort+7, Ref+15, Will+8; Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 18; AL NE; Skills: Alchemy+10, Balance+10, Bluff+19, Climb+6, Diplomacy+19, Escape Artist+10, Forgery+14, Gather Information+14, Intimidate+16, Jump+2, Knowledge (history)+12, Knowledge (mathematics)+10, Knowledge (philosophy)+10, Listen+12, Perform+11, Sense Motive+16, Speak Languages (Castille, Montaigne, Thean, Vendel, Vodacce), Spot+12, Swim+2, Tumble+8, Use Rope+5; Feats: Appearance (Above Average), Combat Reflexes, Dangerous Beauty, Evil Reputation, Improved Critical (rapier), Left-handed, Membership (Swordsman's Guild, Merchant's Guild, NOM), Poison Immunity, Unarmoured Defense Proficiency (master), Weapon Focus (dagger), Weapon Focus (main gauche), Weapon Focus (rapier), Willful

Hughes Sices du Sices

The current leader of the Rose & Cross finds himself in a strange position. While many Council members would dearly love to control an organisation as powerful as the Knights, he was very content for years to control the group from behind the scenes. The assassination of Aristede Baveaux has thrust the soft-spoken Montaigne noble into a very large spotlight, one that has made it more difficult to operate as he always has done. While most of his fellow Knights would be aghast to learn of his association with NOM, he is perhaps one of the least villainous of the Council members. That is not to say that he is totally clean however, countless Knights have died needless deaths over the years on missions that served only to advance the causes of the Council. Many years ago, when one of the two Seneschals that act for the Minister of the Order got a little too close to information on Hughes, he killed the man with his own hands. All these actions do gnaw away at Hughes conscience and he at times wonders if he has completely betrayed the whole meaning of the Order. Archiniega, ever the greater pragmatist, simply points out that having a conscience to prick will end up being Hughes undoing. While he tends to be a mediating voice in Council discussions, the one area he has spoken out on is Blood Alchemy, which he views as an aberration on creation. His outspoken views on this have so far not drawn any action from Archiniega, which some speculate as to mean that Hughes holds some small influence over the scholar.

Hughes has made a career out of going unnoticed by most people, be it at a social event with the Grand Master or simply walking around the corridors of the Laybriinthe in Paix. He is not unattractive, but nor is he particularly striking and although he dresses in good quality clothes, they were always just that bit plainer than fellow nobles. Many members of the Order have advised the new Grand Master to increase his presence, but he usually replies to that with a shrug and a self-deprecating comment. It is not to say that Hughes lacks an ego, he is simply skilled enough to not let it show and confident enough in his power to not need to demonstrate the fact. Few have ever seen the Master Knight raised to anger, but those that have are likely never to want to witness such a thing again. Usually his response to something that annoys him is a wry quip or a stare that could



drive the most hardened criminal to break.

The Rose & Cross always gave Hughes a strong foundation of power, and now being Grand Master to an addled Minister, his control of the organisation across Theah is almost unchecked. The Revolution has also opened up a wealth of new possibilities, with the strengthening of ties with the Musketeers and the fact that Hughes was one of the few nobles that was untouchable by the Committee for National Welfare. Although his long association with NOM has allowed Hughes to increase his power and his own agenda, it is also true that the Rose & Cross has been strengthened in many cases by his actions. It should be noted that the groups opposition to sorcery fits in nicely with the aims of NOM, although the emergence of Blood Alchemy worries Hughes greatly and he continues to look for ways to oppose its progress. All Hughes needs is to make contact with a group that can act unimpeded and have a pathological hatred of all things sorcerous.

Exactly how a NOM Council member rose to the heights of the leadership of the Rose & Cross is an example of the long-term planning that the group is capable of carrying out. Hughes paternal uncle was a former member of the Council of Thirteen and had discussed with the others that the group had never managed to successfully infiltrate this new and popular Order. Where as existing NOM agents were either passed over for promotion or did not even get accepted into the group, Knights themselves had proven stubbornly resistant to bribery and coercion. Claude-Maurice Sices du



Sices's plan was to groom a person from birth to be both a member of the Rose & Cross and then later a NOM agent. When one of his brothers gave birth to a second son, he saw the opportunity and showered the family with gifts and attention. As a second-born son with no sorcerous powers, Hughes was not likely to have much in the way of prospects within the rarefied elite of Montaigne, so the path to the Rose & Cross was becoming increasingly popular. Claude-Maurice ensured that his nephew had the best martial training and schooling to prepare him for the application, as well as pulling in favours with a number of nobles who he knew were Patrons of the Order. All the time the young man was told of the tenets of the right of the few to control the destiny of the many, ensuring that he would be open to the ideals of NOM when the time came. To the delight of his uncle, Hughes was accepted into the Order and his innate skills and training allowed him to progress well, all the time with Claude-Maurice carefully watching for the correct time to act. That came when Hughes and his domine were investigating some criminal activity in Buche, Claude-Maurice arranged an ambush for the two Knights which led to the death of Hughes's mentor and his rescue by another man who acted as his first contact with NOM. Feeling indebted to the stranger that saved him, Hughes helped him out a number of times and slowly was prepared by being shown how actions are sometimes necessary even if they are not deemed right. Although Claude-Maurice died while Hughes was only a Sergeant Knight, his legacy has left the Council with both a powerful member and their first major player within the powerful secret society.

Allies and Enemies: Hughes is often seen as a mediator on the Council, working with the various factions to try and lead to a plan that settles the over-all agenda of NOM. For this reason, Hughes has few strong allies but there are also few that are definitely opposed to the affable Montaigne gentleman.

Resources and Strongholds: The largest resource to Hughes is of course the Rose & Cross, although his control of the organisation must remain subtle. Based from the chapterhouse in Paix, he also counts the city and its diplomats as his playground. As one of the few senior figures who remained in Montaigne during the Frenzy, he

took advantage to seize control of a number of networks and contacts from the other NOM Council members in the area.

Hughes Sices du Sices - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, *Finesse* 4, *Resolve* 4, *Wits* 5, *Panache* 3

Reputation: 80 perceived (-60 actual)

Arcana: Misled

Background: True Identity

Advantages: Avalon (r/w), Combat Reflexes, Grandmaster, Indomitable Will, Membership (NOM, Rose and Cross), Montaigne (R/W), Night Trained, Noble, The Secret, Théan (R/W), Vendel (R/W), The Vow

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2, Break Fall 4, Leaping 4, Rolling 4, Swimming 2, Swinging 3, Side-step 4

Commander: Strategy 2, Tactics 2, Ambush 4, Artillery 1,

Diplomacy 3, Incitation 3, Leadership 5, Logistics 1

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 4, Fashion 2, Oratory 4,

Diplomacy 3, Gossip 4, Politics 4, Scheming 5, Seduction 5,

Sincerity 6

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2, Parry (Improvised Weapon) 1

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload 3

Politician: Etiquette 4, Oratory 4, Socializing 4, Diplomacy 3, Incitation 3, Politics 4, Scheming 5, Sincerity 6

Rider: Ride 3

Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 4, Research 2,

Law 4, Natural Philosophy 1, Occult 3, Theology 3

Spy: Shadowing 5, Stealth 5, Bribery 3, Conceal 5,

Cryptography 5, Disguise 5, Hand Signs 4, Interrogation 4,

Memorizing 4, Poison 1, Sincerity 5

Streetwise: Socializing 4, Street Navigation 4,

Underworld Lore 5

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 5, Throw (Knife) 3

Desaix (Master): Double Parry (Fencing/

Knife) 5, Feint (Fencing) 5, Lunge

(Fencing) 5, Exploit Weakness

(Desaix) 5, Exploit Weakness

(Quinn) 3, Exploit Weakness

(Valroux) 2

Hughes Sices du Sices (d20™)

Montaigne Noble 3 / Spy 5 /

Swashbuckler 2 / Desaix

Swordsman 5: CR 15; HD

3d8+7d6+5d10; hp 65; Init +2;

AC 23; Atks: rapier +13/+9/+4

melee (d6; 18-20/x2) and main gauche +13 melee (d4; 19-20/x2);

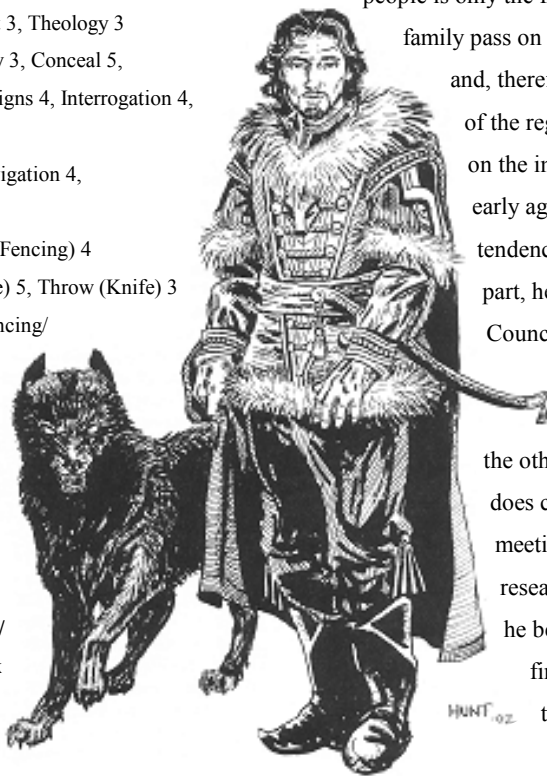
SA Seduction, Sneak Attack+3d6, Two Blades-One Attack; SQ

Alias (DC 42), Brilliant Getaway, Commanding Presence, Contacts, Friends in High Places, Lightfooted, Lightning-quick Defense, Wealth; AL LE; SV Fort+6, Ref+11, Will+10; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14; *Skills*: Bluff+19, Diplomacy+15, Disguise+14, Forgery+7, Gather Information+10, Hide+15, Knowledge (arcana)+5, Knowledge (nobility)+8, Knowledge (philosophy and theology)+10, Listen+9, Move Silently+15, Perform (dance)+3, Ride+7, Sense Motive+16, Speak language (Avalon, Montaigne, Théan, Vendel), Tumble+7; *Feats*: Combat Reflexes, Counterattack, Deceitful (wile), Forgettable, Leadership, Membership (NOM, Rose and Cross), Misled (flaw), Raging Attack, The Secret, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defense Proficiency, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Specialization (main gauche, rapier)

Aleksi Pavtlow Markov v'Novgorod

To say that the Knias of Rurik is an evil man from a family of evil men is something of an understatement. He cares nothing for his people or for Ussura, but only his own comfort and power. A few members of the Council are the only people in Theah that Aleksi truly considers as equals, all others are there merely to further his goals of the destruction of Matushka and her puppet Gaius. The fact that Matushka chooses her leader from among the common people is only the final insult for Aleksi, whose

family pass on the heritage of being the first and, therefore in their minds, rightful rulers of the region. The influence of the Wolf on the impressionable Aleksi from an early age has only raised his darker tendencies to the surface. For the most part, he has little involvement in Council affairs, so long as NOM leaves Ussura to him, he is quite happy to leave the rest of the world to the other twelve. The one thing that does continue to bring him to the meetings in Numa is the chance to research at he group's library, where he believes he is becoming closer to finding the weakness that will lead to Mother Winter's downfall.



Aleksi dresses and looks as he thinks befits a man of his position, finishing the look with an almost permanent sneer.

Although Ussura is known for its cold, Aleksi's heart is colder and although he may show outward signs of emotion, the observant will notice that they almost never reach his eyes. Although he has the resources of generations of his family to draw upon, it is clear that Aleksi has less direct power than most of the other Council members. The reason that for most of the time he is left to act unopposed in his own domain is simply that few of the other members have any particular interest in Ussura. Aleksi is less against the Bargainer sorceries than many of the other Council members, mainly because the power he despises is Matushka and she appears to hate the Bargain more than most. He is also incredible pragmatic and views anyone, including sorcerers, as a tool that may get him closer to his goal. While this does not make him an ally of Arciniega and the Blood Alchemists, if they were to prove that they could help him realise his goal he would certainly be willing to return that with his support.

While many in Ussura attribute Aleksi's hatred of the Gaius to the death of his father, who the young Ilya had fed to his own dogs, the truth is not quite that simple. The fact that the death of his father allowed him to take control is one of the few things he can almost thank the Gaius for, since there was little love lost between him and his brutal father. The true weakness of Aleksi is that his entire ambition is centred around this one goal and he has given very little consideration as to how he will maintain his rule when he is finally able to overthrow Matushka. The Wolf is partly to blame in this as its influence simply wants to destroy its ancient enemy and has little concern about what happens after that point to the instrument of its vengeance. In recent months, Aleksi has seen the beginnings of a plan to achieve his aims with the Explorer's Society interest in Syneth ruins to the north-east of Ussura. While the Gaius has forbidden any entry by foreign organisations to explore Ussura, Aleksi has secretly passed information through Merin Zumer on the nature of the ruins and how best to avoid any problems in travelling to the site. With Odyesse still under pseudo-Montaigne control, this gives the Explorers an entry point into Ussura that Aleksi can claim to be out of his control. He hopes that the actions of the westerners at Lake Vigil will be a diversion for Matushka, in the same way that the rise of Cabora was, and allow him to put into motion his attempt on

the Gaius himself.

Allies and Enemies: Aleksi removes himself from much of the machinations of the Council, although his arrogant attitude and view that his agenda is the most important certainly has not endeared himself to his associates. A fair-weather ally of Alvara Arciniega over the issue of Blood Science, he will truly lend his support to any Council member who may be able to assist his plans.

Resources and Strongholds: With a province of Ussura under his effective control, Aleksi does not want for wealth or resources, although he of course wants to have the entire of Ussura to use and abuse. As the undisputed ruler of Novgorod, Aleksi can be more blatant than others in his operations although he holds the NOM line on not revealing the extent of the organisation

Aleks Pavtlov Markov v'Novgorov - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 4, *Finesse* 3, *Wits* 5, *Resolve* 4, *Panache* 3

Reputation: 45

Background: Vendetta

Arcana: Deceitful

Advantages: Ussuran (R/W), Teodoran (R/W), Théan (R/W), Combat Reflexes, Grandmaster, Membership (NOM), Noble, Scoundrel, Servants

Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 4, Fashion 2, Gaming 2, Gossip 3, Oratory 2, Politics 4, Scheming 4, Sincerity 5

Hunter: Ambush 4, Animal Training 3, Skinning 4, Stealth 5, Survival 4, Tracking 6, Trail Signs 3, Traps 4

Athlete: Break Fall 2, Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Leaping 2, Swimming 3, Side-step 3

Commander: Incitation 4, Leadership 5, Logistics 3, Strategy 4, Tactics 3

Spy: Conceal 2, Poison 3, Shadowing 2, Sincerity 5, Stealth 5

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Firearms: Attack 4, Reload 3

Rider: Mounting 3, Riding 4, Trick Riding 3

Pyeryem (Master): Fish 3, Kodiak Bear 5, Man 5, Red Fox 4, Snake 5, Snow Leopard 5, Speak 5, Wolf 6

Aleks Pavtlov Markov v'Novgorov (d20™)

Ussuran Male Pyeryem Shapeshifter 15 / Assassin 3: CR 19; HD 15d10+15 plus 3d6+3; hp 130; Init+3; AC 13 (+3 Dex); Atks: rapier +15/+10/+5 melee (1d6+2) and pistol +16/+11/+6 ranged (1d10); SA: Forms (8), Shape of the Beast, Soul of the Beast, Speak with Animals, Transformation 5/day, Poison Use,

Sneak Attack+2d6, Death Attack; SV Fort+13, Ref+15, Will+8; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 15; AL CE; *Skills*: Animal Empathy+3, Balance+5, Bluff+9, Climb+5, Diplomacy+2, Gather Information+10, Handle Animal+5, Hide+6, Intimidate+6, Jump+2, Knowledge (Matushka)+8, Listen+4, Move Silently+8, Ride+4, Search+2, Sense Motive+6, Speak Languages (Ussuran, Teodoran, Théan), Spot+2, Swim+5, Tumble+3, Wilderness Lore+5; *Feats*: Deceitful (Wile), Expertise, Parry, Scoundrel, Weapon Focus (rapier)

Serk Markstrom

The booming Eisen Field-Marshal may seem out of place among the careful planners of the Council, but he has proven to be a valuable and tenacious member. Indoctrinated from an early age into the philosophies and goals of the group, he joined the Council at the remarkable age of twenty. It was not until he crippled a disliked member of the Council in a duel that the other members really came to accept him as anything approaching an equal. In the winter of 1644, three men visited monarchs around Theah and gave birth to the Swordsman's Guild. Serk was the first of the Council to see the potential in this group and with his impressive martial skills he became an important member in the fledgling organisation. This has given him access to some of the most promising swordsmen across the entire of Theah and a great many of NOM's agents now come directly from the Guild. Now in his early fifties, he has not slowed down and remains an imposing presence. From the very start of his association with the Council, his ambition has sought to control the group and this has brought him into conflict with Arciniega on many occasions. With Guild resources spread across Theah, he only waits for the correct moment to act, although it will be seen if he is truly able to outthink the genius of Arciniega. He strongly opposes the use of Blood Alchemy by the group, not through any sense of morals about the nature of the craft but purely because it is something through which Arciniega wields influence. This rapid opposition to Arciniega has cost him some support among the other Council members, who do not trust him enough to involve him in any of their plans to deal with their tyrannical leader. For all his bravado and bluster, Serk is not convinced he could defeat Arciniega in personal combat so his usual brute force tactics avail him little in this regard.

People often joke how the poor soil of Eisen manages to

grow such big men, Serk is certainly someone who this applies towering as he does over most people at six and a half foot tall. The military training is obvious from only a casual glance at the Field-Marshal, who dresses in plain but incredibly well-kept clothing. Unlike the preening soldiers of Montaigne, Serk wears no medals or gaudy displays of rank. Anyone who should know his position does know and he commands obedience in those beneath him by his pure force of personality. While strict on discipline he is not cruel to those that work for him, unless they fail him in which case his response can be quick and violent. Apart from power, about the only other thing that seems to interest Serk is hunting which he does at any opportunity. Well trained in a number of techniques by friends among the Gelingen hunters, he has hunted most wild animals across Theah and is also interested in a new challenge. On one occasion he apparently lamented the death of the ancient Drachen of Eisen as he believed that they would make "excellent sport". With his contacts he is one of the few non-Montaigne that have been invited to the L'Il du Bete hunting reserve, although his opinion of most of the spoiled Montaigne gentry that tend to frequent the location is far from complimentary.

With the fractured nature of Eisen, Serk does not possess the same control of land as some of the other members. Instead his main resources come from his involvement in the Swordsman's Guild and links to Eisen mercenary companies across Theah. Very patriotic about his homeland, Serk views most of the current Eisenfurst with veiled contempt, the only one gaining a small amount of respect being Fauner Pösen purely for her obvious military capabilities. He has considered a number of times trying to unite the pieces of the Emperor's dracheneisen armour, however there is no one that he would trust to manipulate and does not wish to make himself such a visible target by taking control directly. Instead he plots and plans to take control of the Council and use its considerable resources and wealth to further his plan for Eisen and Empire. The changes that have taken place in Heilgrund worry him considerable and he has debated strongly with the other Council members about taking action to rectify the situation. Having previously been one of the most vocal opponents to the idea of Stephen Heilgrund being inducted into NOM, he now sees the fall of the

Eisenfurtsen into darkness as vindication of his opinions.

The moment that could be said to have truly shaped the character of the Field-Marshal was the death of his father to Vestenmannavnjar raiders when he was fifteen. They killed every member of the merchant ship's crew except Serk, a gangly youth who picked up his father's sword and faced their captain. Given a scar across his cheek and thrown overboard, the failure to save his father still burns in his heart to this day. Taking over his families merchant fleet, he was indoctrinated into NOM by his father's chief advisor, with the hatred for the Vestenmannavnjar allowing the ideals of the group to fall on fertile ground.

Allies and Enemies: Serk truly, truly despises Alvara Arciniega, if only for the reason that he is leader of the Council and he is not. Having served on the Council under Iselo, Serk saw no reason that the old man should promote someone from outside directly to control of the organisation. As one of the vocal opponents of Blood Science, he can be counted on to side with anyone else who speaks against it and has a begrudging admiration for many of the other Council members who lead through strength, such as Giovanni Villanova and Aleksí v'Novgorod.

Resources and Strongholds: Serk sees Eisen as his own resource, although many other Council members have agents in that nation. The biggest true resource that Serk can really claim is his influence in the Swordsman's Guild, although with the existence of the trained assassins of the Espectro Acero its actual usefulness is limited.

Field-Marshal Serk Markstrom - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 6, *Finesse* 5, *Wits* 4, *Resolve* 4, *Panache* 5

Reputation: -44

Arcana: Ambitious

Background: Defeated

Advantages: Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Connections (many), Combat Reflexes, Grandmaster, Indomitable Will, Large, Legendary Trait (Brawn), Membership (NOM, Swordsman's Guild, Vendel League), Noble, Toughness

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Oratory 4, Politics 4, Scheming 5

Captain: Ambush 3, Incitation 5, Leadership 4, Logistics 3,

Strategy 5, Tactics 4

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Side-step 3, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Gallegos (Master): Feint 5, Riposte 5, Tagging 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Heavy Weapon: Attack 6, Parry 5

Kjemper (Master): Attack 5, Corps-a-corps 5, Lunge 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Leegstra (Master): Beat 5, Corps-a-corps 5, Lunge 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Shield: Attack 5, Parry 5

Wrestling: Grapple 5, Bear Hug 4, Break 3, Head Butt 3

Field-Marshal Serk Markstrom (d20™)

Eisen Male Noble 1 / Fighter 6 / Gallegos Swordsman 5 /

Kjemper Swordsman 3 / Leegstra Berserker 5: CR 20;HD

6d8+9d10+5d12+26; hp 135; Init +2 (Dex); AC 15; (+2 Dex +3 Shield); Atks: rapier +26/+21/+16/+11 melee (d6+7 18-20/x4) or bastard sword +26/+21/+16/+11 melee (d12+7 19-20/x4); SA Devastating Blow, Mighty Swing, The First Circle, The Second Circle; SQ Commanding Presence+1, Damage Reduction 2/-, Friends in High Places, Shield Focus, Take the Pain, The Third Circle, Wealth; AL LN; SV Fort+13, Ref+7, Will+14; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 12; *Skills:* Bluff+16, Climb+10, Diplomacy+11, Intimidate+8, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Knowledge (tactics)+15, Perform (dance)+7, Perform (oratory)+14, Sense Motive+7, Speak Language (Eisen, Montaigne, Vendel, Vodacce), Tumble+10; *Feats* Ambitious, Brawny, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Great Cleave, Improved Grapple, Improved Sunder, Improved Unarmed Strike, Large, Leadership, Legendary Trait (Strength), Membership (NOM, Swordsman's Guild, Vendel League), Parry, Power Attack, Riposte, Toughness x2, Weapon Focus (bastard sword, rapier)

Boli Kollsson

One of the clearest signs of the betrayal of the old ways of the Vestenmannavnjar, Kollsson is one of the few Laerdom practitioners to embrace the new order of the Vendel. The truth is that he only sees the Guild as a means to achieve his own goals, which is why he has refused to become too involved in the politics of the Guild or take a permanent Chair position. Kollsson relies on the fact that his skills are so useful to the senior Guild members and also incredibly rare, this allows him to subtly manipulate the League



without getting tied into its own internal squabbles. Kollsson came to join NOM through his own drive and ambition, the northern isles were never part of the Empire and their families have no ties to the history of the organisation. It is an irony not lost on Kollsson that the Guild that he dislikes is the only reason that he is of use to NOM as without its resources he would simply be a barbarian sorcerer from the far north.

