

# STRANGE AEONS



*Revised Edition*

# Introduction

Strange Aeons is the first of many planned genre expansions for use with Core Elements. This revision of the original Strange Aeons fine tunes the sanity rules found in the previous releases, and adds some much needed clarification to the rules for sorcery. Like previous editions of Strange Aeons, the entirety of this release is OGC with the exception of the title. Strange Aeons can be used with either Core Elements or in conjunction with other OGL products of your choice. That said, however you ultimately choose to use the revised edition of Strange Aeons, I hope that you enjoy it.

## London, 1886

A bustling metropolis, the center of Europe's most powerful empire, and home to approximately five million people, London is truly a sight to behold. From the opulent society clubs of Pall Mall to the decadent opium dens of Limehouse, London is a city of adventure under eldritch rule.

In aeons past, long before the advent of humanity, the world was host to hideous alien beings possessed of power beyond our comprehension. These beings held sway over all of creation and now that the stars are right, they have again risen to rule the cosmos and everything in it! Crawling forth from their secret lairs deep beneath the streets of London, these eldritch gods have awakened from their long slumber to unleash their horrible might upon the world once more!

The servants of these hideous powers walk the streets of London - men and women driven in their madness to perpetuate the end of humanity, worshiping their new rules as though they were gods, laying all of humanity at their feet- and only you can stop them!

## An Overview of the City

London county of 1886 is composed of 29 boroughs, with the great city of the same name straddling the river Thames and being divided according to the points on a compass. London proper, the city center and site of the original Roman garrison upon which the great city was founded,

houses an estimated 700,000 citizens from all walks of life and shows no signs of diminishing in size any time soon.

## Noteworthy Locations

The following locations are representative of the best (and worst) that the great city of London has to offer in 1886. These locations may be used both as settings for adventure or as background scenery, utilized to further suspend the disbelief of players (that is, scenery described in passing to make players feel as though they were actually in London).

**Albert Hall:** The Kensington district assembly hall used for high-society music concerts, political events, and other social galas attended by the city's upper-class.

**Bethlem:** The most infamous madhouse in London, the screams of 'patients' can be heard all hours of the day and night at "Bedlam".

**Big Ben:** Arguably the most famous clock in the world, "Ben" resides in the clock tower of the British Houses of Parliament, sounding every hour on the hour.

**British Museum:** The national museum of the British Empire, the British Museum boasts thousands of objects taken from the Empire's various foreign holdings, as well as a vast library of obscure scholarly and religious texts procured from all over the world.

**Buckingham Palace:** Queen Victoria's London home and residence of the other Saxe-Coburg royals in London, as well.

**Cleopatra's Needle:** Transported from Egypt to London in 1877 by Dr. Erasmus Wilson, this massive obelisk that once stood outside of Alexandria now stands on the Victoria Embankment opposite the end of Salisbury street.

**Freemasons' Hall:** Located on Great Queen's street in Lincoln's Inn, are both the offices of the Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter of English Freemasonry.

**Isle of Dogs:** A peninsula on the river Thames that hosts the docks of the famous East India Company, as well as many other shipping companies.

**Limehouse:** A poverty-stricken district in the city's East End, Limehouse is home to both the largest concentration of opium dens and Asian immigrants in London.

**London Bridge:** The oldest bridge in London, it runs from London Proper across the river Thames.

**London Proper:** The center of the City and former site of the ancient Roman garrison upon which modern London was founded.

**Lyceum Theater:** Managed by Dubliner Abraham Stoker (better known as "Bram" Stoker) and Sir Henry Irving, the Lyceum specializes in eccentric shows.

**Obelisk, The:** Not to be confused with Cleopatra's Needle, "The Obelisk" was erected on Blackfriars Road in 1771 in honor of Brass Crosby, Esq. Why an obelisk? Nobody rightly knows.

**Old Bailey:** Properly known as the Central Criminal Courts of London, the Old Bailey is operated in conjunction with Newgate Prison.

**Soho:** The officially recognized foreign quarter of South London, Soho is both cleaner and safer than Limehouse (if you discount the legends of the Soho Chimera).

**St. Bartholomew's:** The oldest hospital in the city, home to the county coroner's office, and affiliated with the University of London as a medical school.

**St. Luke's:** A public madhouse in London that, unlike Bethlem, is known for treating its patients with dignity and respect.

**Tower of London:** Formerly a fortress and prison, the tower now serves primarily as a tourist attraction and is rumored to be haunted.

**Westminster Abbey:** The site of all coronation ceremonies for the Monarchy, burial site of past monarchs, great poets, and the reputed final resting place of King Arthur.

**Whitechapel:** A district in the city's East End known for its cramped alleys, numerous slums - and in the near future, the murders of Jack the Ripper.

Naturally, the above list of noteworthy sites that one can find in the London of 1886 is not exhaustive, and is intended to serve only as a very brief introduction to the city of London as it exists in the world of Strange Aeons.

## *Organizations of Import*

This brief compilation of organizations, like the list of noteworthy locations above, is by no means exhaustive. Rather, this list of organizations exists to the most noteworthy gatherings of folk that exist in the London of Strange Aeons.

**British National Association of Spiritualists:** Founded in the year 1884 to further research occult phenomena, the British National Association of Spiritualists is located at 38 Great Russell street and charges a membership fee that starts at 5s. per annum, and ranges upwards depending upon the privileges that the member is privy to.

