

G U R P S<sup>®</sup>

# VOODOO

## *THE SHADOW WAR*



BY C.J. CARELLA

TIM &  
BRAD-  
STREET  
1995  
AND  
GRANT

STEVE JACKSON GAMES



# A BLOSSOMING EVIL

## BEFORE THE DAWN

of history, mankind pierced the veil between the material world and . . . something else. Perhaps one person in a hundred could perceive a little more than the rest. One in thousands gained true power. Some of these *Initiates* used their supernatural talents to aid their people. Others became predators, or rulers, or the secret power behind rulers.

When the Europeans crossed the Atlantic to conquer the Americas, their *Initiates* – the ancient *Lodges* – came with them, crushing the natives' mystic defenders. But a new force arose. From *Initiates* among the African slaves, from surviving native shamans, from knowledge stolen from the *Lodges* themselves, *Voodoo* was born – a powerful magical religion, whose gods, the *loas*, actually possess, or “ride,” their followers.



For centuries, the *Voodoo Initiates* and the *Brethren of the Lodges* have waged their invisible war. Now both sides realize that they face an even greater enemy: the *Corruptors*, cannibal spirits that feed on the misery of mankind.

Now the *Shadow War* is a tangle of deadly plots and counterplots: *Voudounistas* vs. *Brethren*, loyalists from either side vs. traitors, servants of the *Corruptors* vs. everyone else . . . as the world collapses around them.

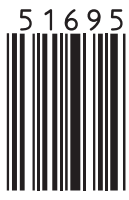
This is the story of the *Shadow War* and those who fight it. A new magic system recreates the powers of the *Initiates* – and the spirits that surround them.

Can the battling *Initiates* forget the centuries of betrayal and hatred, and join forces against the greater evil? Or is humanity damned to destroy itself over and over as fodder for the *Corruptors*?

Written by C. J. Carella  
Edited by Susan Pinsonneault  
Cover by Timothy Bradstreet  
Illustrated by Shea Ryan



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## The Shadow War



By C. J. Carella

Edited by Susan Pinsonneault

Cover by Tim Bradstreet

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*GURPS* System Design by Steve Jackson

Page Layout, Typography  
and Interior Production by Rick Martin  
Color Design and Production by Jeff Koke  
Proofreading by Spike Y. Jones  
Art Direction by Lillian Butler

Print Buying by Andrew Hartsock  
Dana Blankenship, Sales Manager

*Playtesters:* James H. Cloos, Jr., Bill Collins, Salvatore Falco, Jeff Gaines, Robert Gilson, Karl Hoffman, Kris Ingenieri, J. Hunter Johnson, Jonas Karlsson, M. A. Lloyd, Kathy McClure, Brian Phillips, Eric Phillips, Brett Slocum, David J. Snyder, Curtis Stabler, David Lewis Stroup, Andrew Wardell, Allen Wilkins, Peter Wilkins, Stephan Zielinski

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# INTRODUCTION

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

*Pyramid*. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS*, as well as information on our other lines: *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures* and more. It also covers top releases from other companies — *Traveller*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun*, and many more.

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*Q&A*. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

*Gamer input*. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

*Illuminati Online*. For those who have home computers, SJ Games has an online service with discussion areas for many games, including *GURPS*. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! It's up 24 hours per day at 512-448-8950, at up to 28.8K baud — or telnet to io.com. Give us a call! We also have conferences on CompuServe, GENie, and America Online.

## Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. PS refers to *GURPS Psionics*, MA refers to *GURPS Martial Arts*.

The world of *GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War* is not unlike our own. Innocent people are victimized by criminals, governments and other predators that can be called “human” only by a stretch of that word’s definition. Illegal drugs are an industry that produces more money than the GNP of many nations, and 12 years of the so-called “War on Drugs” have not come close to solving the problem. The “artworks” of serial killers are displayed in galleries, and murderers go free. But in the world portrayed in these pages, those crimes, wars and natural disasters are all pieces of a puzzle — moves in a planetwide game with the souls of humankind at stake. Those with the right talents can identify the people and entities that cause the chaos. They might even put a stop to it.