As well as his skilful manipulation of the senior Guild members, Kollsson is also one of the few Council members to use techniques such as mental manipulation and sleeper agents. His greatest success has been the placement of Joris Brak into such a senior position, although the increasingly erratic behaviour of the master of the Carpenter's Guild threatens to undo all his efforts. Kollsson's single resource is the Guild and the position that the Vendel have attained in Theah in such a short time, although this fact has brought him into conflict with some of the other Council members, especially Giovanni Villanova who despises the Vendel League with a passion beyond bounds. As well as being a vocal supporter of Arciniega's quest for Blood Alchemy, Kollsson is also the leading Council member pushing through the NOM agenda to spread the Guilder to all of Theah. The long-term goal is to be able to use the currency in order to wield financial control of the Thean markets and also allow the organisation to distribute funds more easily among their various criminal enterprises throughout the nations. Giovanni Villanova has argued strongly against this plan from its inception but it has strong support throughout the Council so he has little recourse but to go along for now, although he does not make it easy for the Vendel and has been a driving force behind the tensions between the two mercantile powers, although always careful not to be seen to be the primary instigator and displease the Council. What Villanova is not aware of is that Kollsson has used his sleeper techniques to place a single agent within the ranks of Villanova's own family, just in case the Merchant Prince becomes too problematic. Fortunately the agent was chosen for their lack of ambition and so he has not been one of those dealt with by Giovanni in his loyalty purges.

The greatest threat to Kollsson is not any of the other Council members but his own grandfather, who he killed

when the old man discovered just how evil his grandson was. His abilities in Laerdom allow Kollsson to control spirits, which not only gives him access to a wealth of information but allowed him to find out that his grandfather is still working to undo all the damage he has caused. Kollsson converted to the Objectionist faith with a zeal just to try and get away from this vengeful spirit, but it has not worked and the old man is gradually wearing down the sanity of his grandson. If any of the other Council members were to learn of this weakness, they could exploit it so he keeps the fact very well hidden.

Allies and Enemies: As a significant supporter of Arciniega's agenda on Blood Science, Kollsson has been rewarded with some support from the leader of the Council on his own plans. Driving the NOM agenda on the expansion of the Guilder, Kollsson can usually count on the support of Merin Zumer and Serk Markstrom, although of course this comes with the dangerous and vocal opposition of Giovanni Villanova.

Resources and Strongholds: Since Kollsson has gained significant influence within the Vendel League, as that organisation becomes more influential across Theah so does he. His true resource that has maintained his position is the use of sleeper agents, which a number of other Council members have found useful over time and, although they would never say, worry a number of them in equal measure. He maintains an office within the League that is used more by his assistants than himself, preferring to do most of his own work from the comfort of his estate outside Kirk.



Boli Kollsson - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, *Finesse* 3, *Wits* 4, *Resolve* 3, *Panache* 3

Reputation: -79

Background: Hunted

Arcana: Ruthless

Advantages: Eisen (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Connections (many), Grandmaster, Keen Senses, Membership (NOM, Vendel League)

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 4, Fashion 5, Gaming 3, Mooch 3, Oratory 4, Politics 4, Scheming 5, Sincerity 3

Criminal: Ambush 2, Cheating 2, Gambling 1, Quack 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 3

Spy: Conceal 3, Interrogation 6, Shadowing 4, Sincerity 3, Stealth 3

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Side-step 2, Sprinting 2,

Swimming 3, Throwing 1

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Attack (Improvised Weapon) 3, Eye-gouge 2

Fencing: Attack 3, Parry 2

Rider: Ride 3

Laerdom (Adept): All knacks at 3 except *Kjølig Villskap*, *Sinne* and *Tungsinn* which are at 4

Male Vendel Courtier 1 / Laerdom Mage 14 / Spy 2: CR 17;

HD 3d6+14d8-17; hp 56; Init +1 (Dex); AC 21; Atks: custom rapier +14/+9/+4 melee (d6+3; 18-20/x2); SA Becoming,

Inscribing the Runes, Invoking the Runes, Sneak Attack+1d6, Spells; SQ Alias (DC 28), Contacts, Laerdom Adept, Laerdom

Apprentice, Style and Grace, Talent, Wealth; AL NE; SV Fort+8, Ref+8, Will+15; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 9, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 14;

Skills: Bluff+12, Climb+5, Concentration+10, Diplomacy+8, Disguise+7, Gather Information+7, Hide+10, Intimidate+24,

Knowledge (arcana)+6, Knowledge (games)+6, Knowledge (nobility)+13, Knowledge (tactics)+5, Listen+13, Move

Silently+11, Perform (dance)+8, Perform (oratory)+12, Ride+7, Sense Motive+5, Speak Language (Eisen, Vendel), Spot+13,

Swim+8; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Tattoo, Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Full-blooded (Laerdom), Improvised

Weapon, Leadership, Membership (NOM, Vendel League), Stealthy, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner); *Spells*

(7/8/7/6/5/3/2/1 save DC 14+spell level): 0-level: *Light*, *Mending*; 1-level: *Bull's Strength*; 2-level: *Endurance*, *Locate*

Object; 3-level: *Haste*, *Meld into Stone*; 4-level: *Flesh to Stone*, *Stoneskin*; 5-level: *Ring of Lightning*, *Stone Shape*; 6-level:

Control Weather, *Wall of Stone*; 7-level: *Hand of Stone*; *Runes*:

Kjøtt, *Bevegelse*, *Varsel*, *Uvitenhet*, *Stans*, *Storsæd*, *Kyndighet*, *Sterk*, *Velstand*, *Grenseløs*, *Sinne*, *Tungsinn*, *Herje*, *Fornuft*,

Reise, *Kjølig*, *Villskap*

Note - With his craft feats, Kollson has created his rapier, and he is planning to create a custom-made *Staff of Stone* with *Hand of Stone*, *Stone Shape* and *Stoneskin*

Marcus Aurelian Numanus

A member of the Numanus family has always sat on the Council of Thirteen, all the way from the founding of the group. They remain something of an anachronism in Vodacce society, with their use of old Numan naming styles and traditions. While many may make jokes at their expense in private, few will speak out directly against them as it is widely recognised by all that a family that is not one of the Merchant Prince lines but has survived in the Great Game all this time must have something in its favour. This power is simply the greatest collection of information, blackmail and rumours in all of Theah which the family controls through their custodianship of the Secret Library (see later in this book). Even in the days of the Numan Empire, the family was known as working behind the scenes, whispering into the ears of Senators and suddenly being granted favours and wealth. Over the centuries they have amassed a truly expansive network of agents and informants throughout most of Theah that filter all their reports through a complicated courier system back to the family in Numa. Because of this resource and the fact that it is of use, for a substantial price, to all of the Merchant Princes, no one Vodacce leader has taken direct action against the Numanus in all this time. In the last few centuries, they have expanded their influence beyond Vodacce and now provide sensitive information and secrets to the great and not-so-great of Thean society. It is true to say that no-one in a position of power that has the wherewithal to remain in power has not heard somehow of the Numanus family. While most shun the dirty politics that they dabble in, few can ignore the threat that it poses and wonder what information the family may possess about them or their ancestors. That is one of the truly insidious things about the Library, in that with its breadth of information they can perhaps know more about the dark deeds of ancestors than the person itself and can use that to subvert even the most noble of leaders.

Marcus Aurelian took over leadership of his family nearly twenty years ago, when his father decided to retire to apparently take up painting and fine art in one of the family villas. Known as a popular figure in the Vodacce social circle, he is one of the youngest leaders of the family in a number of generations. With contacts among the various Merchant Princes and also outside Vodacce, from his travels

abroad when he was a student at Dionna University, he was in a strong position to continue the family trade in rumours and information. He has taken to this role with zeal and welcomes the challenge of sitting on the Council of Thirteen, which he has known about since he was young and a role he has been groomed for almost from birth. While many leaders of the family oversee the network of agents through their seneschals and other trusted advisors, Marcus has taken a personal interest in the whole process and also spends quite a bit of time in the Secret Library in Numa reading through the collected records of the family for useful information. When he is not reading at the Library or attending a party hosted by one of the Merchant Princes, he is usually practising fencing at one of the salons where he is welcome as a member. Fastidious about his appearance, he dresses in expensive if somewhat old-fashioned clothing and takes great care about his manners. A duel when he was younger left a small scar on one cheek that is a very sore topic with Marcus which most associates know not to bring up in conversation.

There is no great secret in Marcus's own life, although he takes a great amount of pleasure in using the information that the family collects to ruin people who oppose him. While not the sadistic nature of someone like Alcide Mondavi, it is a trend that is likely only to grow as he becomes more and more used to this power. If it threatens to damage the standing of the family and its relationship with NOM, there are many of his cousins who will take action. With no wife and heir himself, but simply a long line of romantic dalliances, Marcus is currently in a rather exposed situation in this regard although the family will work to oppose anyone from outside that seeks to take advantage of the these facts.

Allies and Enemies: The nature of his work means that few on the Council really trust Marcus Aurelian, not knowing exactly what dirty secret the family may hold that they could use against them. It is certainly true that Alvara himself has supported Marcus on a number of Council issues that have surprised the other members and dramatically turned the balance of power in his favour. Hughes Sices du Sices sees the value in the work of the Numanus family, but has made quite clear his distaste for the whole matter, a statement that

has also been echoed by both Merin Zumer and even Serk Markstrom on occasion.

Resources and Strongholds: The Numanus family has one major resource which defines their role and very existence. Based around the Secret Library, the family wealth has allowed them to establish a number of estates throughout mainland Vodacce and in Numa itself. They also have a series of apartments in Dionna through which they conduct little of their business, for fear of Giovanni Villanova being to aware of their clients.

Marcus Aurelian Numanus - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, *Finesse* 3, *Resolve* 4, *Wits* 5, *Panache* 4

Reputation: -80

Arcana: Hateful

Background: Fascination (Library) 2, Obligation (Family) 3, Sensitive (Scar) 1

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Dangerous Beauty, Fhidelì, Island Hideaway, Membership (NOM, Merchant Guild), Montaigne (R/W), Noble, Patron Saint (Jerome), Théan (R/W), University, Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Artist: Writing 5

Athlete: Climbing 1, Footwork 4, Sprinting 2, Throwing 1, Swimming 4

Cloak: Parry (Cloak) 3, Entangle 3

Courtier: Dancing 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 3, Oratory 2, Diplomacy 3, Gaming 4, Gossip 4, Lip Reading 3, Memorizing 5, Politics 3, Scheming 4, Seduction 5, Sincerity 4

Criminal: Gambling 3, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2, Cheating 4, Prestidigitation 4

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Eye-gouge 4, Throat Strike 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 5, Reload 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 4, Throw (Knife) 4

Merchant: Scribe 3, Hagglng 5

Rider: Ride 4

Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 3, Research 6, Law 3, Natural Philosophy 2

Spy: Shadowing 2, Stealth 2, Bribery 4, Conceal 3, Cryptography 5, Disguise 4, Forgery 5, Hand Signs 4, Lip Reading 3, Memorizing 5, Poison 1, Sincerity 4

Marcus Aurelian Numanus (d20™)

Male Vodacce Courtier 7 / Fighter 4 / Noble 2 / Spy 3: CR 16; HD 10d6+2d8+4d10; hp 66; Init +0; AC 20; Atks: rapier +12/+7 melee (d6+1 18-20/x3) or pistol +11 ranged (d10 x3); SA Sneak

Attack+2d6, Twist the Heart; SQ Alias (DC 31), Brilliant Getaway, Commanding Presence+1, Contacts, Friends in High Places, Gossip, Versatile (Decipher Script), Voice+7, Wealth; AL LE; SV Fort+7, Ref+6, Will+14; Str 12, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14; *Skills*: Appraise+5, Bluff+16, Climb+4, Craft (Poison)+5, Craft (Writing)+20, Decipher Script+12, Diplomacy+9, Disguise+9, Forgery+20, Gather Information+7, Hide+8, Knowledge (games)+8, Knowledge (history)+15, Knowledge (mathematics)+10, Knowledge (law)+10, Knowledge (nature)+8, Knowledge (nobility and royalty)+12, Knowledge (religion/philosophy & theology)+8, Knowledge (tactics)+5, Move Silently+8, Perform (dance)+13, Perform (oratory)+8, Ride+8, Search+10, Sleight of Hand+4, Speak Language (Castille, Fhidel, Montaigne, Théan, Vendel, Vodacce), Spot+9, Swim+8; *Feats*: Combat Expertise, Dangerous Beauty, Exotic Shield Proficiency (Cloak), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Hateful, Improved Disarm, Iron Will, Membership (NOM, Merchant's Guild), Parry, Unarmored Defense Prof (Beginner), University

Lady Jane Killmarvon

Lady Jane is one of the more recent additions to Avalon society. She has quietly risen up the ranks of Elaine's court to become one of the most renowned of courtiers. The fact she is an utterly stunning woman is rarely missed, but she has also proved a knowledgeable glamour sorceress and brings a certain grace and charm to everything she does. She is becoming the belle of Avalon society, and done so without rising the ire of the other ladies. This may be due to her status as a widow, which keeps the gentlemen at a respectful distance as well.

Lady Jane's husband was a quiet but respected lord with wealthy but moderate holdings. It is assumed he married Jane for her beauty and grace, as she had little land or noble blood. However, anyone who meets Lady Jane cannot question her late husband's choice. Out of respect to his memory, very few people ask about Jane's bereavement, however it is the widely held opinion that he was taken by angry unseelie fae for breaking some form of geas.

What few people know is that the beautiful Lady Jane Killmarvon was not born a noble. She was in fact the second daughter of a moderately wealthy merchant family. Instead, her birthright was a dark hearted coldness, and if she had not been born beautiful as well she my well have passed a bitter

life in peace. Instead she found that her looks brought her a certain amount of attention that she could turn to her advantage.

Jane hated her comparatively lowly position in the social scale. Someone as beautiful as she must deserve more, and she became determined to get all that was owed to her. There was no way she was going to inherit, not with an elder sister and three older brothers. Her only hope was to marry into nobility, but who would marry a lowly girl like her with little or no dowry?

The answer was to have some claim to nobility, and that meant sorcery. You needed to be born to Glamour, but if you wander the darker paths of Faery you can find places to bargain for it. Jane sought out the nasty and powerful Unseelie lords and ladies who eventually offered her power in return for entertainment and blood. She had to prove herself by killing her mother and two of her brothers first, but that was not terribly hard for her. What did give her pause was the price of sorcery itself, but she paid it nonetheless. She had to give her unborn children to the timeless Unseelie. Had she lived a normal life she would have given birth to three children. However they are now given over to the Sidhe and sometimes Jane dreams of her unborn daughter and two sons screaming.

Having paid such a terrible price made her even more dedicated to her cause. She knew that the eldest son of a noble house might be charmed by her looks, but never allowed to marry her. So she needed to see that her husband to be came into some money. She set her sights on a particular man, Thomas Killmarvon who was fourth in line to his family's considerable wealth. She pursued him with maddening virtue and chastity, to ensure he would have to marry her to benefit fully from her charms. When he was hooked, she spent a long time reeling him in, and at each stage in their relationship she saw to it that he moved up a rung on the ladder to inheritance.

Ellen Killmarvon, the eldest sister died in childbirth a few days after the couple met. Thomas' second eldest brother died in a hunting accident the same month that Jane was invited to meet Thomas' parents. The third eldest brother



mysteriously disappeared two days after Jane and Thomas announced their engagement. The final tragedy occurred when Davyd the eldest son was killed in the War of the Cross. His unit was attacked as he travelled home to attend his brother's wedding.

Such was the death in the family and the skill in Jane at covering her tracks that the only possible answer was a Sidhe curse. So it was not surprising when the old Lord Killmarvon died of a severe chill after falling into the water on a boating trip. Jane would have been happy to stop there, but she discovered that her husband and his family had a problem, gambling. Much of the Killmarvon fortune had secretly been used up to the late night excesses of its inheritors. When Thomas started gathering debts Jane decided to do something about him as well.

There was one group who did notice what she was doing. The family had ended up owing most of their debt to agents of NOM, who were secretly siphoning cash from the nobles of Avalon. They were not impressed by the Sidhe curse story of family bereavement and managed to uncover Jane's duplicity. Having a need for a skilled assassin and agent in the Avalon court they recruited her in return for writing off the debt. She agreed, and has gradually moved up the ranks to take a place on the council itself as one of the newest members.

Allies and Enemies: As one of only two NOM members based in Avalon, it would be expected that Merin and Lady Killmarvon would be bitter rivals but they have struck up an unusual friendship. A number of the other Council members tested her abilities when she first joined the Council of Thirteen, Lady Killmarvon delighted in mailing them back the pieces of their agents over a period of weeks.

Strongholds and Resources: With what is left of the family fortune now under her control, Lady Killmarvon has used her NOM contacts to invest the funds she has to further secure her position. As a noble of Avalon, she has voting rights within the upper house of parlement in Luthon, where she is a more regular visitor than most of the landed gentry of the island. Most look upon her active involvement in Avalon politics as the exuberance of youth, more than any

dark motive.

Lady Jane Killmarvon – Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Panache 4

Reputation: -35

Background: None

Arcana: Ambitious (Hubris)

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Vendel (R/W) Appearance (Intimidating), Connection (Informant), Dangerous Beauty, Grandmaster, Indomitable Will, Membership (NOM, Parlement), Noble Courtier: Dancing 4, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 3, Gossip 5, Lip Reading 2, Oratory 2, Memorizing 3, Mooch 5, Politics 3, Scheming 5, Seduction 6, Sincerity 5

Criminal: Gambling 1, Lock Picking 2, Pick Pocket 2, Prestidigitation 2, Shadowing 3, Stealth 4

Scholar: History 3, Law 3, Mathematics 1, Natural Philosophy 1, Occult 4, Philosophy 1,

Spy: Bribery 4, Conceal 5, Interrogation 2, Poison 5, Shadowing 3, Stealth 4

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 4, Side-Step 5, Sprinting 2, Swimming 2, Throwing 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 4, Throw (Knife) 3

Rider: Ride 3

Glamour Sorcery (Adept) King Elilodd 4, O'Bannon 4, Iron Meg 4, Thomas 4

Lady Jane Killmarvon (d20™)

Courtier 3 / Assassin 2 / Glamour Sorceress 10: CR 15; HD 5D6 plus 10D10+30; hp 120; Init +2; AC 10+ (+2 Dex, + UDP); Atks: knife +10/+5 melee (1d4); SA: Apprentice (glamour), Adept (glamour), Death Attack, Glamour Checks+5, Known Legends (King Elilodd, Mad Jack O'Bannon, Iron Meg, Thomas), Poison Use, Sneak Attack+1D6, Style and Grace, Talent, Wealth; SV Fort+4, Ref+8, Will+10; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 20; AL NE; *Skills:* Alchemy+5, Appraise+5, Bluff+10, Concentration+2, Diplomacy+5, Disguise+5, Escape Artist+5, Gather Information+10, Innuendo+5, Intimidate+5, Knowledge (Avalon Court)+5, Knowledge (Unseelie Sidhe)+5, Listen+5, Move Silently+5, Open Lock+2, Perform+5, Pick Pocket+3, Read Lips+5, Ride+5, Search+5, Sense Motive+10, Speak Language (Avalon, Castillian, Eisen, Montaigne, Vendel), Spot+5, Swim+2, Magic Device+5, Use Rope+4; *Feats:* Appearance (Above Average), Assassin's Hand, Dodge, Gifted Liar, Glamour Mage (Full Blooded), Iron Will, Sex Appeal

Merin Zumer

A small but very fierce woman, Merin is sometime referred to as 'the terrier with a quill' by some of her fellow members of the Explorer's society. Merin was born and raised in Eisen, and before the war she was the wife of General Hagard von Wendel, a noted leader of some of the Vaticanic forces. However Merin was far more than just a soldier's wife. Her skills as an administrator had gained her the position of chief steward to the Heilgrund household, which she held for over seven years.

Sadly, General von Wendel was killed two years before the end of the war of the cross. Merin mourned him until peace was declared, and then decided she would no longer be married to a gravestone or spend the remains of her life looking at a country broken by war. She wrote to a cousin who was serving the Explorer's society in Avalon, and he offered her a place to escape to.

When she arrived in Avalon, Merin refused to survive on charity and offered her considerable accounting skills to the local businesses. Within a few months she was handling the books for most of the merchants in the town. As such a prized commodity to local commerce, she was often invited to some of Avalon's social occasions, and it was at one such banquet she met Vincent Bernvadore.

Merin was intrigued by the passion Bernvadore exuded when he spoke of the society. She found herself becoming more and more interested in the work of the organisation and the exciting places it visited. She added the local society to her list of clients and within a month she was in charge of the finances for a district. She began to drop clients to pursue her Explorer interests, and after six months she was working exclusively for the society, as its head of finances. Her rise to power was assured by her dedication and the fact that the post had been empty for some time.

She has now served the Explorers for a few years and has become a crucial lynch pin in the organisation. Her shrewd investment program and attention to detail has made sure the finances of the society are well managed and flourish. As a consequence there are now more expeditions than ever before, even though most field scholars complain that Merin never allows them the resources they need.

What annoys Merin is the secrets that lie in the heart of the society. She can see from the books that there are certain operations that are never mentioned and receive prime funding. She also cannot believe that the society has not discovered more than they profess. She is asking questions, and Bernvadore has been so impressed with her work that he is considering answering them all.



Much of Merin's story is quite true; but there are just a few details her public story leaves out. She joined NOM soon after she was married, quite early in her life. Her gifts for stewardship were recognised by NOM who offered her work as an 'academic spy'. When she figured out who she was really working for she was happy to become more involved. She was tired of war and saw the society as the best way to bring stability to the world. When the

War of the Cross started she became even more dedicated to this opinion.

Merin's dedication to NOM's ideals allowed her to rise high in the society. Her family had been part of the society before, and in very powerful positions. Her background, coupled with her record made it impossible for the pragmatic society not to allow her to join the Council. When they finally offered her a place she became the first woman to sit on the Council of Thirteen.

Her meeting with Vincent Bernvadore was not the accident it appeared to be; but a carefully calculated operation. NOM

needed a new way to launder money, and the informal but wealthy Explorer's society appeared to be the best option. Merin ran the operation to ingratiate herself with care and tact, and as expected she did very well. She now funnels NOM funds and investments through the Explorer's society creating vast paper trails around her fraud and criminal activities. She is careful to keep the Explorers in credit though, as their operation is now vital to NOM's own financial affairs.

What is true is her interest in the secret affairs of the explorers. However, she seeks this knowledge for NOM rather than herself. She has gained Vincent's trust and soon he will grant her access to some of the most dangerous secrets of the Synchron that man has discovered. When these are added to what NOM already knows, who can tell what the council will come to understand.

Allies and Enemies: Merin's involvement in the financial aspects of NOM brings her into contact with both Boli Kollsson and Giovanni Villanova, where she is often required to act as an intermediary between the two powerful merchant areas. In Avalon society, she has had quite a bit of contact with Lady Killmarvon and she was one of the Council members who championed her ascension to the Council. Although respectful of the power that Arciniega wields, she is distrustful of Blood Science and could prove to be an ally for those that oppose that agenda should they show to be sufficiently competent in dealing with the leader of the Council. Eman was a strong opponent to bringing a woman onto the Council, and now with three females among them, he continues to rally against their sex and their suitability to do the work of men.

