



by Chad Underkoffler

Art by [andi jones](#)

[*Editor's Note:* Elements of this article will appear in *Post-Modern Magick*, an upcoming Atlas Games supplement for *Unknown Armies*.]

In [Atlas Games'](#) new roleplaying game *Unknown Armies*, you and your allies in the Occult Underground mix it up with good guys and bad guys alike. At the street level, magickal Adepts duke it out with gun-toting enforcers and weirdos of every stripe. At the global level, organizations like the Sect of the Naked Goddess, the True Order of Saint-Germain, and the New Inquisition have set their sights on becoming the powerhouse of the Occult Underground. And on the cosmic level, soon the universe will die and be reborn. Next time around, the world might be a terrible place - - or it could be Paradise. Someone gets to decide. Might as well be you.

This article introduces a new school of magick - - Bibliomancy, plus a sample Bibliomancer character, two related artifacts, and some adventure seeds for your *Unknown Armies* campaign. Given the loose and abstract nature of the *UA* rules, there should be enough information here to convert the school, character, and artifacts to any desired system. Enjoy!

Bibliomancy

(Book - Based Magick)

"Book lovers are thought by unbookish people to be gentle and unworldly, and perhaps a few of them are so. But there are others who will lie and scheme and steal to get books as wildly and unconscionably as the dope-taker in pursuit of his drug."

- - Robertson Davies, *Tempest-Tost*

Knowledge is power.

The greatest repositories of knowledge - - and thus power - - are books. To gain power, one must seek out and read as many books as possible. Not only that, but to access and hold the caged power of a book, the adept must retain possession of

the book in his Library. Possession is nine-tenths of Bibliomancy. Bibliomancers are often called librarians or bookworms in the slang of the Occult Underground.

The central paradox of Bibliomancy is that even though one may read a book and transfer its knowledge and power to memory, the physical book itself must still be kept - - purely for reference, you understand. Bibliomancers collect huge Libraries around themselves, much like the shell of an oyster. And like an oyster shell, a Bibliomancer's Library is usually immobile, strongly defended, and full of pearls (of wisdom, perhaps?). Attempting to attack a Bibliomancer in his Library is stupidity of the rankest sort.

Bibliomantic Library: A bookworm's Library is the center of his power. He can use it to charge himself up, store those charges, and use those charges on spells like Let Me Check My Notes and Arcane Knowledge. The downside is that his Library also limits his power: a bookworm only has access to those skills contained within the books of his Library; the number of books in his Library limits the number of charges he can hold; and he must remain in proximity to his books to use his magic. The GM should feel free to impose negative shifts as the bookworm gets further away from his books; the maximum distance is roughly a number of feet equal to the bookworm's Soul attribute. The player of a bookworm must detail what books comprise his Bibliomantic Library; this is important for a number of spells. See Taboo (below) for more details.

Also, very importantly, a Bibliomancer may not receive a charge from a book currently owned by another Bibliomancer, much as Dipsomancers cannot share their special drinking vessels. Thus, Bibliomancers often spend much of their energies theft-proofing their Libraries, and trying to steal rare books from each other.

Many bookworms believe that the Library of Alexandria was destroyed because it was the magickal Library of an ancient Bibliomantic scholar-king. And indeed, there are some indications that many Bibliomantic traditions have been inherited from a now-extinct old-school Bibliomantic tradition. Other Adepts point to strong correlations between Cliomancy and Bibliomancy, and believe that Bibliomancy is merely a variant form of that history-based magic.

For the purposes of Bibliomancers, any printed and bound material (including scrolls) is a "book." Thus, magazines, Xerox copies, and even comic books can be considered books; computer disks, "books on tape," and electronic files are not. Furthermore, electronic commerce involving books usually does not grant charges for discovery, purchase, or auction, though there have been very rare exceptions to this general rule. Time spent seems to be a large factor in qualifying a book search for charge generation.

