

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Ascension of the Magdalene is an adventure that can be played using either the *SRD* rules for the Open Game License (OGL) or *Unknown Armies* rules. If you plan on playing this adventure, you should stop reading now – the rest is only for the GM.



AN OGL PARTY SHOULD CONSIST OF FOUR TO SIX CHARACTERS OF LEVELS SIX TO NINE.



An *Unknown Armies* group should be moderately experienced, with at least one adept or avatar.

Format Notes

This adventure has statistics for both the *SRD* rule system and the *Unknown Armies* rule system. You can play using either set of rules, paying attention only to the statistics for your game system of choice. To help make it a little easier to follow the statistics you need, we've set them apart with formatting, letting you ignore everything that doesn't concern you.



INFORMATION FORMATTED LIKE THIS (GRAY TYPE AND SMALL CAPS) AND PRECEDED BY A WHITE CLOCK FACE IS FOR *OGL* ONLY. YOU CAN SAFELY IGNORE IT IF YOU'RE PLAYING THIS ADVENTURE USING *UNKNOWN ARMIES* RULES. ALL MATERIAL IN THIS FORMAT IS HEREBY IDENTIFIED AS OPEN GAME CONTENT, AS DEFINED BY THE OPEN GAME LICENSE.



Information formatted like this and preceded by a black clock face is for *Unknown Armies* only. You can safely ignore it if you're playing this adventure using *SRD* rules.

The rest of the text is formatted like this, and is for both systems. This is the information that is used no matter what rules you're using; things like descriptions of rooms or events, or the reactions of other characters in the adventure.

One last important point. The adventure is written so that you can use it for either game system, and the statistics provided support this. Just keep in mind that the statistics for the various encounters were developed separately, not converted: lots of things don't map quite properly between the games. This adventure is not intended to be a conversion guide between *OGL* and *Unknown Armies*.

What's Going On

It's 1610 A.D., getting on towards Christmas. The city of Prague is all bundled safe in its bed, but not everything is peaceful. Boiling under the surface of the city is a secret battle being fought by conspirators and magicians, a battle that stretches from the Jewish slums to

the palace of Rudolf II, the Holy Roman Emperor. Something big is happening on the mystic front, and everyone wants a piece of it.

This past summer, one of the most influential painters in the world disappeared on an extended journey from Naples to Rome. This was Caravaggio, renowned both for his amazing paintings and his heretical attitude towards the Church. His attitudes didn't stop him from being supported by many influential Church representatives, like the papal Secretary of State, who commissioned the last of his paintings.

Once Caravaggio disappeared, things started to get weird. The Church closed in on his workshop to secure his paintings and prevent anyone from seeing them. When they got there, there were only three paintings left, and only one of those made it to the Secretary of State. The other two vanished, including one referred to as the *Magdalene*.

There are a lot of rumors surrounding this event and the Church cover-up of Caravaggio's disappearance. They spread the story that Caravaggio collapsed and died on a beach when he found that his boat back to Rome had left without him. Of course, all records about any of this have been mislaid or destroyed.

It's now six months later. Those in the know in Prague are getting all stirred up because word is that Emperor Rudolf II has somehow acquired the *Magdalene* painting. No one is quite sure how he got it, but there's a lot about Rudolf that no one is sure of. Rumors claim he has secreted the painting in his *Wunderkammer*, a secret museum of oddities and rare objects that he keeps hidden deep inside Hradcany castle.

This is the situation when the characters stumble into it, looking like the perfect group of (ahem) experts to help the rightful owners secure the painting.

The Invisible Clergy

Above mortals, but below the gods, there is the Invisible Clergy. They are those who have come to best represent the Archetypes of the world. Archetypes are symbolically powerful human roles such as the Mother, the Warrior, or the King, and the Clergy are former humans who have ascended into a higher plane where they embody these roles as something more than human. Their existence gives power to those who follow them – humans known as Avatars – allowing such people to tap into the vast power of unconscious belief in the form of magical abilities known as Gifts. The Clergy members interact with reality through the subtle interplay of probabilities and chance, affecting events from behind the scenes, waging a hidden battle for the supremacy of their ideals.

It is important to distinguish between the role of the Archetype and the person who represents it in the Invisible Clergy. Once an idea takes hold enough to cre-

CHAPTER TWO:

SETTING

So, what are our heroes getting themselves into? Prague is a very active city, both in the mundane and the mystical spheres. There's a lot going on at this time, and most of it is affected to one degree or another by the characters' antics.

Politics

Prague is the current capital of the Holy Roman Empire. It has become the hub of learning on the continent, thanks to Rudolf II. His encouragement of art, science, and mysticism has attracted the cream of the European intellectual community to his court. Though the visitors don't always stay long, their time in Prague is generally highly profitable and productive, thanks to Imperial patronage.