**City Churchyard Protection Society:** Based at 22 Charterhouse Square, the purpose of this society is self-evident by virtue of title. Founded in 1876, the Society charges no membership fees or dues, being composed entirely of volunteers.

**Dilettanti Society:** Originally established as an Opera appreciation society in 1743, members of the Dilettanti Society currently dedicate themselves to the study of rare and unusual antiquities. At the present time, they make their home above the Thatched House Tavern on St. James street.

**Dorsey Society for Exploration:** Located in the private residence of its founder, Edmund Dorsey II, this society is ostensibly dedicated to the exploration of untamed lands, but in truth its members are sworn to seek out and fight the forces of the Chaos and its servants.

**Freemasons:** Self-proclaimed descendants of the masons who constructed King Solomon's temple dedicated to God (in which the Ark of the Covenant was stored), Freemasons claim to be the keepers of

several divine secrets (including that of the so-called "Philosopher's Stone").

**Goetic Brotherhood:** The forerunners of the more familiar (and more public) Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, members of the Goetic Brotherhood are dedicated to amassing personal influence and wealth. Known servitors of the Chaos, they are rumored to possess a Latin copy of the *Lemegeton*.

**Pall Mall Club:** The Pall Mall Club of Waterloo-place ostensibly exists to "facilitate the association of gentlemen who wish to enjoy the social advantages of a club having no political affiliation." That said, its lofty £15 entrance fee and policy of tight-lipped secrecy have led others to speculate that Pall Mall is more than a mere social club.

**Royal Colonial Institute:** Located at 15 Strand, the Royal Colonial Institute sells lifetime memberships to resident fellows at the cost of £20, and to non-resident fellows at the cost of £10. The Institute is dedicated to providing a library of recent and correct intelligence pertaining to colonial holdings of Britain, as well as a collection of artefacts gathered from said holdings.

**Si-Fan Society:** Like the Thuggee cult, the Si-Fan Society is a highly organized group of thieves and assassins. Unlike the Thuggee, however, the Si-Fan have no religious affiliation - instead they swear fealty to the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu. The primary goal of the Si-Fan is to destroy Western civilization, per the direction of Fu Manchu.

**Thuggee:** An ancient cult of murderers and thieves dedicated to the worship of the Dark Mother, Kali (a known Chaos godhead) that originated in Southern India. Although they were supposedly suppressed and forced to disband by William Henry Sleeman in 1848, rumors of a reorganized Thuggee have been circulating in both India and London over the last two years.

## Getting About in London

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the primary mode of transportation utilized by the citizens of London in 1886 is walking. That said, although it is always affordable, walking isn't always *practical*. When time

is of the essence and there isn't a moment to spare, the citizen of London hails a cab.

Horse-drawn carriages in London come in two varieties - the Hansom cab and the Clarence cab. The former is a two-wheeled vehicle, while the latter vehicle has four wheels. Of the two carriage types, the Hansom cab is far more common, with the Clarence cab being reserved for use primarily by the wealthy.

Finally, traversing the river Thames on foot or horseback is generally not recommended - to this end, numerous ferry operators ply their trade at the docks in London. While riding a ferryboat is quite inexpensive, the hazards presented by the unsavory types who frequent the docks make it a sub-optimal way to travel.

## Communicating in London

Interpersonal communication is facilitated primarily by way of post or personal messenger. Both systems have their advantages and disadvantages - delivering a letter by post tends to be quicker, but the privacy ensured by a personal messenger trumps that offered by the General Post Office.

After 1870, the telegraph saw a surge in use both domestically and internationally, having been revitalized by the laying of the transatlantic cables during that same year. Typically, a domestic telegram that is 15 words in length will cost 1 shilling, while an international telegram of the same length may cost anywhere from 2 to 4 shillings.

Finally, while they do exist in London, Bell's telephones are largely inefficient and unreliable, (although the invention of automatic dialing in 1892 will change this). This being the case, they are truly little more than status symbols of London's upper-crust at the present time.

## The Dreamtime

There exists, buried in the depths of human consciousness, a world of nightmares and dreams. This world, a dark and twisted reflection of our own Earth, is known as the Dreamtime. To those who have recently discovered it, the Dreamtime is a paradise indescribable with mere words - to those who can no longer leave it, the Dreamtime is nothing short of Hell.

## *Cosmetics of the Dream*

Despite being an entirely different existence, certain aspects of the Dreamtime differ little from those of our own world. The geography of the two realities, for example, is startlingly similar. Many places and faces native to our own world also exist in the Dreamtime, however, this is where any similarity ends. Even those aspects of the Dreamtime which exist in our own world adopt a different appearance - bright colors become brighter, dark colors defy spatial constraints, pronounced angles develop an almost supernatural geometry, and intricate patterns emerge in even the most mundane surfaces.

Though such cosmetic alterations appear to be harmless initially, these subtle changes play a very important role in the cosmology of the Dreamtime. These psychedelic trapping are just that - they exist to make newcomers feel at ease, to fill them with awe and wonder and to distract them from the horror that lies hidden just beneath the surface of this world until it is too late.

## *Realities of the Nightmare*

The truth is that the waking mind was never meant to find the Dreamtime for it is the home of our *second* self. Indeed, the Dreamtime is just as real as our own world - it is merely the world in which our subconscious self, our lesser, base self lives. Never were our two worlds meant to collide - but they have, and with consequences that could prove to be devastating.