All Bibliomancers know the Minor Ritual of Seek the Lost Tome. The ritual, which reveals the location of formerly owned but now missing books, is passed down from teacher to pupil as part of the Bibliomantic school. It is rumored that there is a Major Ritual known as Seek the Hidden Tome; this ritual is said to allow the caster to locate any book that exists, previous ownership is not a prerequisite. All bookworms drool for such a ritual, and will follow any leads or rumors regarding it relentlessly.

Bibliomancy Blast Style: Special. Bibliomancers have no Blast of their own, but can "borrow" the Blast of other schools through the use of the Arcane Knowledge spell (below). The Entropomancer Significant Blast or Killing Stare is often enchanted as a one-charge artifact into the valuable books in a bookworm's Library, to punish

would be book thieves (usually other Bibliomancers!).



Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Read a new (to the bookworm, at least) book of at least 100 pages, or 100 pages of a longer work that belongs to your Library. Find a rare book in a used bookstore, at a flea market, or successfully purchase one at an auction, then add it to your Library. Walking into the local mega-chain and paying for the New York Times number one bestseller will not work. (Please note that a Bibliomancer will receive two charges -- eventually -- for coming across a rarity: one for the discovery, and one for the reading.) Recall that a Bibliomancer may not receive a charge from a book currently owned by another Bibliomancer.

Generate a Significant Charge: Read completely or add to your Library a historically significant or famous book.

Examples would be Mother Theresa's personal Bible, a Caxton *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the grimoire of another magickal school, an author's copy of *Foucault's Pendulum*, etc.

Generate a Major Charge: Read completely or add to your Library a one-of-a-kind book: the real *Necronomicon*, the *Q Gospel*, the *Copper Scroll*, the *Red Book of Westmarch*, the *Voynich Manuscript*, the authentic diary of Howard Hughes (or Adolf Hitler!).

Taboo: The two major taboos of Bibliomancy involve the number of charges a bookworm may hold, and the need to remain in close proximity to one's Library.

Charges: A bookworm may only have as many charges as he has books: minor charges require 1 book per charge, significant charges require 10 books per charge, and major charges require 100 books per charge. Thus, for a bookworm to retain 1 major charge, 2 significant charges, and 5 minor charges, his Library would have to contain a minimum of 125 books. If he generates more charges without increasing the requisite size of his library (say, by coming across a mint-condition Storisende edition of James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen*, for example; a significant charge demanding an additional 10 books), the charge is lost!

Proximity: A bookworm must remain within a number of feet roughly equivalent to his Soul attribute, or lose access to his charges. The charges will remain with the Library. Recall that distance within the acceptable maximum range can still apply a negative shift to Bibliomancy rolls at the GM's option.

Luckily, a bookworm may put together a "traveling Library" of selected books, usually enough to fit inside a briefcase or backpack; otherwise, they would be unable to leave their lairs without being defenseless. Figure number of charges as normal.

Example: David the bookworm needs to travel to Pittsburgh to bid on a rare copy of the *Malleus Malificarum*, worth a significant charge to him. However, this takes him far from his Philadelphia home . . . and Bibliomantic Library. He outfits a small traveling Library of 50 books, which will allow him to carry his 2 significant charges and his 7 minor charges. He also has a major charge (from a rare copy of *The King in Yellow* that he acquired last year), but decides that carrying too much of his Library with him would be too high of a risk given the vagaries of travel and all, and leaves that charge at home with his Philadelphia Library, trusting the magickal defenses he's set there. While in Pittsburgh, it will be as if he had no major charge at all, since he's out of range of his main Library.

If another bookworm steals a book holding a charge from another Bibliomancer's Library, the held charge is lost, both to the victim and the thief. However, the thief immediately regains the charge by gaining possession of the book, and the victim loses a "slot" to hold a charge!

Random Magic Domain: Bibliomancy is concerned with the power of knowledge. It is powerful magic for finding things out, for illuminating or obscuring the facts of something, and for influencing events that are knowledge-dependent. Need a password to hack into a database? Sure. Need to cover-up the signs of a break-in? All right. Need to sift truth from a farrago of lies? You betcha.