This book uses the myths of the mystical religion known as *Voudoun* and *Santería*, placing the believers and practitioners of Voodoo in the middle of a cosmic struggle. The Shadow War is a conflict fought on many fronts. Voodoo Initiates have to contend with the Lodges — European magicians who have hidden their occult power and who consider themselves to be the secret masters of the Western World. Behind that conflict, some Initiates have begun to realize, lies a more basic struggle between humankind and beings that have no use for power or wealth — only for destruction.

Players can take the roles of Initiates in sorcery and spirit magic, confronting the forces trying to destroy the world. A new magic system simulates the way Voodoo priests, and the shamans of many ancient cultures, think magic works. The PCs will face political intrigue, ancient conspiracies, urban decay and violence, and supernatural monsters. They may be urban shamans using their power to fight the evil that lives in crumbling neighborhoods or crawls out of the sewers at night. Or they may be ordinary people who discover the horrors behind the scenes.

Unlike many “dark” RPGs, *GURPS Voodoo* is not about enduring the horror, but fighting it. The participants in the Shadow War are fighting to *win*. Human Spirit Warriors, monstrous In-Betweeners renegades and even ghosts can join forces to stop the manipulators and deceivers that spread suffering through the world. The world of the Shadow War needs heroes, however frail or flawed. Your characters may be just the heroes it needs.

## About the Author

C.J. Carella’s love affair with *GURPS* began with the publication of *Man to Man*, and he has never looked back. Born in New York, C.J. has lived in Peru, Venezuela, Connecticut and Florida. His writing credits include *GURPS Martial Arts*, *GURPS Imperial Rome* and *GURPS War Against the Chtorr* for Steve Jackson Games, as well as *Pantheons of the Megaverse* and *Rifts Mercenaries* for Palladium Books. He is now working full time as a freelance writer and game designer in New Haven, Connecticut; his last surviving cat is currently in exile.



## A Brief Disclaimer

Voodoo is more than a myth or a superstition; it is a religion with millions of followers. The Voodoo described in these pages is based on the magical side of that religion, and is not meant to portray the actual performance of Voodoo in the real world. Neither does this book describe actual magical rituals or other occult practices. Both the Lodges and the Mayombe are wholly fictional, and In-Betweeners are mythological creatures of African and Voodoo legend.

All the conspiracies mentioned in the book are the products of the author's fevered imagination. They are not meant to describe actual institutions or organizations, and any resemblances are purely FNORD.

## Racial Issues

Many of the themes of *GURPS Voodoo* deal with racism. Slavery is not necessarily racist: many cultures have enslaved people of the same race. But slavery in North and South America was inherently racist. A century after its disappearance from the continent, its legacy lives on. In the context of the game, racism has supernatural consequences beyond the normal pain and misery it causes in the "real world."

Since the race issue can be sensitive, GMs and players must exercise their judgment in dealing with it. The Shadow War setting offers many opportunities to roleplay characters from different racial and social backgrounds, and players and GMs may discover that it is tougher to roleplay a Haitian refugee than it is to play a Dwarven warrior in a fantasy setting. Falling into stereotypes is easy, but the author hopes that in the course of the game players will transcend them and create interesting, three-dimensional people.