Typically when we bed down, our conscious self blinks out of existence and our subconscious self manifests in the Dreamtime. Neither self is aware of the other's existence, each self living out its own existence in its own world, with only fragments of the other's thoughts remaining when they awaken to face a new day...remnants of a dream. This is how things are supposed to work.

That said, both the increased consumption of narcotics by the world's population and a recent, unexplained, surge in psychic ability have lead to several waking, conscious, individuals entering the Dreamtime unintentionally - almost as if they were being drawn into it by some dark magnetism - and, subsequently, disrupting the already delicate balance between that world and ours.

## *When Two Worlds Collide*

When a conscious mind slips into the world inhabited by its second self - or when that second self slips into our own world - the balance that exists between these worlds is threatened, leading to an accelerated rate of entropic decay in the fabric of reality, causing existence itself to slowly unravel in the process. It appears that soon, this decay will reach a critical state, bringing the prophesied End of Time to our doorstep.

The aforementioned disintegrating barrier between our own world and the Dreamtime is largely responsible for the current state of chaotic disarray that our world finds itself in - and, possibly, for the existence of the Chaos in our world, as well. This latter possibility has grave implications when one considers how long the Chaos has maintained a presence here.

Thankfully, the fabric of existence, space and time is quite resilient, perpetually mending itself even as it is threatened with destruction. When balance between our world and the Dreamtime is skewed too heavily in one direction, order is typically restored by displacing the foreign self (a conscious mind in the Dreamtime or a subconscious mind visiting our own world) back into its native reality. *Typically.*

## *Displacement Goes Awry*

Due to the advanced state of entropic decay that hangs over the collective heads of our world like a hammer waiting to drop, the marvelous self-repair mechanism of existence has become strained - and, like any mechanism that operates under prolonged stress, it has started to break down.

As mentioned, balance between the world of the Dreamtime and our own world is typically restored by displacing the intruding self back into its own reality. In worlds plagued by advanced entropy, however, time is of the essence and this optimal solution is not always possible - sometimes the native self is displaced instead.

When the self native to a particular reality is displaced into the other, balance is restored between the two realities (a single specimen of a given self now exists in each reality), but the natural order of both realities is horribly warped - for now each reality contains an utterly alien presence in its midst.

Imagine, if you will, your second self - your dark, twisted, reflection - suddenly exchanging places with you. We've all heard the ancient stories of evil changelings and sinister doppelgangers, but not until recently did we realize that they were based in fact. What would such a changeling do if it were turned loose in London today?

## *The End of Time Cometh*

As the invisible barrier that separates our world from the Dreamtime continues to dissolve, and as both worlds are irreversibly warped in the process, Chaos and madness claim the whole of existence as their own. Unless things can be made right, the stage will soon be set for the Great Tragedy of Man, the fabric of existence will be torn irreparably, the Old Gods will rise and everything that we know will simply blink out of being like one of Edison's electric light bulbs being disconnected from its power source.

## *Entering the Dreamtime*

Although some individuals have maintained that they possess the ability to enter into - and egress from - the Dreamtime at will, such claims are highly dubious. My own extensive research indicates that, in fact, conscious minds do not enter the world of the Dreamtime of their own accord, but rather, are drawn there by some unknown force. If this is the case, it raises some very important questions - namely, "What force would seek to deliberately unbalance the fabric of existence and why?"

One thing that my own studies have proven is that, whatever the nature of the force that calls the waking mind to the Dreamtime, it cannot act without assistance - in every documented case of travel to the Dreamtime that I have examined, the traveler (or perhaps, the *abductee*) was either laboring under the

effects of an intoxicating substance (usually opium) or professed a degree of recently acquired psychic awareness.

I have come to believe that both the altered state of perception that an individual experiences while under the influence of intoxicants, as well as the manifestation of previously non-existent psychic ability are directly tied to the aforementioned decay of the barrier which separates our world from the Dreamtime. That said, regrettably I cannot presently define the exact nature of this relationship, rather I can say only that I am certain it exists.

## *Rules of the Dreamtime*

Although my own research is inconclusive at the present time, like our own world, the Dreamtime appears to be governed by certain immutable laws, ostensibly natural in origin. For example, it appears that entering into the Dreamtime while in a conscious state suspends our body's natural healing process (logically, I assume the same to be true of entities from the Dreamtime that enter our own world). The following is a list of all such laws of 'nature' that I have so far uncovered.

1. When a conscious individual from our own world enters the Dreamtime, they arrive therein in exactly the same physical state in which they departed from our own world. Their wounds do not magically heal upon their arrival in the Dreamtime.
2. While a conscious individual from our own world is present in the realm of Dreamtime, any wounds that afflicted them at the time of their arrival do not heal or subside, nor do any wounds that may be visited upon their person while in the Dreamtime (an effect that I liken to that of our own immune system's treatment of foreign bodies).
3. Wounds that a conscious individual from our own world sustains while in the Dreamtime remain when that individual returns to our own world (thankfully, once returned to our own world, these wounds appear to heal normally).
4. Wounds sustained while in the Dreamtime can, apparently inflict a very permanent death (one of many ways in which the Dreamtime differs radically from a mere dream).

### **Deliberate Dreamtime Access (Option):**

If a character wants to gain conscious access to (or exit from) the Dreamtime, their player must make a Willpower save with a DC of 25. At the discretion of the Referee, a character who partakes of intoxicating substances (absinth, opium, etc) prior to such an access or egress attempt may reduce this DC to 17, while the creative use of spells reduce it further.