Strongholds and Resources: As well as her rooms in the Explorer's headquarters in Carleon, Merin maintains a small office in Luthon from her days as an accountant to the local merchant population. She still finds it useful to maintain a number of these clients, although other NOM agents now do their books. The fact that she controls so much of NOM's finances gives her a large degree of influence on the Council, especially when deciding on major operations or excessive bribes to key officials.

Merin Zumer – Scoundrel (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 2, Wits 6, Resolve 4, Panache 2

Reputation: 26

Background: Mole

Arcana: Adaptable

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), High Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Theodoran (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Eagle Eyes, Grandmaster, Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Legendary Trait (Wits), Linguist, Membership (NOM, Explorer's Society), Pain Tolerance, Toughness

Archaeologist: Artefact Evaluation 2, Occult 2, Research 5, Society Lore (Explorers) 4, Synchron Lore 2

Scholar: History 3, Law 3, Mathematics 5, Natural Philosophy 1, Occult 2, Research 5

Servant: Accounting 6, Etiquette 4, Fashion 3, Hagglng 5, Seneschal 5, Menial Tasks 1, Unobtrusive 5, Valet 2

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Memorizing 4, Sincerity 5, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2

Athlete: Climbing 1, Footwork 3, Sprinting 2, Swimming 2, Throwing 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 4, Reload (Firearms) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Rider: Ride 2

Merin Zumer (d20™)

Spy 12: CR 12; HD 12D6; hp 50; Init +2; AC 19 (+2 Dex, +7 UDP); Atks: knife +9/+4 melee (1d4) or pistol +11/+5 (1d10) ranged; SA: Alias (2), Brilliant Getaway, Contacts, Face in the Crowd, Innocent Smile, Sneak Attack+6D6; SV Fort+4, Ref+8, Will+4; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 13; AL: N; *Skills:* Appraise+5, Balance+4, Bluff+10, Climb+2, Concentration +5, Craft (Accounting)+15, Decipher Script+5, Diplomacy+4, Disable Device+2, Disguise+6, Escape Artist+2, Gather Information+10, Hide+5, Innuendo+5, Move Silently+5, Open Lock+5, Read Lips+5, Search+5, Sense Motive+10, Speak Language (Avalon, Castille, Eisen, High Eisen, Montaigne, Théan, Theodoran, Vodacce), Spot+5, Swim+5 *Feats:* Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Gifted Liar, Skilled Liar, Road Scholar, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner)

Eman Istrasis

Unlike the rest of the council, Eman is renowned as a hero through his homeland of the Crescent Empire. He has fought the slave traders across the world and freed countless slaves from the bondage of the flesh traders that roam the seas. Of course, like with most of the Council, this is not quite the whole truth.

Eman was born to rich parents in the beautiful city of Iskandar in the Crescent Empire. He studied hard and was well on the way to joining the Sultan's court as a minor official. However on a sea trip, his ship strayed into Tiakhar waters and was attacked by slavers. Eman and the remaining crew were taken prisoner. He was sold on to a slave galley and served there for over ten years. His dreams of a quiet academic life were gone. While the life of an oar slave was torturous and cruel, it built Eman's muscles and made him very strong and fit. When the ship he served on was attacked by pirates, he managed to seize his chance with fellow slaves and escaped. They joined the pirate crew for the time it took to make shore and then Eman left to seek revenge of the criminals who had stolen his life, determined never to be under the control of another ever again.

For over five years Eman has led attacks on slaver cartels. He has released countless slaves and seen many slave lords and their power destroyed. Only recently did he return home to rejoin his family. He felt he could not return until his honour was returned to him, which could only happen when he destroyed the slavers who took him originally.

Eman is a quiet and dedicated man. He is a hero to those who he has freed from bondage and a nightmare that haunts the slaver traders of the world. However, as he continued to enact his revenge he came to a dark realisation. The only way that he could ensure that he would never be enslaved was to become the enslaver himself. Unknown to all, over the last few years he has become one of the greatest slave traders in the Crescent Empire. How he does this while maintaining his heroic status is to work through a network of agents and aliases. He has even been known to attack one of his own ships to maintain the illusion, but only if the cargo was of little value or had already been sold.

Eman's usual modus operandi is to join the slaver crews and then murder the leaders during the night. In this regard, he is an assassin with no morals. There are no methods he would not use to kill another slaver, no poison is too horrible, and no person is more than a tool. Slaves who are freed speak of a cloaked man who opened the doors to their prisons and bid them to run. They did not see the bodies of the men Eman slew to reach them. Most boats of slaves he

sets free to damage the business of his enemies, but some ships of very valuable captives are cleared through his network of agents into slavery elsewhere in the peninsula.

NOM watched the avenger's career with interest. When Eman started attacking the slavers of '*Il Consorzio*' and other enemies of NOM, the society took an interest. They managed to piece together the motives and history of the man and discovered that he could be useful. They offered their help, as long as he served them as well. With the threat of revealing his secret and the fact that the group could further his goals, Eman readily agreed.

Eman gained a seat on the Council through his dedication and the need for someone with influence in the East. He has pursued NOM's cause with equal enthusiasm to his own, knowing that the more powerful NOM was, the more he could use that power to destroy his enemies. However, many of the Council are not happy to have a Crescent heretic in their midst, and a few are worried he is a dangerous and obsessed loose cannon. For all Eman's skill, dedication and usefulness, they may be right.

Allies and Enemies: Eman does not really have any friends upon the Council and he does not really care. He knows that most of the other members view him as a heretic and takes little action to change that opinion. His work keeps him away from western Theah and so he has little contact with the others outside of Council meetings, where he tends to vote simply with whichever side looks to win the argument. In the Crescent Empire, his network of agents and also the goodwill of slaves that he actually freed give him a strong powerbase. He is also one of the few agents in NOM with extensive knowledge of the waters of the Mirror and the coast of Cathay, although he has little knowledge of the mainland of that exotic country.

Strongholds and Resources: Eman maintains a simple home in Erivan although most of his time is usually spent on one of the ships that he controls in the Mirror or among the slavers he is infiltrating. A number of the slaves that he has freed have vowed to serve their apparent saviour and so he has fairly quickly gathered a network of spies and operatives throughout the peninsula and the southern coast of Ussura.



He is also alleged to have some contacts in Cathay although he has so far not revealed the extent of this to the other members. His slaver captains report to him through a complicated network of contacts and couriers, which while inefficient does maintain his false image.

Eman Istrasis - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 5, *Finesse* 3, *Wits* 3, *Resolve* 5, *Panache* 3

Reputation: 22 perceived (-45 actual)

Background: Bloodsworn

Arcana: Adaptable

Advantages: Atlar-Baraji(R/W), Kurta-Baraji (R/W), Tikaret-Baraji (R/W), Tirala-Baraji (R/W), Castillian, Eisen, Vodacce (R/W), Combat Reflexes, Firm Grip, Grandmaster, Indomitable Will, Keen Senses, Night Trained, Pain Tolerance, Toughness

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 1, Fashion 1, Oratory 2, Politics 3, Scheming 3, Sincerity 4

Criminal: Ambush 6, Lock Picking 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Sailor: Balance 2, Climbing 5, Knotwork 3, Pilot 2, Rigging 3, Sea Lore 2, Weather 3

Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 1, Research 1

Spy: Bribery 2, Conceal 2, Interrogation 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 5, Footwork 4, Leaping 2, Rolling 2, Side-Step 2, Sprinting 3, Swinging 4, Swimming 3, Throwing 4

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3,

Knife: Attack 3, Parry 3, Throw 2

Rider: Ride 4, Mounting 3, Trick Riding 3

Pugilism: Attack 5, Footwork 4, Jab 3, Ear Clap 3, Uppercut 5

Daphan (Master): Beat 5, Lunge 5, Pommel Strike 5, Exploit Weakness 5

Eman Istrasis (d20™)

Wanderer 9 / Daphan Swordsman 5: CR 14; HD 9D8 plus 5D10+56; hp 150; Init +2; AC 19+ (+2 Dex, +7 UDP); Atks: scimitar +11/+6/+1 melee (1d6+3, 18-20/x2) and pistol +10/+5 ranged (1d10); SA: Attack Vigorously, Evasion, Forceful Attack, Snapping the Blade, Tradesman, Uncanny Dodge (2), Wanderers' Knowledge, Ward of the Albatross; SV: Fort+7, Ref+7, Will+4; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 12; AL: N; *Skills*: Appraise+5, Balance+5, Bluff+5, Climb +5, Disable Device+5, Escape Artist+10, Gather Information+10, Heal+5, Hide+5, Intimidate+5, Listen+5, Move Silently+5, Open Lock+2, Pick Pocket+2, Profession (Gallery Slave)+6, Search+5, Sense Motive+10, Speak Language (Atlar-Baraji, Kurta-Baraji, Tikaret-Baraji, Tirala-Baraji, Castillian, Eisen, Vodacce), Spot+5, Tumble+3, Use Rope+5, *Feats*: Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Exotic

Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Reserve Energy, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Beginner), Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Specialisation (scimitar), Wicked Strike

Grandmaster Training

Each of the members of the Council of Thirteen detailed here has the Grandmaster ability, that is they are capable of teaching their specialist subject to the Rank 6 level. If the Council member is willing they can train a player character who already has Rank 5 in that knack. The training can take between one month and a year, with the Hero having to spend 25 XP to complete the process. This does not then allow the player to gain the Grandmaster ability, since that could be game-breaking in most campaigns. Of course, convincing one of the Council of Thirteen to train you in a whole matter in itself.

Accounting: Merin Zumer, Carleon

Ambush: Eman Istrasis, Erivan

Attack (Heavy Weapon): Serk Markstrom, Insel

Gossip: Monica Allais du Crieux, Charouse

Interrogation: Boli Kollsson, Kirk

Natural Philosophy: Alvara Arciniega

Research: Marcus Aurelian Numanus, Numa

Scheming: Giovanni Villanova, Dionna

Seduction: Lady Jane Killmarvon, Luthon

Sincerity: Hughes Sices du Sices, Paix

Tracking: Aleksi Pavtlow Markov v'Novgorov, Pavtlow

Other Important People

Aside from the Council of Thirteen, NOM is made up primarily of a massive network of non-descript assassins, couriers, spies and general criminals that report to one of the Council members. Most operatives are not in any way aware of the extent of the organisation they serve, but only the local interests of their particular boss. A few agents are more valuable and serve as loyal lieutenants to the Council members, either having proven their worth in the field over time or having some other connection to the mastermind. Often family lines have worked for NOM for generations, with the fathers inducting their sons and even daughters into

working for a powerful Council member. On the occasion when a Council member is killed or overthrown, rival members of the Council may seek to bring their most useful operatives under their own control. There are also a number of key figures in Theah that are discussed here for their knowledge of NOM or the fact that they are a great opponent to the Council of Thirteen, whether they know exactly who they are working against is another matter entirely.

Reune Vengasdotter

One of the eldest and most powerful members of the Sophia's Daughter conspiracy, Reune is one of the few of that group aware of the full extent of the NOM organisation. This is because she has been a member of NOM under a number of guises for many years now, the latest being under the name of the Avalon scholar Aden Wigsfield. She also served as a housekeeper to Alvara Arciniega, where she spied extensively on his activities and especially his research on Blood Alchemy. Up to now she has kept all this knowledge to herself, although she has fed a few pieces of information to the Daughters that have allowed them to thwart a number of the more insidious NOM operations in Castille. If the Handmaidens were to find out about the depth of the secrets she has been keeping they would be shocked, for she has in effect sold out the cause of the Daughters to advance her own knowledge and power. More importantly if one of the senior members of NOM ever realise who she is, it will be bad not only for her but for the various dupes she has worked in the organisation all these years including Alvara Arciniega himself.

Reune Vengasdotter - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Wits 6, Resolve 3, Panache 3

Reputation: -31

Background: Dead to the World

Arcana: Deceitful

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castille (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Ussuran, Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Alchemist, Connections (many), Membership (Sophia's Daughters, NOM)

Alchemist: Natural Philosophy 6, Occult 5, Poison 5, Research 5

Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Oratory 3, Politics 5, Scheming 4, Seduction 3, Sincerity 5

Herbalist: Compounds 5, Cooking 3, Diagnosis 4, First Aid 4, Flora 5, Poisons 5

Merchant: Cooking 3, Gardener 5

Scholar: Astronomy 4, History 4, Law 3, Mathematics 3, Occult 5, Natural Philosophy 6, Philosophy 3, Research 5, Theology 2

Scrying (Master): Scry 5, False Potions 5, Antidote Philter 5, Fumes of Slumber 5, Elixir of Eagle's Flight 3, Elixir of Velme 4, Gilead's Whispers 5, Glasswater 3, Philter of Intelligence 4, Philter of Invisibility 5, Vapor of Forgetfulness 5

Servant: Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 5, Valet 4

Spy: Shadowing 4, Stealth 5, Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Disguise 4, Read Lips 4

Athlete: Climbing 5, Footwork 4, Leaping 3, Long-distance Running 4, Sprinting 4, Swinging 3, Throwing 3

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 4

Firearms: Attach 5, Reload 4

Knife: Attack 5, Parry 3

Valroux (Master): Double-parry 5, Feint 5, Tagging 5, Exploit Weakness 5

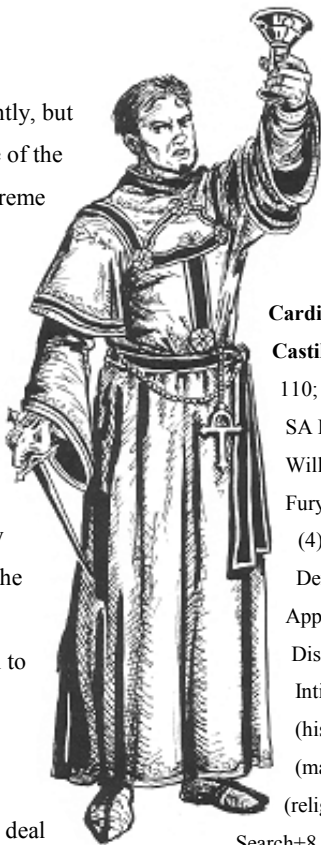
Reune Vengasdotter (d20™)

Vesten Female Courtier 1 / Scrying Sorceress 18 / Spy 1 / Valroux Swordsman 5: CR 25; HD 18d4+2d6+5d10; hp 89; Init+0; AC 23; Atks: rapier +14/+9/+4 melee (d6+3 18-20/x2) or pistol +13/+8/+3 ranged (1d10); SA Raise the Stakes, Sneak Attack+1d6, Spells; SQ Alias (DC 35), Breath water, Brew Potions, Nimble, Portal to Bryn Bresail, Scry Checks+12, Scry Master, Sense Alignment, Style and Grace, Talent, Wealth; AL NE; SV Fort+11, Ref+10, Will+19; Str 9, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 22, Wis 18, Cha 12; *Skills:* Bluff+10, Climb+10, Craft (alchemy)+20, Craft (cooking)+15, Craft (poison)+20, Diplomacy+10, Disguise+12, Gather Information+6, Heal+8, Hide+16, Jump+8, Knowledge (arcana)+20, Knowledge (astronomy)+15, Knowledge (law)+14, Knowledge (mathematics)+17, Knowledge (natural philosophy) +25, Knowledge (nobility) +14, Knowledge (philosophy and theology)+15, Listen+8, Move Silently+16, Perform (dance)+8, Perform (oratory)+8, Profession (gardener)+11, Profession (herbalist)+12, Profession (servant)+11, Search+10, Sense Motive+7, Speak Language (Avalon, Castillian, Eisen, Montaigne, Théan, Ussuran, Vendel, Vodacce), Spot+10, Tumble+6; *Feats:* Combat Expertise, Deceitful, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Full Blooded (Scrying), Parry, Power Attack, Run, Membership (NOM, Sophia's Daughters), Scheming, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Intermediate), Weapon Focus (main gauche, rapier), Weapon Specialization (main gauche, rapier); *Scrying potions:* All the scrying potions presented in Swashbuckling Arcana except from: *elixir of tongues, oil of dullness, philter of strength; Spells (9/10/9/8/7/5/4/3/2/1 save DC 14+spell level):* 0-level:

detect poison; 1-level: *comprehend languages, true strike*; 2-level: *detect thoughts, misdirection*; 3-level: *augury, clairaudience/clairvoyance*; 4-level: *locate object*; 5-level: *bryn bresail*; 6-level: *legend lore, true seeing*; 7-level: *insanity*; 8-level: *demand, screen*; 9-level: *weird*

Cardinal Esteban Verdugo

Verdugo may have fallen from grace recently, but for a significant period of time he was one of the most powerful figures in Theah as the supreme leader of the Vaticine Inquisition. To control such a large resource of zealous followers would be the envy of most Council members, though they would perhaps take exception to the faith that Verdugo professed in carrying out his goals. While the Council of Thirteen saw the rise of Verdugo from its inception, they failed completely in trying to manipulate the direction of the new Inquisition although Arciniega was able to use the organisation to forge the Invisible College and so strengthen his own standing further. Over the last few years, the Council have discussed on numerous occasions plans to deal with Verdugo, who they came to see as a great threat to their plans, especially in the subversion of the young Castillian monarch Sandoval. While the pressure that drove Verdugo from office came mostly through his own obsession on El Vago, NOM agents have used their influence within the Church to try and shape the result of the fall to their liking under the direction of Cardinal Christina. Alvara Arciniega has even proposed a radical idea to the Council to turn the former thorn in their collective side into a valuable tool for the move forward in this new age.



Esteban Verdugo - Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Wits 5, Resolve 4, Panache 4

Reputation: -88

Background: Moment of Awe

Arcana: Righteous

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Faith, Indomitable Will, Ordained, University

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Oratory 6, Politics 5,

Scheming 5, Seduction 4, Sincerity 5

Merchant: Calligraphy 5, Scribe 4

Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 4, Oratory 6, Philosophy 4, Theology 5, Writing 5

Scholar: History 5, Law 4, Mathematics 2, Occult 3, Philosophy 4, Research 4, Theology 5

Servant: Accounting 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Gossip 4, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 5

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Cryptography 4, Forgery 4, Interrogation 5, Lip Reading 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Knife: Attack 2, Parry 2

Cardinal Esteban Verdugo (d20™)

Castillian Male Inquisitor 17: CR 17; HD 17d8+17; hp 110; Init+0; AC 10; Atks: +12/+7/+2 dagger melee (1d4); SA Fanatic Strength (3), Gaze into the Abyss, Hierophant's Will, Knight Inquisitor, Malediction of Theus, Righteous Fury, Silver Tongue, Sorcery's Stench, Untapped Reserves (4), Voice of Theus; SV Fort+12, Ref+5, Will+17; Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 18, Cha 16; AL LE; *Skills:* Appraise+9, Bluff+9, Decipher Script+8, Diplomacy+10, Disguise+4, Gather Information+12, Innuendo+8, Intimidate+12, Knowledge (arcana)+7, Knowledge (history)+9, Knowledge (law)+7, Knowledge (mathematics)+6, Knowledge (philosophy)+7, Knowledge (religion)+11, Listen+7, Move Silently+7, Read Lips+8, Search+8, Sense Motive+12, Spot+8; *Feats:* Fanatical (Wile), Great Fortitude, Indomitable Will, Iron Will, Leadership, Ordained, Politicker, University
Note - The original version of Verdugo had no Attack values listed, since his fall from grace he is not quite so unwilling to get personally involved

Nolan Chaucer

As the head of the Couriers group of the Rilasciare and the nearest thing that anarchic organisation has to a leader, Nolan is one of the most informed people in Theah on what is happening behind the public perception. Over the last few years he has collected evidence on a group of incredibly powerful figures that manipulate Theah, the scale of their operations terrifies the old Avalon to death. Recently he found documents that were signed using a strange seal and referred to a "Council of Thirteen". Even though he has kept these observations to himself, the fact that he has become aware of NOM has come to the notice of the Council and they have dispatched agents to keep a close eye on Nolan

while they decide the best cause of action. Knowing that Nolan is a careful man, they are concerned that he has hidden the evidence in a way that it would be revealed if he were simply to be killed, so for now they have held off on their usual strong-arm tactics in dealing with those that discover the secret. Arciniega has proposed inviting Nolan to join the group, but some are unsure if he would be open to the goals of NOM. This has not deterred Arciniega who knows that anyone can be made to come around to the views of NOM with the correct persuasion.

Nolan Chaucer - Hero (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, *Finesse* 2, *Wits* 5, *Resolve* 4, *Panache* 3

Reputation: 27

Background: Fear

Arcana: Focused

Advantages: Castille (R/W), Connections (many), Eisen (R/W), Grandmaster, Linguist, Montaigne (R/W), Safehouse (all), Théan (R/W), The Bargainer's Secret, University, Ussura (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W)

Commander: Leadership 5, Logistics 6, Strategy 2, Tactics 2

Firearms: Attack 3, Reload 2

Forger: Calligrapher 5, Cryptography 5, Forgery 5, Paper Maker 3, Research 4

Rider: Mounting 2, Riding 2

Scholar: History 4, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 3, Research 4

Streetwise: Socialising 2, Street Navigation 4, Underworld Lore 4

Nolan Chaucer (d20™)

Vendel Expert 14: CR 12; HD 14d4+28; hp 80; Init+0; AC 10; Atks: pistol +10/+5 ranged (d10 x3); SQ Cunning Plans; SV Fort+6, Ref+4, Will +10; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 14; AL NG; *Skills*: Appraise+6, Craft (calligraphy)+17, Craft (paper making)+13, Decipher Script+8, Escape Artist+4, Forgery+20, Gather Information+12, Knowledge (history)+15, Knowledge (logistics)+20, Knowledge (mathematics) +8, Listen+4, Profession (Tactician)+10, Ride+6, Sense Motive+2, Survival +6, Speak Language (Castille, Eisen, Montaigne, Thean, Ussuran, Vendel, Vodacce); *Feats*: Focused, Leadership, Membership (Rilasciare), Skill Focus (forgery), Skill Focus (logistics), University

Auguste Danceny du Rosmonde

Over the last few years the Duc has gone from being the main patron of Alvara Arciniega's work in Blood Science, to a husk of a man addicted to the potions that Arciniega sends to him in exchange for blood samples and funds. Having

helped to speed along the Montaigne revolution by poisoning the mind of the Empereur against Montegue and then sending word to the General through his wife, Auguste took great advantage of the chaos of the Frenzy. Being known to a number of local militant cells, he was protected himself from harm and pretended to give refuge to a few fleeing nobles from Charouse. Most of the nobles became a source of blood for Arciniega's laboratory, although even the great Castillian himself is not aware that so much blood came from only a handful of murdered people.

The only thing apart from the potions that matters to Auguste is his granddaughter Gabrielle, who he managed to smuggle out of the country to Avalon before the revolution broke. Unknown to him she has fallen in love with a poor playwright from the Balroux Downs, something that she knows her grandfather is unlikely to approve of. That said, she may not have to wait long as the Duc's health deteriorates by the day, from the adverse effects of several test potions sent to him by Arciniega. His skin is slightly ashen and he often has difficulty breathing, now rarely going out and if he does only in the company of a number of retainers. Alvara has become increasingly concerned about this fact, not fully aware of the full degree of addition and the number of potions the Duc has used. However, if he were to stop taken them now it is likely that the withdrawal symptoms will kill him anyway.