Starting Charges: Newly-created Bibliomancers start with three charges and a Library of 10 books. The player needs to come up with the titles of those 10 books and receive the GM's approval on them.

Bibliomancy Minor Formula Spells

Speed Reading

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: By spending a minor charge, a bookworm may absorb all of the information contained within a single book - - which need not be part of his Library - - into his mind. The Bibliomancer retains total photographic recall of the work for around 30 minutes, which then fades to a normal level of recall, just as if he had read the book in a mundane fashion. A bookworm does not generate a charge when using this spell to read a book.

Let Me Check My Notes

Cost: 1 minor charge

Effect: A Bibliomancer has a magickal connection to his Library, and may spend a minor charge to retrieve any information contained within its books. This spell allows total photographic recall of any piece of information, provided there is a book that contains it within his Library. The bookworm must identify the target information he wishes, and the Library work from which he intends to retrieve it. "George Washington, from the W volume of *Encyclopedia Britannica*."

If the Bibliomancer chooses to expend an additional minor charge, he may search all the works of his Library for a composite of all information contained therein on a single subject.

It's Right There in Black & White

Cost: 2 minor charges

Effect: When a bookworm needs to see what the future holds, he merely picks up a book, burns two charges, and riffles through it. Some of the words and letters on the pages will raise themselves up and glow, to spell out a cryptic message of the next 24 hours. The quality of starting text influences the quality of message received. If you use a telephone book, the message will be short and spotty. A *King James Bible* works better - but tends to archaic language. Casting this spell on a noir mystery results in short staccato sentences.

Bookworms do not use books from their Library for this spell unless it is a last resort; something in the divinatory magick summoned "taints" the book for weeks, making it unable to grant or hold charges, or be used by any other Bibliomantic spell.

I've Read the Manual

Cost: 2 minor charges

Effect: This spell allows the use of any mundane skills recorded in the books of the adept's Library. It is similar to the Cliomantic spell Instant Zen Master and the Dipsomantic spell God Looks Out For Drunks, allowing you to use your Bibliomancy skill in place of any other normal skill, including the ability to flip-flop rolls.

This means that a Bibliomancer can use I've Read the Manual to "tap" his Library to Fence like D'Artagnan, Notice like Sherlock Holmes, Seduce like James Bond, Speak Basque like a native, and so forth. That is, as long as he has an appropriate book, and he's within proximity to it. The GM should feel free to apply negative shifts to the Bibliomancy roll if the bookworm is not actually touching the required book with one of his hands.

Blur the Lines

Cost: 3 minor charges

Effect: There are many facts out there that would be dangerous if they saw the light of day. Blur the Lines allows the bookworm to obscure any one fact, making it difficult for any researcher to come across it. This is very similar to the "disappearance" of all information regarding the true identity of the Naked Goddess. Always by happenstance or bad luck, - the needed page seems to be ripped from the telephone book, ink spilled over the name on the signed confession, databases lock up and crash the system when it comes across the Blurred address, no one seems to know the identity of that Cigar Smoking Man . . . Data obscured by this spell will usually reappear in a matter of days. If an additional significant charge is spent, the fact can be permanently Blurred, and will require magick to bring it to light.

Bibliomancy Significant Formula Spells

You Can't Judge a Book By Its Cover

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: Make an inanimate object look like another inanimate object for 15 minutes. This isn't invisibility, this is changing the way observers think about the subject. Though they may be looking at a chair, the part of their brain that would normally say "chair" is saying something else, like "motorcycle." Like Just a Harmless Drunk, the affected object will still appear in photographs, reflections, video cameras, and

so forth.

There is a -50% shift to Notice "something odd" about the affected object, less if the object is in an incongruous area (a motorcycle in the living room). This spell will not make a living or animate being appear to be anything else.

Read Between the Lines

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: The short version: by spending a significant charge, you can ascertain whether or not a single fact is true, at that moment in time.