5. When a conscious individual from our own world returns to it upon exiting the Dreamtime, any wounds that they suffered prior to their entry into that reality, as well as any wounds that they sustained therein, begin to heal normally.

6. Objects procured in the Dreamtime cannot be transported back into our own world - although, if such an object has a counterpart in our own world, it follows that said counterpart can be located here in a place that corresponds to that occupied by its other 'self' in the Dreamtime.

I have observed what I believe to be other such laws, as well (the earlier mentioned act of displacing selves in an effort to restore an existential balance, for example) - but I stop short of deeming them as laws at the present time, as they are merely educated guesses that I cannot currently prove or disprove. Perhaps, when I have an opportunity to conduct more adequate research, I will be able to prove my theories.

Note that, while again, I cannot say with certainty, I suspect that the inverse of the six laws outlined above apply to denizens of the Dreamtime that enter our own world while conscious, as well (something that should, if true, give my fellows a significant edge in the coming war).

## Mental Health

The deterioration of a character's mental health is a prominent trope of the cosmic horror genre. Normal people, when confronted with unimaginable horrors of an utterly alien variety, typically react in a completely irrational and frenzied manner. That is, they're typically frightened out of their skull - sometimes they're driven utterly mad.

A character's state of mental health is represented by a numeric abstraction that functions in very much the same way that hit points do. That is, this number represents a character's ability to deal with maddening revelations and psychological trauma. A character has a total number of mental points equal to 10 + their WIS modifier at level one and gains a number of mental health points equal to their Wis modifier per level thereafter.

## Mental Health Checks

A *mental health check* is a saving throw made whenever a character is trying to avoid being

overwhelmed by fear or madness when confronted with horrible truths or other such frightening things. When making a mental health check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the die roll are their Wis modifier and their base defense bonus.

The DC of a mental health check is dependent upon the exact circumstances of the horror with which a character is confronted, but is otherwise determined as the DC for an action that isn't being actively opposed by another character or creature. The following table presents examples of some horrific situations and suggested DCs.

Situation	DC
Discovering a Corpse	10
Discovering a Horribly Mutilated Corpse	15
Reading a Tome of Forbidden Lore	12-20
Casting a Spell From a Tome of Forbidden Lore	15-25
Encountering an Inhuman Creature	12-27
Encountering The Unnameable One	30+

## Horror Ratings

Horrific situations are accompanied by a *horror rating* that defines the magnitude of the horror being faced and determines how psychologically devastating such an encounter can be. As a general rule, the HR of any such situation is 1/4 of the DC (round fractions up to the nearest whole number).

## Fear and Madness

In the event that a player fails a mental health check being made on their character's behalf, several things happen. First, without fail, the character's mental health is adversely affected - a number of points equal to the *horror rating* (HR) of the situation at hand are deducted from the character's mental health points. Second, if the situation is directly related to forbidden lore and horrible truth, the character gains a rank in their Forbidden Lore skill as the horrible reality of the situation firmly takes hold.

Once a character's mental health points have been reduced to zero, the character is disabled (locked in a catatonic trance or paralyzed with fear, teetering on the edge of complete madness); if their mental health points are reduced to less than zero, but not less than -10, they are pushed into madness (but may recover with proper treatment); and when

their mental health points have been reduced to less than -10, they have been driven permanently insane.

Unlike hit points, mental health points can be regained in only two ways (unless a character has been driven permanently insane, in which case they can never be regained)- by undergoing psychiatric treatment and therapy that specifically addresses the cause of the character's madness or by consciously suppressing their fear long enough that it subsides naturally (i.e. gaining levels due to experience, and thus gaining more mental health points).

## Healing Psychic Injuries

Generally, healing the diseased mind is beyond the realm of possibility for most doctors of 1886. While asylums do exist, they are little more than a convenient place for the affluent families of Victorian Britain to quietly dispose of relatives that have become either a public nuisance or insufferable embarrassment. This said, numerous *experiments* into the treatment of the mentally ill are conducted at asylums.

The fact of the matter is that psychologists of the Victorian Age perform a great deal of research on the subject of treating mental illness - after all, they have an abundance of human test subjects at their disposal. Frighteningly, most patients cease to be viewed as human beings upon their admission to an asylum with committal being, more often than not, a death sentence - and oftentimes far, far worse.

## Forbidden Lore

Another important genre trope of cosmic horror is mankind's natural curiosity and the subsequent discovery of horrible truths that satisfying that curiosity brings about. Here, these horrible truths are referred to as *forbidden lore* and a character's knowledge of such horrible truths is represented by a skill of the same name.

Initially, ranks in the Forbidden Lore skill may be purchased as are ranks in any other skill, but be wary - those privy to horrible truths pay a horrible price in addition to skill points. For each rank that a character possesses in the Forbidden Lore skill, they reduce the number of mental health points that they have (as determined in the following section of these rules) by one.

Once a player has determined the initial number of ranks that their character possesses in Forbidden Lore, they may not spend any more skill

points to increase the number of ranks in this skill - after initial character creation, ranks in this skill are gained only through the discovery of such horrible truths in actual play (as determined by the Referee).

## The Magik Spell

In games of Strange Aeons, arcane energies are invoked and commanded by audibly reciting similarly arcane syllables that have been chained together to form words. Similarly, these words have themselves been chained together to form languages over the centuries, the end result of this linguistic evolution being that audibly emphasizing certain syllables, that are found in certain words, that appear in certain tongues can both invoke and control magikal energy. Unsurprisingly, it isn't by random chance that such invocations are referred to as "spells" by the uninitiated.

