



# PULP VILLAINS:

# THUGGEE

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**THRILLING  
TALES**

OR ANY OTHER  
MODERN d20 GAME

# PULP VILLAINS: **THUGEE**

## INTRODUCTION

They strangle unsuspecting travelers on dark country roads. They glide through New York's glittering streets clinging to shadows, carrying fear and death in their yellow scarves. They dance and debauch, brutal thugs masking their villainy behind a façade of ancient mysticism.

They are the Thugee, a cult of murders whose history and myth stretch back to the time of Herodotus. They terrorized India's roadways for at least six hundred years. Each year they killed travelers by the tens of thousands. Eventually a single man stood up to them, ferreted them out of the dark places, and hung them high for all to see.

The British Empire hung thousands of Thugee in the period between 1830 and 1850. Thousands more fled rather than pay for their

crimes. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the terrible cult vanished from India. In the fictional world of the pulps, though, the cult persisted into the modern world.

Charismatic conmen use its rituals to disguise their sinister schemes. Remnants of the original Thugee continue their murderous rites.

Rebels and terrorists hide their very modern ambitions under the strangling cord and the pick-axe.

Do you dare oppose them? Or will you too fall to a cunning smile and a swiftly applied yellow strangling cord?

## IN THIS BOOK

Welcome to *Pulp Villains: Thugee*, a book in Adamant Entertainment's **Thrilling Tales** line

of pulp fiction roleplaying aids. This book examines the Thugee, a cult Kali-





worshiping assassins who murdered countless thousands during over least six centuries. They routinely slaughtered travelers by the hundreds yet maintained such secrecy and organization that few acknowledged their existence until a single crusading Englishman drove them into the light.

This book starts with an examination of the historical Thugee cult. It goes on to describe three separate “Thugee organizations”, each suitable for inclusion in a pulp themed campaign. These three cults can play a minor role in an existing campaign or act as a primary campaign motivator, depending entirely on the Game Masters needs.

After exploring the Thugee, this book presents a method to generate entirely new cults. This method allows Gamemasters to quickly create cults in the same vein as the Thugee: societies dedicated to their goals and willing to ignore any social prohibitions standing in their way. He does this by assigning the group between one and seven descriptors, each with accompanying descriptions, group attribute modifications, and suggested methods for further development.

This cult creation method segues into cult F/X and feats associated with cult membership. These extra abilities give antagonists and protagonists new options suitable for games ranging from non-magic adventure games to minor supernatural/psychic effects similar to those found in the “psychic detective” sub-genre.

The pre-made characters and cult sheet in Appendix A and B bring together the tools presented in proceeding chapters. Appendix A provides “drop in” characters tailored to Thugee cults and wielding cultic F/X. Appendix B provides a sheet for recording

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GM-created cults and their adjective/attributes

## CHAPTER ONE : THE THUGEE

The historic Thuggee's saga reads like something out of an adventure novel. It has shining heroes, villains so vile they barely qualify as human, and a nasty intersection between religious fervor and material interest. Its sensational and scandalous nature inspired several best sellers, not to mention a judicial campaign reaching into India's darkest shadows.

In many ways, the Thuggee provided the model writers used to create cults in pulp fiction. They organized themselves into hereditary gangs. These gangs operated in secret and communicated among themselves using a indecipherable cant. When not engaged in their murderous deeds Thuggee lived ordinary lives, had families, and contributed to their communities. In other words, they were everything we imagine a secret society to be: lethal, organized, and completely invisible to the outside world.

In the real world it took a man of remarkable dedication to bring them down. In the world of the pulps it will take more than that: it will take courage, determination, and a fistful of bullets.

The English word "thug" comes from the Hindu word *thag*, meaning a cheater or a thief. In general use a thug is a ruffian, a tough who does what his betters tell him. Gangsters employ thugs to beat people to a pulp. Smarmy business men with connections to gangsters hire these slope-browed simians to intimidate weak-willed customers.



Originally, though, the word described something far more dangerous than a class of criminal bottom feeders. Thugs terrorized India for centuries, murdering travelers and stealing the property. Thuggee, their system of beliefs and practices, organized a network of assassins, informers, merchants, and politicians unrivaled in human history. This network turned religious murder into a profitable enterprise, capable of literally mustering an army and ignoring authorities until one man finally brought them to justice.

This section starts by describing the historical Thuggee cult and its grizzly end. It then goes on to describe three different fictional versions of the Thuggee. The first outlines a loosely organized group of psychotic killers under the command of a criminal mastermind. The second suggests a possible continuation of the original Thuggee cult, assuming their goddess actually interceded to protect a her followers. The third outlines a hybrid between these two approaches, describing a rebel fascist organization structured using the ideas of the original Thuggee cult.

All four of the Thuggee cults described below use the Organisation Rules from Mongoose Publishing's *OGL Horror* (which are presented again in this book). The attributes

for the historical Thuggee cult represents the author's best guess as to the Thuggee's actual capabilities; the other three derive from the cult creation method outlined in the second section of this book: Creating Cults.

### Note on Descriptors

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of descriptors; adjectives used clarify aspects of a cult's personality and role in the game. The number of descriptors a cult receives depends on how important it is to the plot, how often it appears, and whether it is of ancient or modern origin.

For more information on descriptors, their use, and the questions associated with them please refer to Chapter 2.

## THE HISTORICAL THUGGEE

The Indian "thugs" came to the attention of the East India Company during the 1820s through Captain William Sleeman's Herculean efforts. This young British captain boldly assaulted a centuries old institution of murder and robbery without consent from the local authorities. Ignoring centuries of Company policy he interfered in local affairs, hunted down bandits, and eventually changed life for Indians throughout the sub-continent.

The organization Captain Sleeman destroyed operated throughout India. Princes and kings gave it tacit assistance in return for vast wealth. Its members, both Hindu and Muslim, engaged in wholesale murder during the summer months then returned to their ordinary lives. They passed the cult's wealth and its terrible secrets to their children, indoctrinating their sons in murder before their eighteenth birthday.

### Descriptors:

**Ancient Occasional Opponent** (3 Descriptors): Greedy\*, Murderous, Scattered  
\*required by Ancient designation

### Attributes:

The historical cult might possess the following attributes:

**Hit Points:** 14,000

**Force:** 30 (+10)

**Response:** 10 (+0)

**Resources:** 24 (+7)

**Information:** 20 (+5)

**Occult:** 10 (+0)

**Influence:** 20 (+5)

**Skills:** Disguise (Inf) +15, Forgery (Info) +15, Gather Information (For) +20, Intimidate (For) +20, Knowledge (Current Events) (Infl) +15, Knowledge (Streetwise) (Info) +15, Research (Info) +15, Search (For) +20

**Feats:** Arsenal, Covert, Secure Base x4

**Descriptor Modifiers:** +2 bonus to Resource checks, operatives add +10 to Intimidate checks, DR 7/- against organizational attacks.

### Quick Description:

The Thuggee cult uses murder to further its greed and desire for goods. They have a decentralized structure but the leaders know each other fairly well.

### Extended Description:

Herodotus mentioned a people known for strangling their victims in his Histories, written in the fifth century BCE. Nineteen hundred years later, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE, a "Thug" financed a mercenary army to repel an Afghani invasion in northern India. Four hundred years after that, the British suddenly took an interest in the unexplained disappearance of 40,000 people every year from India's roads. They found, to their horror, a loosely organized



group capable of murdering everyone in a caravan or plucking one traveler out of a crowd and killing him.

The thugs participated in a cult called “Thugee”. In theory the cult worshiped Kali in her aspect as goddess of destruction. Hindus and Muslim’s participated in the cult, despite the obvious religious conflict between monotheistic beliefs and Kali worship.

Practically speaking, though, Thugee and the thugs were a family business. Fathers and uncles inducted young men into the practice early then passed on their positions as they retired. They disposed of their ill-gotten gains through centuries old channels, funding kingdoms and armies throughout the sub-continent.

Thugs lived ordinary lives during most of the year; many became respected members of their communities. They practiced trades, ran businesses, raised families: all of the things expected of normal citizens. However, they also took long “trips” into India every year. For three or more months they stalked the

countryside in search of the proper targets.

Selecting a target required careful consultation of omens and proper ritual practice. It also involved an element of practical assessment. The thugs rarely moved unless they outnumbered their target by at least three to one. Reliable accounts describe them murdering caravans of 100 or more, so they obviously traveled in groups of at least 300 at times.



Thugs did not attack their foes in screaming waves, waving knives and shooting guns. Instead they joined their victims as fellow travelers. They could journey with a potential victim for months, usually posing as guards or

entertainers, before finding the perfect moment to strike. When that moment came they attacked on a pre-arranged signal. Two thugs held the target, kicking him repeatedly in the genitals as a distraction, while a senior thug strangled him with a yellow scarf.

After completing their rituals and burying the bodies in unmarked graves, the thugs disposed of the victims’ possessions by selling them to

established governments. This influx of wealth supported several of the larger central Indian states, giving the thugs somewhere to hide while they prepared to resume their ordinary lives.

Among themselves the thugs spoke a secret language. Although clearly of Hindi origin, this language differed from its root language enough to prevent casual interception. Even so, they did not speak it in public, reserving it instead for their planning sessions and communications within the cult while not out seeking victims.

The Thugee cult continued almost unopposed until 1820. In that year a captain in the British Army, one William Sleeman, discovered their existence. For the next twenty years he hunted down thugs wherever he could find them. He might not have succeeded, but early in his operation he captured several cult leaders. The kind of person willing to casually murder hundreds of innocents also, to the good captain's benefit, will also usually turn on his compatriots in return for considerations. These leaders helped Captain Sleeman round up and hang thousands of their fellow thugs despite sometimes stiff local opposition.

For all practical purposes the cult ceased to exist by 1840, though the East India Company continued to issue regulations about them into the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Captain Sleeman's exploits and the confessions of several Thugee leaders became best-selling novels after suffering various degrees of fictionalization. The real events were, after all, almost too much for an educated readership to believe.

## **Characters**

Any campaign involving the historical Thugee cult should touch upon at least the following characters:

**Ameer Ali (Male Human Charismatic Hero 5/Fast Hero 4):** Ameer Ali, a Thugee member and leader, confessed to over six hundred killings during his years as a cult member. His recorded, then fictionalized, confessions became the basis for "The Confessions of a Thug", an instant best-seller in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Charming, sophisticated, and intelligent, his complete lack of moral compunctions about murder or betrayal fascinated readers for almost one hundred years. Characters might encounter him in any one of a number of disguises or meet him after his capture in their quest to destroy the Thugee.

**Captain William Sleeman (Male Human, Dedicated 7):** Mr. Sleeman came to India as a police officer and left a Major-General after a twenty year campaign against the Thugee. At the start of his career he is a well-built, intelligent young man fired by high ideals and a sense of righteousness. By the end he suffers from the debilitating effects of living in a tropical environment for two decades, though he still carries himself with great dignity. Characters who encounter him early in his career will find him accessible and charming as he tries to recruit them to his cause. Later in his career Mr. Sleeman's wife smoothes over his hard edges and occasional bouts of temper as he nears the end of his long quest.

**Feringeea (Male Human, Charismatic 9):** This magnetic young man styled himself as the "Prince of the Thugee". Charming and educated, he almost escaped Captain Sleeman but turned himself in after Sleeman took his

mother, wife, and children into custody. His assistance proved invaluable as he turned over thug leaders all over the Indian sub-continent.

### **Adventure Seeds and Plot Hooks**

The historical Thugee might appear in any number of stories:

- 1) Characters in a historical campaign could become involved with Captain Sleeman during his early days as a policeman. His fanatical devotion to changing India will put him at odds with the Company executives, the local authorities, and the Thugee themselves.
- 2) In the later part of his campaign Sleeman becomes a very public and important figure. The characters may find themselves assigned to protect him as the Thugee, practiced deceivers and assassins, make a final effort to remove their opponent.
- 3) Indian characters may take on the role of Thugee defending their ancient and honorable calling from interference by the colonial powers. In between bouts of murder they will have to defend their leaders, mislead the authorities, and perhaps even assassinate the meddling Englishman who brought all of this about.