The long version: it's not as simple as that. When you cast Read Between the Lines, you are granted a vision of the reality behind the fact you wish to judge. These visions are believed to be glimpses into the statorosphere: a look at the probabilities behind the machinery of the universe. As such, they are ever-changing, cloudy, and incredibly vague. In general, when asking about the veracity of a mundane fact, the result will either be "true" or "false." When magick gets involved, results can vary from "sorta true" to "almost totally but not quite false." Evaluating facts that have to do with Avatars return a solid "maybe." And any fool silly enough to attempt to Read Between the Lines on a fact having to do with an archetype or the Invisible Clergy directly is really asking for it.

Cross-Reference

Cost: 2 significant charges

Effect: Gathers and correlates any and all extant and available printed information on a living target into a blank book, much like those sold in most local bookstores or stationery stores. If there is too much information to fit in the book, the type will become smaller, until there is enough room. (Rumor has it that a Bibliomancer once cast this upon a business rival, unaware that the man was secretly the Comte de Saint-Germain. The pages of the book turned black.) This does not include information available upon the Internet, unless that information has been downloaded, printed out, and bound (it's magick, deal with it!). This reference work will bear the target's name as its title, and the bookworm as its author.

Your Life is an Open Book

Cost: 3 significant charges

Effect: Ever wanted to know exactly what someone does all day long? This spell will transfer the entire current life experience of a living target - - who must be within line of sight - - into a blank book, much like those sold in most local bookstores or stationery stores. The book begins with the last sunrise or sunset, and details every action that is taken, every word that is spoken, every idea that is thought up until the second the spell is cast. The title of the book is "A Day in the Life of (target's name)", and the author of the work is the Bibliomancer. A target of this spell will notice the casting of it, much as if someone were staring at them concertedly, studying them like a bug under glass.

Arcane Knowledge

Cost: 2 significant, plus any other charge requirements

Effect: This is the Big Gun of the Bibliomantic School. A more powerful version of I've Read the Manual, it allows the use of mystic skills (even from an Avatar skill)

magickal skills (the formula spells of other schools), other magical effects (the magic phrase "Open Sesame," for example), or out-and-out super-powers ("Up, up, and away!") recorded in the books of the adept's Library, as long as all requirements are met. Remember, the GM should feel free to apply negative shifts to the Bibliomancy roll if the bookworm is not actually touching the required book with one of his hands. This means that a Bibliomancer casting an Epideromantic spell like Warping would need to spend 2 significant charges (for Arcane Knowledge) plus the 1 minor charge (for Warping itself). GM has the final call on whether an effect will work, and how it will work. Bookworms should take warning, however: the last Bibliomancer who tried to duplicate the Biblical feat of Moses parting the Red Sea apparently suffered a Reality Erase (p. 146), according to witnesses of the trigger event.

Bibliomancy Major Effects

Discover any desired piece of information, no matter how well-concealed. Obscure any fact such that it not only drops off of the world's radar, but looks as if it never existed. Learn any skill. Translate or decode any representation of knowledge.

Sample Character

David Robertson, Bookworm

Summary: Surprisingly dapper for a portly man, David Robertson hasn't always been the urban and worldly gent he is today. Just a decade and a half ago, he was a sickly, chubby teenager. Bedridden much of the time, his only friends were books. He got to know the County Librarian quite well - - Miss Agatha Minsky, spinster, last survivor of to an old-money publishing family . . . and Bibliomancer. Miss Minsky shared young David's love of adventure fiction - - many are the hours they spent discussing *Treasure Island*, *Kim*, and *Captain Blood* - -and she nurtured his magickal talents as well. She also gave the young man a taste of what true refinement was.

As David grew in power, his sickliness decreased; with the support of his magick, he took up fencing at the local YMCA. He fenced for the college team, and won a second place ribbon in a tournament during his sophomore year. He eventually graduated with honors, double-majoring in Library Science and English Literature.

Currently, David works as a consultant for the Philadelphia Public Library system. He also operates an Internet-based bookfinder service, which pulls in some supplementary income and allows him to travel in order to search for rare and occult books for his personal Library.

Personality: A film noir Victor Buono.

Obsession: The knowledge and mysteries contained within long-lost books, and the power such information grants (Bibliomancy).

