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The Power of Illumination

by Bevan Thomas

They are the Invisible Ones, the Powers That Be, the Men of Knowledge, the Secret Masters. Lords of the Conspiracy and Kings of This Earth. People who have been granted visions and power far beyond those of lesser men. They are the Illuminati, and we are pawns in their games.

The *GURPS Basic Set* uses an advantage entitled "Illuminated" to describe the core powers of the Illuminati. This advantage is worth 15 points and grants the character three abilities: the power to recognize on sight anyone who is likewise Illuminated, the power to know if Illuminati are responsible for particular events, and the power to perceive and communicate with supernatural beings that are tied to Illuminated conspiracies. Though this advantage does grant the Illuminati some unique abilities, it keeps them on more-or-less the same power level as other characters. Though this is appropriate for some Illuminated campaigns, mythology and literature are filled with characters whose enlightenment grants them the ability to work wonders, such as the siddhar of Tantric lore, the prophets of the Bible, and the Illuminati of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy.

This article explores how different advantages and disadvantages can be linked with Illumination, allowing the GM to make the Secret Masters beings of power and customize their abilities to suit his campaign. Though of most obvious relevance to a *GURPS Illuminati* campaign, it is useful in any setting where those who are enlightened or divinely chosen gain access to supernatural powers.

The Might Shared By All

The most obvious way to enhance the powers of the Illuminati is to make "Illuminatus" a "meta-trait" (*Basic Set*, p. 262), granting new advantages and disadvantages to all the enlightened. A example of such a meta-trait is found in *GURPS Illuminati*. This version of Illuminated contains all its abilities from the *Basic Set*, but adds Intuition and the 30 point version of Luck, which in *Fourth Edition* would make the cost of the meta-trait 70 points. However, there are many other ways to customize the powers of the Illuminati.

Being Illuminated is usually envisioned as supernatural insight, and in addition to Intuition, any advantage identified with "ESP" would be appropriate, particularly Channeling, Medium, Oracle, and Precognition. They could be treated as psionics, or instead as derived from another source, such as God, spirits, or even the energy of Creation itself.

The Blessed advantage deserves special attention, as it is the most evocative and generally apropos advantage to include in the Illuminati meta-trait (next to the Illuminated advantage itself, of course). Divine visions is the power most often accredited to enlightened individuals, be they Abrahamic prophets, Eastern gurus, or even disciples of Illuminated orders (who often receive cryptic messages from spectral secret chiefs). Furthermore, Blessed has the most scope for variety on the part of the Game Master, allowing him to tailor the visions and the patrons who send them to suit his campaign.

Variations of Luck can also be suitable for an Illuminatus -- not only the 30 point version, but the 60 point Luck, Super Luck, and particularly levels of Serendipity can be used to define Illuminati who are so attuned with the universe that reality begins to accommodate their wishes.

Depending upon how the Game Master wishes to treat Illumination, the Illuminatus meta-trait could also include either Magery or Power Investiture. The GM could even decide that Illumination is required to perform magic, because only an Illuminatus is attuned to the forces of universe (for Magery) or has a direct link to the divine (Power Investiture). This would be particularly befitting in a modern conspiracy world where only the Secret Masters of the Conspiracy are expected to wield the occult with any ability.

Other advantages could be applied to the meta-trait. Various forms of Empathy (Animal Empathy, Spirit Empathy, etc.) could demonstrate how enlightened individuals have become sensitive to those around them, "one with everything," while True Faith would be a good choice if the Illuminati are divinely inspired and Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, Regeneration, Resistant, and/or Unaging could be used for Illuminati who have perfected their bodies along with their minds. In a very different setting, advantages such as Daredevil, Enhanced Move, and Super Jump traits could be granted to all Illuminated for a cinematic style involving battles between the secret masters (such as in the manga X).

Disadvantages as well as advantages can be part of the Illuminatus meta-trait. The most obvious disadvantages are alterations of the mind, for it is a common theme that the Illumination bends and even breaks the sanity of those who experience it. Such mental disadvantages as Delusions, Lunacy, Nightmares, and Phantom Voices are the most obvious, though others could certainly be used. In many settings, particularly Horror ones, the Illuminati may no longer be entirely human, and disadvantages such as Disturbing Voice, Divine Cruse, Frightens Animals, and Unnatural or Supernatural Features could demonstrate how an Illuminatus has gone beyond the pale.

Epilepsy deserves special notice in regard to Illuminated disadvantages. As its entry states, epileptic fits have often been associated with the presence of gods and other spirits, who are either communicating with or possessing the subject in question. Even if the fit is not the direct result of such a presence, it could still be caused by the Illuminatus' connection to the mystic world and therefore a product of his Illumination. In some settings, it may be the only way for a character to receive this disadvantage.