Duc Auguste Danceny du Rosemonde – Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 1, *Finesse* 2, *Wits* 4, *Resolve* 3, *Panache* 3

Reputation: -48

Advantages: Alchemist, Bodyguard, Castille (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Membership (Invisible College, NOM), Montaigne (R/W), Noble, Research Library 1, Servants, Théan (R/W), University

Arcana: None

Background: Fear 3, Potion Addict 3

Courtier: Dancing 4, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Oratory 3, Diplomacy 4, Gaming 2, Gossip 5, Lip Reading 2, Memorizing 2, Politics 5, Scheming 4, Sincerity 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 5

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2

Porte (Apprentice): Attunement 2, Bring 1, Bleeding 2, Pocket 1
Rider: Ride 4, Mounting 3

Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 3, Research 4, Astronomy 3, Law 3, Natural Philosophy 5, Occult 4

Valroux (Journeyman): Double-Parry (Fencing/Knife) 4, Exploit

Weakness (Valroux) 5, Feint (Fencing) 5, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Duc Auguste Danceney du Rosemonde (d20™)

Montaigne Noble 5 / Porte Sorcerer 3 / Blood Scientist 3 / Valroux Swordsman 3: CR 14; HD 3d6+8d8+3d10; hp 55; Init +3; AC 13; Atk: rapier +11/+6 melee (d8; 18-20/x2); SA Commanding Presence+1, Friends in High Places, Off-Hand Fighting, Raise the Stakes, Seduction; SQ Attunement: ½ mile, Bleeding 2, Brew Cordial, Bring, Extracts, Fast Healing 2, Pocket 10 lbs, Porté Checks+2, Side Effects 1-4; AL NE; SV Fort+9, Ref+7, Will+15; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 9, Int 17, Wis 14, Cha 9; *Skills:* Appraise+5, Bluff+14, Concentration+7, Craft (alchemy)+13, Craft (poison)+5, Diplomacy+4, Hide+8, Innuendo+7, Intimidate+16, Knowledge (arcana)+11, Knowledge (mathematics)+8, Knowledge (natural sciences)+16, Knowledge (nobility)+13, Knowledge (philosophy)+11, Listen+7, Move Silently+8, Sense Motive+13, Speak Language (Castillian, Montaigne, Thean), Spot+5, Tumble+8; *Feats:* Expertise, Frightening Countenance, Half Blood (Porté), Membership (Invisible College, NOM), Weapon Focus (main gauche, rapier), Weapon Specialization (main gauche, rapier); *Porte Spells* (2/2 save DC 12+level): 0-level: Message, Open/Close, Prestidigitation; 1-level: Expeditious Retreat; *Blood Science Knacks* (5/3/3 save DC 12+level): 0-level: Detect poison, Purify Food and Drink, 1-level: Endure Poison, Inflict Light Wounds, 2-level: Cat's Grace, Endurance.

The Espectro Acero

Introduction

The strong arm of the Council of Thirteen, the “Steel Spectors” were formed early in the days of the organisation to help secure sites that were important to NOM, prevent the Council members from simply assassinating each other and also to deal with any problems to the group. The importance of the group has waxed and waned with the rise of strong leaders and the nature of the men who sit on the Council of Thirteen. In recent years the Espectro Acero have been subverted to an extent under the leadership of Iselo and now Alvara Arciniega. While the vast majority of agents still serve the Council, the fact that their leader Quinn is such an ally of Arciniega means that he can call upon the group to forward his own agenda. That said, Arciniega has been carefully so far not to abuse this position against the other Council members, as even with his influence he could not stand against them all. Quinn is also aware that when Alvara eventually falls, his actions will dictate whether he survives

the transition in power.

Membership in the Espectro is gained from a number of routes. Traditionally, the Council knew a number of Vodacce families and their sons trained into the group if they showed the necessary skills. If a criminal or duellist came to the attention of the group, they may also be observed and approached to join. In more recent years, the Swordsman's Guild has become something of a recruiting ground for the group, with a number of agents in the various duelling schools around Theah. Administration for the organisation is carried out from its base in Dionna, although they maintain a number of smaller schools in other major cities that act as cover for their work. This is especially the case in Freiburg and Charouse, which house the greatest number of Espectro agents outside of Vodacce.

Activities

The Espectro carries out the main role of preventing direct action by the Council members against each other purely by its existence. It is made clear to any senior member and especially those that join the Council of Thirteen, that if they are found to be directly responsible for the unwarranted death of another NOM member then they will be killed in turn by the Espectro. Alvara himself could be argued to have violated this rule with his destruction of Jean Pierre du Lac, but he argued that the deceased has first broken the accord by trying to act against his daughter and of course having the leader of the Espectro in his pocket always helps.

Apart from this veiled threat of retribution, the majority of the work of the Espectro is to enforce the will of the Council when other resources will not suffice. Each Council member knows that the life of the highly-trained members of the group are not something to be wasted, so its agents should only be used where the task is important enough and their own operatives are not sufficient. The type of missions that this entails usually falls into one of three categories- assassinations, thefts and recovery. The assassinations carried out by the Espectro would be expected to be very high profile and involve either a singularly skilled opponent or one with plenty of protection, this has included throughout history a number of Kings, Emperors and even in one case the Hierophant. Thefts of items are usually dealt

with by either long-term planning or infiltration, but if any object needs to be acquired quickly or perhaps taken out of the hands of another group before they can use it, then one of the specialist members of the Espectro may be called upon. While these members are trained in swordplay like all the others, they either through their background or training have a particular flair for stealth and disguise. Finally, on the occasion when a NOM operation has gone awry it is often the Espectro that need to be called in to sort out the problem. This can include the rescue of captured agents, assuming they are important enough, or the covering up of traces of the groups involvement. In instances where the Council or another senior member has had to call in the Espectro to perform this task on another member's operation, the instigator would be expected to make a full accounting to the group. It is fairly typical that as part of the annual Council meetings, the Council of Thirteen review all Espectro activity to look for any flaws and some member take this opportunity to score political points over their rivals.

Quinn

Quinn is Novus Ordum Mundi's chief assassin, one of the best in Theah, and the head of the Espectro Acero. Whenever they need someone important silenced, Quinn is the first person called upon. In order to keep individual Council members from abusing his services, only the leader of the Council of Thirteen knows how to contact him, or so goes the reasoning of Arciniega anyway. Quinn had a very good relationship with the former leader of NOM, Iselo Arciniega de Aldana, and maintains the same type of relationship with Alvara. Quinn was introduced to Alvara many years ago, when Iselo was grooming Alvara to succeed him. It is Quinn's nature to constantly seek weakness in a man, yet he has found none in Alvara, only a man willing to do anything to achieve his goals. Over the years, Alvara has earned Quinn's respect, something which is not given lightly.

Quinn is an enigma. No one knows where he came from, what his background is, or even his nationality. He is a master of disguise who seldom appears as the same person twice. The only person who has ever seen his true face is his head student, who has vowed to take her knowledge to the grave. Even Alvara can only speculate about his true identity. Some of the Council believe that he may have once

been a doctor, or a soldier, but none of the rumours have been confirmed; none have had the audacity to ask him.

Quinn – Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, *Finesse* 5, *Wits* 4, *Resolve* 4, *Panache* 4

Reputation: -67

Background: True Identity

Arcana: Commanding

Advantages: Avalon, Castille (R/W), Eisen, Montaigne (R/W), Thean (R/W), Vendel, Vodacce (R/W), Combat Reflexes, Linguist, Membership (NOM)

Doctor: Diagnosis 4, First Aid 4, Quack 1, Examiner 4, Surgery 4

Performer: Acting 5, Dancing 2, Oratory 2, Singing 2, Cold Read 4, Prestidigitation 3

Spy: Shadowing 5, Stealth 5, Bribery 3, Conceal 5, Disguise 5

Athlete: Climbing 4, Footwork 5, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2, Break Fall 3, Leaping 4

Fencing: Attack 5, Parry 5

Knife: Attack 5, Parry 5

Quinn (Master): Beat 5, Exploit Weakness (Quinn) 5, Feint 5, Lunge 5

Valroux (Master): Double-parry 5, Exploit Weakness (Valroux) 5, Exploit Weakness (Donovan) 3, Exploit Weakness (Eisenfaust) 2, Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 2, Feint 5, Tagging 5

Quinn, Master Assassin (d20™)

Male of Unknown Heritage Assassin 7 / Fighter 1 / Spy 1 / Théan Bard 2 / Valroux Swordsman 5: CR 16; HD 8d6 +2d8 +6d10; hp 79; Init +3 (Dex); AC 24; Atks: rapier with fencing ring +15/+10/+5 melee (d6+1; 18-20/x2) and serrated main gauche +15 melee (d4; 19-20/x3); SA Ambush Attack+1, Bardic Music (Countersong, *Fascinate*, Inspire Courage+1), Death Attack (DC 19), Raise the Stakes, Sneak Attack+5d6; SQ Alias (DC 39), Bardic Knowledge+4, Conceal the Evidence, Poison Use, Inconspicuous, Uncanny Dodge; AL NE; SV Fort+8, Ref+14, Will+10; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 14; *Skills*: Bluff+18, Climb+10, Diplomacy+5, Disguise+15, Heal+15, Hide+18, Jump+10, Knowledge (anatomy)+6, Listen+4, Move Silently+18, Perform (acting)+15, Perform (dance)+7, Perform (oratory)+7, Perform (singing)+7, Sense Motive+13, Speak Language (Avalon, Castillian, Eisen, Montaigne, Théan, Vendel, Vodacce), Spot+4, Tumble+14; *Feats*: Combat Expertise, Commanding, Improved Feint, Lunge, Membership (NOM), Parry, Power Attack, Quinn Mastery, Two Weapon Fighting, Unarmored Defence Proficiency (Intermediate), Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (main gauche, rapier), Weapon Specialization (main gauche, rapier)

Quinn School of Assassination

Quinn himself created this school based on his martial prowess, and his knowledge of the human anatomy. Students use a knife as their primary weapon and are trained in the arts of "blending in." They also learn to utilise the "soft spots" of the human body in order to inflict maximum damage with their blade. These techniques can only be used with a knife, stiletto, or dagger, as any other weapon is too large and clumsy for the necessary precision. For the same reasons, the techniques may not be utilised if the weapon is thrown. So far, Quinn has only taken on ten students, none of whom have yet become masters. It is not recommended that you allow Heroes to learn this school.

The main drawback to the school is that it was designed to be used against an unknowing victim. It is not readily effective in a toe-to-toe sword fight with a skilled swordsman. If a practitioner of this school is challenged to a duel, he had better know another fighting style, or he is likely to be handed his liver on a plate.

Quinn Swordsman School (7th Sea™)

Basic Curriculum: Spy, Knife

Swordsman Knacks: Beat (Knife), Feint (Knife), Lunge (Knife), Exploit Weakness (Quinn)

Apprentice: Students of the Quinn school first learn where the soft parts of the human body are, and which areas are most vulnerable to attack. You gain one additional Unkept die when rolling for damage with a knife. If you have surprised your victim (with a successful Stealth roll), you instead gain one additional Kept die when rolling for damage with a knife. In addition, you receive one Free Raise when using Stealth.

Journeyman: As an apprentice you learned where to strike. Now you must learn how to strike. Journeyman have honed their fighting skills to such a degree that they seldom miss. You gain two Free Raises when attacking with a knife. In addition, you receive another Free Raise when using Stealth.

Master: Masters of the Quinn school have learned to deliver a killing blow with a single stroke of their blade. You may spend two Drama dice on a successful hit to inflict an automatic Dramatic Wound. If you have surprised your victim (with a successful Stealth roll), on a successful hit you may spend all of your Drama dice to inflict one Dramatic Wound per Drama die spent.

Quinn Mastery (d20™ New Feat)

You are fully trained in the deadliest of assassin techniques – Quinn's school has killed many a NOM obstacles. Understanding the anatomy, you have honed your sneak or ambush attack to perfection.

Prerequisites: Lunge or Improved Feint. Sneak attack +2d6 or Ambush Attack +1. Membership (NOM)

Benefit: 1/day, you can declare that you are using this ability before attacking a flat-footed opponent with a small blade. You can reroll the roll to hit for this attack.

You also choose to increase your sneak attack dice by +2d6 (if you already have the sneak attack ability) or your ambush attack by +2 (if you already have the ambush attack ability) for this attack. You can choose only one of these options each time you declare you are using this ability.

Infiltration of Other Groups

Avalon

The islands of Avalon have traditionally not been of great interest to the members of Novus Ordum Mundi due to their remote location and lack of involvement in mainland politics. This changed with the imposition of Montaigne rule on the nation, which brought with it the nobles and court system that the Council members knew and had influence over. NOM agents manipulated events in the islands through their Montaigne networks and government structures, but did not on the whole recruit the local population to their cause except for the odd thug or criminal to carry out specific tasks. This lack of foresight was shown up when the Montaigne rule was overthrown and the eventual rise of Queen Elaine. The rebirth of Avalon as a global power at first caught the Council without a plan, but the parlement system of Avalon has given them a structure to bend to their uses. While there are still few senior NOM agents in Avalon, the group is expanding their influence through Avalon, although making less progress in the more volatile political arenas of the Highland Marshes and Inismore. Merin Zumer is the Council member in the best position for the nation with a number of the resources of the Explorer's Society available to her and the fact that she can use the organisation as a cover to meet with members of parlement and other notables to sway their thoughts.

Castille

NOM influences the development of Castille through two sides, with both the society of Dons and the Church infiltrated by the organisation over many centuries. The rise of the Inquisition threatened to undermine the group's influence in the nation, since few agents had managed successfully to portray themselves with sufficient zeal to advance in this expanding wing of the Church. It is generally considered a masterstroke by the Council members that Arciniega was able to use the biggest threat to the group in Castille, in order to create the structure of the Invisible College and so provide a valuable new resource. The Montaigne invasion was both a blessing and a curse in that it strengthened the power of the Inquisition and Verdugo in particular, but it also created a large amount of displaced nobles that were open to assistance in order to regain their position and wealth. With the subsequent fall of Verdugo and the election of a new Hierophant, the Inquisition has been pared back to its former state and Castille is now of the beginning of what might be a new golden age. It is also a new age where the Council of Thirteen have more Dons in their pocket than ever before and an impressionable young monarch who has lost his two closest advisors.

Eisen

Eisen was a central part of NOM plans all the way up to its disintegration with the death of the last Emperor. Many Council members through the history of the group have argued that only an Eisen Emperor could reunite western Theah and return to the supposed paradise of the Numan Empire. That philosophy which had become a minority view over time died a sudden death with the suicide of Reifentahl. As it stands now, only Pösen and Heilgrund have any significant level of NOM activity with the other wasted states seen as of little value to the group. The exception is Freiburg, which both fascinates and terrifies the Council of Thirteen, being a state without a discernible government to subvert. That said a great number of NOM assassins and underworld operatives work out of Freiburg simply for this reason. For some time, the Council had considered inducting the young Stephen Heilgrund into their number but they have been shocked by his more recent actions and are now wondering if they will need to act to

address the situation in that region. If they do act it is likely to be through other parties or organisations such as the Rose & Cross or die Kreuzritter.

Montaigne

Second only in importance to NOM behind Vodacce, Montaigne has been heavily infiltrated though most of the history of its existence due to the absolute power of its noble class. No other nation in Theah has been so consistently ruled by a powerful elite, who rely on their wealth and influence to define their very person. This system is a ripe ground for the machinations of the Council and the political fates of many landed nobles owe their success or failure to the actions of certain key agents. Most Council members have ensured to have at least some influence in Montaigne, if only because it was such a powerful player on the wider world arena. Those who used the Vaticine church as their network in Montaigne lost most of their influence with the rise of Leon, but that was mitigated by the glorification of the social elite that came with the rule of the new Emperor. Nobles relied even more on their influence in Court to maintain their position and rumour and gossip were able to make or break a figure. NOM agents in the Court could manipulate matters like never before, even if failure was more often or more dangerous. With the climactic fall of the regime, the Council of Thirteen were surprisingly not involved but it did not take long before they put plans in place to make something out of the situation. The new government of the People seemed to be an excellent organisation to infiltrate and subvert, but the growing paranoia of Arnaud Maximilian du Charouse made many operations difficult. One aspect of the new Frenzy that did play into the hands of the Council was the formation of the Committee of National Welfare, which was eminently suitable for infiltration by NOM agents with the needed skills in subterfuge and assassination. Some agents embedded in the Committee have actually been responsible for smuggling certain nobles out of the country to Avalon or Wische if the Council believes that they may be useful in the future. With the fall in turn of the Revolutionary government and the return of Montegue, the Council of Thirteen looks to a opportunity to influence a new leader with limited political experience and also the return of some of their network of the noble classes.



Vendel

If the isolated nation of Avalon was of little interest to NOM, then the barbaric northern tribes were completely beneath the notice of the Council for centuries. It took the foresight of one member of the Council of Thirteen to turn the nation into one of the greatest tools for the group in modern times. Being aware of the disquiet of the underclasses against the rule of the Jarls, the Council member worked to support the uprising and used agents to influence key people to bring things to a point where a civil conflict was inevitable. He was then in a place to help to build the structure of the Vendel League that came out of this action, making sure that key members of the organisation were sympathetic to NOM goals if not full members of the organisation. With the bureaucratic morass that is the League becoming stronger, NOM then moved to bring the idea of the Guilder to the rest of Theah. While some argue that the idea of the currency will allow greater trade and prosperity throughout the west, the Council's goals are not quite so altruistic as they see it as a superb tool for manipulating the economy of Theah and also to transfer funds easily among their operations. With the final defeat of the remnant Vestenmannavnjar and their exodus to the west, the League can now concentrate once more on imposing their agenda and that of the Council on large parts of Theah.

Vodacce

Vodacce is the spiritual home and also powerbase of Novus Ordum Mundi, stemming from the time of the Numan Empire and also due to the very nature of Vodacce politics. Few Council members who lack the skill of operating in the dangerous arena of Vodacce survive for long against the machination of their fellow leaders, the group does not tolerate weakness at any level. The power of NOM in Vodacce is centred on a number of hereditary lines, notably the Numanus family and in more recent centuries the powerful Villanova line of Merchant Princes. Through sponsorship of key members of the different Merchant families, the Council members of NOM play their own version of the Great Game pitting their resources against each other while all the time keeping Vodacce divided and controllable. Few major twists in Vodacce history have not had NOM influence somewhere at their core, from the

founding of the major Merchant families through to the Crusades, they have all at least at first been guided by some greater plan by the Council. The one notable exception to this is the recent loss of status of the Caligari family and the unexpected action of Alcide Mondavi that lead to the loss of Merchant Prince Lucani. The removal of two great players in the Vodacce political scene has had great repercussions throughout the south of Theah and the Council have so far taken limited steps to stabilise the situation until they can better assess the climate.

Crescent Lands

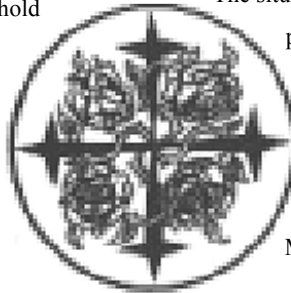
The Council has a long history of involvement in the Crescent peninsula both before and during the time of the Church embargo. Much of the coastal areas were tribute states of the Numan Empire and so where the government of the Empire went so did the agents of the Council. With little in the way of a cohesive nation following the fall of the Numan Empire, the Council relied on influence with certain key leaders and a number of small nomadic groups to forward their agenda. What was thought to be needed was a significant threat to the people of the area in order to force the various groups together under strong leadership and lead to a single nation-state. When the Second Prophet was killed in Crescent lands, the Council saw the opportunity and used its influence in the Church to call for a Crusade against what they painted as a heathen land that needed the control of the west. While the likelihood of the western powers being able to control the vast peninsula was slim, they hoped this would act as the catalyst for the formation of a Crescent that they could more easily control. When the Crusades finally ended, there was a number of strong leaders but things quickly descended into factionalisation again and it is not until the late 14th century that the entire region has come under the control of one authority in the form of the Sultan at Iskandar. The Council are working to influence this new government and also promote its opening to outside influences, something that has been helped by partially lifting of the embargo such as by the Bernoulli family and also the fateful events from the rising of Cabora. In all these endeavours the agents of NOM must be very wary of the Eyes of the Peacock, who appear to be both beyond the usual corruption and have proven themselves competent at tracking down conspiracies or those that seek to unduly influence the



Sultan.

Far Cathay

Cathay has the noted feature on the continent of Theah of having had no contact with the Numan Empire, so there was never a historic opportunity to establish a foothold in this distant land. NOM has access to the reports of the few Church expeditions that have ventured to Cathay and a number of agents have also entered into the nation but have left little impression. The main reason that NOM has had so little effect on Cathay is partially down to its remoteness and lack of involvement with the rest of Theah, but also to the fact that the governance of the land is run in such a different way that any other nation. While the Empress is served by a gigantic bureaucracy that makes any other in Theah look like a small business, the way that it operates on favours, protocol and traditions form an impenetrable wall to infiltration by outsiders. While some agents have managed to find ministers and clerks in the system that are open to bribes for certain favours, they are also equally likely to turn on the outsider a some later date if it is deemed to be in their or the countries interest.



Knights of the Rose & Cross

This popular organisation has resisted most attempts by the Council to infiltrate it in its relatively short history, much to the annoyance of a succession of Council members eager to turn the group into a tool of NOM. Existing agents had either failed to be accepted entry into the Rose & Cross or else were inexplicably passed over for promotions and never attained any level of information or influence in the group. Knights have also proven on the whole to be more reticent than most to the philosophy of NOM or the more typical methods of bribery and threats. Again like many times in the history of NOM, it took the long-term plans and insight of a single Council member to change this situation. Hughes Sices du Sices was born the second son of a minor line of the Sices du Sices family and under normal circumstances in Montaigne would have had little



opportunity in society. However, his uncle was a member of the Council of Thirteen and had a particular destiny in mind for his newborn nephew. The success of the operation to get a key operative into the Rose & Cross has gone further than the now departed elder Sices du Sices could have guessed.

The situation is still delicate though, as although the position gives Hughes great influence in the group, the nature of the Rose & Cross means that he cannot use the group in a lot of areas and his control is checked by both the other Master Knights and, in the absence of the Minister, also by the secretive Seneschals.

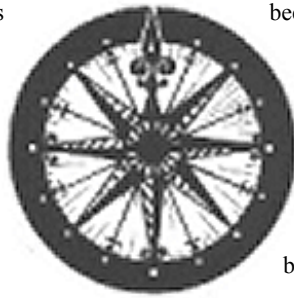
The Invisible College

The nature of this secretive group of scholar has been almost entirely subverted by the machinations of Alvara Archiniega to make it entirely dependant on his control and able to serve his grand plan. With the threat of the Inquisition now diminished, the scholars are starting to show the first signs of breaking with Archiniega's control and it is only a matter of time before the differences in belief within the group come to a head. The constant determination of Archiniega to focus on Blood Alchemy threatens not only to split the Council of Thirteen but also the College, with many senior scholars speaking out against the research even without being aware of the darker acts that the alchemists carry out to advance their knowledge. If he were to lose control of the College, Archiniega would suffer a massive loss of resources and prestige within the Council, so this is a possibility that he will take any and all actions to prevent. He already gave up the eminent Jeremy Cook to the Inquisition in sacrifice to his goals, so he is certainly not afraid to do so again.