These incantations may be recited from memory or read aloud from a written text to produce the desired results. That said, even very experienced practitioners of magik eschew reciting incantations from memory unless absolutely necessary, as the proper pronunciation and recital of the many arcane syllables that compose a spell is very important. As a series of unfortunate incidents has demonstrated, a mispronounced or incorrectly remembered syllable can alter the desired outcome of an incantation drastically, often times causing great harm to the individual performing the recital.

All of that having been said, *anybody* can attempt the recital of incantations and - provided that an individual understands the language in which the incantations are written, can pronounce it properly, and can keep the words straight in their head they can even achieve the intended results. Why then do so few masters of the arcane arts exist in the world? Well, simply put, studying different languages and learning to apply them correctly is a very lengthy and involved process - indeed, the complete and total mastery of a *single* language may take an entire lifetime.

## Types of Spells

In Strange Aeons there are five types of spells that characters will encounter (likely on a regular basis). Should the Referee decide to include them, there may well be other types of spells in your version of Victorian Britain, but these rules focus only on the five spell types described below.

**Binding Spells:** Binding spells impose the caster's will upon a given target (most commonly a servitor of Chaos) for a specified amount of time. A binding is usually thought of as an arcane contract of sorts, holding the entity upon which it is cast to a set of certain terms and conditions defined by the caster.

**Contact Spells:** Contact spells are used to draw the attention of Chaos servitors that are known to inhabit the area in which the spell is being cast. Casting a spell to contact ghouls near a cemetery where ghouls are known to congregate, for instance, would attract the attention of such ghouls. Magi would do well to note that powerful entities who are contacted in this manner usually expect a sacrifice or offering in return for responding to the caster's call.

**Offensive Spells:** Offensive spells cause minor physical damage to a target. Rarely powerful, the offensive spell is a poor substitute for a loaded gun, hence most magi employ them only when they are left with no other option. That said, every now and again a magus has been known to cast an unusually deadly offensive spell (often times attributed to an unintended mispronunciation of an incantation).

**Summoning Spells:** Summoning spells function similarly to contact spells, but they aren't constrained by the physical boundaries of a given locale - a true summoning spell can attract the attention of a being that exists anywhere in time or space. Using a summon spell without protection offered by binding and warding spells is generally *not* recommended.

**Warding Spells:** Warding spells exist specifically to protect practitioners of magik from the beings that they contact and/or summon to do their bidding. The most common form of warding spell is, perhaps, the "magik circle" - an arrangement of magikal glyphs drawn upon the ground that acts as a kind of barrier, either confining something within its borders or making certain that something without does not penetrate them. Similarly, the so-called "elder sign" indicates the presence of a simple warding spell that repels creatures of the Strange Aeons.

## *Reciting From Memory*

Whenever a character recites an incantation from memory, their player states the intended effect of the spell and makes a Forbidden Lore check against a base DC of 16 (naturally, the Referee may alter this difficulty class as they see fit).

If the total roll result generated by the player of the casting character meets or exceeds the final difficulty class assigned to the casting by the Referee, the spell effect occurs as it has been described by the player. If the total roll result obtained by the player of the casting character fails to meet or exceed the assigned DC of the casting, the spell effect varies wildly from the intended result, as described by the Referee. For example:

*Tyler's character, Grant Dalton, is attempting to invoke a contact spell from memory to draw the attention of the chimaera that he believes lurks in the sewers under Soho. Given that Grant has descended a ladder into those very sewers, thus closing as much distance between himself and the 'chimaera' as humanly possible, the Referee decides to lower the base DC to 10.*

*Tyler must produce a total roll result of 18 or more for Grant to successfully contact the chimaera of Soho. If Tyler fails to generate a total roll result that equals or exceeds the DC of 18, things will go horribly awry for Grant Dalton - luckily, he has an INT bonus of +3 and five ranks in the skills "eidetic memory" and "forbidden lore".*

---

## *Reciting From Inscription*

As a rule, an incantation inscribed upon a piece of parchment or in a book is always more reliable than even a very experienced practitioner's memory. Whenever a character attempts to recite an incantation from a written text, the player controlling that character makes Forbidden Lore check against a base DC of 13 (again, the Referee may see fit to adjust this difficulty class as specific circumstances surrounding a given casting attempt warrant).

If the total roll result generated by the player of the casting character meets or exceeds the final DC assigned to the casting by the Referee, the spell effect occurs as it has been described by the player. If the total roll result obtained by the player of the casting character fails to meet or exceed the assigned difficulty class of the casting, the spell effect varies wildly from the intended result, as described by the Referee (in the same manner a failed invocation from memory does).

## *About Spell Effects*

Maybe you're still wondering "What exactly happens when a character recites an incantation?". The answer is that, if invoked correctly, the desired

effect of the incantation as described by the player of the casting character is produced without negative incident. If invoked incorrectly, the effect of a given invocation is a completely undesirable circumstance as described by the Referee. Finally, whether good or bad, the effects of a magikal incantation should always be *magikal* - when describing the effects of a given incantation, get creative, detailed, and weird!