## **THE THUGEE CULT OF PERSONALITY**

After the destruction of the historical thugs English and Indian conmen began to use its rituals and traditions as a cover. They took popular accounts of the Thugee, mixed it with their own agendas, and produced an amalgam of East and West even more terrifying than the original.

The cult below follows one such hybridization to its logical conclusion. It describes the efforts of an English conman (Duncan Turnbull) to cover his crimes under the aegis of a long dead cult. His ability to manipulate the weak-minded lower-classes, along with his absolute belief in his personal superiority, lend this cult a hard pulp edge.

### **Descriptors:**

**Modern Important Opponent (5 Descriptors):** Cell, European, Fearsome, Greedy, Murderous\*

\*Required by Modern designation

### **Attributes:**

**Hit Points:** 3,100

**Force:** 17 (+3)

**Response:** 12 (+1)

**Resources:** 21 (+5)

**Information:** 10 (+0)

**Occult:** 8 (-1)

**Influence:** 14 (+2)

**Skills:** Craft (Info) +10, Disguise (Inf) +12, Forgery (Info) +10, Search (For) +13

**Feats:** Covert, Financial Sway, Secure Base x2

**Descriptor Modifiers:** Organization never appears to have more than 1/10<sup>th</sup> its actual size, Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Popular Culture, Tactics) by 1/2, +2 to Resources checks, Organization operatives'



add its Influence modifier bonus to their Gather Information skill checks, Organization operatives' add its Force modifier bonus to their Intimidate skill checks

**Quick Description:**

The "Thugee" use popular fear of their name and outright murder to bully people into handing over their material wealth. They have a highly decentralized structure in which each leader only knows one other leader. The "Grand Priest" knows all of the cells but none of their leaders know him by his real name or face.

**Extended Description:**

In 1892 Duncan Turnbull went to the bar in London for the third time. The charges of criminal misconduct, fraud, and murder were enough to insure his speedy removal from society. Then, in a daring move assisted by three accomplices, he escaped from prison on the date of his sentencing. On the run and beyond the law he cooked up a grand scheme.

After leaving his accomplices where the authorities could find them Duncan vanished. A year later, rumors circulated though the underworld of coves showing up in shadowed alleyways. Though dead bodies, especially those of young men, appeared daily, something about these new murders caught people's attention. Each young man had a yellow scarf wrapped around his neck. Each one also had his head smashed in by something big, heavy, and sharp.

At first the authorities ignored the threat. After all, dozens of madmen and anarchists used the yellow scarves every year in a vain hope to confuse investigations. Two years into the crime spree, though, a group of constables turned up dead. Their strangled and mutilated bodies, posed in mockery of some ancient

Indian sexual text, incited public outrage and belated official action.

Scotland Yard took four weeks to track down and apprehend the criminals. The investigation lead them though sordid opium dens, the Thames warehouses, and into London's darkest heart. In a stunning raid they captured twelve men and a vast assortment of Indian paraphernalia. Under interrogation the men claimed descent from the original Thugee cult, long though exterminated. They even produced papers proving the claim, though these papers later proved to be forgeries.

The investigators closed the case after the raid and confessions. They filed it away as a bit of left over business from the British Empire's early years. A month later, rumors again surfaced of more men and women murdered by strangulation. Close investigation, though, revealed no foundation to the accusations.

A decade later, in New York, the cult surfaced again. This time the aggressive New York Police Department had its hands full with gang wars, turf battles between political factions, and the constant pressure of new immigrants from Europe and Asia. Since it looked like one group of odd-colored men murder other odd-colored men, their captains decided to ignore it.

The streets of New York proved a fertile place for the burgeoning cult. It recruited men from the lowest rungs of society, gave them wealth, and taught them to kill. Eventually cells began to grow in other cities, some as far west as Chicago.

**Duncan Turnbull becomes William Sleeman**

The new Thugee came into being when Duncan Turnbull vanished. He decided, at the spur of the moment, to re-invent himself. Using his

skills as a confidence man and actor, along with things he learned reading trashy novels in jail, he created a new persona “Mr. William Sleeman, Importer.” In order to finance this change he contracted a number of down and out Indian criminals. To make his story more believable he provided the men with false documents “proving” their descent from the ancient Thugee families.

Upon this flimsy foundation “William Sleeman” built an international criminal empire. Independently organized cells of thugs murdered travelers, tourists, and immigrants in vast numbers. They would travel to a new city or burrough each season, murder and rob, then return home to their cover-lives as upright citizens. All of the stolen goods moved through Sleeman’s import business, effectively laundering them while simultaneously tying the enterprise into the local business community.

When Sleeman lost the first cell he relocated from the familiar environs of London to New York City. There he found a seething immigrant population, an inattentive police force, and lax import/export laws. In short, nearly perfect ground for his efforts. Disaffected men, cut off from their traditional moral and ethical authorities, happily signed on with his “thugs” in an attempt to make something of themselves.

### **Cult Members**

The cult recruits members exclusively from the lowest of the low. Cell leaders seek out the unenfranchised, the newly arrived, and those who have potential but cannot quite make it on their own. They set these men up with legitimate, if low earning, businesses. They give them language training. They help them to put their children into schools and schedule medical care for those who need it.

In return the cell inducts them into the business. The new members learn a secret language made of up “Indian sounding” words that has no real rhyme or reason. One week every three months they go on a trip to an out of town location where they watch older cult members stalk, strangle, and rob anyone who looks like a good target. Once they have participated in enough murders the cult leader inducts them into the society.

No cult member knows much about the other cells. The cell leader, an appointed position, only sees their leader once per year and then on a day chosen by the “Grand Leader”. Loot is left in large blind drops, from which it mysteriously vanishes within a few days.

When not actively engaged in their murderous trade the cult members live ordinary lives. Most own small shops specializing in the garment trade or groceries. None acknowledge other cult members on the street, though they meet once a month to perform stylized rituals to the Dark Goddess Kali.

Unlike the real Thugee this cult does not select its targets though an elaborate system of omen-reading. Instead they use purely pragmatic criteria for selecting victims. Their newfound faith and techniques cannot cover over their lowly origins.

### **Cult Environs**

The cult does not maintain a central base of operations. When in their “normal” lives the cult members dwell and work in small shops. When on the road they stay in cheap hotels and boarding houses.

### **Cult Encounters**

Though it would be convenient cult members do not wander around in Indian turbans

with necklaces of human skulls around their necks. They dress conservatively, either in the well-tended clothes of a factory worker or the middle of the road shirt and jacket of successful businessmen. They present a friendly, even cooperative, face until they lull the target.

When the target feels perfectly safe they strike. One member attempts a choking attack from the rear while at least one other distracts the target by pummeling him. If the target breaks free the thugs flee by the fastest possible route.

### **Characters**

Any campaign involving the Thugee cult of personality might encounter the following characters:

**Duncan Turnbull aka William Sleeman (Male Human Charismatic 10):** Mr. Sleeman openly immigrated to the United States in 1896, bringing with him an active import business specializing in fine artifacts from around the world. His constant supply and cheap prices made him an instant favorite with the cash conscious but status climbing upper-middle class and criminal elements. The more established old money families continued to use their own dealers. Within a year he built up four cells, and has since established another dozen scattered throughout the states. He then hires pawn-brokers and locals to pick up the stolen goods and sells the loot in cities far away from where they were first nicked.

In person Duncan's almost hypnotic voice and aura of confidence lure people into a hazy daze from which they emerge after several hours. His flashing dark eyes and sardonic wit put even the most hardened investigators at ease, even when he directs his mockery towards them. Connections in the upper reaches of government and society prevent any serious

investigation of his activities, even if he were revealed as a Thugee strangler.

**Jericho Ameer (Male Human Charismatic 4):** Jericho came to this country poor, tired, and sick. His "uncle" Mr. Sleeman took him in, gave him a job, and eventually elevated him to a position of respect. Now Jericho runs a cell in Cleveland Ohio. His mostly Polish and Eastern European cell hunts in Chicago, Toledo, and occasionally Philadelphia.

**Miriam (Female Human Dedicated 2):** Miriam came to the United States with her husband. Now he runs a small business in New York, refitting rich-men's shoes. Though she does not like the way they look at her, she does appreciate how much money her clients lay down when they come into the back room for fittings. However she has become very concerned about her husband. His constant black moods get even worse after he comes back from his visits to Chicago or New York in search of good shoe leather. She has started to ask the other local wives for help and may eventually go to the local parish priest even though she is Muslim.

### **Adventure Seeds and Plot Hooks**

The cult of personality could easily become a main campaign villain. Cleaning out a cell could take an entire adventure; defeating Duncan himself would tax even the most psychopathic adventurers.

1. The characters encounter a Thugee group while traveling between two other adventure sites. The Thugee attack them in the middle of the night, leaving one or more of the character's in critical condition. This brutal introduction to the Thugee could spark a long (or short) set of adventures in which our heroes search out their foes,



only to discover they have vanished back into the darkness.

2. One of the character's long-standing friends dies while on a business trip. Some time later, in another part of the US, the character's see a signature item (e.g. a unique engraved pen or broach) for sale in a pawn shop window. The shop owner is not a cult member but he bought the item in a lot from Sleeman Imports.
3. The characters begin to do business with Mr. Sleeman or one of his representatives, selling items of dubious providence to the importer in return for good cash. Eventually a crusading police officer comes to speak with them, inquiring about their activities. The officer's investigation, though brushing up against the characters' activities, really focuses on Sleeman's import/export business and its connection to a small ring of murderers the policeman uncovered.

## THE THUGEE: ANCIENT SURVIVORS

The body of knowledge called Thugee supposedly came as a revelation from the goddess Kali. She gave her chosen people the right and obligation to murder, knowledge of how to do so safely, and the ability to read omens which would guide them to suitable targets. Such knowledge should have protected them from a mundane extermination campaign, even one launched by the much lauded British Rajah.

Divine knowledge did indeed protect this

version of the Thugee survivors. In fact, Mr. Sleeman's campaign successfully destroyed the heretics and unbelievers who infested their cult over the centuries. With the detritus gone the chosen ones can now renew their vows in secrecy.

### Descriptors:

#### Ancient Occasional Opponent (3

Descriptors): Centered, Murderous, Proudful\*

\*Required by Ancient designation

### Attributes:

**Hit Points:** 4,000

**Force:** 18 (+4)

**Response:** 12 (+1)

**Resources:** 18 (+4)

**Information:** 14 (+2)

**Occult:** 20 (+5)

**Influence:** 10 (+0)

**Skills:** Decipher Script (Occ) +12, Disguise (Inf) +10, Forgery (Info) +16, Knowledge (Arcane Lore) (Occ) +19, Search (For) +18

**Feats:** Artifact, Covert, Fanatical Loyalty, Library (Arcane Lore), Secure Base

**Descriptor Modifiers:** Organization cannot hide its size. It heals damage at twice the normal rate, Organization operatives' add its Force modifier bonus to their Intimidate skill checks, +2 to Occult checks

### Quick Description

Kali saved the families of the current Thugee from the maelstrom ignited by Mr. Sleeman in his one-man quest to make India more European. In awe and celebration they worship her in the way she commanded: each man murdering one stranger each year and each woman maintaining the façade of an ordinary life. The Thugee High Priest comes from the family who received Kali's vision in 1820. The other cult members obey without question or hesitation.

## Extended Description

In the beginning Black Kali chose from among the people those who could worship her as she desired. To these men she taught the art of reading omens, the skills of the strangling cord, and the words which none other could hear. Her chosen children did as their goddess commanded and all was good.

Over thousands of years, though, her children lost their way. Many fell into decadent practices, murdering without recourse to the proper rituals. They lost the knowledge of true omens, instead taking every turn of a leaf or sudden shower as a sign from the goddess herself. Some became no better than common thieves, killing for their own glory rather than the goddesses.

Eventually Black Kali stretched forth her hands. With one taloned fist she grasped an Englishman's heart. With another she smote the pretender's minds, making them blind to their oaths of loyalty. With a third she opened the eyes of the last remaining man of faith. To this last man she gave a list of names; the names of Thugee who might be brought to see the light.