*“ . . . Undoubtedly, you will think these the ravings of a lunatic. Do not be deceived, my friends. You will not find the names of evil in the **Malleus Malleficarum**, but you will hear them whispered among the denizens of our cities' worst slums – and in the halls of the powerful. What we conveniently relegate to the status of interesting superstitions are the forces that control our world. Our complacency is founded on ignorance, and it will not protect us or our children. A war is being waged; we read about the casualties every time we look at a newspaper, and we fail to understand, to even acknowledge . . . ”*

*Impatiently, he plucked another sheet, this one fresh from the laser printer. “Chango and Oggun are not the Enemy. Neither are Hecate or Pan, although all these Powers exist. The Enemy's name has eluded me. Some call it **Mayombe**; others use the old epithets, the mistranslations of the Hebrew Bible that have blinded us. Beelzebub and Asmodeus are linguistic aberrations that do little to express the true monstrosities that revel in our crimes. Use those names if you will, but I shall use the Afro-American terminology . . . ”*

*Deveraux shook his head. The paper was incoherent; it did sound like the ravings of an unhinged mind. He smiled, remembering his best source of information, the Haitian woman at the insane asylum who told him secrets despite the straitjacket and the heavy sedatives that bound her body and spirit. Perhaps insanity was the path to knowledge; certainly the discoveries he had made were best contemplated in a state of lunacy. But his erstwhile colleagues would not understand. He shrugged. Maybe one or two would be intrigued enough to follow the route toward Initiation; that was all he could hope for. He opened his E-mail program, and listed all the individuals and institutions he would target through the modem. Now all he had to do . . .*

*He froze. The door downstairs had banged open. He heard quick footsteps racing toward his office. Deveraux swung back to the computer; he moved and clicked the mouse with the desperate movements of a drowning man. Somebody knocked on the door just as he clicked the mouse on the last command. He switched the screen off and started to run to the fire escape outside the window.*

*An invisible force slammed into him, not painfully but hard enough to make him lose his balance and stagger against a desk. His eyes wide with terror, Deveraux understood how Jefferson had died four days before, when he “jumped” in front of the subway train. “Jumped” because nobody had been close enough to push him – at least, nobody that human eyes could see. He tried to continue to the window, and again his invisible tormentor pushed him back. This time, he heard faint echoes of childish laughter. The **loa** was taking perverse pleasure in thwarting him.*

*The door to his office was not kicked in. The knob turned gently, and with a click the latch slid aside. The door swung open, and the Smiling Man stepped inside. Deveraux's guts turned to ice; he fell to his knees, his legs suddenly too feeble to hold him. Rumor had not been enough to prepare him for the In-Betweeners' entrance. The man was wearing Deveraux's own face, twisted in an inhuman grimace. “Hello, Gerard,” the creature said in a whispering voice. “I thought I should return this to you.” With one swift motion, the Smiling Man pulled off the face, revealing the skinless, glistening flesh beneath. The skin-changer's smile displayed its teeth in all their sharpened, cannibal glory.*

*Deveraux had time for one short scream.*

*Next to the thrashing figures, unmindful of the blood spatters, the computer continued working silently, transmitting Deveraux's last paper . . .*

***GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War*** is set in a world where the wildest imaginings of occultists, New Agers, and witch doctors are only fragments of a greater, more disturbing whole. Invisible entities share the earth with



humankind. They can and often do intervene in human affairs, at the behest of the few people who know how to petition them. Wishes can and often do come true – although often in ways not foreseen by the wishers. Curses and desires have unexpected consequences, and irrational faith can produce miracles – if one is prepared to pay the price. Hauntings, “demonic possession” and poltergeist activity are in fact the result of these entities’ actions.

Over the centuries, many people have learned to contact and deal with the invisible world. Some became high priests, saints and kings, while others worked in secret to escape persecution. In Europe, these powers were hidden and kept in the hands of a select few. These people have allowed the physical sciences unfettered development, but have purposely obscured the realms of religious thought and metaphysics, which are now largely the province of so-called primitive cultures. The secret magicians of the Western world used their powers to neutralize and discredit the shamans of other cultures.

But the old ways were not abandoned everywhere. The American continents, both North and South, became a place where different cultures and mystical heritages met and combined (see p. 9). In the Caribbean and parts of South America, this fusion combined powerful African traditions, European Christianity and occultism, and Native American animism. This potent blend, popularly known as *Voodoo*, has spawned one of the most dynamic mystical amalgams this planet has seen.