## Spell Effects In Combat

Spell effects that inflict damage to a target work a bit differently than physical attacks do. Any spell designed to cause injury that is successfully cast causes an amount of damage to the intended target equal to the amount by which the player's d20 exceeded the DC for casting the spell, plus their INT modifier and their AB. For example:

*Holly's character, Justine Bouchard, invokes a curse of withering from memory upon the mugger who has cornered her on the Isle of Dogs. Holly rolls a result of 18, and possesses a INT bonus of +4 and an AB of +5, so her withering curse will cause 11 points of damage to the mugger (and probably scare him something awful).*

## Advice for the Referee

Although the advice found in this section of Strange Aeons was written specifically with the Referee in mind, it is perfectly acceptable for other players to read it. In fact, it might be *better* if all of the players read this section of the rules, as it will help to make sure that everybody is on the same page (no pun intended) when it comes to a question of what the group expects from Strange Aeons.

## A Note About Genre

The world as it exists in Strange Aeons is the direct result of blending literary genres and, thus, can't easily be classified as belong to any one genre. That is, one can't simply classify Strange Aeons as "a game of Victorian Age adventure" or "a game of cosmic horror" - because it is *both* of these things. It is important that the Referee keep this simple truth at the forefront of her mind when designing adventures for a Strange Aeons campaign.

It can be extremely tempting to organize Strange Aeons campaigns as either straight Victorian adventure sagas or as straight tales of mind-blasting

cosmic horror. *Don't succumb to this temptation* - it is the marriage of conventions from both genres that makes Strange Aeons unique and, similarly, it is this unique blend of genre conventions that the rules are designed to support.

## Components of Adventure

The following list of common story elements is drawn from both Victorian Age adventure fiction and from the later Mythos Cycle stories. Again, the importance of honoring both genres during the course of a given Strange Aeons campaign can't be emphasized enough - these genres *together* form the basis for Strange Aeons and, thus, the story elements from both of these genres come together to form the basis of adventures in the world of Strange Aeons.

**Morality in Black and White:** In both period adventure fiction and Mythos Cycle stories, morality is dealt with in terms of absolute good and absolute evil. Despite claims to the contrary, moral ambiguity is rarely the centerpiece of stories belonging to either genre - the forces of good are easily distinguished from the inhuman monstrosities and nefarious villains that they battle against.

**Evil Personified:** The protagonists of both period adventure fiction and the later stories of the Mythos Cycle are the personification of *good* - so, naturally, they need a personified incarnation of *evil* to square off against. Whether this personified evil is a criminal mastermind, the leader of a sinister cult, or a mad scientist is immaterial - so long as the forces of evil are also represented by 'champions' after a fashion.

**Grandiose Schemes:** Evil thinks big. The hideous alien godheads of Chaos and their faithful servants aren't interested in snatching purses - and players likely aren't interested in such petty crimes, either. Evil wants to conquer the world, seize control of Parliament, or steal the Crown jewels (and, hopefully, player characters will want to stop evil from doing those things).

**Mysterious Locales:** Pre-Roman catacombs deep beneath the streets of London. Thuggee temples secreted in the slums of Whitechapel. Secret rooms in the basement of the British Museum. All of these places can become the stage for an encounter with unspeakable evil or its devout servitors. Mysterious locales (especially those hidden in mundane places) are a common staple of Mythos Cycle stories.

**Perilous Locales:** The face of Big Ben, the roof of a moving freight train, and the lion's den at Regent's Park Zoo are all fine examples of perilous locales that scream to be utilized as the backdrop for some tense, swashbuckling, action. Perilous locales are to Victorian fiction what mysterious locales are to the stories of the Mythos Cycle.

**Cursed Codices of Forbidden Lore:** A definite staple of Mythos Cycle fiction and sometime subject of Victorian adventures, cursed tomes brimming with things that man was not meant to know are right at home in games of Strange Aeons. From the journals of mad Arabs to collections of Solomon's seals, books of secret and sanity-shattering revelations play an important role in many adventures.

**Sinister Cults and Cultists:** Sinister cults and their equally sinister adherents are another common thread that both Mythos Cycle stories and Victorian adventure fiction share. From Fu Manchu's Si-Fan society and the resurrected Thuggee, to the secret circles of those that worship the Yellow King, cults can provide multiple campaigns worth of adventure potential.

**Signs of the Times:** Both Mythos Cycle stories and tales of Victorian adventure are ostensibly set in the 'real world', their authors having taken pains to mention current events and call attention to fads of the time periods in which their stories are set. Such attention to detail helps to suspend disbelief, adding to the illusion that these stories - and adventures of your own - are more than mere fiction.

While Strange Aeons adventures need not include every last element outlined above, the more of these elements that are incorporated into a given adventure, the closer that adventure will come to embodying the vision that Strange Aeons was designed to fulfill - roleplaying in a world where eldritch horror and swashbuckling adventure co-exist side by side!

## *Incidental Characters*

Incidental non-player characters, commonly referred to as 'mooks' by roleplayers, exist purely as scenery for a given locale. Nameless cultists, shopkeepers, and pedestrians on the streets of London all serve as examples of incidental non-player characters. incidental NPCs.

Major NPCs in a game of Strange Aeons are created and used in the exact same manner as player characters - but that's an awful lot of work to pour into incidental characters. Instead, incidental non-player characters are defined like this:

### **Thug: 2**

The number "2" in this example of incidental NPC definition serves as an indicator of the Thug's overall ability. The word "Thug" in this example not only classifies the NPC, but also serves as a broad skill. That is, when this incidental character does *anything* related to Thuggee, the Referee rolls 1d20 to determine their success, and adds 2 to the result as though it were a skill rank. For example:

*Harry's character, Herman Paige, has found himself surrounded by nameless Si-Fan soldiers while exploring the Alhambra Music Hall. These soldiers of the Si-Fan are incidental characters defined as "Si-Fan Soldier: 3" - thus, when one of them swings his sword at Herman, the Referee would roll 1d20 and add three to the result to determine the outcome of that action.*

Now, you may be wondering exactly how the Mental and Physical health of such incidental non-player characters is tracked. The short answer is that incidental non-player characters don't have any such health to speak of. If an incidental NPC isn't already completely mad, a single exposure to some sanity-blasting horror will quickly make them that way. Similarly, all it takes is one successful blow in combat to cut short the life of an incidental character.