As the Englishman slaughtered his way through the false Thugee, the faithful man (named Dhuliji Lahiri) raced ahead to save those who

the goddess named. He drew the faithful into the deep jungle where they lived in a small village while the fires burned out.

The Thugee emerged from seclusion once the British turned their attention to other matters. Mr. Lahiri caused them to scatter throughout the country under an injunction to commit no crimes for the next decade. They established new identities, business, and families. Some emigrated to Europe; others stayed in their homeland or went east to the Americas.



In 1860 the Thugee resumed their murderous ways. Quietly, in groups of no more than thirty, they gathered to hear Lahiri's instructions. Once properly motivated they stalked the roadways, selecting targets using the ancient omens and murdering them in the old ways.

Three generations of strangers have come into the business since those fateful first days. The group maintains its emotional fervor and discipline, though some of the fourth generation may fall to greed's temptation. After all, each strangler group possesses the accumulated wealth of thousands of victims; a fat target for an ambitious man.

In order to avoid the failure of the first cults, the High Priest maintains iron control over group activities. He declares the hunts,

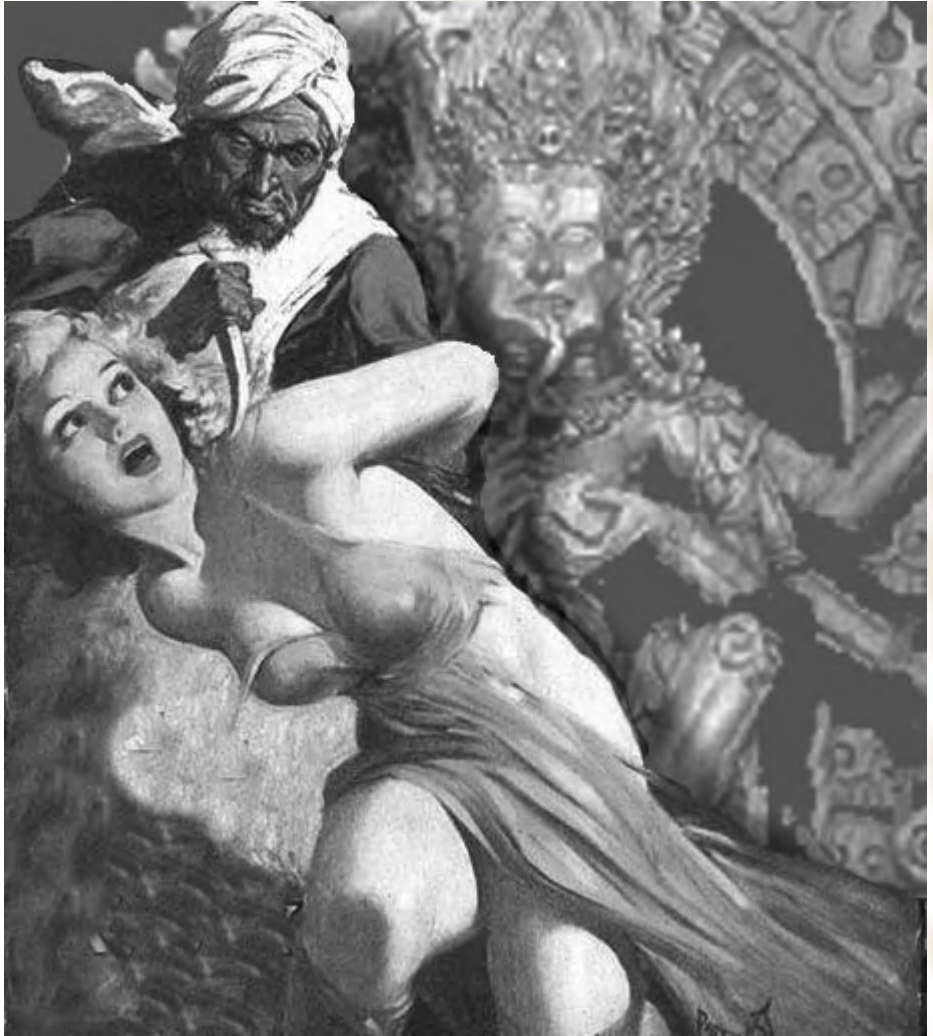
disposes of the loot, and determines who will advance or fall from grace. The later sentence carries with it deadly repercussions. After all, those who turn against the goddess cannot be allowed to live.

The Thugee communicate among themselves using a variation on the language spoken by the fallen cult. They also send messages, even telegrams, in this elaborate code.

### **Cult Members**

All members of the ancient survivors come from the families who survived Sleeman's purge. Each proudly traces their lineage back to a single man chosen by the goddess herself for deliverance.

In the intervening decades the cult's spread from its mountain fastness has necessitated some thinning of the chosen bloodlines. Once a thug moves out into the world the High Priest expects him to marry local and raise his family as a part of the growing cult. Females must petition the High Priest for permission to marry; males may marry whomever their father selects for them.



The High Priest also chooses and sends a local group's leader from among the members of his family. This allows him to retain central control and maintains orthodoxy. It also angers many of the younger thugs, especially those who live in the United States or Europe.

### **Cult Environs**

Cult members do not jeopardize their cover by storing cult materials in their homes. A home invasion or legitimate search of such a place will turn up nothing of importance.



However, the local cult members all pay to support a small, secluded shrine to Kali. The shrine will always be at least thirty miles from any cult member's home. Here they gather once a season to receive messages from the grand temple and the High Priest, to perform their secret rituals, and to bask in Kali's glory. Failure to attend a meeting results in the local leader disciplining the member either by verbal reprimand or by killing one of his family members.

The local shrines communicate with the main shrine in India via special couriers. These couriers carry messages to the shrines, leaving them at times when no cult member is in attendance. Each courier receives extensive training in subterfuge and conditioning to resist questioning. Should he be captured he will try to destroy his messages before ending his own life.

The Thugee built their primary temple on the site of the village Kali revealed to them. Isolated by jungle and mountains, it functions as an impenetrable fortress for them to retreat into in times of need. The lavish temple itself houses almost one hundred thugs; the village supports another three hundred. The couriers and local leaders come from the families living in the temple, so as to insure their loyalty to the higher cause.

### **Cult Encounters**

The ancient survivors engage in ritual murder rather than whole-sale banditry. They use the same tactics as the historical Thugee (strangulation and mass attacks from surprise) and make liberal use of their ability to bluff and confuse targets.

### **Characters**

Any campaign involving the ancient survivors should include some or all of the following characters:

**Dhuliji Lahiri (Male Human Fast 4/ Dedicated 4/Charismatic 6):** The now ancient Dhuliji Lahiri still presides over the reformed Thugee cult from the jungle-bound temple in India. He communes with his goddess daily, though he does not always share the results of his visions. His withered frame and lank white hair speak to the decades of his service to his goddess. The immense strength with which he can turn a strangling cord manifestly demonstrates her favor. The other thugs worship him almost as much as they do their goddess.

**James Sinha (Male Human Strong 2):** James grew up in New York City. He played with men who now make their livings as gangsters, confidence men, shop keepers, and factory workers as a boy. As a man, the contract between their growing wealth and his cult mandated simple lifestyle galls him. Why should a strapping young man like himself, blessed with good looks and the wits God gave a man, live in poverty while sending riches to some old man back in the old country? His questions resonate with the new generation of Thugee even as their elders try to teach them the ways of the cord and pick-axe.

**Ajita Lahiri (Female Human Charismatic 6):** Even though mocha-skinned Ajita comes from the direct line of the High Priest she cannot inherit a position of power in the cult. By tradition she should have married, settled down, and built a cover identity for some local cult leader. Instead the smoky-eyed beauty talked her father into making her a courier. So she travels the world, amusing her self with the businessmen she meets, and delivers messages

to out of the way towns where she cannot show her face. Fortunately her skills as disguise and deception match her arresting looks and charm.

### **Adventure Seeds and Plot Hooks**

The ancient survivors might become a major campaign villain but they work best as a shadowy threat. Characters encountering them might not even realize they are anything more than a slightly exotic street gang. Only later, when the cult plays its hand, should they begin to realize it might be even more sinister than they initially imagined.

Some examples of this kind of story include:

1. Low level characters operating in New York (or another large city) might encounter James Sinha as he breaks away from the main Thugee cult. His group of young, dissatisfied thugs apply their murderous methods to local crime. Just as the characters close in on them, the elder thugs remove the younger entirely, leaving behind their strangled bodies and a vast sum of money as reparation.
2. One of the male characters might encounter Ajita during her travels. Their interlude together at first seems like a throw-away scene. A little later, the character finds himself under attack by assassins of Indian descent. It turns out the High Priest is well aware of his daughters activities and prefers to “silence” men she spends time with.
3. In a game with some occult overtones the characters may become involved with one of the

ritual murders. After all, the Thugee murder as a form of worship, an act which could call forth dark powers. Occult investigators might be dragged from murder site to murder site until they eventually uncover the cult’s methods of operations.

4. The cult kidnaps one of the characters’ close friends or family members (usually a beautiful woman or girl) as a special sacrifice. In order to get her back the characters can race the kidnapers, fail to catch them at a port, and then travel to India in order to save her before the time of sacrifice. Eventually they wind up trekking through the jungle and storming the main temple.



## THE THUGEE: INSURGENT FIGHTERS

Historically the Thugee avoid direct interference in politics. However, the British intrusion of their morality into Indian affairs inevitably lead to a backlash against them. In this case, even though the Thugee themselves vanished a number of patriotic men recreated the cult with the expressed purpose of driving the British from the sub-continent.

These thugs us the old methods of deception and strangulation to rid their homeland of the oppressive outsiders. Their carefully target murders serve to destabilize and terrify the foreign population. The British respond by increasing their security and applying even more pressure, leading to an ever escalating cycle of violence from which neither side will back down.

### Descriptors:

**Modern Occasional Opponent (3**

**Descriptors):** Indian, Intimidation, Murder\*

\*Required by Modern designation

### Attributes:

**Hit Points:** 5,000

**Force:** 20 (+5)

**Response:** 14 (+2)

**Resources:** 10 (+0)

**Information:** 16 (+3)

**Occult:** 10 (+0)

**Influence:** 12 (+1)

**Skills:** Decipher Script (Info) +11, Demolitions (Resp) +10, Disguise (Resp) +10, Forgery (Info) +11, Gather Information (For) +13, Knowledge (Civics) (Infl) +9, Knowledge (Tactics) (For) +13, Search (For) +13

**Feats:** Arsenal, Emergency Response, Fanatical Loyalty, Widely Known

**Descriptor Modifiers:** Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) and Search by 1/2, Organization operatives' add its Influence modifier bonus to their Gather Information skill checks, Organization operatives' add its Force modifier bonus to their Intimidate skill checks

### Quick Description

A nationalist Indian cult that masks political ambitions under the cover of a famous belief system. They use the fear of the Thugee and carefully executed assassinations to achieve their goals.

### Extended Description

Mr. Sleeman unleashed a tide of change when he destroyed the Thugee. His obsession catalyzed a shift in British policy from accommodation and trade to outright political and military domination. The Indian Rajah responded in a typically incoherent fashion. Some capitulated, others accommodated, a rare few resisted but quickly fell to the superior coordination and firepower brought to bear on them.

The duty of resistance therefore fell to the common men. Indians of many castes decried their domination by outsiders with no respect for their ancient ways. Most simply complained. A few took up arms, leading doomed rebellions. The smartest reached back into recent history for inspiration.

This inspiration came in the form of several popular novels released in Britain during and after Mr. Sleeman's efforts. They detailed a complicated, dangerous secret cult with brutally effective methods. These murderers slaughtered Indians by the thousands for centuries without being discovered. Their methods, properly updated, would undoubtedly work just as well in the modern world.



From this initial idea sprang one of the most effective resistance and terrorist organizations ever imagined. Operatives working in coordinated teams began a wholesale slaughter of British officials and foreign civilians. The murders used the strangling cords and spoke in gibberish, but only as a smoke screen to cover the modern methods of mayhem they espoused. Many openly admitted their membership, using the terror inspired by the popular history to force otherwise unwilling collaborators into the fold.