Now, the heirs of the Voodoo tradition must join forces with their former enemies and members of other traditions to confront supernatural predators. Voudounistas have been dragged into a secret war as old as humankind. Most of them only wish to practice their magical religion in peace, but the darker forces that manipulate the world have other plans.

---

## BEHIND THE FAÇADE

To an observer, the world is a chaotic place, plagued by senseless killings and insane outbursts of violence. The authorities are unable to protect a large percentage of the population from crime, and many governments actively victimize their citizens. In America, the drug traffic, crime and urban decay have devastated most large cities. Sociologists, historians, politicians and economists have all offered explanations and solutions, none of which have worked.

In the world of the Shadow War, no earthly science will solve these problems; they originate from *supernatural* sources. Beings that feed on the evil that men do are secretly manipulating the world to perpetuate and aggravate that evil. These beings have granted their servants enormous power – for a price. They have many names, but are best known as the Corruptors, the Eaters of Life, the demiurges. Voodoo mythology calls them the *Mayombe*, the cannibal spirits. Only those with knowledge and understanding of the matters of the spirit will be able to help the world against these entities.

In the steamy jungles and on the sunny beaches of the Caribbean, devotees of strange gods dance, chant and perform colorful ceremonies. Tourists take their pictures, anthropologists study and label their culture, and the world at large ignores them. But these “superstitious” people know more about the way the world *really* works than any scientist. In their rituals lies the power to change the world – for good or for ill.

This is a world where no major event occurs without supernatural backing, where an evil Voodoo ritual killed JFK and where the U.S. and the former Soviet Union were created by the same team of sorcerous social scientists. Monsters that shed forms as easily as snakes shed their skins walk the streets of every major city, preying on the weak and defenseless. Most people live and die unaware of the true forces that determine their fates. In this world, prayers

## The Many Names of Voodoo

The word “Voodoo” is an artificial term, popularized by European and American books and dime novels, for the African-American religions of Haiti. Many different terms have been coined for these religions, from the even more discredited “Hoodoo” to “Voudoun,” “Voudou” and “Voudu.” The last three are becoming more popular among scholars of the subject, especially since Voodoo is now used as a label for everything from magic rituals to dubious economic policies.

In this book, Voodoo is being used to indicate *all* African-American magical religions, and *Voudoun* refers specifically to the Haitian cult. *Santería* is the Yoruba-influenced magical religion practiced in the Spanish Caribbean, *Obeah* the form found in the British West Indies, and *Macumbe* the Brazilian cult. For the purposes of this game, they are similar enough to be indistinguishable to outsiders.





influence of politicians, and the struggle to be the force behind a given political leader is as fierce as it is secretive. Many of the sudden reversals in ideology or policy that Senators, mayors and even presidents undergo are the result of a new faction's victory over the previous controllers.

### **The Police**

Most police officers are dedicated people trying to do a dangerous, difficult job despite being overworked, underpaid and distrusted, feared and looked down on by the very people they swear to protect. In their frustration, some cops see themselves as a group separate from the rest of society. This “us-against-them” mentality has all but destroyed the old concept of the policeman as a valued member of the community. The ensuing alienation between the police and the public benefits many factions of the Shadow War, but the Mayombe and the other evil entities have reaped the most rewards from it.

Some officers have become servants of the Corruptors. Several “fraternal orders” of police are fronts for supernatural cults. Through subtle manipulation, the Corruptors widen the gap between police and the population at large. Some acts of “police brutality” are carefully staged, or even elements of sacrificial rituals! Cops are discouraged from going after the true crime bosses, and any investigation that might lead to the discovery of supernatural agencies is cut short. Many cops rebel against those rules, and achieve results despite the interference of their superiors; they become targets for defamation campaigns, or even murder.

Some of the Mayombe are working toward the day when open warfare erupts in the city streets, and police departments become just more armed factions in the ensuing chaos. The Los Angeles riots were a dress rehearsal for a much larger tragedy – unless the Corruptors are stopped, whole cities may burn.