Wound Points: 40

Passions

Rage Stimulus: Book mutilators (this does not include those who add high-quality

marginalia) and book burners.

Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) David is afraid of any harm that may come to his books from sources that he is unable to plan for.

Noble Stimulus: Free Expression; he is strident in his condemnation of those people who ban books and tireless in supporting those who uphold this most sacred of rights.

Stats

Body: 40 (Pudgy)

Speed: 45 (F) (Leisurely)

Mind: 65 (Font of Knowledge)

Soul: 70 (Deep & Mysterious)

Skills

Body Skills: General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%, Fencing 25%

Speed Skills: Driving 15%, Dodge 25%, Billiards 35%

Mind Skills: General Education 35%, Notice 40%, Occult & Rare Books 20%

Soul Skills: Lie 20%, Charm 25%, Magic: Bibliomancy 55%

Madness Meter

Violence: 1 Hardened, 1 Failed

The Unnatural: 3 Hardened, 1 Failed

Helplessness: 0 Hardened, 1 Failed

Isolation: 1 Hardened, 1 Failed

Self: 0 Hardened, 1 Failed

Possessions

David's prize possession is a Xerox copy of an unpublished Dirk Allen manuscript called *Djinn Blossoms*, written in 1983. It appears to be a barely fictionalized account of a severe occult dust-up in Pittsburgh in the late '70s. The work includes an adequate description of the magickal "how-to's" of three Dipsomantic formula spells: Moment of Truth, Lil Whammy, and Now I See . . . David can use his Significant spell of Arcane Knowledge to cast any of these Dipsomantic spells, so long as he retains ownership and is in proximity to the manuscript.

Also of note in David's Bibliomantic Library is a *Gutenberg Bible*, a shooting script of the *Babylon 5* episode "The Geometry of Shadows," a battered paperback copy of the first Doc Savage book, *The Man of Bronze*, a first edition of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a signed copy of Rafael Sabatini's *Bellarion*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's treasured copy of *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, by Alexandre Dumas, pere.

His traveling Library usually contains - - at the minimum - - a copy each of the following: *Goldfinger* (Ian Fleming), a leather-bound *Complete Shakespeare*, *The Three Musketeers* (Alexandre Dumas, pere), a *King James Bible*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Arthur Conan Doyle), *Roget's Thesaurus*, *Yeager: An Autobiography* (Chuck Yeager), a *Webster's Pocket Dictionary*, *The Lord of the Rings* in one

leather-bound volume (JRR Tolkien), *Groucho and Me* (Groucho Marx), *The Complete Books of Charles Fort* (Charles Fort), a *Random House Desk Encyclopedia*, *Galactic Patrol* (EE "Doc" Smith), and a handful of foreign language phrase-books. He also carries a few books in his jacket and pants pockets; *Riders of the Purple Sage* (Zane Grey), *The Great Houdini* (Beryl Williams & Samuel Epstein), the *Boy Scout Handbook*, and *Buckaroo Banzai* (Earl Mac Rauch) are particular favorites for these "last resort" selections. Note that as David carries this load around with him in his shoulder bag, the weight of all those books will cause him to suffer a -10% shift in combat while he carries it.

Bibliomantic Artifacts

Transcription Volume (Minor)

This common artifact is one-use by its very nature. Simply, a Transcription Volume is a blank bound book-much like the ones you can find at your local bookstore or stationery store-that can be left to transcribe a conversation within its presence. Keep in mind that human speech is normally around 250 words per minute - - more if the speaker is excited - - and that a normal book page can hold roughly 250 words. So, in general, assume a page is required per minute of conversation.

The book starts with a bookmark jammed between the front paper of the book and the first page. To begin recording, one must merely remove the bookmark. All spoken words or noises that would be audible to a human listener are copied down in a firm, dark font on the pages of the book. To stop the transcription, one need only place a bookmark between the pages currently being filled with text. You can run out of pages just as you can run out of tape on a recording cassette.