By the turn of the century this highly organized society of killers works on a steady agenda. They assault government officials, civilian contractors, and travelers in large numbers. Captured operatives are murdered in their prison cells, left dangling from the ceiling on yellow silk scarves. Local community members who talk to the authorities usually vanish, or suffer in anguish as some beloved family member vanishes in their place.

The thug network fuels its efforts with robbery and murder for hire. The surprisingly public contacts flaunt their affiliations, selling stolen goods almost openly though away from the British Raj's military force. Most of these public contacts truly know little of the organization; they receive their funds and pass messages though dead drops of various sorts.

### **Cult Members**

The modern insurgency gets its members from those who wish to overthrow the British rule of India. Anarchists, communists, patriots, and psychotics all find a place among them. They come from many castes and places, bound together in common cause.

The insurgency members never engage in their

crimes near their own homes. Taking a page from the thugs' old techniques, they always travel a considerable distance before executing a mission. This distance helps to shield them from detection, as well as making it more difficult to trace them if they somehow get caught.

When home they maintain a façade of normal activity. Almost all of the "cultists" work as seasonal laborers, giving them an excuse to travel frequently and maintain a low-profile lifestyle suitable to their needs. Most do not have families, as the risks they take exact a heavy toll on their time and livelihoods.

The insurgency leadership works at a fever pitch. Most have abandoned their ordinary lives, instead choosing to live in secluded jungle villages. From these locations they send out tactical leaders who "activate" a local group then lead it to its target.

### **Cult Environs**

The cult can strike anywhere. Unlike the real Thug, they engage in mass assaults and direct attacks, though they also use the tried and true ruses that made the Thug so famous.

The individual members live simply, usually in single room huts in the slums surrounding large cities. The command lives just as meanly but stays in isolated jungle villages where the authorities rarely venture. These villages hold no more than forty men and a handful of women kept on for their services.

### **Cult Encounters**

Characters can encounter this group in one of three ways: as a screaming horde of insurgents, as traditional thug, and as assassins in the night.

The insurgent thuggee operations involve large groups of semi-literate Indians whipped into a pseudo-religious frenzy. A single thuggee leader uses religious iconography and hokey rituals to convince a large group of angry men that they are Kali's chosen. After a suitable period the leader unleashes this mob in an orgy of violence directed at any foreigners in the area. He then vanishes back into the jungles until he reappears somewhere else to start the cycle all over again.

Traditional thuggee thievery supports this cycle with both funds and materials. Bands of operatives wander India's lonely back-country roads looking for travelers to waylay. They prefer to target Europeans but will happily murder natives as well. These operatives use the traditional methods but supplement them with firearms, chemical weapons, and explosives.

The assassins also adopt modern methods but with a far more lethal intent. These thuggee come out of the jungle and usually strike under the cover of a screaming horde. As the authorities try to deal with the chaos caused by a sudden uprising the assassins sneak in and strike with surgical skill. They murder leaders, plant false documents, destroy hardened targets, and generally wreak havoc in the government infrastructure. These thuggee also take responsibility for murdering any captured operatives and will commit suicide rather than accept capture.

### **Characters**

Encounters with the modern insurgents could involve any one of the following characters:

**Devendara Pattanayak (Human Male Tough 3):** By day ebon-skinned Devendara works in a stone quarry, cutting out stone blocks that

will eventually become tables and sculptures for the British authorities. At night he engages in wrestling matches and other sports in an attempt to work out his frustrations. He also attends meetings of an ancient society, the cult of the Thuggee, where a masked priest leads the congregation in chanting and prayers to the goddess Kali. When the time comes he will take up the strangler's noose and help set things right. Fortunately the time will come soon.

**Boli Verma (Human Male Charismatic 6):** Soft spoken and intense, Boli easily passes himself off as a deal in rare goods and occasional middleman for individuals in search of an elegant beauty for the evening. His soft voice becomes strident, even commanding, when it issues from behind the elaborate mask he wears at the secret meetings. There he allows his oratory skills free reign, cajoling and inflaming the simple men who come to hear him speak. When the time is right he will unleash his hounds then disappear back into the jungle from whence he came.

**Hidhan Nagchaudhuri (Human Male Fast 8/Infiltrator 4):** Working as a house servant, especially one skilled in the fine art of being unobtrusive, allows Hidhan to scout out his targets long before the covering riots begin. His precise English and gentle manners put the targets at their ease while his keen mind plans out the details of their demise. His only weakness is his addiction to challenge; he cannot resist a little extra fun while on the way out from an assignment.

### Adventure Seeds and Plot Hooks

Although masquerading as a religious organization the modern insurgents are nothing more than anarchists and provocateurs.

Characters might encounter them in any of the following ways:

1. They could simply stumble across one of the meetings or a hidden village. The thugs immediately respond with lethal force, even before the characters discover anything. Characters being what they are they will probably escape, leading to an escalating series of dramatic encounters culminating in the destruction of one or both groups.
2. The characters take a contract to protect a British magistrate as he
3. Characters engaged in other business wake up to find the city burning down with them in it. Mobs screaming “Kali, Kali, Kali” race around, dragging foreigners out of their beds and strangling them in public. The characters can choose to cower like beaten dogs or attempt to stop the madness. Meanwhile a group of assassins cuts through the government quarter like a bad wind, leaving bodies and fires in their wake.





## CHAPTER TWO: CREATING CULTS

Chapter One describes the historical Thugee cult and gives three “pulp fiction” variations of the cult as it might appear in the 1920s to 1940s. This chapter extends these descriptions into a generalized cult creation system so Gamemasters can create cults unique to their own games.

It does this by outlining an adjective based system, in which the creator assigns a number of descriptors to a cult. Each descriptor provides a useable block of narrative information, a bonus to the organization’s attributes, questions for further group development, and presentation suggestions.

### CREATING CULTS: SUMMARY

Pulp fiction presents cults as organizations motivated by a fanaticism. The cult members may pretend to be normal men in public; some even hold high offices. In private, though, their activities shock and horrify even the most jaded of men. Once exposed, the cult gathers its members to protect its inner secrets rather than fade into the background. After all, the heroes must die so they cannot spread their knowledge to others.

*Pulp Villains: Thugee* expands upon the organization rules presented in Mongoose Publishing’s *OGL Horror* by assigning the cults a set number of descriptors. Each descriptor provides bonuses and/or a penalty to specific organizational abilities, feats, or skills as described in the *OGL Horror* rules. These descriptors also affect how the organization reacts in a narrative sense, giving the Game Master some guidance in the creation of

consistent villainy.

The creation process goes through the following steps:

- 1) Decide you wish to create a cult,
- 2) Determine whether the cult is of ancient or modern origin,
- 3) Determine the cult’s narrative weight and appropriate number of descriptors,
- 4) Assign the descriptors and record their modifiers,
- 5) Record the quick descriptions, and then
- 6) Decide if the quick description provides enough information or go into the detailed creation questions.
- 7) Use the included Organization Rules to create the cult’s statistics.

### CULT, OR NOT TO CULT?

The first decision, whether or not to make an organization a cult, is less obvious than it seems. The pulps certainly contained stories about a vast number of cults. Pulp heroes also went head-to-head with anarchists, fascists, socialists, communists, slave traders, psychotics, and just about every form of degenerate humanity the authors could imagine. Many of these antagonists did not work together or share the elements required of a cult.

By definition a cult is a group of people who share religious or spiritual beliefs. Political organizations, business collations, and lone madmen do not qualify. Groups organized around a practical purpose (e.g. overthrowing a government or preserving the status quo) do not qualify. Groups designed to protect a specific place, defend a blood line, or destroy the world might or might not qualify, depending on the circumstances.

Additionally, cults in the pulps demonstrate fanatical devotion to their cause. Cult members rarely turn against their beliefs. The cult leaders command instant respect and unwavering obedience. Captured cult members would rather die than reveal their secrets; many come pre-programmed with suicide directives implanted in their minds through the cult's indoctrination procedures.

The religious or spiritual aspect must also come into play. Cults in the pulps almost always worship forgotten gods, people pretending to be forgotten gods, or strange creatures from other worlds. All will claim ancient lineage, though many originate in the world's immediate past.

Answer the questions below if you have any doubts as to whether the organization functions as a cult:

- 1) Does the organization have a religious or spiritual doctrine?
- 2) Does the organization ostensibly exist to promote its doctrine?
- 3) Does the organization demand and receive fanatical loyalty?
- 4) Does the organization claim an ancient tradition?

If you answer yes to one or two questions the organization is most likely not a cult. If you answered yes to three or more questions the organization displays enough cult-like attributes to continue.

## CULT ORIGIN: ANCIENT OR MODERN?

Assuming the organization passes the above test for cult-like attributes, the Game Master needs to decide whether it is of ancient or modern origin. This choice affects what descriptors you will commonly select and the cult's role in the game world.

### **Ancient Cults**

Ancient cults appear most often in games with fantasy or horror elements. They can trace their descent over hundreds, if not thousands, of years. This lineage may break from time to time but the overall sense of continuity remains intact. More importantly, the cult retains access to resources and secrets emanating from the depths of time. Many have knowledge of things man was not meant to know and honestly cannot understand without going insane.

Pulp ancient cults typically embody an emotion or primitive concept. They come creeping out of the shadowy past in an attempt to drag the bright present back into the darkness of superstition and doubt. Ancient cults with a relatively modern face or modern objectives still have this seamy underside. In order to simulate this embodying function, all ancient cults must select at least one emotional descriptor.

In the era of the pulps, authors and readers rarely distrusted progress, corporations, and all the trappings of modern civilization. The horrible excesses of World War I sullied the mix, but people generally placed the blame for it on "old ways of thinking". A cult trying to exert its power in the modern world represents a horror, an aberration all right-thinking men will do anything to stop.

## Modern Cults

Modern cults appear most often in games with mystery or and science-fiction elements. They are, almost universally, scams run by various charismatic figures. The leader cloaks his true intentions behind a façade of occult or religious mumbo-jumbo. Some of this façade comes from ancient texts and forbidden knowledge; most the conmen make up on the spot so they can fool the rubes.

Pulp modern cults typically have some kind of practical purpose hidden under the religious façade. The cult members usually know nothing of this purpose. The leader and his trusted lieutenants will definitely know it, though they do not share it with outsiders.

In order to simulate this practical function all modern cults must select on methods descriptor.

In the era of the pulps, authors and readers fully expected charismatic conmen to overwhelm the “unwashed masses”. Racism and classism ran rampant though the era’s business, politics, and fiction. When incorporating a modern cult into a game, play up these aspects without directly stepping on our modern outrage at

these attitudes. Fill the cult’s rank and file with illiterate, uneducated men and women who unquestioningly obey their betters. The upper-crust should contain individuals of wealth and distinction, preferably with good educations, who can banter with the characters while ordering their minions into the breach.

## Mixed Cults

The ancient and modern cult descriptions deal with the simplest and most obvious variations on the cult theme. You can mix and nest the two concepts almost infinitely, creating for example:

- 1) A cult of modern lineage that accidentally taps into an ancient cult’s knowledge,
- 2) A cult of ancient lineage that has a religious duty to create the modern age, or
- 3) A cult of modern lineage with a modern leader whose followers secretly adhere to an ancient cult from a forgotten past.





## NARRATIVE WEIGHT AND NUMBER OF DESCRIPTORS

All cults, whether ancient or modern, have a number of descriptors. This number can be based off of one of two things: the organizations size or its importance to the game's narrative (its narrative weight). The size measurement allows the Gamemaster to comfortably build organizations from the small to the massive and fits in with the game mechanics used by the organization rules. The narrative weight measurement requires a trickier balancing act, and assumes the game world unfolds as the characters interact with it.

When using the organization's size to determine the number of organization descriptors consult the following table:

When using narrative weight, the Gamemaster must decide how important the organization is to the game. An organization the characters rarely interact with and that has very limited impact on their activities has correspondingly little narrative weight even if it boasts a hundred thousand members. Conversely a very small organization playing a dominant role in the story may have five or more descriptors even though barely a dozen men claim membership.