Explorer's Society

The Explorer's are one of the youngest groups of its type in Theah and as such the Council have not had that much time, or even inclination, to heavily influence the group. Many Council members argue that the organisation is not worth the effort and resources it would take, but this is countered by some that see the Explorer's as becoming more important as time progresses and also warn of them making a significant discovery that the group is

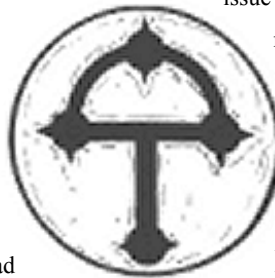
unprepared to deal with. The fact that Merin Zumer has risen to a position on the Council of Thirteen shows how serious some take the potential of the group, although it is also in part to the lack of other influence in the Avalon isles where the Explorer's are becoming a prominent special interest group within many government circles. NOM infiltration tends to concentrate on the administration side of the organisation, since this allows greater coverage with fewer individuals and the nature of small groups of explorers venturing into the wilds does not lend itself well to other types of mission.



shape of Theah to their own goals. While the Council has been aware of the existence of the group for a number of centuries, they have tried to ensure that the full extent of their own organisation does not come into the view of the Handmaidens or the Sophia herself. Council members have sacrificed key agents if they believe that they may be compromised by Daughter operations to prevent them from revealing anything further. NOM have taken direct action against the Daughters on a number of occasions so long as they believe they are able to cover their tracks or work through intermediaries, an example of which being the execution of Madeline de Chatelaine in Montaigne due to the paranoid suspicions of Arnaud Maximilian du Charouse. When the Council discover the truth behind Aden Wigsfield as a cover for Reune Vengesdotter, they will act quickly to remove the problem and this will have serious repercussions for Alvara Archiniega himself due to his association with her. Another issue is the affiliation of Villanova's wife and

Die Kreuzritter

The Council is one of only a few organisations fully aware of the existence and operations of the Black Crosses, mainly through their infiltration of the Vaticine Church. They see the potential in an organisation of shadowy assassins dedicated to a cause, but do prefer to keep the Kreuzritter at arms length as they recognise that the group could make as powerful an enemy as there are a tool. Like with the Rose & Cross, infiltrating the group has proven difficult and a NOM operative has never reached any high level of influence within the organisation. Instead the Council rely on their operatives in the Church to keep them informed of Kreuzritter actions and if need to feed selected information on the group to get them to do specific things or act in a certain way. One such action was providing the details of the route of the fleeing Leon Alexandre, which lead to his capture and execution by the Order. Serk Markstrom has also been responsible for some of the tension between the Rose & Cross and the Kreuzritter in southern Eisen, by his subtle involvement in the creation of a new Rose & Cross chapterhouse in Tannen that is seen as a threat to the other organisation.



mistress with the group, which has lead to the wounded Merchant Prince to rally against the society at Council and call for NOM to use all its resources to destroy the secret society.

Rilasciare

The fractured nature of the Rilasciare make it both a threat and a boon to the Council members of NOM. Some cells and groups have wittingly or unknowingly worked for the Council on certain operations, while others have come close to finding out about the network through their contacts in the Thean criminal underworld. While the Council of Thirteen is more aware of the size of the Rilasciare movement than most in Theah, it is true that even they do not know the full extent of the group. The ability of the Jacob's Political Society to influence the massive changes in Montaigne with the fall

Sophia's Daughters

The Council of Thirteen distrust the Daughters like no other group or organisation in Theah, mainly due to their power and the fact that they also exist behind the scenes trying to manipulate the



of Leon Alexandre came as something of a surprise given reports on the nature and efficiency of that group to the Council. A number of agents have now been tasked with reassessing the threat posed by the group to NOM operations and if any major plans will need to be made to deal with them. One immediate threat has been the evidence of the existence of NOM

uncovered by Nolan Chaucer, although the Council remains divided about whether to recruit or assassinate the important Rilasciare figure. With their knowledge of the Porte abilities of Chaucer's main courier and close associate, they would certainly be able to set him up to be dealt with by areas of his own organisation.

Los Vagos

During the height of Inquisition control in Castille, the activists of Los Vagos became a convenient scapegoat for a number of NOM operations in the country. While no agent was actually a member of the Vagabonds, quite a few used the imagery or name of the group to cover their own actions. This has included the assassination of a number of low-level church officials that were problematic to the Council, which is one of the reasons that the Inquisition was so set against the Los Vagos. Since the end of the Montaigne invasion and the fall of the Inquisition, the group has been seen to be rather without a cause and sightings have diminished. NOM is keeping a watchful eye on the situation as with all others, but at the current time has no real interest in the group.

The Rye Grin

This small group of noble supporters in Montaigne at the height of the Frenzy came to the interest of the Council purely as a means of covering up from any operations they carried out to smuggle nobles with NOM connections to safety. With a number of agents within the Committee for National Welfare, the Council were able to either use the Rye Grin as unwitting dupes to do the deed for them or an agent would fabricate evidence pointing to the activities of this thorn in the side of the revolutionary government to cover their own involvement.

Adventurer's Society of Luthon

The Council knows of the true purpose of the small explorer group in subverting the monarchy through its core players referred to as the "Foundation". They have approached the leader Wesley Johns IV on two occasions now to join their

ranks, he has refused both times and the Council must now decide what action to take against him. With the fall of Elaine into a coma in 1672, it puts power back to parliament and gives the Foundation impetus to step up their actions.

A Novus Timeline

To detail all NOM activity going back to the beginning of the organisation would take a small library, something like the one that the group has in Numa. Here is presented some information on NOM involvement in more recent events, some of which reveal a second side to incidents that the public are well aware of while others are completely in secret. The events that occur after 1670 will in many cases be dealt with in future writings.



1642 - Alvara Arciniega graduates from La Ciencia and stays under the tutelage of Iselo Arciniega de Aldana.

1657 - Alvara Arciniega uses his own wealth to build la Universidad de Arciniega while becoming a prime recruiting ground for NOM scholars.

1658 : With the rise of Elaine, Montaigne NOM nobles in Avalon are forced to leave, including Council of Thirteen member Jean Pierre du Lac.

1659 - The headmaster of La Ciencia and a vocal opponent of Alvara is murdered by a petty thug in a NOM operation.

1660 - Iselo passes away from a long-term illness and is succeeded to the head of the Council of Thirteen by his chosen protege, Alvara Arciniega.

1662 : Alvara Arciniega betrays Jeremy Cook to the Inquisition, forcing the Invisible College further underground and reliant on his communication protocols.

1664 : The Vendel League with unknown financial and technical help from the Council launch the Guilder in a bid to standardise currency in Theah.



1665 : NOM agents in the Church and Castillian court work to deny the young Sandoval full control in order to preserve their influence in the nation.

1665 : Gaius Ilya comes of age and kills the father of Aleksii v'Novgorov, who inherits his fathers seat on the Council

1666 : The death of the Hierophant leaves the Inquisition unchecked and NOM influence in the Church is threatened

1666 : Alvara Arciniega announces his discovery of the light spectrum, but just escapes the Inquisition who move quicker than he had expected.

1667 : The suicide of Imperator Reifentahl throws Eisen into chaos and the Council withdraw until they are certain of the new political entities that arise.

Spring 1667 : Following from the Inquisition attack on his person, Leon Alexandre declares war on Castille and catches the Council unprepared.

Summer 1667 : With NOM agents whispering of treason, Leon Alexandre sends his son-in-law Montegue on an ill-fated invasion of Ussura. The attack on Castille slows.

Tertius 1668 : The attack on a merchant ship of the Villanova family by the Vendel threatens an open war, but the Council manage to restore the situation.

Julius 1668 - Monica Allais du Crieux is rescued from the Inquisition by Quinn and brought to Alvara Arciniega.

Corantine 1668 : The Council becomes aware of reports of a mystical event centred on the Mirror. Shortly afterwards Caligari's island sinks and the mysterious Cabora rises.

Septimus 1668 : Villanova escapes the assassination attempt by Alcide Mondavi. The Council are again surprised by the actions of Modavi but refuse Villanova's request to have him assassinated.

Septimus 1668 : Rioting in Charouse blossoms into a full-scale revolution. NOM agents manage to smuggle a number of noble informants and operatives out of the city.

Octavus 1668 : NOM agents pass the details of Leon Alexandre's escape route to the Kreuzritter and the former Empereur is caught and hung.

Octavus 1668 : The Treaty of Cabora is signed to limit access to the dangerous island. Not wanting any technology to fall into the wrong hands, the Council ensure that all governments ratify the treaty through their influence.

Nonus 1668 : The new Revolutionary Government of Montaigne is formed, with a number of different groups having infiltrated the structure.

Decimus 1668 : Valentina Villanova kills her two sons and flees with Juliette, leaving a vengeful Giovanni with one less eye and a burning hatred.

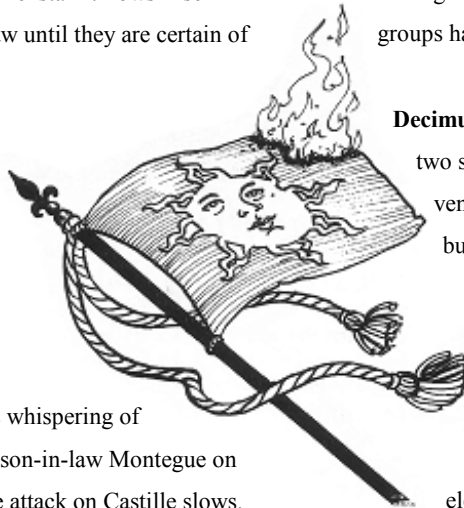
Primus 1669 - At the annual meeting of the Council of Thirteen, Alvara accuses Jean Pierre of acting against his daughter. With du Lac destroyed, he elevates his own daughter to take his place over protest of the Council.

Julius 1669 - The death of Aristede Baveaux raises Hughes Sices to Sices to Grand Master of the Rose & Cross, while plunging Montaigne into the beginning of the Frenzy.

Corantine 1669 - The Committee of National Welfare is formed and quickly infiltrated by NOM agents.

Corantine 1669 - Evidence provided by NOM agents sees Madeline de Chateline of the Sophia's Daughters executed for treason by the Montaigne government.

Quintus 1670 - Evidence of the location of the missing Montaigne archbishops comes to light. A transfer of Inquisition gold is revealed to Cardinal Durkheim by NOM.



Sextus 1670 - After sixth months of bloodshed in Montaigne, Posen releases Montegue who returns and takes control of the nation.

Octavus 1670 - Arnaud du Charouse becomes the last victim of *le Coiffeur*. Most of the NOM operatives in the government manage to plea clemency or are smuggled out.

Primus 1671 - Cardinal Verdugo looks to start the new year with ending his El Vago problem. He captures and quickly executes Don Andres Aldana, but when shown to be wrong is forced to acquiesce to Sandoval's demands.

Secundus 1671 - King Sandoval is granted *Rex Castellum* and without his two senior advisors becomes reliant on the other Dons, many of which are NOM influenced.

Quartus 1671 - The restored Montaigne archbishops choose Victor Allais de Crieux as their new Cardinal, so completing the Hieros Council once more.

Julius 1671 - The Hieros Council meets for the first time since the death of the Hierophant. It rules against Cardinal Verdugo's recent actions and confines him to a monastery at the foot of the *Sierra de Hierro* mountains.

Nonus 1671 - Derwyddon is tricked by Queen Maab into battle and trapped inside a small pearl.

Tertius 1672 - Bors McAllister finds the comatose body of Queen Elaine in her quarters, having been struck with Sidhe blade. The Sidhe withdraw from Avalon and the power of Glamour lessens, leaving Carleon a dark place.

Quartus 1672 - With Avalon in turmoil, the Council move to secure parlement using their agents and Lady Killmarvon to rally loyalist forces against Piram.

Sextus 1672 - Facing imminent attack from Piram's forces, parlement issues an emergency bill to raise a new model army that will serve them alone.

Corantine 1672 - The O'Bannon disappears supposedly in order to fight for the Sidhe, leaving the Inish court mainly in

the control of the O'Brien clan.

Nonus 1672 - After a number of indecisive skirmishes and in the coldest month in living memory, the army of King Piram marches on Luthon.

Sextus 1673 - At the annual Althing, the Vestenmannavjar leadership decides on an exodus into the West. A small group stays behind under the control of Magnus Brynjulfrsson to face the Vendel.

Corantine 1673 - A large army of Vendel and Eisen mercenaries, funded in part by NOM finances, destroys the remaining Vesten tribes on the slopes of the Tärn.

Octavus 1673 - Cardinal Sergio Bilardo dies during the debates on choosing the new Hierophant. Against the influence of the Council, the other Cardinals chose the unknown Eisen Ferenc Orlund von Durenstad in his place.

Decimus 1673 - Herself out of the running, Cardinal Durkheim confronts Cardinal Christina about her connections to NOM, although the Eisen does not know the exact details of the group. Cardinal Christina Lorente de Cisneros quietly removes herself from the running in exchange for taking over the reformation of the Inquisition.

Nonus 1674 - After almost another year of intermittent debate, the Cardinals finally chose the new Cardinal Ferenc to become the next Hierophant. Humbled and shocked by the selection, Ferenc takes the name Pius and is presented to the jubilant people in Vaticine city.

Primus 1675 - Serk Markstrom finally makes his move against Arciniega by levelling accusations of incompetence in his leadership with the selection of the Hierophant.

Secundus 1675 - Cardinal Esteban Verdugo, having returned to his residence in the Vaticine City receives an unexpected visitor.



The Burning Fortress

History

One of the most powerful castles in Théah rests high in the mountains of *La Sierra de Hierro*. These mountains in Rancho Gallegos reach from the southern end of the *La Peninsula de las Naranjas* to the end of the great River. The people here, who have little contact with the rest of Castille, share a rich history of folk tales and superstitions about the mountains and those who work with flame, the *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerers. But stories about these magic-users are not restricted to the wilds of Castille's highest mountains. Even at the most sophisticated dining tables in the nation, you may hear tales about enclaves of these excommunicated magicians and their wild experiments with deadly flames.

The tower is so closely formed to the cliffs on which it rests that it looks like a giant claw gripping the landscape. The cliffs are over 200 feet high, and the fortress walls rise 80 feet above that. Set behind the walls is a smooth stone keep that rises yet another 70 feet. The fortress goes down as far as it goes up, burying itself into the mountain beneath in a mass of tunnels and dungeons below. The only outward sign of this network are five support towers fused to the cliffs. Resembling fingers, they give the castle its claw-like appearance. One of them serves as an entry point and (given the height of the structure) is the only way into the castle.

Despite its towering height, the castle is also one of Castille's most well kept secrets. Few travellers dare to stray into the lands controlled by *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerers. Those who do so rarely get close enough to see the fortress before those same sorcerers deal with the interloper. The lord of this fortress is the famed scientist Alvara Arciniega. It is his stronghold and secret base, but it is not just there to hold against the Inquisition; even Cardinal Verdugo has little idea that it even exists. While equipped to defend itself, the fortress is in reality the largest laboratory in Théah with whole rooms dedicated to single experiments and is the foremost place for the study of Blood Science.

The tower did not belong originally to Arciniega. During its 600-year history, many of its owners have added to the

original structure, not the least of whom was the old king of Castille.

Juan Carlo Gallegos, a Castillian nobleman, originally built the castle long ago sometime between 800 and 850 AV. His merchant dealings made him very rich, largely because he took risks with bad cargoes and criminal elements. As his wealth and power increased, he grew arrogant. His risk taking reached a peak when he tried to double-cross the Lorenzo family in Vodacce, which turned out to be a big mistake. He realised his error soon after the deal had been struck, and decided to leave town in a hurry. He needed to find a safe, remote bolthole so he secretly retained the services of an architect and local builders high in the *Sierra de Hierro* Mountains. He reasoned that if he moved around for a while as they built in secret, he could lose the Lorenzos and then go into hiding.

He paid the laborers a good proportion of the money up front telling them to build a strong keep in the mountains. He was going to go "on tour" for a while, and would be unreachable until the project was finished. If he wanted more done, he would send more money. With that he left them to it, and started wandering Théah in an effort to avoid the Lorenzo assassins who no doubt were after him. It was all in vain, as three days later he was found dead in an inn after drinking poisoned wine. With no one to instruct the secret laborers, the work on the tower continued.

No one knew what they were supposed to do and so secret was the project that no one was able to tell them their employer was dead. Juan Carlo had also set up an emergency plan with his steward to keep paying the mountain locals. He had not told him why, so the steward kept paying them, along with other payments that kept the land and estate going.

Nearly fifty years later, the tower was finished and far larger and more impressive than Juan Carlo had dreamed. After all, each time the locals received money, they added something new to the building plans. Even when the architect Marcello Rodriguez, fell ill and died, they completed his final plans. Marcello knew it was going to be his last work, and so he made it his best. When the laborers finished the work they



decided to come down from the hills and ask for the final payment. They were in high spirits and proud in their achievement, so they were a little upset to discover that their employer and his majordomo were dead, and no one had any idea who they were. Needless to say, heated arguments broke out.

The dissension reached the ears of the King very quickly. Neither side would budge from their position. The laborers wanted payment for a completed job, but the family had very little money left and no hope of paying even a fraction of what was owed. They also felt it was not their debt, as they had not asked for a castle in the middle of nowhere. The situation began to get nasty so there was only one solution -- the king decided to buy the castle. He got a good deal because he only needed to pay the final instalment. He got was a castle in the middle of nowhere that he did not really need but royal funds settled the problem and everyone went home more or less happy.

The castle remained almost unoccupied for another fifty years or so, until around 900 AV when the next king of Castille gained another son. Don Faustus del Castillo was an *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerer of incredible potential. As the youngest of several brothers, he had little claim to the throne. What he lacked in birthright, however, he made up for in lineage. His fire magic was some of the greatest Théah has ever seen. He could control great pillars of fire, or create delicate creatures from tiny flickers. The fact that he grew increasingly more obsessed was a minor inconvenience.

As Faustus grew up he was considered a great asset. With such a sorcerer beside them, the royal family feared little. His power was such that he could almost destroy an army with sheets of fire. However, as time passed, it became obvious he had become almost impossible to control. Unless he had one to play with, he would start a fire and the fire in his blood gave him terribly passionate mood swings. He was a teenage nightmare with the power to burn down buildings.

The only person who could control him even a little was his older sister Isabella. She had been born without any fire magic, which made her the calmest and most level headed of the family. Somehow her calm and peace were almost

tangible. Arguments would cease as she entered a room. More importantly Faustus would become quiet and gentle in her embrace.

It was inevitable that Faustus would have to leave the capital some day. The King finally made that decision when shortly after Faustus' fifteenth birthday he burned an entire wing of the palace during one of his renowned "tantrums." Not even the sorcerous might of the entire family or Isabella's gentle touch would be able to halt the blaze before it consumed much of the palace.

The King decided that Faustus and his obsession must be moved somewhere he could do less damage. It was not only his pyromaniac tendencies that made life in San Cristóbal impossible. Due to the rage in his blood, he could not stand the cold. Even in Castille, winter turned him into a shivering wreck. He needed to live in a very warm place. The king had no money to build a new castle even for his own son; besides, it would take time he did not have. When he learned about the family holding high in *La Sierra de Hierro*, his problem was solved. The castle was perfect, miles from anywhere and built to last. In that isolated locale, the King reasoned that Faustus could do little damage.

The King authorised work to strengthen the old walls and fortifications, just in case. Stone was hewn from the nearby rocks to strengthen the main keep and add a low wall around the perimeter. It definitely needed to be strong enough to contain Faustus' worst moments of madness. The only problem would have been the cold from the high altitude but luckily the mountain still had places of volcanic activity. In fact, the castle was built on one, and deep below the basement there was a source of raw magna. Sorcerers from the royal family drew up the river of molten rock and used it to warm the castle. Such heat was almost intolerable for most, but Faustus was happy and content. His sister spent all the time she could with him, keeping him calm and gentle.

The castle also became a great draw for other fire sorcerers. Nobles came to bask in the heat. They also had a wide area to practice their magic without fear of damaging the countryside. It became a popular retreat, and Faustus loved to hear news from home. He also loved the constant chaotic



whirl of people and magic that flowed throughout the place. As a side benefit, villagers from local mountain towns discovered a wealth of trade opportunities were available at the castle. They joined the staff as servants and guards and enjoyed the rich trade the nobles brought with them. A certain degree of intermingling in the remote area led to quite a few children being born with noble blood.

Such heady days of sorcery and hedonism could never last. The warning signs began soon after Isabella married. She went to live with her new husband, (one of the sons of the Eisen Emperor) in southern Eisen, so her visits to Faustus became less frequent. It was not that her husband refused to allow her to visit, but her duties as his wife made her less able to take the long and arduous journey to visit her brother. Soon she became pregnant, and was unable to visit at all for a year. Those around Faustus began to see a return of his renowned fits and tantrums. It was as if some chain that kept him manageable was weakening and breaking. Without his sister's calming influence he could no longer control his rage. Visitors quietly decided to leave after witnessing one too many of his moments of madness.

Left alone, he would retire to the deep places of the castle and cast magma against the walls. He would conjure such heat and flame that the walls would melt around him. He began carving a network of caves under the castle as he took

his frustrations out on the rock beneath.

Word of his state eventually reached Isabella, who realised only she could help him. Although close to delivery, she left immediately and headed to Castille, her husband and retinue in tow to guard her on the journey. When they arrived, things were even worse than she had been told. Only Faustus was left in the castle. Some of the staff had been burned to death in "accidents" and everyone else had fled. Faustus had lost control completely and set fire to everything. While the stones of the castle's walls were intact, every room was an inferno of blazing furniture and tapestries. Isabella and her husband fought their way inside despite the danger. They followed the crazed laughter they heard echoing down the corridors into the dungeons below.

Eventually they came to the deepest room, a cavern of magma where the heat was incredible. On an island below them, Faustus stood, covered in flame, blasting away at rocks with sheets of fire. His laughter echoed round the huge room amid the boiling of molten rock. Thinking the group approaching him were more of the long dead or fled castle occupants come to control him he lashed out with sorcery. Isabella at the head of the group was covered in flame. Faustus saw her engulfed and came to his senses.

The fires throughout the castle extinguished in an instant,



but it was too late for Isabella. She died of her burns in her husband's arms. He said nothing, but picked up his crossbow and shot Faustus through the heart. The mage could have fried the bolt and the men with ease, but did nothing as the shot smashed his chest and threw him off the island into the magma. Isabella was buried nearby, and her husband returned to Eisen. The castle was locked and barred. No one would enter it again for another 300 years.

The dustsheets were removed in the late 1200's. This time, however, it was not some local noble but a notorious group of bandits who took up residence in the abandoned castle. Many bandits had occupied the place, but few for long. Although the place was remote and very inaccessible, no bandit group ever had enough men to cover all the access ways. Sometimes local law enforcers arrested them, other times they were thrown out by a new bandit group. There were even rumours of bandits following a young woman to the cliffs and then plunging to their death.

The group who stayed the longest (around 1400) were truly fearsome. Called *Los Cuchillos Negros* (The Black Knives) they were led by a ferocious man called *Sangriento* ('Bloody') Santos. The group did very well raiding caravans travelling from Vodacce to Eisen or Castille, and then retreating to their fortress if the authorities came along. The operation worked so well that it was not long before they could afford to add to the fortress outer wall. They restored the towers and raised the wall its almost impregnable level. The band was large enough to hold the fortress against the many attempts made by the Castillian authorities to bring them to justice.

Inside their powerful castle *Los Cuchillos Negros* grew arrogant and decadent until they finally went too far. They killed, raped and pillaged their way around a small area "just for fun." Unbeknownst to the bandits the villagers were the families of people who had served in the fortress. Despite their humble appearance, they were skilled *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerers so they simply raised the magma underneath in revenge. The bandits had fortified the fortress so well that they could not escape; they were burned alive to a man, and the castle stood empty once again.