People dealing with (or even working for) police departments may run across these hidden conspiracies. Although the majority of cops are not servants of or even aware of the Corruptors, they will follow reasonable orders from superiors who *are* servants of the Mayombe. By pulling the right strings, the Red Sects can have well-armed and trained SWAT teams and riot squads at their disposal.

### **Cults**

Cults, in the form of secret societies, religious groups, clubs and even openly “satanic” organizations, are all combatants in the Shadow War. The more obvious a cult is, however, the less likely it is to be powerful – unless the publicity is a façade covering a much larger conspiracy by hiding it in the open. Many cults form around a charismatic leader, who may or may not be an Initiate. Some are the creation of idealistic individuals; others are formed just to make money. A few have darker purposes.

If a cult is successful enough, one of the factions in the Shadow War will take an interest in the organization, and try to co-opt or neutralize it. Some cults



## **New Cambridge (Continued)**

A small circle of Lodge rebels operates in New Cambridge. The circle is a mixed band of Initiates totaling six members of the Schismatics, the Servants of Hecate, and the Ophites. Three of the six teach or study at New Cambridge University; one is a journalist at the local paper, and two Servants of Hecate own a small occult bookstore. These Initiates also suspect that an evil entity is secretly controlling the city. They have yet to make contact with the Loa Lords.

### **The Corruptors**

Despite what the Lucumi and the Lodges think, the Corruptors have a firm hold on New Cambridge. Ever since colonial times, evil spirits have played havoc with the inhabitants of the city. Unknown to all but a handful of people, a Dark Lodge brought a Devourer to New Cambridge during the 18th century. The creature has dwelled beneath the city since then, steadily growing in size and power.

Lodge leader Roger McCormick has been corrupted by that Devourer for several years. McCormick was contacted when he was a Third Level Initiate, barely inducted to the Lodge's Second Degree (see p. 54). He was offered more power than he could ever hope to get on his own. Thanks to the Devourer's help, McCormick rose both as an Initiate and a Lodge member, eventually reaching the leadership of the New Cambridge Lodges.

McCormick's intervention has prevented the Lodges' rituals from finding any trace of his master. He has also blocked any police investigation that would link over 70 murders of prostitutes and homeless people over the last ten years. These murders (and some 50 more that were never reported) were committed by the Sendings of the Devourer (see p. 103). The Sendings all look like ragged men with sharp metallic appendages instead of fingers. Occasional sightings have given rise to a whole body of urban legends centering around “Razorfingers.” Tales of Razorfingers have been in circulation for at least a hundred years, and reported sightings are greeted with incredulity by most.

Besides its Sendings, the Devourer controls a number of lesser Corruptor spirits, including a dozen or so Nkisi spirits (see p. 95). A small Red Sect led by an insane native American Initiate lives in the sewer system, occasionally coming out to grab a victim to sacrifice to their dark god. The local drug dealers are servants of other Corruptor spirits that dwell outside the city, and they include two Snake People In-Betweeners, neither of whom accept the leadership of the Devourer.

*Continued on next page . . .*

This Mayombe takes on the appearance of the Great White Hunter, complete with safari clothes and a rifle; most Initiates who see him assume from his looks that he is a European spirit, which makes it easy for him to manipulate racist humans to his own purposes. His symbols include knives, nets and snares. His Spirit Warriors can recognize each other instantly, and often work together. Traveling gangs of killers scour the roads of the U.S. and Canada, making stops where they snatch a victim or two, and then moving on, burying the bodies in remote places many miles away. Mbua's followers in police departments destroy any evidence or clues linking the killings and disappearances to his roving gangs.