**Table 2-1: Maximum Number of Descriptors by Size**

Size	Number of Descriptors
Local Organization	1
Local Government Section	3
State Level Organization	5
National or Multi-national Organization	7



The chart below provides the recommended number of descriptors based on the organizations narrative weight:

**Table 2-2: Maximum Number of Descriptors by Narrative Weight**

<b>Size</b>	<b>Number of Descriptors</b>
Minor role or one-shot appearance	1
Occasional opponent (appears once every four to six sessions)	3
Important opponent (appears every two or three sessions)	5
Primary antagonist (drives the plot)	7

An organizations narrative weight may change over time as the game evolves. As an organization's weight increases, increase the number of descriptors. As it decreases, suspend any bonuses and penalties from descriptors in excess of the maximum allowed number.

## THE DESCRIPTORS

The descriptors mentioned in the previous sections provide the Gamemaster with information about the cult in an easy to reference format. Each descriptor provides a flavorful hook, a brief description, a bonus and/or penalty to the organization, and questions for further development.

Descriptors are organized into the following groups: *emotion*, *method*, *origin*, and *structure*. Emotion descriptors indicate the cult instills specific emotional states in its members. Method descriptors suggest the groups "signature" method of operation and can be easily combined. Origin descriptors provide bonuses and penalties to the organization based on its lineage and association with specific

traditions. Structure descriptors point out an important aspect of the group's hierarchy or organizational methods.

## DESCRIPTORS VS DISCRPTION

The descriptors highlight the things important to the organization; anything not directly under their influence can be however the Gamemaster wishes it to be. For example, the GM may describe a local modern cult with the "Wealth" method (1 total descriptor) as having a "cell structure" without necessarily giving it the descriptor bonus for "Cell".

**Table 2-3: Descriptors by Category**

<b>Effect</b>	
<b>Emotion</b>	
Desperate	+2 to Occult checks
Envious	+2 to Response checks
Greedy	+2 to Resources checks
Lustful	+2 to Influence checks
Prideful	+2 to Occult checks
Wrathful	+2 to Force checks
<b>Method</b>	
Corrupt	Organization operatives' add its Resources modifier bonus to their Diplomacy skill checks (bribery)
Deceptive	Organization operatives' add its Response modifier bonus to their Forgery skill checks
Fearsome	Organization operatives' add its Influence modifier bonus to their Gather Information skill checks
	Organization operatives' add its Information modifier bonus to their Sense Motive skill checks
Murderous	Organization operatives' add its Force modifier bonus to their Intimidate skill checks
<b>Origin</b>	
African	Organization reduces time of Intimidate and Repair by 1/2
Ancient	Organization reduces time of Decipher Script and Research by 1/2
Arabic	Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Theology) and Research by 1/2
Celtic	Organization reduces time of Disguise and Treat Injury by 1/2
Eastern	Organization reduces time of Diplomacy checks by 1/2
Egyptian	Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Art) and Decipher Script by 1/2
European	Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Popular Culture, Tactics) by 1/2
Indian	Organization reduces time of Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) and Search by 1/2
Greco-Roman	Organization reduces time of Knowledge (History, Physical Sciences) by 1/2
<b>Structure</b>	
Cell	Organization never appears to have more than 1/10 <sup>th</sup> its actual size
Centered	Organization cannot hide its size. It heals damage at twice the normal rate
Circuit	Organization may take 10 on Response checks but suffers a penalty equal to its Response modifier on all Force checks
Monolithic	Organization may take 10 on Force checks but suffers a penalty equal to its Force modifier on all Response checks
Scattered	Organization cannot take 10 or 20 on a skill check. It gains DR equal to its highest attribute modifier against attacks by other organizations



## EMOTION DESCRIPTORS

On the surface, the emotion descriptors describe a particular tenor of emotional frenzy the cult incites in its followers. Everyone involved with the cult, from the highest echelons of leadership to the lowliest thugs, displays this emotion in varying degrees of sophistication. Heavy-knuckled bruisers express their feelings with their fists while the cultured elites engage in lofty discourses about obtuse philosophical principles.

On a philosophical and narrative level a cult's emotion descriptors describe its primary psychological function. The cult both inspires its members to the emotion and embodies that emotion's power in the fictional world. For example a cult of wrath both inspires great rage in its minions and functions as an external representation of the characters' wrath in the world.

This later point is particularly important in pulp games. Pulp heroes have a lot of problems, both personal and professional, but rarely lose control of their masks. An opposed cult with an emotional element can act, in a narrative sense, as the heroes' dark alter ego, doing all of the things he wants to do but is too civilized to admit to.

The emotional descriptors include desperate, envious, greedy, lustful, prideful, and wrathful.

### Desperate

The cult's founder revealed to them one of the world's great truths. They know nothing matters and the world will continue as it has for ages until it finally drowns in its own accumulated filth. All human creatures dance out their lives on the end of unseen strings, taking whatever pleasure they can before they

lay down to rot in the earth.

### Quick Description

The cult revels in its lack of hope.

### Effect

The cult receives a +2 bonus to its Occult attribute checks.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The following questions help flesh out the cult's despair.

1. Does the cult believe the world will continue in its present state or find freedom from its misery?
2. How do the cult members express their despair?
3. How does the cult inculcate despair into its members?
4. Does the cult look to a single event or source as the "cause" of life's meaninglessness?

### Envious

The cult's founder showed them the world is not fair. This does not come as news to anyone, but he also taught them they deserved all of the things denied them by the world's unfairness. Cosmic forces, random chance, or the will of the gods denied them their rightful place. The cult members must rise up and reclaim whatever was wrongfully taken from them.

### Quick Description

The cult knows someone denied them their rightful place.

### Effect

The cult receives a +2 bonus to its Response checks.

### **Questions for Detailed Description:**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's envy.

1. Does the cult believe it can ever achieve its goals?
2. What exactly does the cult feel entitlement towards?
3. How do the cult's members manifest this envy in their ordinary lives?
4. How does the cult inculcate envy into its members?
5. What happens when the cult finally gains something it envies?

### **Greedy**

The cult's founder revealed to them the foolishness of seeking out spiritual pleasures. Only the things of this world, wealth and gold and jewels, can bring pleasure. Only the wealthy can know peace because only they can afford to live well. Wealth, and its trappings, is a sign of divine favor and enlightenment.

#### **Quick Description**

The cult desires wealth and power.

#### **Effect**

The cult receives a +2 bonus to Resources checks.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's greed.

1. What specifically does the cult desire?
2. What is the cult's favorite form of wealth?
3. Which cult members control access to the cult's wealth?
4. How does the cult inculcate greed into its members?
5. How does the cult's greed manifest in the cult members' lives?

### **Lustful**

The cult's founder taught his followers to revel in the flesh. He showed them that the path to spiritual bliss lies first through then beyond pleasure and pain. Staid society created its moral limits to prevent ordinary people from ascending past their limits.

#### **Quick Description**

The cult revels in the body's pleasures.

#### **Effect**

The cult receives a +2 bonus to Influence checks.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's lust.

1. What forms of debauchery does the cult encourage?
2. What forms of debauchery does the cult prohibit?
3. How does the cult inculcate lust in its members?
4. Does the cult allow outsiders to participate in some of its activities? If so, which ones?

### **Prideful**

The cult's founder told his followers a flattering truth. He claimed they numbered among the chosen, the divine children selected for salvation from among the corrupted masses. Their divine superiority granted them license to do as they will. Everything else, from the plants to the people, exists only to serve the chosen.

#### **Quick Description**

The cult rests secure in the knowledge of its own salvation.

### **Effect**

The cult receives a +2 bonus to its Occult checks.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's pride.

1. What central event provides the cult with its sense of superiority?
2. Does the cult believe this superiority will manifest as material or spiritual wealth?
3. How does the cult instill its pride in the members?
4. What happens when the cult encounters a group with equal pride?

## **Wrathful**

The cult's founder taught his followers to unleash the fury in their souls. They can answer every slight, every insult, and every denigration with absolute violence and overwhelming anger. By giving into their basest desires they transcend human limitations, becoming like onto gods.

### **Quick Description**

The cult's anger and vengeance spill beyond all civilized bounds.

### **Effect**

The cult receives a +2 bonus to Force checks.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's wrath.

1. What targets dominate the cult's wrath?
2. Why does the cult feel such fury towards those targets?
3. How does the cult inculcate fury into its members?

4. How do the cult members manifest this fury in their daily lives?

## **METHOD DESCRIPTORS**

On the surface the method descriptors describe the cult's preferred technique for eliminating problems. They deploy these techniques to achieve their nefarious ends, running roughshod over whoever dares stand in their way. The slightly more cultured approach taken by the cult's leaders simply acts as a velvet glove over the method's steel fist.

On a narrative level the method descriptor shows what happens when a good thing goes too far. Heroes in the pulps bribe, deceive, bully, lie, and fight but they do so with respect for the norms of their times. Cults display no such respect. They do what they want, go as far as they want, and in so doing become villains.

The method descriptors include corrupt, deceptive, fearsome, manipulative, and murderous.

### **Corrupt**

The cult knows everyone feels desires they cannot admit to. Everyone wants things they should not have. They exploit this truth, offering up whatever the individual desires if he will give in to their will.

### **Quick Description**

The cult encourages giving in to temptation in order to get its way.

### **Effect**

A cult member may add the cult's Resources modifier (if positive) to their Diplomacy skill



checks when attempting to bribe a target. This bonus only applies if the member acts under his cult's orders.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The following questions help flesh out the cult's approach to corruption.

1. Does the cult prefer monetary, moral, or fleshy corruption?
2. What corruptive methods does the cult forbid its members to use?
3. Does the cult permit the cult members to use corruptive techniques in their daily lives?
4. Does the cult use corruption to control its own members?

## Deceptive

The cult knows men rarely see past the surface of events. They therefore mastered the use of misdirection and confusion, distracting their potential foes from the reality of their actions.

### Quick Description:

The cult's activities are always hidden under multiple layers of misdirection.

### Effect

A cult member may add the cult's Response modifier (if positive) to their Forgery skill checks when preparing false clues. This bonus only applies if the member acts under his cult's orders.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The following questions help flesh out the cult's approach to misdirection.

1. How many layers of deception does the cult usually lay between its activities and the outside world?
2. How many layers of deception exist between the cult leaders and the cult

members?

3. How does the cult react when a layer of deception is revealed?
4. When does the cult tell the truth?

## Fearsome

The cult studied the fear lurking in every man's heart. They know how to call it forth, how to bend it to their will, and how to use it as a harrying lash on the back of any who dare to oppose them.

### Quick Description

The cult knows how to make cowards of the bravest men.

### Effect

A cult member adds the cult's Influence modifier (if positive) to his Gather Information skill checks when acting on the cult's orders.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The following questions help flesh out the cult's fearsome methods.

1. What signature method does the cult use to strike fear into men's hearts?
2. Does the cult use fear to control its own members?
3. Why do people fear the cult's influence?
4. Can the cult act openly to cause fear or must it act in secret?

## Manipulative

The cult knows the flattering lies men prefer to cloak their actions in. They know the use a whispered word to make a man turn his back on his brother and the trick to inciting hatred between friends. Let others dance at the end of the world's puppet-strings; they have seized a few of the threads for their own use.

### **Quick Description**

The cult's mastery of sweet words lets them control other's actions.

### **Effect**

A cult member adds the cult's Information modifier (if positive) to his Sense Motive skill checks when he targets an opponent selected for him by his cult's leadership.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's use of manipulation.

1. How does the cult search for ways to control its targets?
2. What is the cult's favorite lie?
3. How does the cult respond when others discover its actions?
4. What does the cult do when it faces a particularly tough target?

## **Murderous**

The cult exploits the paralyzing terror gripping men's hearts when they face death. They also realize personal death holds no fear for some people. Even the most fearless opponent, though, must store his heart somewhere. When faced with such a foe the cult will mercilessly hunt for something whose loss he does fear. This search leaves behind a trail of bodies wide enough for even the most bumbling detective to follow.

### **Quick Description**

The cult murders those who oppose it.

### **Effect**

A cult member may add the cult's Force modifier (if positive) to his Intimidate skill checks when he openly acts in the cult's name.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's murderous methods.