There was to be one last occupant before the place passed to Alvara Arciniega and that was Victor Markstein, a brilliant Eisen doctor and scientist. He had lost his Castillian wife in a bandit attack that left him with a permanent limp. Tragically they had been attacked on their way to his family's estate right after their marriage. After Celina's death, Victor threw himself into his work, hardly noticing when the bandits were caught and hanged. As time went on, he began to focus on darker and darker aspects in the field of medicine. Unable to cope with Celina's death, he searched for a way to bring her back but his experiments grew so distasteful to his neighbours that he was forced to leave Eisen. He came across the empty fortress and set up house there, turning it into a huge laboratory.

No one is really certain about what he did up there. Villagers told of terrible noises late at night. The few servants Victor employed talked of strange and unholy experiments. Eventually the Inquisition took notice and led a small force to take the castle. Few spoke of the inhuman horrors that rose out of the darkness to defend the castle. The only thing that was certain in the morning was that Victor was dead and castle was empty.

Arciniega needed a base of operations in a quiet area and acquired the castle in 1660 for a very reasonable price because the land apparently did not belong to anyone. A scientist himself, he knew about Markstein's laboratory so it was not difficult for him to find the old place and negotiate a sale from Markstein's estate. It was more difficult, however, to win the trust of the local *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerers who have always had connections to the great tower. Arciniega's patient and clever diplomacy ensured that he would last longer than any other occupant.

Layout

The curve of the mountains offers few places to view the structure from the base of the mountains. It is so high up that details are unclear; from the ground it just looks like an old watchtower. Only those willing to brave the climb to stand beneath the massive building can appreciate its size and majesty.

The fortress consists of a huge round tower keep that looms



over a courtyard surrounded by high walls that rise from the cliffs themselves. Sunk into the walls are five circular watchtowers that function as guard posts and equipment stores for those manning the wall. What cannot be seen is the large expanse of tunnels underneath the fortress that were blasted out of the rock by the mad prince of Castille years ago. Others have added to and adapted them, albeit with less dramatic methods.

Thanks to the new inhabitant, the fortress is not what it appears to be. It is no longer merely used as a powerful fortress. Now it is a laboratory, the largest and most well stocked in Théah. The large spaces allow whole rooms to be given over to just one experiment. The powerful walls and strong construction also allow the most dangerous tests to be conducted. Only Arciniega really knows and understands the processes carried out in his castle. His staff is well aware that touching or even looking at things that do not concern them will bring dire consequences.

With the help of local *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerers, Arciniega has modified and expanded the fortress' heating system so that raw magma could be pumped through certain tunnels that were closed off to the inhabitants. The presence of this magma so close to the surface makes the whole place very warm, even in winter. Although it would be possible to provide heat for the top-most rooms, Arciniega has different temperature needs for his experiments, and keeps the higher rooms colder. Containing the power source in the basement is wise for another reason. Experience with Faustus taught that molten rock could do tremendous damage to the castle and its inhabitants should it get out of control. While Arciniega trusts the sorcerer who keeps the system running smoothly, he does not like so much power over his domain in another's hands.

The tower is the oldest part of the structure. Rising 150 feet above the courtyard, it contains 15 floors. The tower itself is quite thin, one of the reasons it can support its great height. The structure is somewhat vulnerable to the punishing winds that blast past at this altitude so the architect designed the first three floors in a bell shape to provide foundation and then built a series of flying buttresses to stabilise the tower which gives it a dark and threatening appearance.

The tower contains mostly laboratories and a few guestrooms. It also contains "guest laboratories," areas for visiting scientists to use. They are fairly basic but sufficient for any scientist in Théah to be impressed by their quality. The same goes for the guestrooms.

Arciniega maintains rooms in the middle of the tower, although the best suite of rooms is at the top with its incredible view over the mountains. Truly pragmatic, the Castillian scientist converted that suite to a laboratory for experiments needing cold and altitude. His rooms below are well appointed but very impersonal. Everything to Arciniega is potential workspace. His laboratories are maintained in fastidious order but his personal quarters are piled high with books and papers in system that only he understands. Despite the appearance of utter chaos, somehow Arciniega manages to find exactly what he wants instantly.

The only truly public areas in the castle are the walls. Arciniega has ordered the tower and catacombs below completely off limits, even to his guards. There are too many delicate experiments to risk some idiot walking into the wrong room at the wrong time. The real reason for such restriction is that Arciniega also has a lot of important guests who like their work and identity kept very quiet.

The guards do not mind being restricted to one area. There is enough space in the watchtowers to house quite an army, but Arciniega does not need one, so much of the space remains empty. The guards tend to congregate in the middle tower, but pass their duty hours in the entrance tower. The walls are thick but not built for living quarters. There are a few corridors to link the towers but no firing positions because the designer wanted nothing to weaken the integrity of the stonework. The guards patrol the walls and the other towers. It would be very difficult to climb the walls so only the entrance tower really requires any manpower. After all, few people even make it this far.

The tunnels are the busiest part of the castle. Arciniega handpicks the few guards stationed here for their skill, loyalty and most importantly their discretion. The tunnels weave under the castle in no particular order, and the whole place is riddled with secret entrances and corridors. A dry



heat pervades the place and gets worse the further down one goes. There are many levels under the fortress, but it is difficult to tell one from the other because of sloping corridors and dead end staircases because a madman cut most of them out.

Deep below them all is the lowest chamber, and the source of the heat – a huge cavern filled with molten lava and containing only a small island in the centre. It has only one entrance and a small outcropping links it to the island. Any wooden object bursts into flame almost as soon as it enters the room. The resident *El Fuego Adentro* sorcerer works here, controlling the flame and heat, which is then directed into the various small tunnels to heat the building. These tunnels are technically large enough for a man to crawl through, if he could resist molten lava.

Dramatis Personae

The Unnamed Man

This quiet and gentle servant was actually created by the previous owner, Victor Markstein, and stands as his greatest achievement. The Unnamed Man is very strong and resilient. The heat from below powers his heart so he cannot leave the tower. He is loyal to Arciniega as he has nowhere else to go, and it is in his personal interest that the fortress stands unharmed. The secrets of his creation were lost with the death of his creator. However, Markstein kept a detailed diary, which Arciniega found in a secret safe in the fortress. The Castillian now keeps the tome locked in a hidden safe in his most secret laboratory. Even he is unwilling to share the secrets of creating life, especially as much of the book is written in Syrneth codes and uses Syrneth items. To see this book would terrify Cardinal Bilardo or any of the members of *die Kreuzritter* who have seen a similar diagram on a plaque in a vault beneath Numa's cathedral.

The Unnamed Man - Henchman (7th Sea™)

Brawn 5, *Finesse* 4, *Wits* 4, *Resolve* 6, *Panache* 3

Reputation: 10

Background: Obligation

Arcana: Self-Controlled

Advantages: Eisen (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Keen Senses, Large, Lightning Reflexes,

Toughness

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 3, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2.

Commander: Strategy 3, Tactics 5, Logistics 5

Servant: Accounting 4, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Haggling 3, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 5, Unobtrusive 5, Valet 4

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Interrogation 3, Memorizing 5, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2, Throw (Knife) 2

The Unnamed Man (d20™)

Fighter 3 / Alchemist 3 / Man of Will 3: CR 9; HD 3D10 +3D6 +3D12+45; hp 95; Init +3 (Dex); AC 19 (+3 Dex +6 UDP); Atks: rapier +7 melee (1d6+4); SA: Craft Elixir, Brew Potions, Unstoppable, Fearless, Clarity; SV Fort+9, Ref+3, Will+7; Str 19, Dex 16, Con 20, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 12; AL N; *Skills*: Alchemy+5, Climb+3, Concentration+5, Decipher Script+7, Diplomacy+5, Handle Animal +4, Intuit Direction+5, Move Silently+5, Profession (Servant/Steward)+10, Sense Motive+4, Speak Language (Eisen, Castille, Théan, Vodacce), Swim+2; *Feats*: Ambidexterity, Blind Fighting, Dodge, Reserve Energy, Servant, Unarmored Defense Proficiency (Beginner)

Ceandro del Vasquez, Resident Sorcerer

Ceandro has served at the fortress for the last five years, succeeding his father who trained him in the arts of *El Fuego Adentro*. Ceandro lives underground near the magma chamber deep below the fortress. He does not need to stay in the chamber all the time as there are at least four apprentice mages who take shifts and assist him. However, he cannot leave the castle itself, in case something goes wrong.

Ceandro is young, and wishes he could travel and see the world but he is happy where he is, and Arciniega rewards his sacrifice by providing a very good lifestyle. Even if he could leave he would not for he has fallen madly in love with Corabella Rodriguez one of the guards (who also shows talent as an *El Fuego Adentro* mage). She seems to return his affections, but has not quite entertained his advances. Some of the other castle residents worry that Ceandro may take any rejection badly, and with dangerous passion. He loves his fire and is only alive when feeling flame run and play at his command. He is a tall and broad man with a passionate demeanour who sometimes displays a worrying tendency towards insanity.

Ceandro del Vasquez - Hero (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Panache 2

Reputation: 10

Background: Obligation

Arcana: Hot-Headed

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Full blooded (El Fuego Adentro), Appearance (Above Average), Showmanship

Athlete: Climbing 4, Footwork 3, Sprinting 3, Throwing 1

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 3, Scheming 3, Seduction 3, Sincerity 3

Hunter: Ambush 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Tracking 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 3

El Fuego Adentro (Master) : Concentrate 5, Extinguish 5, Feed 5, Range 5, Firestarting 5, Flaming Blade 5, Hurl Fire 4, Fireflies 3, Flame Serpent 3, Firebird 4

Gallegos (Apprentice) : Riposte (Fencing) 1, Feint 3, Tagging 1, Exploit Weakness (Gallegos) 2

Ceandro del Vasquez (d20™)

El Fuego Adentro Sorcerer 18 / Courtier 1 / Gallegos

Swordsman 1: CR 20; HD 18D8+1D6+1D8+40; hp 146; Init +2 (Dex); AC 21 (+2 Dex, +9 UDP); Atks: gallegos blade +14/+8/+3 (1d6+1 18-20/x2); SA: Heat Immunity, Range 100, Fire Resistance (10), Fast Healing (5), El Fuego Adentro Check+9, Spell Use, Wealth, Talent, Style & Grace, The First Circle; SV Fort+11, Ref+6, Will+15; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 16; AL CN; *Skills:* Alchemy+8, Balance+12, Bluff+4, Concentration+8, Craft (Blacksmith)+8, Disguise+8, Escape Artist+8, Intimidate+4, Knowledge (Arcana)+8, Listen+10, Move Silently+12, Sense Motive+8, Spellcraft+8, Speak Language (Castille, Vodacce); *Feats:* Appearance (Above Average), Dashing & Daring, Dodge, Low Light Vision, Unarmed Defense Proficiency (beginner), El Fuego Adentro; *Spells* (9/9/8/7/6/5/4/3/2/1 save 10+spell level): All *El Fuego* spells in Swashbuckling Arcana except Firebird

Alois Varnkern, Captain of the Guard

Alois is the powerful half-Eisen, half-Castillian Captain of the Guards for he fortress. He trains new guards and handpicks the best for “special duties” in more sensitive areas of the fortress. He has spent much of his life in Altamira where he gained something of a reputation as a swordsman and mercenary. Although his short stature has made him the butt of many jokes, his skill and temper ensure those jokes are only made once. He fought in the War of the Cross but two years of that much pain and bloodshed was enough to make him loose his faith in the sword, and he retired, returning to Altamira. Arciniega needed a proper

captain for his army after the old captain, a long-serving NOM agent, “retired.” Alois is an honourable and loyal man who loves his new life but keeps such feelings to himself with typical Eisen stoicism. He is aware that his employer has a number of shadowy affiliations but he does not know the details and makes no effort to learn more.

Alois Varnkern – Hero (7th Sea™)

Brawn 4, Finesse 3, Wits 5, Resolve 5, Panache 4

Reputation: 56

Background: Obligation

Arcana: Self-Controlled

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), High Eisen (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Cold Climate Conditioning, Combat Reflexes, Indomitable Will, Small

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 5, Sprinting 3, Throwing 4

Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 4, Scheming 3, Sincerity 3

Hunter: Ambush 3, Stealth 5, Survival 5, Tracking 5

Scholar: History4, Law4, Mathematics3, Philosophy3, Research3

Spy: Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Commander: Artillery 2, Ambush 3, Cartography 2, Diplomacy 3, Gunnery 3, Incitation 5, Leadership 4, Logistics 5, Strategy 5, Tactics 5

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2, Throw (Knife) 2

Rider: Ride 5, Mounting 4

Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 5, Footwork 5, Jab 4, Ear Clap 3, Uppercut 5

Gallegos (Master) : Riposte (Fencing) 5, Feint 5, Tagging 5, Exploit Weakness (Gallegos) 5

Unabwendbar (Master) : Advance 3, Charge 5, Envelop 5, Flank 5, Hold Ground 5, Regroup 5, Scout 5, Set Vs Charge 4, Trim Line 4, Withdraw 5

Alois Varnkern (d20™)

Fighter 6 / Gallegos Swordsman 5 / Unabwendbar

Commander 5 / Wanderer 3: CR 19; HD 11d10+8d8+76; hp 180; Init +2 (Dex); AC 11 (+2 Dex, +16 UDP); Atks: gallegos blade +18/+1 melee (1d6+3 18-20/x2) or pistol +17 ranged (1d10); SA: Weapon Specialization (rapier), The First Circle, The Second Circle, The Third Circle, Concentration, Schooled in Command (includes Leadership and Orders feats), Take & Give Orders, Lead by Example, Evasion, Ward of the Albatross, Uncanny Dodge; SV Fort+11, Ref+7, Will+11; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 10; AL N; *Skills:* Balance+6, Bluff +6, Climb+7, Escape Artist+6, Handle Animal+5, Jump+8, Knowledge (War)+8, Listen+5, Move Silently+8, Profession



(Commander)+8, Ride+5, Sense Motive+6, Speak Language (Castille, Eisen, High Eisen, Vodacce), Spot+5, Tumble+8, Use Rope+8, Wilderness Lore+4; *Feats*: Able Drinker, Back Brother, Beat, Bruiser, Commander, Detect Lie, Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Expertise, Firm Grip, Weapon Focus (rapier), Unarmored Defense Proficiency (master).

Guards

The guards are mainly Castillian men and women, many of whom were recruited from the mountains and trained by the captain and more experienced soldiers. Although they see little active service, Alois allows no one to become soft or let their skills to go lax.

Anyone wishing to visit the tower must first stop at the “waiting place” which is a small cottage set in a clearing in the forest. After a thorough inspection, guests are blindfolded and escorted up the mountain to the fortress. The guards must learn the difficult and dangerous route very well. At least five guards remain in the waiting place at all times.

There is, however, an alternate route from the waiting place to the bottom of the mountain, which is reserved for Arciniega and those he trusts.

Guards of the Fortress Watch (7th Sea™)

Rank Three Castillian Brutes

Threat Rating: 3

Usual Weapons: Swords (Medium Weapons: 6), Firearms (15)

TN to be Hit: 20

Castillian Nation Bonus: These Brutes Roll and Keep +1 extra die on their actions.

Knacks: Ambush 4, Climbing 4, Etiquette 1, Menace 3, Riding 2, Tracking 2,

Swordsmen: Gallegos (Apprentice): Riposte (Fencing) 2, Feint 1, Tagging 1, Exploit Weakness (Gallegos) 1

Standard Guard (d20™)

Fighter 5 / Gallegos Swordsman 1 / Wanderer 1: CR 7; HD 5d10+2d8+7; hp 50; Init +2 (Dex); AC 17 (+2 Dex, +5 UDP); Atks: rapier +7 melee (1d6+1 19-20/x2) or pistol +6 ranged (1d10); SA: Weapon Specialization (rapier), The First Circle, Evasion, Tradesman; SV Fort+4, Ref+3, Will+3; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 12; AL Any; *Skills*: Balance+2, Bluff+2, Climb+6, Handle Animal+2, Jump+2, Ride+2, Speak Language (Castille, Eisen, Vodacce), Spot+2, Swim+2,

Tumble+8; *Feats*: Dodge, Expertise, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (firearms), Weapon Focus (rapier), Unarmored defense proficiency (beginner)

These hard trained men and women are largely untested (there are few attackers in the Fortress' remote location) but are skilled and prepared nonetheless. They are trained and ready to do anything for their superiors. As part of their regimental training the Guards are all Apprentices of the Gallegos School.

Sergeant of the Guard - Henchman (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, *Finesse* 3, *Resolve* 2, *Wits* 2, *Panache* 3

Reputation: -10

Advantages: Castille, Commission, Théan

Knacks: Climb 4, Footwork 3, Throwing 2, Break Fall 1, Leaping 3, Attack (Firearms) 2, Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 2, Ambush 4, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Tracking 2, Riding 2, Etiquette 1, Stand Watch 2, Unobtrusive 1

Gallegos (Apprentice): Riposte (Fencing) 3, Feint 2, Tagging 2, Exploit Weakness (Gallegos) 3

Officer of the Guard - Henchman (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, *Finesse* 4, *Resolve* 3, *Wits* 3, *Panache* 3

Reputation: -15

Advantages: Castille, Commission, Théan, Toughness

Knacks: Climb 4, Footwork 4, Throwing 2, Break Fall 3, Leaping 3, Attack (Firearms) 4, Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 4, Ambush 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Tracking 4, Riding 3, Etiquette 3, Stand Watch 4, Unobtrusive 4

Gallegos (Apprentice): Riposte (Fencing) 4, Feint 3, Tagging 3, Exploit Weakness (Gallegos) 3

Raffaella Corazza, The Collector

In her younger days, Raffaella was a great courtesan attached to the Falisci family. Born to poverty on the mainland, the chance to become a courtesan was a dream come true. She wanted only to escape her life and gain power and respect. But she was not as clever as she thought she was or as ready for the danger of the islands. She made the mistake of cheating a Villanova, and he cut her face to teach her a lesson. The wound left a vivid scar that no amount of make-up could hide, and because of this no one wanted her anymore.

In the space of a year she went from a celebrated courtesan to a common Jenny in Altamira. She had left for Castille

because at least there, no one knew how far she had fallen. Shrewd and desperate, she managed to survive and it was these traits that brought her to Arciniega's attention. When she discovered one of his Harvesters she beat the girl into telling her what was going on and Raffaella realised this may be a way out of the street life. When the beaten Harvester had explained what had happened to her employer, he sent someone to "silence" Raffaella. The clever woman ambushed her would be attacker and forced him to take her to Arciniega.

Impressed by her talent and determination, Arciniega offered her a job. He needed someone to collect the samples from his Harvesters and manage the network. Raffaella was clever and resourceful enough to do that. More importantly she was desperate for a new life, and this was her only chance for a decent one. Arciniega keeps her well paid and she travels round the Harvester network collecting their blood samples and bringing them back to the fortress. She will go to any extreme to protect Arciniega and the life she now has because without it she would have nothing - and nothing to lose.

Raffaella Corazza – Villain (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, Finesse 4, Wits 5, Resolve 4, Panache 3

Reputation: -46

Background: Exiled

Arcana: Ambitious

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Thean (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Appearance (Below Average), Dangerous Beauty, Indomitable Will, Toughness

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 4, Throwing 2

Courtier: Dancing 5, Etiquette 5, Fashion 4, Oratory 4, Scheming 5, Seduction 5, Sincerity 4

Courtesan: Acting 3, Cold Read 4, Gossip 3, Jenny 4, Masseur 3, Politics 3, Poison 3

Performer: Acting, 4, Cold Read 5, Dancing 5, Disguise 4, Oratory 4, Prestidigitation 3, Singing 1

Spy: Bribery 5, Conceal 5, Interrogation 5, Lip reading 3, Memorizing 4, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Streetwise: Socialising 5, Street Navigation 3, Scrounging 4, Underworld Lore 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 5, Parry (Knife) 5, Throw (Knife) 5

Cappuntina (Journeyman): Pin (Knife) 4, Throw (Knife) 4, Trick Shooting (Knife) 5, Exploit Weakness (Cappuntina) 4

Note - Without the long knife scar that runs from her right eye to

her mouth she would have the Appearance (Intimidating) advantage. As it is, she has the Appearance (Below Average) disadvantage. However her 'Dangerous Beauty' negates this a little.

Raffaella Corazza

Assassin 2 / Spy 4 / Courtier 8 / Cappuntina Knife Fighter 3:

CR 15; HD 14d6+3d8+51; hp 130; Init +3 (Dex); AC 21 (+3 Dex, +8 UDP); Atks: knife +11 melee or thrown (1d4+2 x2); SA: Poison Use, Sneak Attack+1d6, Death Attack, Alias, Contacts, Brilliant Getaway, Wealth, Talent, Style & Grace, Iron will, Gossip, Twist the Heart, Dominate the Weak, Versatile, Weapon Specialization (dagger), Quick Draw, Off Hand Fighting, Pinning Attack; SV Fort +4, Ref+12, Will+8; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 17, Cha 18/8*; AL NE; *Skills*: Appraise+3, Bluff +10, Craft (Love Play) +12, Decipher Script+10, Diplomacy+10, Disable Device+6, Escape Artist+8, Gather Information+12, Heal+6, Intimidate+7, Knowledge (Etiquette)+10, Knowledge (Vodacce Games)+10, Listen+12, Move Silently+4, Open Lock+6, Perform+10. Read Lips+8, Search+10, Sense Motive+12, Speak Language (Castille, Eisen, Montaigne, Théan, Vodacce), Spot+12; *Feats*: Alertness, Courtesan, Sex Appeal, Unarmored Defense Proficiency (beginner), Weapon Focus (dagger)

Note - With and without scar her figure is stunning, but her face is twisted

Adventure Seeds

Isabella's ghost still walks the castle walls in the dead of night. She is looking for Faustus' restless soul, hoping to finally bring him peace. His soul writhes in torments of his own devising for killing her. She calls out to the players in their dreams, drawing them to the secret stronghold of Arciniega. She hopes they can call the spirit of Faustus to the mortal realm so that she can forgive him and thereby allow him to forgive himself. But Arciniega and the forces at his command dislike visitors, especially ones who have discovered the secret paths to his stronghold. He is unlikely to believe a ghost showed them the way.

Another twist to the story above is that the woman who walks the walls is not Isabella but Celina, Markstein's young wife who wanders soulless and alone. Before he died Markstein managed to bring her back in the same way he made the Unnamed Man. It was not the Inquisition who burned the castle and killed the scientist. When he brought his wife's body to life he found it had no soul and realised



his wife had truly passed beyond his reach. Either he killed himself in a rage or Celina's now-living corpse destroyed him in revenge for the dark half-life he had given her. It is her soul that calls out to the players to help destroy her body and give her release.

An enemy the players have been trying to destroy begins a secret journey, travelling high into the mountains of Gallegos. The enemy is at the GM's discretion – a member of NOM visiting the stronghold for a secret meeting, a member of the Invisible College, a rogue scientist who wants to share something with Arciniega or perhaps kill the Castillian or maybe it is a member of the Explorer's Society who has wandered away from a dig. By following him the players should get far more than they expected.

One of the players, a sorcerer, wakes up feeling ill after an amorous encounter with a lady of ill repute. Unlike many Harvester encounters, the lady he spent the night with lies unconscious on the floor. After taking his blood she tripped over something on her way out, apparently hit her head as she fell, and knocked herself cold. The player may be curious to know why a vial of blood lies next to her. Will she reveal the reason for the blood, and can the players discover anything more about the conspiracy if they are led to Raffaella?

There are a number of secret rooms within the fortress and catacombs and plenty of space for a GM to add many more. The following rooms could be anywhere in the place, it is up to the GM to decide where to put them. After all, secret rooms don't stay secret if the players get to read this!