It's not all rosy, though. The rise of the Protestant faiths has put a great deal of pressure on the Emperor to relax discriminatory laws. This has put Rudolf in a very difficult position. He is supposed to be defending the sanctity of the Roman Catholic Church, yet many of the states of the Holy Roman Empire have threat-

ened revolt unless their faith is recognized. Rudolf has walked the thin line between the Church and his subjects, and has succeeded in falling out of favor with both. His lackluster administrative abilities and corrupt staff don't help matters at all. The rivalry between the state religion (Roman Catholicism) and the Protestant beliefs (primarily Lutheranism) causes a great deal of tension in the city and in the Empire as a whole.

One thing that really fans the flames of discord is the freedom and esteem that Rudolf bestows upon the Jewish community. Indeed, Rabbi Loew, one of the leading Jewish figures in Prague, is a personal acquaintance of Rudolf, and the two are quick to come to each other's aid when required. The close association between Rudolf and the Jews is a very sore point for the Christian Protestants, and has helped fan anti-Semitism in the city to a dangerous pitch.

Waiting in the wings for Rudolf to make his final slip is his younger brother, Matthias. Matthias is much more of a moderate than Rudolf, and is looking for his chance to lawfully take the throne and bring some semblance of stability to the Empire before his brother drags it down into ruin. He is using the issue of Protestant unrest and discrimination as the means for establishing his personal popularity with the dissident factions, hoping to ride into power on their support.



RUDOLF II

Rudolf understands exactly what *The Ascension of the Magdalene* means, and why it's important. He even understands the powers it has, and the ways of curbing or using the effects of the painting. He has glimpsed the majesty of the Invisible Clergy and that knowledge has more to do with his insanity than his syphilis does. His skewed idea of the after-life, caused by his knowledge that only the Archetypes survive after death, has led him to believe that he is destined for Hell – the complete absence of the presence of God, in traditional doctrine. This occupies his attention more and more often of late.

He's not about to give up possession of any of the items of power that he has acquired, viewing these as the only possible means of establishing the needed connection with the Invisible Clergy. He believes he needs that connection for the salvation of his soul. That means he takes the theft of the *Magdalene* with absolute seriousness and stops at nothing to recover it.

Rudolf could teach most of the cabals lurking in Prague a great deal about the nature of the universe, the true power of magic, and the meaning of life. He has tried, but only Rabbi Loew seems to have listened at all. One of the downsides of being mad, he has found, is that you lack credibility.

No stats are provided for Rudolf, as he doesn't enter directly into the adventure. If you want the characters to have a chance to assassinate the Holy Roman Emperor, that's your own headache to deal with.

CHAPTER THREE: INTO THE UNDERNEATH

The characters hear word around Prague about the great magical treasure hidden in the Emperor's *Wunderkammer*. They also hear about one or more secret societies that want to get their hands on the painting. The patron they choose depends on the nature of the group as well as the GM's plans.

For a devout group, the Knights of Malta, backed by the Order of St. Cecil, make a perfect patron. The characters can contact them either through the Church (discreetly, please) or by meeting them at the Order House in the Judith Tower. There's a fair bit of money offered, as the Knights of Malta are bankers as well as warriors and healers, but the real value is having the powerful Knights and the secret Order owe the characters a very big favor. Father Giacomo is more than happy to discuss terms with the characters in the safety of the Judith Tower.

If the group has a reputation for retrieving hard-to-find items, Order of Hero agent Michael van der Meer is definitely interested in hiring them to secure the painting in order to save Prague from the curse of Hanus of Ruze. He can offer not only a decent amount of cash but also some special little clockworks, and even consents to train a suitable character in the art and science of Mechanomancy. The story of the clock is well known in the city, and the story of the Order of Hero of Alexandria and their quest to restore it is not too hard to dig up. Van der Meer is very open to proposals to obtain the painting for him, and he can usually be found during the day in his workshop in the Gunsmith Tower.

For those with a more mystical bent, the Rosicrucians would accept the characters as members of their society in return for the painting. This would give the characters access to a vast network of occult scholars and teachers, and contacts all across the continent. The Rosicrucians could instead give them a lot of gold, if that's what they would prefer, but that is clearly the lesser offer. The Invisible College is not so invisible these days, and Etienne can be found with a little bit of digging. He spends his days charting the magical influences on Petrin Hill, and is prepared to listen to the characters' proposals.



ANY OF THESE FACTIONS CAN BE TRACKED DOWN BY MAKING A GATHER INFORMATION CHECK WITH A DC OF 20.



If the characters have any skill related to contacts or gossip, they can locate any of the factions with a successful roll. Failing that, allow them to make a Mind roll that is above 30 but below their Mind score to locate the desired faction.