1. What is the cult's signature killing method?
2. Does the cult allow the members to select their targets?
3. How does the cult deal with law enforcement?
4. Does the cult prefer to directly target its opposition or slaughter the target's loved ones before going in for the kill?

## **ORIGIN DESCRIPTORS**

On the surface the origin descriptors describe the cult's point of origin or at least the origin it claims for itself. The cult's litany, physical trappings, insignia, ranks, and rituals all reflect this claimed genesis. Each origin carries with it a long and distinguished history, as well as iconography and mythology already present in the characters' minds.

Practically whether a cult really originates from its described culture depends on whether it numbers among the ancient or the modern cults. Ancient cults almost always stem from a secret tradition passed down through some occult transmission to the present day. Modern cults adopt the trappings of an ancient culture to hide their true intentions. In both cases the rank and file believes the cult to be a secret transmission; only the upper echelons really know the truth.

This knowledge dichotomy creates an interesting weakness in modern cults claiming an origin descriptor. If the characters can somehow expose the truth about the cult they can, at the GM's option, inflict direct organization damage to the cult. This damage

equals 1d6 HP per point of the party's total Charisma modifiers.

The origin descriptors include African, Ancient, Arabic, Celtic, Eastern, Egyptian, European, or Greco-Roman.

## **African**

The cradle of human life and the birthplace of human civilization spawned cults of many types. These cults worship pagan gods of animal aspect. They also hold secrets passed down from the ancient past, secrets of building and making forgotten long before the men of Europe painted the first cave walls.

African cults make extensive use of body-painting, drums, ritual diagrams, and spears. They call upon gods with African names who demand offerings of tobacco, grain, and blood.

### **Quick Description**

The cult's rites clearly show their origin in darkest Africa.

### **Effect**

The cult's approach and worship allows it to reduce the time it takes to reduce the time of organizational Intimidate and Repair skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. What part of Africa did the cult's founders originate from?
2. Does the cult conform to "standard" voodoo practices?
3. Does the cult favor human or animal sacrifices?
4. Does the cult meet in daylight or at night?

## **Ancient**

In the ancient days of humankind's ascension above the animals, he believed many things. Some of these ancient beliefs persist into the modern world. Others, fortunately, vanished when the good news came to Europe. The cult's persistence and worship of things man was not meant to know continues, though, and all right thinking people would certainly rise up to destroy it if they could.

Ancient cults make extensive use of flutes, strange eldritch chants, alien looking head-dresses, and exotic robes. They generally worship creatures with outlandish names and perform rituals "unthinkable to common men."

### **Quick Description**

The cult protects ancient secrets man was not meant to know.

### **Effect**

The cult's moldering libraries and ancient pedigree allows them to reduce the time for organizational Decipher Script and Research skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Describe the secret man was not meant to know in twelve words or less.
2. How does the cult preserve its forbidden knowledge?
3. What ancient culture derived from the cult's founders' inability to keep the secret?
4. How does the cult prevent others from discovering their secret?



## Arabic

The economic, political, and scientific secrets of Arabia did not die when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. Indeed, Arabic cults persist into the modern world, fostering the Muslim cause. These secretive organizations hold vast libraries drawing on the best of eastern and western scholarship.

Arabic cults follow the monotheistic rules of Islam. They generally exist either to promulgate a specific political agenda or to protect a profound scientific insight.

### Quick Description

The poetic beauty of Arabic culture informs the cult's rituals.

### Effect

The organization is heir to the accumulated wisdom handed down from Classical culture. This knowledge allows them to reduce the time for organizational Knowledge (Theology) and Research skill checks by one-half.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Does the cult allow non-Muslims to join?
2. When does the cult meet?
3. Does the cult maintain Muslim holidays?
4. What rules of Islam does the cult allow its members to break?

## Celtic

The cult inherited the druid's wisdom and power. This unbroken occult tradition stretches from the present day into the dim and misty past, in which mortal men worshiped a Goddess with four faces. It also incorporates

the Kabbalah, Roman mythology, and a fair dose of Victorian anthropology.

Celtic cults take their trappings from Irish and Welsh culture. They make offerings of blood and grain to gods and goddesses who represent aspects of an all-encompassing Deity of indeterminate sex. Most also seek a restoration of their priesthood's place in the social hierarchy.

### Quick Description

The cult traces its roots back to the ancient druids.

### Effect

The cult's history of deception and healing allow it to reduce the time required for organizational Disguise and Treat Injury skill checks by one-half.

### Questions for Detailed Description

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Do the cult leaders claim druidic titles?
2. Does the cult practice human sacrifice? If so, does it limit its sacrifices to criminals or will it take anyone?
3. Does the cult still use the Ogham script?
4. Does the cult wish to restore the druid's power over civil society?

## Eastern

From a distance the differences between Japanese, Korean, and Chinese beliefs tends to blend together. In the pulps, this blending produces "Eastern" cults which share the same features regardless of their point of origin. All Eastern cults practice a hodgepodge of ancestor worship, alchemy, and mystical practices aimed at some vague goal titled "enlightenment."

Eastern cults take their trappings from Chinese and Japanese culture. Low tables, lush fabrics, and elaborately embroidered robes all help to set the mood.

### **Quick Description**

The cult's origins in the Far East lend it an exotic air.

### **Effect**

The organization has extensive practice in manipulating others. It reduces the time required for organizational Diplomacy skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. What country does the cult original come from?
2. Does the cult believe in the superiority of Eastern culture?
3. Does the cult engage in alchemical or mystical practices?
4. Does the cult use opium or other drugs to control its members?

## **Egyptian**

In ancient Egypt men and women worshiped strange gods by offering up mountains of gold. They built great tombs and monuments which to this day remain some of the world's greatest wonders. The cults descended from these great people maintain their traditions, and their occult secrets, into the modern world.

Egyptian cults generally favor architecture and costumes appropriate to a British view of ancient Egypt. They wear gold masks and headdresses, perform rituals to hundreds of different gods, and try to steal mummies in

order to reanimate them.

### **Quick Description**

Rites handed down from the ancient Egyptians bind the cult to its holy purpose.

### **Effect**

The organization possesses extensive archives and secrets of artistic expression. It reduces the time requires for organizational Knowledge (Art) and Decipher Script skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Which of the Egyptian gods does the cult serve?
2. Does the cult use hieroglyphs for written communication?
3. Does the cult intend to restore Egypt's glory or does it have another plan in mind?
4. What secret about Egyptian history does the cult guard?

## **European**

Occult and scientific knowledge flowered during the Renaissance. Eventually science proved the superior of the two. However, some occult revelations survived in the guise of secret societies and cults. These cults protect their secrets with fanatical zeal.

European cults enjoy the trappings of the Renaissance. They dress in fancy costumes and hold masked balls where cult members mingle with the highest levels of society. Their rituals draw strongly from European scholarly magic and involve magical circles, amulets, and other objects of power.

### **Quick Description**

The cult came into being as a result of the Enlightenment. They hide the true secrets discovered during that hectic time until the common man can finally understand them.

### **Effect**

The organization constantly monitors modern advances. This knowledge allows it to reduce the time required for organizational Knowledge (Popular Culture) and Knowledge (Tactics) skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. What is the cult's country of origin?
2. Does the cult engage in mystical practices or does it fancy itself scientific?
3. What is the cult's ultimate goal for humanity?
4. What one thing would the cult change about the modern world?

## **Indian**

Cults originating in the great Indian subcontinent can worship a seemingly infinite pantheon of gods or goddesses. They sometimes even engage in this worship despite seemingly obvious theological clashes. For example, Muslims might worship a goddess without for a moment considering the implications to their Islamic faith.

Indian cults worship before massive statues of multi-faced, multi-armed deities. They engage in decadent behaviors no right-thinking man would condone in public. Most use architecture and details from their home country to create a cult space where members feel like they are back in the old country

regardless of their actual geographic location.

### **Quick Description**

The cult springs up from the fertile ground of India's religious cacophony.

### **Effect**

The organization's experience and deep appreciation of the human condition allows it to reduce the time or organizational Knowledge (Behavioral Sciences) and Search skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Which god or goddess does the cult worship?
2. Is the cult considered a respectable form of worship in India?
3. Does the cult allow its members to hold other religious beliefs?
4. Does the cult allow non-Indians to join?

## **Greco-Roman**

The Greeks and the Romans created the basis of European civilization. Their laws and philosophy profoundly influence everything from real estate transactions to codes of professional conduct. Cults claiming descent from this ancient tradition worship the old gods. They also engage in the perversions so beloved by both cultures.

Greco-Roman cults sport the trappings of Greek and Roman culture. They wear togas at their rites, speak in Latin or Greek, and worship gods like Zeus or Saturn. Most favor large marble halls for their meeting places. Many keep slaves despite the practice's dubious legality.



### **Quick Description**

The cult traces its lineage back to the golden ages of Classical thought.

### **Effect**

The cult's long history and profound understanding of Classical science allows it to reduce the time of organizational Knowledge (History) and Knowledge (Physical Sciences) skill checks by one-half.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The follow questions help flesh out the cult's ethnic origin.

1. Does the cult follow Greek or Roman fashions?
2. Would the cult describe itself as a mystery religion or a philosophical school?
3. Do the cult members communicate among themselves in Latin or Greek?
4. Does the cult enjoy the excesses of Greek and Roman life more than the intellectual stimulation of its philosophy?

## **STRUCTURE DESCRIPTORS**

The structure descriptors serve the straightforward purpose of describing the cult's internal hierarchy. This hierarchy protects the upper echelons from distraction and interference while allowing them to pass orders to the seething masses below them. They expect, and receive, absolute obedience. At least, they receive absolute obedience until the heroes somehow foil their dastardly plan.

The structure descriptors include cell, centered, circuit, monolithic, and scattered.

### **Cell**

A cult with a cell structure organizes itself into small autonomous groups. Cell members do not know anyone in the cult beyond their immediate circle. Cell leaders might know one other leader but will usually receive their instructions through a blind drop or other anonymous communication method.

### **Quick Description**

The cult possesses a highly decentralized structure in which each leader only knows one other leader.

### **Effect**

The organization's decentralized structure allows it to hide. No matter how much investigation it suffers it never appears more than one-tenth its actual size.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's internal structure.

1. How does the cult recruit new cell members?
2. What blind methods does the cult use to pass information from cell to cell?
3. Do the cell leaders have any way to contact a central cultic authority?
4. How does the cult insure orthodoxy among cell members?

### **Centered**

A centered cult maintains strong internal leadership and relatively strict hierarchies. Power is distributed throughout the organization, with local leaders making decisions for their own groups without seeking permission from above. The organization responds quickly to damage but is easily monitored.

### **Quick Description**

The other cult members obey the leadership without question or hesitation but local leaders remain some control.

### **Effect**

The cult's centralized command structure makes it impossible for it to hide its size, though it can use organization skills to foil investigations. However, its efficient approach to management also allows it to heal organizational damage at twice the normal rate.

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's internal structure.

1. Where is the cult's central headquarters located?
2. How much autonomy do the local leaders possess?
3. Why does the cult rely on centralized authority?
4. How does the cult deal with heretics?

## **Circuit**

The cult's leaders make regular trips to the local chapters. The chapters themselves do not have a formal local leader; instead they must wait for the leader to arrive before taking action. Most chapters develop an informal leader of some sort who can take care of small problems without waiting for approval.

### **Quick Description**

The cult's leaders move from chapter to chapter, spreading hope and good news as they go.

### **Effect**

The cult's hands-on approach to leadership makes it highly responsive but somewhat lacking in the direct application of power.

The cult may take 10 on Response checks but suffers a penalty equal to its Response modifier on all Force checks

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's internal structure.

1. How do the leaders travel when moving from chapter to chapter?
2. How many times a year does a chapter encounter a leader?
3. How long does the leader stay with the chapter?
4. How many chapters does a leader visit each year?

## **Monolithic**

The cult's leader clutches the reins of power in his tight fists. No one in the organization may take action without direct orders from the leader himself. Some particularly aggressive subordinates may act without instruction under the belief it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission.

### **Quick Description**

The cult focuses all of its resources and power into a single man.