While there are plenty of laboratories in the place, there is one that is kept very secret indeed. This is Arciniega's Blood Science laboratory. It is the best-appointed in Théah, filled with the highest quality equipment in abundance. It is used for nothing other than Blood Science. It also contains another area where known potions can be mass-produced although never in great quantities. Arciniega keeps the experiments that work set up to reproduce the same product when he has the materials available. He has more than enough space and resources to do this.

Only two other people, both colleagues of Arciniega, are

allowed into this laboratory: Joshua Daylen, the Avalon physicist (*The Invisible College* p14) and Don Petrigai, a Castillian Lecturer (*The Invisible College* p17)

In another locked room is a glowing Porté portal that will serve as Arciniega's escape route in case the fortress falls under heavy attack. It leads to the basement of his accomplice, Duc Auguste Danceny du Rosemonde (*The Invisible College* p72-73, 112) in Montaigne. Both ends of the gateway are under heavy guard. Arciniega knows that his escape plan could also provide a way for spies to enter his citadel. To ensure the Duke keeps his side of the gate well guarded, Arciniega has told him he will only deliver Porté potions to the Duke this way. The Duke is hopelessly addicted to the potions and knows Arciniega is not bluffing so he allows nothing to harm or disrupt his supply.

The small but very valuable Potion Storeroom is guarded by Arciniega's second best guard. Kept at strictly regulated temperature and humidity levels, it contains every Blood Science potion currently created. Many of the ingredients for Arciniega's Blood Science experiments are also stored here, including sorcerous blood collected by the Harvesters and kept in a chilled storage unit.

Arciniega's most trust guard watches over the most secret room in the entire place. Only Arciniega and the guard know where it is and only Arciniega knows what it contains. The room is a great chamber with thirteen chairs, and is one of the secret meeting places for NOM. The guard knows the faces of the 13 men and women who are allowed to enter this place, but does not know their names. As a servant of NOM himself, he would not reveal them if he did. The inner council of NOM meets very rarely and not always in this place. In this room high in the mountains of Castille, decisions have been made that have changed Théah and toppled kings.



The Secret Library

Background

The Hieros War changed the shape of the Vaticine Church like no other event since the Corantine Convention that defined the faith. With the power shift to Castille, the Vodacce church leaders were left without their power base in a nation that prizes influence and intrigue almost above anything else. It was only a matter of time before they took steps to try and regain some of their lost influence. One of those steps was ensuring that the main library of the Vaticine faith remained firmly in Numa, where it had been located since the days of the founding of the church. The donation of a vast cache of seized Crescent literature and knowledge was the cornerstone of this plan to secure its future and hopefully the careers of the Vodacce Cardinals.

However, like many things in Vodacce it was not only the blatant power plays of the Vaticine Cardinals that was behind this move. The Council of Thirteen were firmly behind the cause of keeping the library in Numa for one simple reason, they control it and it contains the greatest collection of secrets in the entirety of Theah. Controlled by the Numanus family since the times of the Second Prophet, the library contains a Secret Library with it. While the existence of the Secret Library is rumoured by many, its existence is refuted by the Church and only known for certain by very high-ranking members and a selected few church scholars. The Secret Library, as far as the church is concerned, contains all the Crescent texts and other material that could be considered contentious or heretical. For centuries now though it has also itself hidden another secret that is known to even fewer.

The Numanus family have maintained their position in Novus Ordum Mundi for all these years through the fact that they have the greatest information network in existence. A veritable web of operatives and agents provide rumours, gossip and facts up through a complicated system to the family in Numa. These files are

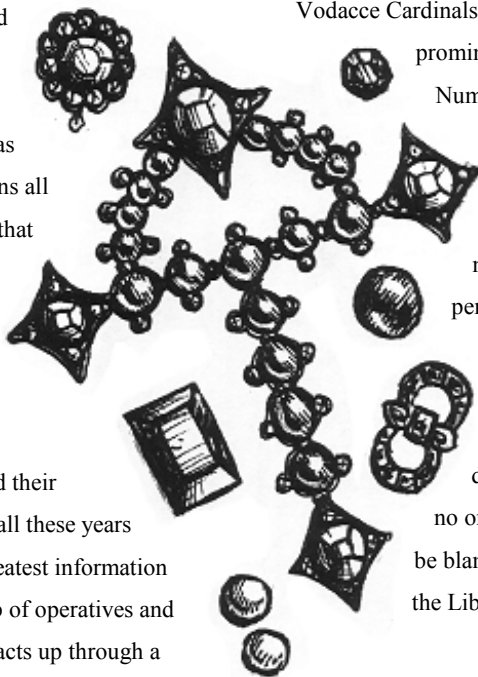
stored in the Secret Library, literally under the very noses of the Vaticine church itself. The great players of Theah know that the Numanus family control a resource like this, though not where it is, and the family does great trade in selling information to the great, not so great and those that aspire to greatness.

The Library

The Library itself is a sprawling mass of ancient and more modern buildings across the centre of Numa, centred on the old Forum building that used to house some of the governance for the Numan Empire. The library scholars that spend most of their lives working within the walls of the Library are likely the only ones that know the exact layout of the facility, with its labyrinthine corridors and small collections of texts in various areas. Many over the years have proposed reorganising the entire library along various systems, but as well as being a mammoth task given all the texts involved, there are those that strongly oppose such a step either due to tradition or for the fact that it would reduce the power and influence of those few that do know where things are located. While not overtly corrupt it is certainly the case that a donation to one of the senior scholars is often helpful in locating obscure texts that the reader could have spent days or weeks trying to track down by themselves. The library is maintained by the graces of the

Vodacce Cardinals and also by the donations of prominent Vodacce families, especially the Numanus who have always been one of the greatest patrons of the Library and so wield great influence in the management and access. Due to the nature of Vodacce society, no one person has ever taken direct control of the Library, but it is rather overseen by a board of senior church scholars that while a very inefficient system does have the distinct advantage that no one person is the target for plots or can be blamed for anything that occurs within the Library.

The aim of the Library is to contain a copy of every text of worth within Theah, although the works of the



heretical Crescent Empire and far Cathay are generally overlooked in this regard. It is also notable that while there are quite a few books on Ussura and the Orthodox Church, these are mostly discourses written by western scholars and not native Ussuran texts. Since the development of the printing press, the number of books produced throughout Theah has increased dramatically, which has made collecting and sorting new books to the Library ever more difficult. The tradition of having links with the monastic orders that used to transcribe the texts by hand and produce beautiful illuminated manuscripts has also been a casualty of this modernisation. Many scholars from outside the Library now comment that the Library is becoming increasingly more staffed by bureaucrats and clerks than with actual scholars.

Access to the Library is provided to anyone who can prove their worth and need in accessing the books. This is usually done by a reference from a known church scholar or one of the Universities that are associated with the Vaticine church. Scholars from Avalon and Vendel are not barred access, but it is certainly the case that processing their applications may take longer or involve significantly more paperwork. It has always been the tradition that Numan locals can also have access to certain parts of the Library and there is a Public Reading Room near the Piazza di Imparare, which contains many common books, such as the main Vaticine books of worship and histories of Vodacce and the Numan Empire. The public areas are guarded by a number of the Church Guard, who in theory are also responsible for the security of the rest of the Library complex, but in practice leave the closed areas to the scholars.

The Secret Library

The Secret Library is located on the top floor of one of the oldest parts of the entire Library complex, under the domed roof of the ancient Palazzo dei Pubblici building. This is the only other location apart from the Public Reading Room that has a permanent presence of guards, with two patrolling the floor on a rotating shift. The Secret Library consists of a single large room split over three floors with a large central atrium. Entered into by a non-descript set of oaken doors, the library is one of the best examples of late Numan design and would be one of the celebrated works of architecture if it was generally known about. At the centre is a large brass

orrery showing the rotations of the planets around the sun Solas. Each of the spheres representing the planets is decorated with semi-precious stones associated with the gods from the old Numan pantheon. Surrounding this is a whole series of neat wooden bookcases, all with gridded lockable fronts filled with texts in dozens of languages from around Theah. Small spiral staircases, crafted in wrought iron after the older wooden ladders proved to be too dangerous for the scholars to use, reach the two higher levels. The top of the three floors is given over entirely to the Crescent collection and includes the wealth of texts seized from Alexia by the Vodacce crusaders. Small desks and leather armchairs are positioned around the rooms, mainly under the shuttered windows for the few scholars who use the Library to work on.

Entrance to the Secret Library is incredibly restricted although the vast majority of the scholars working in the Library do not even realise it exists. Four of the senior scholars who oversee the Library have permanent keys of access, as do each of the Cardinals. The Numanus family hold three keys that allow them, their agents and selected members of NOM to gain entry. Further there are three remaining keys that can be issued to scholars who manage to convince the senior scholars that they need access to the texts locked away in the library. All of these keys are not simply items but rather ancient relics from the days of the early Numan period, which do not rely on turning a mechanical lock but simply unlock the door by being placed within the keyhole. This feature has meant that the Library has resisted all attempts by entry from thieves and other criminals who have somehow found out about the Library or simply opportunistic about the only seriously locked door in the complex.

Secret within a Secret

The true value to NOM lies not in the wealth of information held in the Vaticine Library, but rather in what it in itself hides. A second collection of books that even the scholars are completely unaware exists. The access to this collection is only known to the Numanus family and their very trusted associates, but by manipulating the orrery at the centre of the room using the small set of brass wheels at its base, the planets can be placed in a certain alignment. When that



happens anyone standing in the room will feel a momentary sense of unexplained nausea and perhaps the briefest spell of the light dimming. While they appear to be in the same room, the doors will not open and if they inspect the shelves they will find that many of the books have changed from their heretical contents to the largest collection of information, secrets, rumours and gossip in the entire of Theah. This is the jewel of the Numanus family that has kept them in power for so many centuries, allowing their spy network to collate all their information and store it in the one location that no-one would ever imagine to search. The Numanus will spend any effort to protect this resource and any hint that someone knows of its secret will meet with quick and violent action. However, they also know that the Vaticine church itself will go to great lengths to protect their own Secret Library and so do most of the work for the family. An adventurer that seeks to get the Church to help them by telling a Cardinal of the heinous use of their Library will meet with derision that something like that could have occurred for all this time and then questions as to how they came to know about the Library itself. While the Cardinals certainly do not approve of it on a moral basis, more than one curious scholar has been dealt with by the Inquisition for coming too close to realising that the Church was covering up the extent of knowledge they have in their possession.

Even the Numanus family do not know exactly how their inner library works, the device that has been incorporated into the orrery was found by a Numan expedition to a distant island far in the past. While a simple curiosity to most, it was traded from one family to another until a scholar working for the Numanus happened to activate the device within a closed room and found himself in a strangely different place. It is possible that the device accesses some alternate reality similar to the Dark Paths, but it works only for some reason in small, enclosed spaces. If there is a window or an open door, the device simply fails to do anything. The Numanus library has been designed so that the alternate version looks almost identical to the real one, if there are any major changes to the Secret Library, then a Numanus agent will see that the changes are also carried out in their version. The collection of information stored by the family is spread through the room itself, replacing copies of the main library text as it grows and in order that only the senior members fully know

where to find things as an extra precaution.

Adventure Seeds

While it is unlikely that most parties would come across as major a secret as the Library in smaller campaigns, if NOM is heavily involved as an enemy to the group it is possible that certain paths may lead to its discovery. The most obvious route would be through the Numanus family itself, or Marcus Aurelian as their ambitious new leader. Otherwise the potential would be for accidentally uncovering the start of a trail that leads to this destination.

The party could defeat an important villain or intercept a shipment that contains one of the three Numanus keys. While it looks very much like an ornate brass key, there is something unusual enough about it and the fact that it was so well guarded, that it would warrant investigation by the players. There are a number of groups in Theah that could help with the start of this, such as the Church itself which may recognise the early Numan motif or the Explorer's society who may notice that the craftsmanship resembles certain Synchronic artefacts. This could potentially lead them to the Library at Numa to find out more information, but if the object is shown to certain scholars there it will not gain the positive response that they may seek. It is likely that the Church would act to try and work out where the group got it from and how much they know. If the knowledge of their possession comes to NOM's attention, their reply may be rather more direct.

The Church or the Numanus family may also use the group to their own ends to defend the Secret of the Library. If the players have come to the attention of either group for their skill in resolving situations, they may be recruited for a mission. A scholar has removed one of the books from the Secret Library and fled the city, they want it back and the rogue scholar dealt with. While the Church may refrain from endorsing violence, this is one of those times where the morals of governance become murky and a worried Cardinal may well sanction or at least turn a blind eye to such action. If the players deal with the situation, they will be rewarded and may have gained some influence, but if they are just that little bit curious they may want to know what is so important about the book and where it was stolen from. This would



lead them into direct conflict with their previous employers and perhaps even in league with the fleeing scholar and whatever agenda or organisation he represents.

Finally, it is quite possible that one of the older Secret Societies has come to suspect that the Vaticine church is hiding a wealth of information. Certainly the Rose & Cross have an extensive collection of Crescent texts themselves and so know exactly what kind of information was available to the Church through the Crusading period. The connections that the Kreuzritter have in the higher echelons of the Church may also point towards this knowledge, which they may want to investigate for information on the Bargain and how to oppose the Strangers.

Guard Tomas Camicia di Rossa (7th Sea™)

Brawn 2, *Finesse* 3, *Wits* 2, *Resolve* 3, *Panache* 2

Reputation: 8

Background: Vow

Advantages: Castillian, Thean (R/W), Vodacce (R/W),

Membership (Church Guard, NOM)

Athlete: Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Sprinting 3, Throwing 1

Polearm: Attack (Polearm) 4, Parry (Polearm) 3

Wrestling: Grapple 3, Break 2, Escape 2

Rossini Halberdier (Apprentice): Beat 2, Disarm 3, Bind 2,

Exploit Weakness 2

Captain Lucius di Schermo (7th Sea™)

Brawn 3, *Finesse* 4, *Wits* 3, *Resolve* 3, *Panache* 2

Reputation: 17

Background: Vow

Arcana: Inspirational

Advantages: Castillian, Eisen, Thean (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Academy, Faith, Guardian Angel, Membership (Church Guard)

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Sprinting 3, Throwing 2

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 3

Polearm: Attack (Polearm) 5, Parry (Polearm) 4

Wrestling: Grapple 4, Break 3, Escape 3, Head Butt 2

Rossini Halberdier (Journeyman): Beat 4, Disarm 5, Bind 4,

Exploit Weakness 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 3, Parry (Fencing) 2

Shield: Parry 3, Attack 3

Swords of Solomon (Apprentice): Bind (Shield) 2, Disarm

(Fencing) 2, Attack (Shield) 3, Exploit Weakness 2

Note - Church Guard shields do 1k1 damage

Guard Tomas Camicia di Rossa (d20™)

Fighter 4 / Rossini Halberdier 3: CR 7; HD 7D10+7; hp 75; Init +2 (Dex); AC 17 (+2 Dex, +5 UDP); Atks: polearm +8 melee (1d8+2 x3); SA: Protect your Charge, Anticipate the Attack; SV Fort+9, Ref+6, Will+4; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 12; AL LN; *Skills*: Balance+2, Bluff+2, Climb+6, Jump+2, Sense Motive+8, Speak Language (Castille, Thean, Vodacce), Spot+6, Swim+2, Tumble+8; *Feats*: Power Attack, Membership (NOM), Weapon Focus (halberd), Weapon Specialisation (halberd), Unarmored Defense Proficiency (beginner)

Captain Lucius di Schermo (d20™)

Fighter 4 / Rossini Halberdier 5 / Swords of Solomon 2: CR 11; HD 11D10+11; hp 118; Init +6 (Dex, Improved Initiative); AC 21 (+2 Dex, +9 UDP); Atks: polearm +8/+3 melee (1d8+2 x3) or serpent sword +11/+6/+1 melee (1d12+2 19-20/x2); SA: Protect your Charge, Anticipate the Attack, Get them Before they Get You, Cover the Charge, Alongside the Brethren; SV Fort+13, Ref+8, Will+5; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 14; AL LG; *Skills*: Balance+2, Bluff+2, Climb+8, Diplomacy+2, Intimidate+4, Jump+2, Sense Motive+12, Speak Language (Castille, Eisen, Thean, Vodacce), Spot+10, Swim+4, Tumble+8; *Feats*: Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (halberd), Exotic Weapon Proficiency (serpent sword), Unarmored Defense Proficiency (intermediate)

Other Important Locations

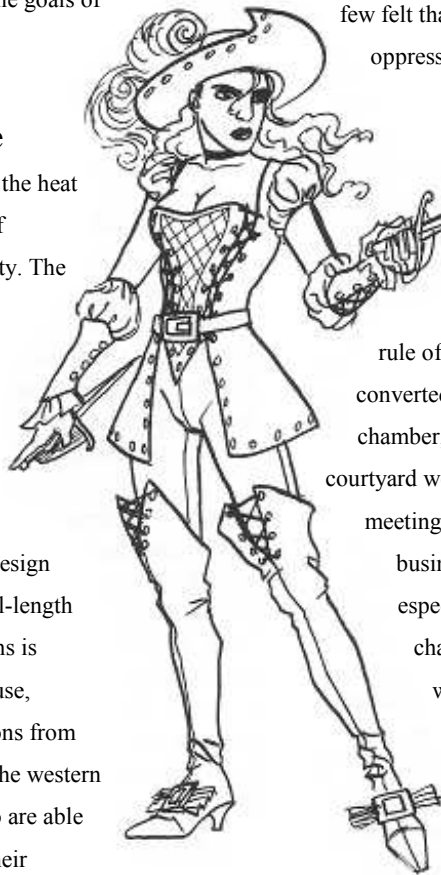
The House of Nine Keys

The Paix chapterhouse of the Rose & Cross in southern Montaigne would seem to be an unusual stronghold for NOM but for the fact that Hughes Sices du Sices has maintained his position in managing the location following his ascension to be Grand Master. Usually the Grand Master of the Order is based from Crioux House, but Hughes argued strongly that he should remain at Paix and that he could not possibly take over Crioux House as a mark of respect for the fallen Aristede Baveaux. The fact of the matter is that he has spent the last decade slowly building up his resources and network within the House of Nine Keys and had no intention of starting that process again. While Hughes may be in effective control of the Rose & Cross, he must still act with great care as the organisation would almost certainly turn on him if they knew his true allegiances. He has ensured that key people within the House are loyal to him and open to a certain degree of flexibility in carrying out missions that he

may ask them to do. Only in the most extreme cases of need has Hughes had to put one of his Knights into a position where they need to perform an criminal or immoral act, and he has been sure to show that such an act was absolutely necessary for the greater good even if it was not really the case. The greater benefit of the House is not therefore in its occupants, but more the location within the old diplomatic hub of Montaigne, where NOM agents work in *le Labyrinthe* to gather information and forward the goals of the Council.

Salon di Lamierine Rosse

This base for the Espectro Acero in the heart of Dionna appears as any number of gentleman's duelling clubs in the city. The ancient façade is a fine example of late Numan architecture and the interior is sumptuous to match. With a member's lounge and small library, the majority of the building is taken up by fencing studios, all following a traditional design with wooden panelled walls and full-length mirrors. A wide selection of weapons is available for those training here to use, including a number of exotic weapons from places like the Crescent Empire of the western islands. From this base the Espectro are able to train new recruits and organise their distribution to where they are needed by the Council. Being close to both Numa and the border of Castille, they are positioned well to send operatives to those areas that are of critical importance to NOM. While Quinn himself tends to travel around the various Council strongholds to ensure the efficient running of the group or is performing a mission for Archiniega, he maintains an apartment within the Salon building for when he is needed in Dionna or wants to take a more active role in training of new members. It is within the Salon that Quinn instructs selected members in his own school of assassination, those that fail the lesson are usually found in an alley sometime after their instruction as a pointed message to the rest of the group and also a bit of practice for one of the trainees.



The Palace of the West Bridge

The parlement building in Luthon has become in recent years a new playground for the Council, with a number of members having agents working its hallways and meeting rooms. Formerly one of the main Montaigne estates in their capital, it was abandoned by one of the Montaigne families that fled back to the safety of the homeland. Its size and grandiose style were of little use to the native populace and a few felt that it should be tore down as a sign of the oppressive rule they had outlasted. Instead in an act of extreme practicality it was converted into the home of the new and enlarged parlement, the system of governance that had preceded the noble rule of the Montaigne. The main ball room was converted with raised benches to become a central chamber, while the rooms around the central courtyard were easily converted into offices and meeting rooms. It is said that more political business takes place in the small rooms and especially the bar of the Palace than in the main chamber itself. The emergence of a new wealthy class of businessmen and politicians in Avalon has lead to more groups having an influence on the role of parlement and this is a trend that NOM has exploited over the recent years.

Universidad di Archiniega

While the university is now without the presence of Alvara Archiniega himself, it is still one of the most important centres of academia for the Council due to the work of Alvara and Iselo before him in establishing a network of scholars and administrators who were either working for NOM or able to be influenced into carrying out their goals. As the most prominent university in Castille that was not dominated by the Inquisition, it proved a useful resource and was also one of the main locations involved in the creation of the Invisible College and its subsequent moulding by Alvara.

Behind the Curtain

Bringing NOM into your game is rather difficult. The Council of Thirteen are not there as cannon fodder or ‘villains of the week’. They are dangerous, Machiavellian and protected by layer upon layer of subterfuge. The player characters cannot just go blazing in, or they are going to get killed, that is if they can even find the right place to attack. NOM is a dark shadow behind plots and double dealing that will haunt the characters, not meet them head on. It is so cloaked in subterfuge that it will take a long time for a group of players to even discover the most basic facts about the organisation. So how do you make use of such a secret organisation in your game when it is difficult to even announce its very existence to the players?

Not for the one night stand

In general, NOM is so vast and far reaching that it should be reserved for a full campaign. However, there is a lot of interesting information in this book which you may want to use even if you do not want to make NOM the feature of the campaign. Luckily there are ways to do this without bringing the full force of NOM down on the characters. One option is to put the players up against one of the individual council members. Just because Villanova is a member, not everything he does involves NOM. Each member of the council has their own agenda that NOM may know nothing about; none of them are slaves to the organisation. In fact, each of them probably thinks he is using the others for his own ends. So the characters can try to thwart Giovanni Villanova (or die trying) without crossing the line into dealing with NOM. However, in fighting Villanova they may get the impression he has help from other allies, which they may later investigate. This could be a way to extend a single adventure into a larger NOM based campaign.

NOM itself is far too convoluted to allow you to get deeply involved in the politics of the organisation in a short adventure. While you can allow the characters to skirt the edges of the society, you are better off using a different enemy organisation such as ‘The Black Tabards’ who can be dealt with more directly and can provide a satisfactory conclusion to a shorter adventure. NOM (and even each

council member) isn’t there to be defeated and destroyed, and certainly not after only one adventure. They provide a powerful force that the characters can occasionally thwart, but never truly destroy without years of bitter struggle. To do any less is to downgrade NOM and create a huge anticlimax. After all, if NOM is the greatest of enemies, where is the challenge when it is gone? The longer the characters have to fight the enemy, the better the final payoff for defeating it. You may find ‘Wolfram and Hart’ in the TV series ‘Angel’ a good example of this in storytelling. In a NOM campaign the important thing is that the good guys defeat the plans of the organisation, even if they cannot make a dent in its power, influence or resources.