In many worlds, the mere fact of being an Illuminated has social ramifications for the character. Depending upon how the Illuminati are regarded, this may result in Reputation and Status (positive or negative), advantages such as Legal Immunity or Social Regard, or disadvantages like Enemy or Social Stigma.

The Gate to Power

Another way to treat the special abilities of the Illuminati is to have the meta-trait grant access to advantages that they could not normally possess, functioning in a similar manner to an Unusual Background.

Any of the advantages mentioned in the previous section are logical possibilities, as are all advantages normal classified as "psionics" (enlightened often unlocks the potential of the mind). Another interesting prospect, especially for GMs who want to give their secret masters a more cinematic feel, is to allow them to learn skills that normally require the Trained By A Master advantage, such Flying Leap and Invisibility Art.

Illuminati could also be used as a gateway to more outlandish advantages. After all, Moses parted the Red Sea and unleashed plagues upon Egypt, the Rosicrucians were rumored to turn invisible and change their shape, and the Tantric siddhar are said to grow, shrink, and walk on air. Even superhumanly high attributes might be acceptable (particularly IQ), as the Illuminati are not bound by human weakness.

Disadvantages could also be gained in this way. For example, some Illuminati might develop Unnatural Feature of "pure yellow eyes," while others Frighten Animals with their strange auras and scent. Each paying in their own way for the power that crackles through them.

As with Unusual Background, the cost of making Illuminated a "gateway advantage" is up to the Game Master, and depends how many advantages and disadvantages it grants access to, and how much the GM wishes to limit them.

The Secret Techniques of the Secret Masters

In a world that includes competing Illuminated groups, an intriguing option would be for each group to receive different supernatural traits. So one secret society might control minds, while another walks through walls. As a series of examples, suggested advantages and disadvantages for the major Illuminated groups from *Illuminati: New World Order* are listed below, as well as the ways their Blessed members would attempt receive visions and the sort of visions that they would likely receive.

Adepts of Hermes

These arcane scholars are dedicated to expanding their minds and improving their occult powers to the exclusion of all else. Magery is almost certainly tied to their Illuminated powers, as is enhanced IQ and probably various forms of supernatural insight (particularly Oracle). However, they are liable to fall to any manner of insanities, as well as suffer under strange supernatural disadvantages produced by their contact with raw mana and their links with dark occult powers.

Their visions are achieved through the mantic arts (i.e. divination), particularly astrology, crystal-gazing, and numerology. The being they contact is their god and founder: Hermes Trismegistos, the lord of magic. He who is known to the Egyptians as Tahuti (Thoth), to the Romans as Mercury, and to the Scandinavians as Odin. The being who the Servants of Cthulhu claim is actually Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos.

Bavarian Illuminati

The sages of hidden authority and subtle power, they, above all of the other Illuminated orders, are masters of controlling from behind the scenes. Their members are often experts in telepathy, allowing them to read and control minds while being able to quickly send secret messages to their underlings and associates. They also favor Invisibility and Shapeshifting and put them to much more varied uses than the Society of Assassins does. These people are the true "Invisible Ones," rarely seen, but always felt.

Even in death their Secret Chiefs still guide the subordinates, particularly through dreams (though certain Bavarians prefer to instead meditate on the pyramid emblazoned on the American one-dollar bill). The ascended spirits of Adam Weishaupt and the other Masters deliver commands and information, always reminding their agents to "listen and obey."

Bermuda Triangle

As their illuminated order seeks variety above all else, the "Boys from Bermuda" are often "jacks-of-all-trade and masters of none," experimenting with different kinds of power, but not specializing in any.

However, a solid minority focuses their power on the sea, gaining such advantages as Amphibious and Doesn't Breathe (Gills) and listening to the voices of the waves . . .

Discordian Society

Firm believers in "doing your own thing," each Chaote is expected to embrace the powers that most suit him or her, as long as they also further confusion and chaos. Psionic mind-control, weird transformations, and badass super kung-fu are all dandy as long as it makes the world that much more interesting. Most Discordians start off crazy, and go downhill from there, often eventually warping their bodies along with their minds.

They are the polar opposite of the Adepts in regard to methods of mystic insight. Instead of employing ancient and respected divinations, each Chaote has his or her own idiosyncratic technique, such as studying the patterns of snails, dancing until an ecstatic frenzy is reached, or even gazing at the images formed in a bubble bath. Whatever method used, the end result is touching minds with the great goddess Eris, queen of strife in one of her infinite incarnations. Her pronouncements are often garbled, convoluted, and even contradictory, but the Chaote would do best to follow them to the letter. Or not. Who knows? All hail Discordia.

Gnomes of Zurich

The most materialistic of the Illuminati, the Gnomes are least likely to gain supernatural powers through their Illumination. However, they often develop strange Affinities and Talents for money and its production, sometimes even gaining unnatural control over the gold. If they don't start with Greed and Miserliness, they soon acquire the disadvantages, and they sometimes even become saddled with Dependencies or other supernatural disadvantages connected with their wealth.