### **Effect**

The cult's focused leadership approach allows it to concentrate power but slows down its responses. The cult may take 10 on Force checks but suffers a penalty equal to its Force modifier on all Response checks

### **Questions for Detailed Description**

The following questions help flesh out the cult's internal structure.

1. Does the cult believe its grand leader to be of divine origin or appointment?
2. What does the cult do when someone

- oversteps their bounds?
3. Does the cult leader have the power of life and death over his followers?
  4. Does this monolithic structure conflict with the cult's philosophy and avowed beliefs?

## Scattered

A scattered cult is linked together by chains of tradition rather than organization. Its chapters and members may exist anywhere. Many do not even know about the others or have only the dimmest awareness of their involvement with a larger organization. At the same time, they will help one another when they can, even going so far as to lay down their lives for complete strangers.

### Quick Description

The cult has a decentralized structure but the leaders know each other fairly well.

### Effect

The cult's highly disorganized approach makes it difficult to coordinate resources. It cannot take 10 or 20 on a skill check. However, it gains DR equal to its highest attribute modifier against attacks by other organizations

### Questions for Detailed Description

The following questions help flesh out the cult's internal structure.

1. How did the cult become so scattered?
2. Do members of different cult chapters recognize one another as brothers in the same organization?
3. How much control does each chapter leader have over his minions?
4. How do the chapter leaders interact with one another?

## QUICK OR DETAILED CULT CREATION

A cult with a full set of descriptors has enough information listed in the "Quick Descriptions" to act as a plot element. By using the pre-built characters in the back of this book the GM can be up and running with a cult in a matter of a half-hour or less.

However, many GMs will want even more detail about their cults. For these GMs the "Questions for Detailed Descriptions" sections provide a starting point for further work. Using these questions he can produce almost endless details to satisfy his players' or his own curiosity.

In order to use the questions first amass the lists from all of the cult's descriptors into a single list. Then sort the questions into related groups, jotting down notes and potential answers while doing so. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to sort the questions. Each Game Master will see different connections between them. Those connections, and how they influence the answers to other questions, add depth and texture to the cult.

The questions provide a guide to laying out the cult's membership requirements, environs, and the kinds of encounters characters will have with it. As with the sorting, there is no right or wrong answers, just varying degrees of detail and imagination applied to the cult's background.

All that remains is to create the cult using the Organization Rules which follow.



## ORGANIZATION RULES

Organizations are described much like other Game Master characters, with ability scores, skills, and feats.

### ABILITY SCORES

Like a character, an organization is defined by six ability scores and has skills, feats, and hit points. These function in a similar way to those of any character. An organization reduced to 0 hit points is destroyed, while an organization with an ability score of 15 has a +2 bonus.

The six ability scores are:

**Force (For):** Analogous to Strength, Force measures how powerful an organization is in terms of military might. An organization with a low Force might be able to hire thugs to beat someone up, while an organization with a High Force might have summoned demons, assassins, or even a private army. Force modifies how help and protection the characters get from the organization or how the organization will oppose them.

**Response (Resp):** Analogous to Dexterity. The higher an organization's Response score, the faster and more agile it is. If the characters are working for a group with a low Response, it might take weeks or months before they get help. A group with a high Response might be constantly monitoring the characters' actions, ready to step in at a moment's notice.

**Resources (Reso):** Analogous to Constitution, Resources measures the financial strength and backing of the organization. A group with high Resources might be extremely wealthy or have huge stockpiles of equipment or treasure. Resources modifies how big a Wealth bonus characters get from being part of the

organization. It also adds to the organization's hit points, as the higher the Resources the more resilient it is.

**Information (Info):** The equivalent of Intelligence, this measures how much scientific knowledge and research ability the organization has. A group with low Information lacks laboratories and researchers; a group with high Information has vast archives. Information modifies the amount of research and background data the characters can get from the organization, as well as how many skill points the organization has.

**Occult (Occ):** Analogous to Wisdom, Occult measures how much magical or mystical power and knowledge the organization has. A low Occult score indicates very little stored information on the occult and only a minor occultist on its payroll. An organization with a high Occult has an extensive magical library and a whole staff of occultists on its payroll.

**Influence (Infl):** The equivalent of Charisma, Influence measures how much pull the organization has. An organization with high Influence can deal with governments and national groups. An organization with a low Influence might have trouble altering the opinion of its neighbors. Influence modifies a character's Reputation.

Organizations do not roll for ability scores; instead the Game Master assigns the scores. Alternatively, let the players build their own organization by buying ability scores from a points budget.

A minor, local organization might have 20-40 points to spend on ability scores. A fringe cult or section of a large government group like a police precinct might have 50-80 points. A major national organization or worldwide

organization might have 100 or more points.

Unlike characters, organizations buy ability scores using points on a one-to-one basis.

### **APPLYING ABILITY SCORES**

**Force:** Roll Force whenever a question of sheer manpower comes up for an organization. Force also determines how much damage an organization can do.

**Response:** Response determines how aware the organization is of the characters' actions. It also serves as a form of Initiative—an organization with high Response will respond quicker to a character's requests.

**Resources:** Each character may add the Resources modifier of the organization to their Wealth bonus (do not subtract if the Resources modifier is negative). If they do so, then the materials or services they acquire from a purchase check are technically the organization's and not their own.

Also, increase or decrease the hit points of the organization by 5% multiplied by the organization's Resources modifier.

**Information:** Information determines how many skill points the organization has. An Information check can be used to determine if the organization knows something offhand. Occult: Occult measures both how much practical mystical knowledge the organization has, as well as its occult defenses and resources.

**Influence:** If the character identifies himself as a member of the organization (and the organization is known), the character applies the organization's Influence modifier to his Reputation bonus. This can actually reduce the character's Reputation bonus.

### **HIT POINTS**

The hit points of an organization are calculated as follows:

- +1 for each individual member
- +5 for each member with special skills (such as a character)
- +10 for each influential leader
- +20 for each major stronghold or headquarters

### **ORGANIZATION SKILLS & ACTIONS**

An organization has a number of skill points equal to four times its Information score. Organizations can select from the table on the following page.

In general, an organization makes skill checks just like a character and with similar effect. For example, a librarian character trying to locate an obscure news article would make a Research check (1d20 + the character's Research skill ranks + Int bonus) against DC 15. An FBI agent character could make a request for his organization to do the same and the GM would make a Research check for the FBI (1d20 + the FBI's Research skill ranks + Info bonus) at the same DC.

Of course, the FBI has a very high Research skill and huge Info bonus. The disadvantages of going through an organization instead of the character making the check himself are:

- Requests made of an organization can be tracked or intercepted.
- Cigarette-smoking men could nefariously interfere with the result of the Research check.
- Requests take a great deal of time, often much longer than it would take the character to do the task himself.

## ORGANIZATION SKILLS

Skill	Ability	Uses	Time Required
Computer Use	Info	Hacking, computer security, programming, searches	8 hours
Craft	Info	Building specialized equipment	48 hours
Decipher Script	Info or Occ	Breaking codes, analyzing ancient tomes	24 hours
Demolitions	Resp	Disarming bombs	-
Disguise	Resp or Infl	Arranging for disguises for the characters	4 hours
Forgery	Info	Forging documents, IDs	8 hours
Gather Information	For or Infl	Door to door searches, surveys, rumor control	48 hours
Intimidate	For or Infl	Gunboat diplomacy or subtle political pressure	24 hours
Investigate	Info or Occ	Crime scene investigation	8 hours
<b>Knowledge</b>			
Arcane Lore	Occ	Information on occult, aliens	48 hours
Art	Info	Information on art history, art world rumors	24 hours
<b>Behavioral Sciences</b>			
	Info	Psychological analysis	24 hours
Business	Info	Information on business world, business rumors	24 hours
Civics	Infl	Information on law and legislation, politics	48 hours
Current Events	Infl	Information on current events, scanning the news	8 hours
<b>Earth and Life Sciences</b>			
	Info	Information on biology, botany, geology, etc.	48 hours
History	Info or Occ	Information on history	48 hours
<b>Physical Sciences</b>			
	Info	Information on chemistry and physics	48 hours
<b>Popular Culture</b>			
	Infl	Entertainment rumors and news	8 hours
Streetwise	Infl	The word on the street	8 hours
Tactics	For	Strategic and tactical advice	8 hours
Technology	Info	Information on cutting-edge technology and devices	12 hours
<b>Theology and Philosophy</b>			
	Occ	Information on religions and philosophy	48 hours
Repair	Info	Repairing specialized equipment	1 week
Research	Info	Digging through public records, libraries, etc.	48 hours
Search	For	Searching an area for a runaway	24 hours
Treat Injury	Reso	Medical treatment	1 week



## REQUEST TIMES

Request Modifier	Time
-5	One month
-4	Three weeks
-3	Two weeks
-2	One week
-1	Three days
	One day
+1	12 hours
+2	8 hours
+3	4 hours
+4	1 hour
+5	30 minutes
+6	10 minutes
+7 or more	Instantly

Some situations give a bonus to the Response modifier:

Situation	Modifier
Emergency!	+3
Characters are geographically distant from the organization	
Outside usual scope of activities	-2
Remote area	-4
Extremely isolated area	-6
Lost	-8

## Making Requests

A character can submit a request for assistance just by making a telephone call. However, every organization takes some time to process such a request and provide aid. The organization's Response modifier determines how quickly it responds.

If the character is in bad standing with the organization, a penalty may be applied to Response (usually -2 or -4).

Each skill check has a time requirement: add the response time to the time required for the skill check to work out how long it will take for the characters to get the results of the skill check.

In addition to making skill checks, an organization can also perform the following actions:

- The organization can take 10.
- The organization can keep rerolling, but each attempt takes the normal Response time.
- The organization can take 20, but it takes 10 times longer than normal.



## ORGANIZATION ACTIONS

Action	Ability	DC	Time
Minor military support (two police officers/thugs)	Force	10	5 min.
Significant military support (police squad, assassins)	Force	12	10 min.
Major military support (SWAT team, snipers)*	Force	15	30 min.
Overwhelming military support (helicopter gunships)*	Force	20	8 hours
Loan of advanced or heavy weaponry*	Force	15	24 hours
Car rental	Response	5	1 hour
Plane tickets to anywhere	Response	15	1 hour
Helicopter*	Response	20	1 hour
Aid another with Investigate, Knowledge, or Research	Information	5	24 hours
Casting a spell*	Occult	15	48 hours
Spreading rumors	Influence	10	48 hours
Rumor control	Influence	15	24 hours
Cover-up	Influence	20	24 hours

\*Requesting any of these too often will really annoy the organization. Also, not every organization can provide these actions. Asking your local police station to cast a spell for you will get an immediate response, but not the one you were asking for.

## ORGANIZATION FEATS

Most organizations have one feat per two important characters (basically, one per two player characters or influential GMCs) to a maximum of three for a local organization, six for a national, or twelve or more feats for a massive, world-spanning group.

### Arsenal

The organization has a large stockpile of weaponry.

**Benefit:** The organization has a +5 bonus to Force checks for requisitioning weaponry and has access to military-grade or illegal gear.

### Artifact

The organization has access to an ancient mystical artifact or alien device of considerable power. The organization knows a little about the artifact but has not yet fathomed its full power.

**Benefit:** The characters can gain access to the artifact if the organization makes an Occult check (DC 15).

**Special:** The organization may take this feat more than once.

### Covert

The organization's very existence is concealed.

**Benefit:** The organization gives no Reputation increase (or decrease), but its members are "off the grid" in terms of fingerprints, police records, and so on, which gives the characters considerably more latitude when it comes to avoiding the attention of the authorities.

### Emergency Response

The organization is always on standby to help the characters.

**Benefit:** The organization has a +5 bonus to Response for the purposes of determining

Response time.

## Fanatical Loyalty

The organization demands absolute faith from its members.

**Benefit:** Organization members may add the group's Occult bonus to Will saves for the purposes of resisting mind control effects.

## Financial Sway

The organization is adept at using its financial muscle to influence other groups

**Benefit:** The organization may use Resources instead of Influence for the purposes of pulling political strings.

## Forensic Laboratory

The organization has a well-equipped forensics laboratory.