The Garden of Forking Paths, by Ts'ui P? (Significant)

A late 18th century Chinese work of mystery.

"Ts'ui P? - - Governor of his native province, learned in astronomy, in astrology and tireless in the interpretation of the canonical books, a chess player, a famous poet and calligrapher. Yet he abandoned all to make a book and a labyrinth. He gave up all the pleasures of oppression, justice, of a well-stocked bed, of banquets, even of erudition, and shut himself up in the Pavilion of the Limpid Sun for 13 years. At his death, his heirs only found a mess of manuscripts. The family, as you doubtless know, wished to consign them to the fire, but the executor of the estate - - a Taoist or Buddhist monk - - insisted on their publication."

The book appears to be a shapeless farrago of rough drafts that contradict each other. Heroes die, then show up in later chapters as if nothing has happened; armies are destroyed, then march through sunny fields unchallenged. All in all, it is a terribly confusing work to read . . . unless you know its secret.

The Garden of Forking Paths is a puzzle, a written labyrinth, whose solution is "time." The author wished to illustrate his view of the bifurcating quality of time: for every action, there is a reality where that action is successful, and one where it has failed. Ts'ui P?'s masterpiece follows both possibilities and their subsequent bifurcations.

If the owner of this work is aware of the solution to its central puzzle, he may elect

to alter any one success or failure into its opposite, once per day. The owner of the book must be present at said success or failure to alter it, and actions may only be changed within the few moments immediately after their occurrence.

Both Entropomancers and Bibliomancers seek to hold this powerful work; it has been the cause of at least a half-dozen magickal duels.

Bibliomantic Adventure Seeds

* A rare copy of *The Garden of Forking Paths* is taken from a New Inquisition team in Chicago. The Occult Underground is up in arms, as the book is being stolen and restolen, bouncing between cabalists and dukes like a tennis ball at Wimbledon. Word on the streets is Alex Abel's sending in his favorite Enforcer, that hardcase Eponymous, to get it back.

* The Sect of the Naked Goddess has been looking for a copy of the actual shooting script (if you can call it that) of the pornographic film in which the Naked Goddess Ascended to the Invisible Clergy. Several known bookworms are interested in it as well, as it's rumored to have what amounts to detailed descriptions of You Know You Want it, Dazzle, and Synchronicity in the "dialogue" and "plot" of the video; furthermore, it's a worth a significant charge on it's own. It's turned up in the hands of a small-time Avatar of the Merchant know as Jimmy "Pickles" Green, who's trying to arrange an all-out auction of the script in Las Vegas. Other cabalists are planning to show up for the festivities. Daphne Lee doesn't plan on leaving Vegas without the script, come hell or high water.

* One of the player characters inherits, finds, or accidentally comes across a slim volume entitled *Atlantean-English Dictionary*, by Dugan Forsythe. Those in the know recognize the name: he's the founder of Cliomancy, and the father of Angela Forsythe, one of the Sleepers. Could it contain secret "Atlantean" code phrase that Cliomancers recognize? Could it contain hidden Cliomantic spells hitherto unknown to the world at large? Or could it very well contain the evidence that the Atlantis that Cliomancers revere is nothing more than a scam? No one is quite sure. Get ready for a visit from Daoud Masbut, Angela's insane Indian bodyguard; David Robertson, freelance Bibliomancer interested in expanding his Library; and . . . Dirk Allen, legendary boozehound? How is he involved?

Bibliomantic Bibliography

Some Bibliomantic Patron Saints:

[Jorge Luis Borges](#)

[Italo Calvino](#)

[Umberto Eco](#)

[Tim Powers](#)

[Robertson Davies](#)

And a must-read for prospective Bibliomancers:

[The Club Dumas](#), by Arturo Perez-Reverte

72 *Pyramid* subscribers rated this article **4.15** on a scale of 1 to 5. Visit the [ratings page](#) for more info.

Copyright © 1999 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to webmaster@sjgames.com.



[Home](#) - [Subscribe!](#) - [Current Issue](#) - [Playtesting](#) - [Chat](#) - - - [Feedback](#)