Their treasure is almost always the medium used to receive visions and omens, they study their reflections in gems as a form of crystal-gazing, watch the light reflect off falling coins, or simply lie on their money and listening to it "talk." Some Gnomes believe they commune with the spirits of departed billionaires, the "genius loci" of their hoard, or archetypal gods of plenty (which their enemies often identify with Mammon, demon prince of greed).

Network

Virtually all of the powers that members of the Network gain through Illumination are geared towards understanding, mastering, and advancing cyberspace. Examples include various Cybernetics (perhaps the process of Network Illumination transforms parts of the body into machinery), Mind Reading (cybernetic), and even Digital Mind ("welcome to the new you"). The downside of these advantages is often poor Illuminati lose contact with the world outside the Internet, and even with their humanity. Some of the leaders of the Network are sentient computers. Were these computers once human?

They achieve their visions by jacking into the Net and either gazing at the shifting tapestry of information or listening to the whispers of the spirits that ride the Information Highway (possibly even that dark god Shub-Internet).

Servants of Cthulhu

Any supernatural advantages granted by the Great Old Ones and the Outer Gods to their minions are quick paths to insanity. In extreme situations, even the body is twisted, eventually resulting in the cultist in question being transformed beyond recognition, such as devolving into protean goo or becoming the member of an appropriate servitor race such as a deep one or a rat-thing.

A Servant receives visions directly from Great Old Ones or from Nyarlathotep, who serves as the herald of the Outer Gods. The vision is usually a combination of bizarre images and strange mutterings, things that no mortal mind was meant to perceive, and which merits a fright check. In order to receive this vision, the cultist will usually chant in some ancient, blasphemous tongue. Ia! Ia! Azathoth, Ia!

Shangri-La

Walking paradoxes, these mystics claim to be pacifists and yet are often masters of a wide variety of martial arts. They will usually either have Trained By A Master as part of their Illumination, or be allowed access to chi skills without it. They also favor psionics of all sorts (except those that cause direct harm).

As believers in simplicity and the powers of the mind, disciples of Shangri-La will usually restrain from rituals or paraphernalia more complex mantras and mandalas when they receive their visions. Through focused meditation, they orient themselves with the universe or commune with bodhisattvas.

Society of Assassins

In opposition to the generalities of the Bermuda Triangle, the Society of Assassins is extremely focused. It does one thing, but it does one thing very well. It is an organization of killers, plain and simple, and their powers are geared towards murder, helping them to track, infiltrate, assassinate, and leave. Invisibility, Shapeshifting, and various forms of Detect are particularly valued.

Though it is commonly believed that this order's drug of choice is hashish, others have suggested that it is instead a strange hallucinogenic known as "black alamut." If the later is true, than virtually all of the visions of the Assassins comes from taking the drug and then perceiving the Garden of Paradise (which they believe they will dwell in forever if they serve the Society well). In the Garden, they are spoken to by the spirit of their founder, Hasan ibn al-Sabah, who still continues to guide the society into the new millennium.

UFOs

If the Flying Saucer People have Illuminated humans, these people would be privy to all sorts of alien secrets and technology. They have special parts of their brains unlocked as part of the aliens' experiments in evolving humanity towards "perfection." Some "lucky few" might even be transformed into members of their patrons' species in order for the UFOs to gain a "human insight" into the workings of Earth.

Any Illuminated messages granted to them would likely be beamed directly from the UFOs to the agents' special implants and genetically altered brains. This information would be short and to the

point, but as it is produced by extraterrestrial mind would involve a certain amount of deciphering.

What Illuminated powers do the true aliens receive? Fnord.

Illuminatus Meta-Trait

35 points

This is an example of a generic Illuminatus meta-trait which will hopefully inspire GMs to produce their own variations. This Illuminatus possesses various forms of mystic insight and finds the universe accommodating to his needs. Furthermore, by virtue of his evolved state of consciousness, he is able to gain access to powers of the mind and body which are out of the reach of normal people. However these powers are not without a price, and his sensitive mental state often causes the character to fall into epileptic fits during times of stress.

The meta-trait includes Blessed [10], Illuminated [15], Intuition [15], Serendipity 1 [15], and Epilepsy [-30]. Furthermore, it may be used instead of Trained By A Master as a prerequisite for skills that involve the focus of chi (Flying Leap, Invisibility Art, Power Blow, etc.), and allows characters to learn new psi powers with earned character points [10].

The most obvious ways to enhance this meta-trait is to take Very Blessed and further levels of Serendipity. Consult the earlier section of the article for other ideas. An individual with this meta-trait will probably be part of an Illuminated order or be a "rogue," either choice will probably grant a further package of traits.

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