By this point in time it has no doubt occurred to you that these rules for defining and implementing incidental non-player characters in Strange Aeons can easily be used to define mundane animals (riding horses, house cats, etc), as well. And they should be. The more time that a Referee spends on fleshing out inconsequential characters (be they nameless lackeys of a greater evil or blissfully ignorant pedestrians that will soon be sacrificed to said greater evil), the less time she has to devote to the things that really matter (such as defining that greater evil, for instance).

Making liberal use of these simple rules for implementing incidental characters will not only free up a good deal of the Referee's time to focus on more important things, but will simultaneously add a heightened sense of Victorian-style heroism in games of Strange Aeons. While using these rules isn't strictly necessary, it is *highly* recommended.

# Obligatory Legalese

Strange Aeons - Revised Edition is Copyright ©2005 by James D. Hargrove. The term "Core Elements" is hereby designated Product Identity as defined in the OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a; section 1(e). All other content in this document is hereby officially designated Open Game Content as defined in the OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a; section 1(d).

## Glossary

Forbidden Lore - Horrible truths that man was not meant to know. Also a skill that represents a character's knowledge of such things.

HR - See Horror Rating

Horror Rating - A numeric value that represents the magnitude of horror inherent to a given horrific situation. HR is equal to 1/4 of such a situation's assigned DC.

MHP - See Mental Health Points

Mental Health Points - A numeric abstraction of a character's ability to deal with maddening revelations and sustain psychological trauma.

## Appendix: Equipment

The following list of equipment details common items available in Great Britain circa 1886, as this is the default setting for games of Strange Aeons. The prices for the equipment listed here are, subsequently, given in British currency. All characters begin with a total of 20 pounds sterling that they may use to purchase equipment.

**About Currency:** For those players unfamiliar with units of British currency, the following notes are presented to assist you in determining prices of a character's personal accouterments:

12 pence (d.) = 1 shilling (s.)  
20 shillings (s.) = 1 pound sterling (£)

Misc. Accouterments	Cost
Newspaper	1d.
Lock Picks (Set)	15s.
Lantern	4s.
Hooded Lantern	6s.
Lantern Fuel, 1pt.	5d.
Pocket Watch and Chain	3£ 4s.
Box Camera	5£
Film (One Exposure)	12s.
Magnifying Glass	11s.
Umbrella	3s.

Meals and Lodging	Cost
Meal (Poor Quality)	8d.-1s..
Meal (Average Quality)	2-3s.
Meal (Good Quality)	4-17s.
Meal (Excellent Quality)	18s.-1£
Hostel (Per Night)	5-25s.
Flat (Monthly Rent)	3£
House (Annual Rent)	40£

Mode of Transportation	Cost
Cab Fare	1s.
Riding Horse	10£
Draft Horse and Wagon	16£
Underground Fare	5s.
Local Train Fare	7-10s.
Cross-Country Train Fare	15s.-1£
River Boat Fare	1-5d.
Channel Ferry Fare	6d.-1s.
Transatlantic Sea Voyage, 1-Way	5-8£

Weapon Name	DR	Cost
Blackjack/Sap	1d4+1	4d.
Rumal	Special*	2d.
Dagger/Dirk	1d6	6d.
Fencing Foil	1d6+1	15s.
Khadga	3d6	1£.
Kukri	1d10	11s.
Penknife	1d4	10d.
Rapier	2d6	1£ 5s.
Tulwar	2d8	1£ 10s.
Light Crossbow	2d8	1£
Recurve Bow	3d6	13s.
Small Caliber Pistol	3d6	2£
Large Caliber Pistol	4d6	4£
Small Caliber Rifle	5d6	4£
Large Caliber Rifle	6d6	6£
Double Barrel Shotgun	4d10	5£

Armor Name	AR	Cost
Chainmail Shirt	4	2£
Full Plate Armor	8	3£ 12s.
Kantha Trana	2	16s.
Small Shield (Buckler)	1	8s.
Large Shield (Dahl)	3	13s.
Helm/Helmet	2	25/30

Several armors and weapons of Indian origin have been included in the equipment lists due to the frequent mention of Indian and Arabian characters in both period fiction and the later Mythos Cycle stories. While most of these entries are self-explanatory, some brief descriptions follow.

**Kantha Trana:** An armored collar that is worn to protect the neck, the kantha trana is especially effective against garotte attacks.

**Khadga:** This weapon is six feet long, broad at the hilt, and razor sharp at the tip. Handled in more than 32 different ways and known by more than nine names, this sword is regarded with superstitious awe.

**Kukri:** A mid-sized cutting weapon with a single-edged, forward-curving blade. Oftentimes compared to the machete of African origin.

**Rumal:** A piece of cloth three feet square with a knot tied in its middle and one end weighted with rupee, the rumal is a strangulation device sacred to the Thuggee.