**Benefit:** The organization has a +2 equipment bonus to Investigate checks. If a character uses the forensics lab, he gets a +4 equipment bonus to Investigate and Treat Injury checks.

## Hospital

The organization has a private medical facility.

**Benefit:** The organization has a +4 equipment bonus to Treat Injury checks.

## Library

The organization has an extensive reference library dealing with a particular subject.

**Benefit:** Choose a subcategory of the Knowledge skill (such as Knowledge (arcane lore) or Knowledge (technology)). The organization has a +2 equipment bonus to that particular type of Knowledge check. If a character uses the library, he gets a +4 equipment bonus to that particular type of Knowledge check.

**Special:** The organization may take this feat more than once.

## Occult Library

The organization has a comprehensive library of occult texts.

**Prerequisite:** Library of Knowledge (arcane lore)

**Benefit:** Members capable of casting arcane spells are treated as having an additional +1 to their Intelligence modifier for the purposes of learning, casting, and preparing spells.

## Research Lab

The organization has a well-equipped research laboratory

**Prerequisite:** Forensic Laboratory

**Benefit:** The organization has access to a research laboratory, which gives it a +2 equipment bonus to Craft, Investigate, Repair, and Knowledge (technology) checks. It can also produce specialized equipment in half the normal time.

## Secure Base

The organization's headquarters is protected by state of the art security systems.

**Benefit:** The organization gains +20 hit points and the headquarters is well defended.

**Special:** The organization may take this feat more than once.

## Widely Known

The organization is famous

**Benefit:** Members gain an additional +5 bonus to Reputation, but they will also attract attention wherever they go.



## DAMAGING AN ORGANIZATION

Every organization has a number of hit points. This is an abstract value that measures how much disruption the organization can take to its structure and plans before collapsing. Losing all its hit points does not mean that every single member of an organization is killed—a group may be forced to disperse long before it loses all its members.

### ORGANIZATION DAMAGE

Event	Hit Points Lost
Member lost or killed	1
Leader or officer lost or killed	2d6
Major base destroyed	3d10
Plot foiled	1d10



## CHAPTER THREE: THUGEE FEATS AND F/X

The Thugee, in all of their incarnations, rely on stealth and subterfuge to carry out their nefarious purposes. Their success, or failure, depends on split second timing and the ability to communicate with one another secretly using plain language.

Some of the cult's incarnations possess additional, dangerous powers conferred upon them by their goddess. These powers, represented as F/X in d20 Modern, enhance their ability to detect prey and elude capture.

## NEW FEATS

All versions of the Thugee and similar cults might grant their followers access to several special feats described below.

### Cant

You can speak and read a secret or forbidden language.

**Prerequisite:** None

**Benefit:** When you select this feat you select one cult or occult society. You can communicate with other members of the cult who also have this feat using a secret language that others do not know. Those overhearing your conversation cannot decipher it, though they may record it for later decoding. Decoding a conversation requires a Decipher Script skill check (DC 25).

**Special:** You must be a member of the cult whose cant you wish to select.

## Coordinated Strike

You can coordinate your sneak attacks with others who have the same gift.

**Prerequisite:** Evasion

**Benefit:** When two or more characters with this feat attack the same target they are always considered to be flanking even if they are not directly opposite one another.

**Normal:** The ability to perform a sneak attack is evaluated on an attacker by attacker basis.

**Special:** A Fast Hero may select Coordinated Strike as one of his bonus feats.

## From Behind

When your target is completely unaware of your presence you can strike deadly blows.

**Prerequisite:** Stealthy

**Benefit:** You gain a +1 bonus to attack and a bonus equal to your Intelligence modifier to damage when making a melee attack against a target during the surprise round.

**Special:** A Fast Hero may select Coordinated Strike as one of his bonus feats.

## Knee and Cord

You have mastered the art of strangling.

**Prerequisite:** +3 base attack bonus

**Benefit:** When you succeed in a grappling attack and use a strangling cord you automatically inflict an additional +1d6 damage.

## Reading

You know the tells separating marks from hawks.

**Prerequisite:** Wis 13+

**Benefit:** As a standard action select one target within visual range. You and the target make a contested Diplomacy vs. Bluff check. If you succeed you may ascertain one of the following pieces of information: the target's CR, his skills, one skill rank of your choice, or one of his attributes. This ability does not allow

you to determine the target's special attacks or special qualities.

**Special:** A Charismatic Hero may select Reading as one of his bonus feats.

## THUGEE F/X

Faithful Thuggee can, at the Games Master's option, become Acolytes. The goddess Kali grants her Acolytes the following additional spells: Hand of the Goddess and Ritual Dedication.

### Hand of the Goddess

Conjuration

**Level:** Acolyte 3; **Components:** V, S, M;

**Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Touch;

**Target:** One creature; **Duration:** 1 round/

level; **Saving Throw:** Will negates; **Spell**

**Resistance:** Yes

When an acolyte invokes the *hand of the goddess* he calls upon Kali's own might to assist him in his attack. Any one medium size or smaller target he touches (with a touch attack) within a number of rounds equal to his acolyte level enters into a grappling contest with an invisible foe. The foe possesses unlimited hit points, a base attack bonus equal to the acolytes, and Strength equal to the acolytes level + his Wisdom. The two continue to grapple until the spell's duration elapses.

### Ritual Dedication

Illusion

**Level:** Acolyte 2; **Components:** V, S, M;

**Casting Time:** 1 hour; **Range:** Touch;

**Area:** 30 ft. emanation from touched point;

**Duration:** Permanent; **Saving Throw:** None;

**Spell Resistance:** No

Kali gives her servants the ability to conceal

their crimes. The ritual dedication creates a subtle illusion, serving to turn aside those who would discover the murders committed by her devotees. After slaughtering his targets the acolyte must pray for Kali's blessing for one hour.

Once complete, the spell creates an illusion which masks the crime's traces. Increase the DC of any Investigation, Research, or Search skill check to investigate the crime by the acolyte's Wisdom modifier. Spells and psionic abilities attempting to probe the action fail if the caster fails to beat a DC equal to the acolyte's level +10 on a caster level check.

## APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

The following characters appear in the Thug cults.

**Thug (Human Charismatic Hero 1/Fast Hero 1):** CR 2; Medium human; HD 1d6+2 plus 1d8+2; hp: 11; Mas 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 13, flat-footed 13; BAB: +0; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); Full Atk +1 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; AP 1; Rep 2; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 13

**Skills:** Bluff +8, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +7, Gather Information +5, Move Silently +4, Perform (any one) +5, Profession +4

**Feats:** Cant, Deceptive

**Talents (Charismatic):** Fast Talk

**Talents (Fast):** Evasion

**Possessions:** Garrote, normal clothes

A lowly beginning thug does not yet understand the subtle art of strangulation or the skills used by his betters to select their marks. His role is to work under the direction of more experienced murderers, slowly building his skills until he can one day wield the noose himself. To that end he cultivates the art of deception and studies the methods employed by his betters.

Thugs are the lowest rank in all four of the Thugee cults described in Chapter 1. They will run away rather than fight an armed and aware opponent.

**Thug Strangler (Human Charismatic Hero 3/Fast Hero 2):** CR 5; Medium human; HD 3d6+6 plus 2d8+4; hp: 27; Mas 14; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 15, flat-footed 15; BAB: +3; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee garrote grapple (1d4); Full Atk +4 melee garrote grapple (1d4); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2; AP 1; Rep 2; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 14

**Skills:** Bluff +13, Diplomacy +13, Disguise +10, Gather Information +10, Hide +6, Move Silently +6, Perform (any one) +8, Profession +7

**Feats:** Cant, Coordinated Attack, Deceptive, Stealthy, Trustworthy

**Talents (Charismatic):** Fast Talk, Dazzle

**Talents (Fast):** Evasion

**Possessions:** garrote, normal clothes

When a Thug finally participates in enough murders he becomes a strangler. The stranglers



act under the direction of the group leader, separating targets from the masses in order to murder them in a quick and effective fashion. Each strangler specializes in lulling his victim into a sense of security, then striking from surprise with the assistance of others.

The historical and ancient survival thuggee will not attack unless there is one strangler and at least two thugs for each target. The other two cults, being less cautious in their evil, may attack with lesser odds.

Although a strangler is a respected member of the thug community he still has a long way to go in honing and developing his skills.

**Thug Leader (Human Charismatic Hero 5/  
Fast Hero 4):** CR 8; Medium human; HD 5d6+10 plus 4d8+8; hp: 42; Mas 14; Init +0; Spd 40 ft.; Defense 17, touch 17, flat-footed 17; BAB: +5; Grap +6; Atk +6 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); Full Atk +6 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +5; AP 1; Rep 4; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 14

**Skills:** Bluff +17, Diplomacy +17, Disguise +12, Gather Information +12, Hide +10, Move Silently +10, Perform (any one) +12, Profession +9

**Feats:** Cant, Coordinated Attack, Deceptive, From Behind, Knee and Cord, Iron Will, Reading, Stealthy, Trustworthy

**Talents (Charismatic):** Charm, Dazzle, Fast Talk

**Talents (Fast):** Evasion, Increase Speed

**Possessions:** garrote, normal clothes

The Thuggee cell leaders mix deception and psychosis into a deadly brew. These charming killers can hold a polite conversation on nearly any topic, engage in intimacies, and then strangle their companion without hesitation. They watch over the stranglers and young thugs, guiding their charges in the ancient ways of the Thuggee.

When not out murdering people the thug leader plays a vital role in his local community. His charisma and organizational skills make him a logical choice for official roles like local sheriff, judge, or even mayor. The leader will not break his cover while in normal life, though he will use whatever power he wields to thwart investigations into the Thuggee.

Historically the average Thuggee leader did not prove to be very loyal. When confronted with their crimes he agreed to cooperate in return for a pardon or reduced sentence. It seems that the kind of man who can murder without compunction might not possess the highest moral or ethical qualities.

**Acolyte of Kali (Human Charismatic Hero 2/Dedicated Hero 3/Acolyte 5):** CR 10; Medium human; HD 2d6+2 plus 3d6+3 plus 5d8+5; hp: 45; Mas 13; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 16, touch 16, flat-footed 16; BAB: +6; Grap +7; Atk +7 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); Full Atk +7/+1 melee garrote grapple (1d4+1); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ Divine skills, divine spells, rebuke undead, combat casting; AL LE; SV Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +8; AP 1; Rep 6; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 14

**Acolyte Spells Prepared** (5/5/4/2, save DC

12+ spell level): 0 – *detect magical aura x2, read magic x2, virtue*; 1st – *command x2, cure light wounds, shield of faith x2* ; 2nd –*augury, hand of the goddess x2, ritual dedication*; 3rd – *animate dead, bestow curse*

**Skills:** Bluff +9, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +9, Disguise +4, Gather Information +9, Handle Animal +7, Knowledge (arcane lore) +8, Knowledge (theology and philosophy) +8, Listen +8, Perform +7, Read/Write (Hindi, Sanskrit), Sense Motive +6, Speak Language (Hindi, Sanskrit), Spellcraft +7

**Feats:** Alertness, Archaic Weapon Proficiency, Cant, Deceptive, Educated, Knee and Cord, Reading, Trustworthy, Educated

**Talents (Charismatic):** Fast Talk

**Talents (Dedicated):** Empathy, Improved Aid Another

**Possessions:** ceremonial robes, garrote, holy symbol

Historically, the leaders of the Thuggee demonstrated many skills including the ability to hide up to ten thousand murders a year. However, in the pulps the greatest of the Thuggee wield an even more sinister power: magic itself. They use the secrets taught them by Black Kali to hide their crimes and dominate anyone in their way.



An acolyte of kali does not go on the long murder pilgrimages. Instead he squats in a hidden temple, issuing orders to the thugs under his command.

# CULT SHEET

**DESCRIPTORS:**

**ATTRIBUTES**

**SCORE**

**MOD**

**FORCE:**

**RESPONSE:**

**RESOURCES:**

**INFORMATION:**

**OCCULT:**

**INFLUENCE:**

**HIT POINTS:**

**SKILLS:**

**FEATS:**