Keep the curtain closed and glance behind

So NOM is better dealt with in a long campaign. Even the existence of the organisation is a secret, from the players as well as the characters. However, that doesn’t mean you can’t use the organisation long before the characters ever get to hear of it. In a long campaign you can have an awful lot of interesting things happening in the background that the players may not discover until years later, but this does take planning. When the characters begin their adventures, they might get involved with all manner of folk. There is no reason not to have a couple of these people have ties to NOM. They shouldn’t be council members at this stage, just agents working for the organisation, but crossing them and foiling their plans will get the attention of NOM. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that putting the players against NOM must mean the involvement of the council. NOM has plenty of other spies and lieutenants, many of whom are dangerous and resourceful in the extreme.

If the characters do well in their battles against NOM (whether they know who their true enemy is or not) and prove themselves capable and resourceful, then the organisation may keep an eye on them, as it will take a while to decide if the characters are enemies or potential recruits. Conversely they could instead be watching to see if the characters are even a threat at all. If they just got lucky foiling the villain’s plans, NOM may just want them disposed of. However, this may not mean simply murdering them, destroying the resources and credibility of enemies is far more effective. After all, killing somebody raises



questions and NOM is above petty revenge attacks. This is why it is in the position that it is today. It is important to remember that NOM takes its time. It will be patient and only move when assured of success. The council may look like Bond villains, but they don't make the same mistakes.

At this stage the players will still be completely unaware of NOM. The bad guy is certainly not going to say anything about it. He knows that if he does, he may be dead before nightfall. Anyone who works for NOM will never divulge their association unless tortured or interrogated. They are certainly not going to volunteer the information, and the characters won't know to ask. If you want to be especially sneaky, then you can ensure that not even the bad guy knows anything about NOM. He is just delivering a cargo, and the agents of NOM are employing him or just watching from afar. In this case he is working for NOM, but has no more idea about it than the players do. Don't be afraid to put NOM agents a long, long way away from anything that may link them to the bad guys, especially at the beginning. These people are extremely subtle and patient.

Predicting the future conspiracy

This may all seem a bit pointless. After all, if the players don't know NOM are involved in some way, why does it matter? The answer might only be apparent when you reach the end game, but remember that the best plots take time to build. So don't be afraid to take time building yours.

Imagine the looks on the player's faces when they discover the guy they fought a few years ago in the campaign was part of the organisation they are fighting, or that a minor NPC is actually a member of the council who has been watching them since the beginning. Everything in your game will suddenly take on new significance as they become aware you have been playing them all from day one. Who else can't they trust? How long has NOM been involved? Was it coincidence at all that they got together in the first place, and are any of the other players in on this as well?

If you are looking for a model, then watch the 'Alias' and 'Babylon 5' TV shows. Both have complicated arc plots that take several seasons to develop. As a viewer you are amazed and intrigued by how things relate in the previous seasons to what is happening now. In 'Babylon 5'

particularly, throw away lines and comments come to have great significance later on. Again, the key here is forward planning. Just like the writers of the TV shows, you must have at least a loose idea of how you want to see things develop. That way you can create vast and intense arc plots, as long as you are patient enough to let them develop slowly. So look for the small things and make them important in ways the players cannot dream. For instance, let's say a character abuses a Jenny, or spurns the love of a paramour. The character thinks little of the incident and forgets about it before too long. However, should the lady have another lover who is involved in NOM, the character could be in a lot of trouble. When NOM comes after them, they may wonder which dastardly plot they foiled to bring such wrath. Few will consider such a forgettable mistake to be the cause of the storm that descends on them. To make things even more complicated, perhaps the lady's lover does not have the go ahead from NOM for revenge. What will the players think when he turns up dead after threatening them, and will they be blamed? You may also want to keep in mind that it need not be a person, or committing a mistake that gets NOM's attention. For instance, the characters foil a group of slavers, the slaves are freed and the ship's remaining cargo is impounded. Now, suppose NOM had a small cargo in the hold, mixed in with a few others, nothing important or illegitimate, just a few bales of cloth. This seems innocuous until you discover the cloth was a pay off to a merchant who wanted payment in something less traceable than money. Now the payment is no use, as impounding it has created a paper trail and the merchant is causing all manner of problems for NOM. Whose fault is it? Why the do-gooder characters fault of course.

If this all sounds too complicated, don't worry. As a GM you can rewrite the unknown parts of history as you go. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, and you can always change and adapt the unknown past of your adventures when it doesn't conflict with what actually happened. Say that you put an NPC pirate against the characters, one you expect them to easily defeat. However, he manages to escape and you decide to use him again. You certainly expect him to get killed this time, but again the characters make a mess and he escapes. So you decide he has a NOM connection, that it is NOM helping him escape each time. This soothes the



character's ego and provides you with an agent of the organisation. When the players finally defeat him and possibly discover his allegiance, they will be amazed. They will assume you had this idea from the very start, and not a few days before the last game session. Suddenly your Machiavellian scheming places you in a new light and the players are intrigued about the other plots wait for them in the game.

Down the rabbit hole

However it happens, eventually the characters will discover the existence of NOM. So then what do you do? Luckily, the players need not discover everything all at once. The first thing they are likely to find out is the name. Make sure some NPC dies to bring them even this small piece of information, to underline its importance. The characters should realise from the first encounter that this organisation is willing to protect its secrets, whatever they may be.

At this stage of the campaign don't make NOM the central focus quite yet. Instead, begin to reveal the depth of the conspiracy. They should believe NOM to be something new at first. Let the only piece of information they know (the name and possibly symbol of NOM) start to appear in all manner of places. Suddenly lots of disparate and powerful things are connected somehow. Next, let them hear the names of their old enemies connected to the organisation. These connections won't be direct at first, use lots of circumstantial evidence to lead the characters to this assumption about NOM's presence in their past dealings, and even then only for a few of their enemies.

This will serve to make them wonder two important things, how big is the conspiracy, and how deep does it go? They must wonder how many people already know about this organisation or are working for it. Do all of their old enemies have a hand here, or just the ones they know about? The depth of the conspiracy will let their paranoia run riot. Their first thought may be to call on the authorities. However, if they start to see circumstantial evidence linking their friends to the organisation they will get really scared. Who can they tell? Who is really their friend? Does NOM know how much they have figured out, or worse know more about them than they do about it?

There are all manner of ways to enhance paranoia, but do it with subtlety. The key here is in the details. Don't point them to huge clues, lay lots of small ones in front of them, and quietly dismiss their paranoid conclusions. The players will start to wonder what you are up to, and that alone will kick in their paranoia. However, be very careful not to overdo it. An enemy the characters cannot see is very frustrating and may provoke your players into acts of desperation with their characters. They may try and blow things up or assassinate their suspects, no matter who they are. Nothing wrecks an atmosphere of brooding menace than a barrel of gunpowder. So when the battle lines between NOM and the players have been drawn, provide them with something to fight.

The enemies should gradually build from the toadies and pawns to lieutenants and even finally a council member. Again, take your time. Start with the pawns who are so scared they will die or commit suicide rather than give away secrets. The player won't learn much from them, but at least they are trashing some of the bad guys. When they have dealt with a few of those, let them get the name of a proper agent of NOM, and craft a few adventures that climax with them capturing and finally interrogating him. Then they can use this information to try and locate the 'mysterious mastermind' behind their enemy. Eventually they may discover the identity of the bad guy (after many mistaken identities) and they can finally place a face to their arch nemesis. Once identified, the characters can spend their time putting a stop to the plans of the master villain, even if he proves untouchable. They will be looking for him to make one critical mistake. All the time they are trying to discover the identities of his accomplices and bring the whole organisation down. If you do this right, even if they destroy the entire council they will be wondering who was behind *them* pulling the strings.

Working for the man

The other way to get NOM involved in your game is to make the players agents, but without them knowing of course. Players have a useful tendency to assume that secrets only ever go one layer deep. Many will assume that they know Arciniega's secrets, because he is the head of the Invisible College. They are very unlikely to assume that he could be



running another, darker organisation as well. If you can convince the players that they have learnt all his secrets (or those of another NOM NPC), they will trust him and as soon as they trust him, they are yours. Usefully, players also have a certain gullibility that makes them trust the secret societies their characters join. So use this, and whatever other tricks you can think of to get them to see the NPCs the way you want them to, but don't overdo it as that is often counterproductive. "What? He gives money to the poor and helps old ladies across the street? That sounds suspicious, we must destroy the fiend!" If the players have to work to discover the 'inner goodness' of an NPC, they will believe it far more as they think they have discovered a secret. They often think all secrets must be true, otherwise why would they be secret? Remember that to a certain degree, you must fool and manipulate the players as well as the characters. It need not be outright lying, but a certain amount of misdirection and false propaganda is still fair. It is all about trust, and you need to gain the players trust to lead them into darkness. However, one trust you cannot abuse is the trust they have in you to create a good story. If you manipulate them just so you can tell them how stupid they were, you deserve all the trouble you are going to get. Either way, they will call you an evil bastard when the game is finished. The important thing is whether they are smiling or growling when they do so.

Using the players as unwitting agents of NOM can be a very good way to provoke adventure and gradually reveal the agenda of NOM to the group. All the time they are working for NOM, they are being assessed on their usefulness. Player characters tend to get the job done (even if they prove a little unconventional) so they will be of interest to NOM as more than just pawns. Good agents are hard to find, and NOM needs all it can get. Quite quickly the players are likely to prove useful and resourceful to the masters of NOM. What will give their employers pause is the degree of stealth and discretion the players employ. NOM wants things handled efficiently and quietly. Subtly and the use of gentle pressure in the right place are the marks of a good agent. While Player characters often succeed, very few do it with any degree of secrecy. So as a GM you must run two separate campaign plots. The first is the open series of adventures for their employer (who is actually a NOM

power-broker). The second is their gradual involvement in NOM. The first you can run as any normal game. The second is very much determined by the way the players go about their missions in the first. After each adventure, secretly mark each individual character for how well they did their part. You are looking for how well they achieved the result, and how subtle and secretly they managed to do so. Award extra marks for using as little resources as possible. Each time the players score well, they will be drawn a little further towards the NOM masters bringing them into their confidence. However, remember that the NOM masters won't let you join with just a single lucky mission. The players must prove consistently useful to be granted higher station among the minions of NOM.

One of us or really one of us?

If the players do well, you may allow them to become full agents. As above, they will first have to prove themselves to NOM. So they will need to unwittingly impress one of the secret masters of the organisation or find out about the society and ask to join. The first option is what we have just talked about, and the second option usually gets you killed. No matter how evil and competent you are, you can't just go into a bar and ask about NOM. Spreading that name around will put you on their hit list very quickly. Once an evil group has got wind of a secret power player in the underworld they are going to have to work very carefully indeed to make contact without getting themselves in trouble.

NOM likes to keep as many people in the dark as possible, so you have to prove rather special to be told the true nature of who you are working for. If the players have proved too squeamish to do evil then they will have to discover the true nature of NOM for themselves (more on that later). So only if the group are pretty nasty are things a little easier. However, just being evil is not good enough. NOM is not by nature an evil organisation. It is a very selfish one looking to gain as much power and resources as it can. It is prepared to do almost anything to get what it wants, but it is not looking to do evil for its own sake. NOM agents will help an old lady across the street or kill her because of what that action gains the society rather than any moral agenda. However, evil agents have more promise as they are more



use. They need not be manipulated into doing bad things, they can just be told to go out and do the job. However, evil people are less trustworthy, they tend not to keep their word and often look to steal from, or blackmail their masters. So NOM employs a few techniques to keep them in line.

If the group prove worthy of elevating to a more informed position, they will be tested, not for ability (which by now should be established) but for morals and loyalty. These tests will be disguised as normal adventures and missions from their patron as usual. They will involve simple things at first. Can they be trusted to take a letter to someone without looking at the contents? Will they deliver the full payment when they are given more money than expected? Can they resist the charms of their patron's stunning and lascivious daughter while they guard her? It will be a long time before they will be asked to do anything more obvious, such as kill anyone for NOM, and by then the society will already have a pretty good idea about whether they trust them or not.

Another good way to ensure loyalty is to make sure the organisation can blackmail their employees. This can be a good way to get free work from them, but is inadvisable in the long term. People coerced into work do not make good agents as they are not looking to further the goals of the society themselves. However, NOM collects as much dirt on people they use as they can and keeps it on file. This way when one of their own threatens to tell the world about NOM, they can calmly hand over the file and announce they will do the same. This has the effect of making the agent realise he has bitten off more than he can chew, and actually creates a greater level of trust. After all, both parties are now keeping secrets for each other, and the agent knows that NOM could have blackmailed him from the start but chose to pay him (very well) instead. NOM does use blackmail on occasion, but not as often as you'd think. Of course this polite behaviour only applies for agents who are useful. Most people who take on the masters of NOM using the threat of exposure find themselves being fished out of the Dionna canals in the morning sunshine.

This leads us nicely into another popular way of keeping people polite, fear. NOM ensures that all of its agents outside the council have a healthy fear of what the society

can do. They do not have to remind their agents about the penalties of failure because these penalties are obvious on a daily basis. This fear need not keep them trembling twenty four hours a day, but it needs to be enough to keep them loyal. So NOM makes sure that while it is draconian in its dealings, it pays very well and does a lot to help its agents when they need it. As a consequence the agents feel they have some back up from the organisation and do well by their association. However they also know that they had better remember who looks after them or they are in trouble. The ways to keep the fear alive are many and varied, and most involve death or pain in some form. The most common are to ensure the agents are there to witness the torture and death of the society's opponents or (as a loyalty test) to be sent to kill people that they know, who are also (knowingly or unknowingly) such opponents. However, there are plenty of other ways to inspire fear, and many are quite subtle. Threats against family are popular, and need not be overt. If an agent comes to visit a secret mistress and she casually says she thinks she is being watched, the agent will feel a cold shudder. Seeing the fear in others can also be a strong motivator. If a powerful duellist or nobleman seems terrified of NOM, he can pass on such fear easily. After all, if the riches or prowess of the duellist or noble cannot protect them, what chance do the agents have? Just to add another level, NOM often employs high level undercover agents whose remit is to 'be afraid of NOM', to inspire this fear in the lower agents.

If the group are trying to toady up to the bosses, NOM can dangle the carrot of proper membership, whether they are really considering it or not. A motivated worker is a dedicated worker and many low level thugs labour under the mistaken belief they are being groomed for top positions. The only trouble here is that NOM does have to promote a few people to keep the pretence up. They get round this by making certain thugs the leaders of other disposable thugs. This way the idiots can get promoted a lot, but never actually get any deeper into NOM. Sometimes the lower end agents become discontent when they figure out that they are not really getting anywhere. So NOM promotes them to run another area of the operations. They say goodbye to their colleagues and set off for their new command, which is usually the bottom of a canal, or the sea between Théah and



the Midnight Archipelago.

When allowing the players to become a part of NOM, remember that you need not treat them all equally. Do not think you need promote them all at the same time. Some players do better than others, and will get ahead on points during the test missions. If someone proves their worth but the other members of the group haven't, you need not wait until they all catch up before you start promoting characters. Needless to say the rest of the group need not know anything about this. NOM isn't fair, and they only employ the best they can find. In fact the character who gets promoted may be assigned the mission of testing his comrades. If the characters are all upstanding and moral, they may not be offered proper membership. However, if one of the characters shows moral weakness as well as competence he may still get a tentative offer. If he accepts he will be assigned to watch the group from the inside and sabotage any plans they have against NOM. The organisation won't want him to kill the others unless things go very wrong. However he will need to get to clues first and destroy witnesses to keep the others in the dark. He may also work to convince some of the group to be a little less moral, grooming them as agents themselves.

Stripping the mask

A game where the players are the patsies for NOM's secret agenda is not going to be fun for long. After all, if they never get to discover the GM's evil plot the only fun you get is to smile smugly at them. This may be fun for a while, but the campaign needs to move on. If the characters are being played along by a traitor, eventually they can discover the viper in their midst. This can be an NPC patron or even (as seen above) one of the group. They may discover some of their missions are not as benign as they thought. They may just get suspicious and decide to investigate their patrons. While they can be manipulated and sometimes do foolish things, never underestimate your player's tendency for cleverness, which under the right circumstances can dupe even NOM.

Discovering the true agenda of NOM is very tricky. They don't reveal themselves on a whim, especially to people they have been manipulating. Doing so is just asking for trouble

and may turn their useful pawns into dangerous enemies.

After all, good agents are also capable opponents, even more so when they realise they have been deceived. However, the players may begin to join up the dots as they do more and more missions for NOM. You can allow them a few small clues to the consequences of their actions. Maybe someone turns up dead after they deliver a parcel to a servant in the victim's house. Perhaps the 'evil merchant' they have just killed turns out to be a dedicated benefactor for the local orphans. These first few clues need not be cast iron proof, just enough to make the players wonder. They may also do a few missions they consider a little suspect, such as gathering blackmail material. No matter who the target is, this can be rather a seedy operation and should start warning bells ringing for them. A society or patron prepared to resort to blackmail, even for supposedly laudable reasons, can't be quite as altruistic as it may pretend to be.

Later on they may start to investigate more carefully, and subtly. They could find out that by delaying a shipment of cloth the price of goods in another market plummeted. Perhaps a contact of theirs is seen far too often in the vicinity of some recent murders. After a while their suspicions may become big enough to be more overt. They could start reading the letters they are delivering and looking into the other business dealings of their patrons.

If the players are really clever they may then try to get inside the operation. NOM can make mistakes, and may offer membership to someone they mistakenly believe to be a promising candidate. With a little playacting, a character might convince someone they are actually evil and dedicated enough to prove useful. If they are then sent to watch the other players they can work as a double agent. This puts one of the characters in a very dangerous position, as while NOM does make mistakes, it doesn't make them very often, and it is rather good at clearing them up.

Eventually you will reach the point where the players are aware of NOM as the bad guy. So where do you go from there when the players may now want to take down Théah's most powerful secret society? If you've done your groundwork properly the answers should be a bit more apparent. The group will either be ready to fight them in a



secret war, or already working for them. Possibly a little of both. From there it can be a straight fight, as the players work to unmask the members of the council and oppose the plans of the organisation. The game can then become a high level investigation, where the players may be able to get help from powerful lords to assist in their investigations. They may not be able to destroy NOM, but they can do their best to unmask and stop their plans. This may get them some of the evidence they need to get some help from powerful nobles and other NPCs. However they must be wary of the hand of NOM behind any potential ally.

In general, there are a few things to bear in mind with NOM. Remember that they are subtle and patient, as much as they are clever and devious. They do make mistakes, but they take their time and do the proper groundwork so these are very few. Powerful as they are, you must allow some chinks in their armour as an invulnerable villain is no fun for anyone. Their main weakness is the quietly fractured nature of the society. For all the power and cohesiveness of the council, they are all powerful individuals in their own right. They are all looking to expand their power, and are only dedicated to NOM because of the power it already has. So use the council as a group of individuals, and not a faceless group of cloaked figures.

This means that (for instance) when the players go up against their patron Arciniega, they may get contacted by Villanova with a clandestine offer of aid and assistance. The question is, does Villanova want Arciniega out of the way, or is he working with him to crush the players? There is only one way to find out, and that is where the adventure really begins.

The Greater Game

“Outrageous!”

Alvara Arciniega’s voice echoed around the stone chamber. Opposite him stood Serk Markstrom, who had been in full flow and now simply glared at the head of the Council. A small smile touched the edge of Giovanni Villanova’s mouth and he brought a goblet of wine up and took a sip.

“How dare you make such baseless accusations in this room. I have broken men for less slander.” continued Alvara visibly shaking with anger. Next to him his daughter watch the exchange with interest.

Not wanting to back down, the Field-Marshal crossed his arms over his chest and retorted, “Then let us settle this as gentlemen of honour and prove me wrong.”

From behind the wine goblet Villanova’s mouth turned up into a full grin.



The next day in Dionna

Serk Markstrom held up the blade and looked down it, the light from outside caught the edge and he smiled. With a turn of the wrist, he brought it down and cut through the side of his thigh. Stifling the briefest of cries, he dropped the now blooded sword and began to apply a dressing to the wound. Hearing a noise, he looked up and saw a silhouette in the doorway.

“Ah Linnae, just in time. I appear to have had an accident while training. How fortunate that you are available to second for me today.” he called out in a deadpan voice.

The master swordsman stepped forward into the room so that his face became visible. “An unfortunate occurrence my friend, however I came to tell you that I am unable to fight Alvara for you.”

The Eisen stopped tying the bandage as all colour drained from his face. In a hoarse whisper he replied, “What?”

“Records have just been brought to my attention that show that Alvara Arciniega is a member of the Guild, and so the byelaws state that I am unable to take a commission on him from another Guild duellist.” replied Linnae Knute without any trace of emotion in his voice.

“But our deal...”

A slightly pained look passed over the man's face, "I must break that, but I cannot pass over our own laws so easily. My position is not what it was...". His voice trailed off. "I wish you good fortune, my friend, may the best duellist win."

Serk Markstrom did not reply, but with sword in hand pushed himself up to stand and limped through the door. As he passed Knute, he paused as if about to say more but then closed his mouth and stepped out into the streets of Dionna.

Now alone, Knute lowered his head and sighed a resigned tone. "And I trust that now completes the debt I owe you."

From the shadows of the other room a man stepped forward, his one good eye looking at the master swordsman. "Indeed my very good friend, indeed."

Beginning to turn to leave, Linnea turned his head back to ask "Why?"

"Why what?", replied Giovanni.

"Why did you do this? I thought you hated Alvara almost as much as Serk."

The slim Vodacce grinned like a predatory animal, "Ah yes I do. But why deal with one thorn, when you can kill the entire rose."



Two weeks later in Vaticine City

Cardinal Esteban Verdugo kneeled in silent prayer before the small shrine of his personal residence. He had been held here for months now, being sent the discussions of the Hieros Council but unable to join in their activities. His fall from Grace was obviously the work of heathens and traitors, so he came here to pray to Theus every day for the strength and opportunity to continue his work. Quiet footsteps behind him interrupted his thoughts.

"I told you I was not to be disturbed."

His assistant stood a respectful distance away and rubbed his hands nervously. Apparently summoning the will to speak, he replied "My apologies your excellency. But there is a man here to see you."

Verdugo stood and turned around. "I have no appointments for today and the Hieros, in their benevolence, do not allow me the honour of guests."

"I know your excellency, but he is here never the less."

"Send him away."

The man swallowed with some difficulty, "I have tried, he will not leave. He said you would want to see him."

With a sigh Verdugo straightened his robes and taking the small Prophet's cross in his hands raised it to his mouth and kissed it. Under his breath he whispered to himself, "Merciful Theus, why do you torment me, your humble servant, with incompetents and buffoons."

Now smiling a forced grin, the fallen Cardinal walked the few steps to his cowering assistant. "Where is he?"

"In your drawing room, your excellency."

With a dismissive wave of the hand, Verdugo marched past and through the doors of the chapel, turned right and down the corridor into his private rooms.

"I do not know who you think you are, but...."

Seeing the man sitting in the leather armchair by the fire, reading from one of Verdugo's books, the Cardinal was cut off mid-sentence. The visitor put the book carefully down and stood up, taking off his small reading glasses and tapping them against his chin.

"My dearest Esteban, I was so sorry to here of that unfortunate incident with the King. Please do sit down, I have an opportunity I would like to discuss with you.", said a very smug and patronising Alvara Arciniega.

Credits

Writing and Layout

Mark Stanton Woodward and Andrew Peregrine

Additional Writing

Ray Yand and Les Simpson

System Mechanics

Nikolas Kyriazopoulos Panagiotopoulos and Floyd Wesel

Artwork

Evi Spanou

Jonathan Hunt

Cris Dornaus

Editing

Mark Stanton Woodward and Nancy Berman

Line Development

Mark Stanton Woodward

7th Sea System Creation

John Wick, Jennifer Wick and Kevin Wilson

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