**\*Strangulation Damage (Option):** A rumal or other strangulation device (such as a wire garotte) inflicts an initial 2 damage when it is pulled tightly across a victim's throat, and an additional 2 damage per round that it is held there.

**Tulwar:** Heavy, long swords with forward-curving blades that are often used as both combat and ceremonial weapons by the martial peoples of India.

## Appendix: Timeline

**1880:** William Gladstone becomes the Prime Minister of England, the inventor Thomas Edison patents his incandescent electric lightbulb, and photographs begin to appear in newspapers for the first time.

**1881:** Britain formally recognizes the independence of the Boer Republic in South Africa, President Garfield of the United States is assassinated, as is Czar Alexander II of Russia (although the Czars remain in control of the government).

**1882:** British troops occupy Cairo and push France out of Egypt, the renowned British explorer Edmund Dorsey II founds the Dorsey Society for Exploration, and electric lighting makes its first appearance in London.

**1883:** Britain establishes firm control of Egypt, the Si-Fan society first appears in the Limehouse district, and Hiram Maxim unveils his machine gun.

**1884:** Old Scotland Yard is decimated by a Fenian bomb, the first underground rail tube opens in

London, and rumors of a reorganized Thuggee begin to circulate in Southern India (and later in London).

**1885:** Salisbury replaces Gladstone as the Prime Minister of England, British forces are massacred at Khartoum, and Louis Pasteur invents a vaccine for Rabies.

**1886:** Gladstone introduces the Irish Home Rule Bill, a number of pedestrians begin to inexplicably vanish from the streets of London's Soho district, and Britain annexes Burma.

**1887:** Britain annexes Zululand, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee takes place, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle pens his first Sherlock Holmes story, and the founder of the Dorsey Society (Edmund Dorsey II) disappears while leading an expedition in Egypt.

**1888:** S.L. MacGregor-Mathers and two of his close acquaintances found the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Jack the Ripper begins and ends his infamous murder spree in London's Whitechapel district, dock workers go on strike in London, and the British military adopts the Maxim machine gun.

**1889:** First electric underground tube in London opens in March and the Prime Minister of Germany (Bismark) is dismissed from office.

**1890:** The New Scotland Yard is opened for business, occultism becomes a national pastime in Britain, and British Parliament formally declines to join an alliance between Austria, Italy and Germany.

**1891:** Gladstone again becomes the Prime Minister of England, Golden Dawn members are implicated in a botched burglary attempt at the British Museum, and gasoline is invented.

**1892:** The House of Lords rejects the Irish Home Rule Bill, the semi-automatic pistol is invented, and Henry Ford unveils his first car.

**1893:** Gladstone resigns his position as Prime Minister of England and Colonel Drax of the French Foreign Legion is court-martialed and imprisoned.

**1894:** Salisbury becomes the Prime Minister of England again, the motion picture projector is invented, and the British author H.G. Wells publishes his novel *The Time Machine*.

**1895:** The British military begins their drive to reconquer the Sudan, short wave electro-magnetic radiation waves (X-rays) are first discovered, and the remnants of Edmund Dorsey's ill-fated 1887 Egypt expedition are discovered in a tomb near Memphis.

**1896:** Queen Victoria celebrates her Diamond Jubilee, Bram Stoker publishes his *Dracula* novel, and an anonymous author publishes an abridged English translation of the Latin *Liber Fas*.

**1897:** An unauthorized French expedition to the Memphis region of Egypt strains relations with Britain, Empress Elizabeth of Austria is assassinated, and S.L. MacGregor-Mathers demands the sworn fealty of other high-ranking Golden Dawn members.

**1898:** The Boer War begins in British South Africa, spinal anesthesia is discovered, and popular British occultist John Dee (a member of the Golden Dawn) is found floating face down in the Thames river with a weird symbol carved into his chest.

**1899:** The British begin to win the Boer War, psychoanalysis is discovered by Sigmund Freud, and Harry Houdini tours London.

**1900:** Queen Victoria dies and King Edward VII ascends the throne, the Golden Dawn is exposed as a fraud by one of its own Inner Circle members, and the Dorsey Society is disbanded; bringing both the Victorian Age and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to an end.

## About this Time Line

This Victorian Age time line is not meant to dictate events, but rather it is intended to serve as a kind of springboard for your own games. Players are invited to expand upon, excise, or entirely ignore any portion of this time line as they see fit. Note also that the preceding time line is neither complete (that is, it does not examine the whole of the Victorian Age) nor based entirely in the realm of fact (this is, after all, a game).

The year 1886 is highlighted in red because this is the default setting date of *Strange Aeons*. This does not mean that *your* game of *Strange Aeons* must take place during 1886 (or even in London, really). Feel free to base your games of *Strange Aeons* where and when you so choose - if you'd like to explore colonial India or the mysteries of the Egyptian Nile, go for it!

## **OPEN GAME LICENSE, Version 1.0a**

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc ("Wizards"). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) "Contributors" means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) "Derivative Material" means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) "Distribute" means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) "Open Game Content" means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) "Product Identity" means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; animals characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, animals, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) "Trademark" means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) "Use", "Used" or "Using" means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) "You" or "Your" means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the

exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder's name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content.

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

## 15 COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.

System Reference Document Copyright 2000–2003, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, Andy Collins, David Noonan, Rich Redman, Bruce R. Cordell, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

Core Elements - Revised Edition Copyright 2005; author James D. Hargrove.

Strange Aeons - Revised Edition Copyright 2005; author James D. Hargrove