### Possession Effects

Mbua never possesses people without their consent. His Spirit Warriors have ST +10, DX +4, HT +3 and DR +5. When infused by Mbua's presence, they also have Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense and High Pain Threshold, as well as Bloodlust and Sadism. The moment they accept Mbua as their patron spirit, they automatically become murder addicts (see p. 99). Many of them also fall prey to a number of Delusions and Odious Personal Habits, including Cannibalism (-15 points).

## The Kiyumbe

ST: 16                      IQ: 7                      Will: 14  
 DX: 14                      HT: 15                      Alertness: 14  
 Move/Dodge: 6/6                      Fatigue: 25

The Kiyumbe are a special form of ghost, which Bokkor sorcerers create by conducting a hideous ritual with the remains of a recently-buried corpse. The Bokkor invokes the base soul of the corpse (see p. 83) and enslaves it. The ghost's personality is eradicated; all it has left is rage and bloodlust. Most of the time, Kiyumbes can be found in the service of powerful Bokkors or greater Mayombe spirits, but occasionally the spirit's master is killed and the Kiyumbe is left to its own devices. Independent Kiyumbes wander the world, attracted to places where death and suffering are the norms; thus, one can find them in emergency wards, insane asylums and prisons, among others.

### Possession Effects

A human possessed by a Kiyumbe gains ST +5, HT +1 and



DR 2. He also acquires the Berserk disadvantage and immediately goes into a rage, attacking the people nearest to him. Nobody willingly invokes a Kiyumbe, because the spirit's mindless rage always overcomes the subject.

## The Nkisi

ST: 18                      IQ: 15                      Will: 16  
 DX: 16                      HT: 16                      Alertness: 16  
 Move/Dodge: 8/8                      Fatigue: 35

The Nkisi are very intelligent and malicious Mayombe spirits. They are favorite familiars of the Bokkor, and often materialize as cats, dogs, rats or snakes that the sorcerer keeps as pets. The Nkisi can also be on their own, corrupting small-time mystics, criminals and other dupes. On some occasions, a Nkisi controls a local drug ring or becomes the "patron" of a street gang. These malevolent spirits are the most common threat Initiates face when confronting street crime. The spirits travel singly or in small groups, and sometimes can be found controlling a group of Kiyumbe spirits, ghosts they have enslaved, or even In-Betweeners.

### Possession Effects

Nkisi mounts have ST +5, DX +2 and HT +2. They get no other advantages or disadvantages. These spirits never grant humans Spirit Warrior powers; they always want to be in control.



## Campaign Setting

Selecting the place for the campaign to start will determine the types of PC that can realistically participate and the initial threats and opportunities the characters will encounter. The campaign location need not be fixed in one place, of course. Globe-trotting campaigns can be a lot of fun, provided they do not place too much strain on the GM.

### The Caribbean

The home of Voodoo, the Caribbean is exotic enough to be mysterious, but familiar to the many people who have vacationed there or seen it portrayed in movies or books. The islands and the South American coastline are all places with a great deal of adventuring potential. Characters in the Caribbean can deal with drug-dealing Colombian, Haitian and Jamaican gangs, dictatorial governments in several nations, and widespread corruption in the rest, not to mention the occult forces that dwell beneath the sunny beaches and palm tree façades. Characters of all races and backgrounds fit in, although Americans will usually be met with a mixture of suspicion and hospitality. The most important forces in the area will be the Voodoo Societies and the Corruptor-controlled Red Sects, although the Lodges retain a strong presence among the ruling classes in most countries of the Caribbean.

*Continued on next page ...*

## Time Period

The “default” setting for the Shadow War is the present day, but GMs and players need not limit themselves to the 20th century. Voodoo and the Shadow War have existed for hundreds of years, and can be played on a number of time periods. GMs wishing to try some of the options given below might want to pick up some *GURPS* sourcebooks dealing with those time periods (see sidebar, p. 107).

### Conquest and Piracy (1500-1700)

This is the period of the European settlement of the American continents. The first African slaves appeared within decades of the arrival of Europeans to the New World. As the native population in the Caribbean and North America was either pushed into the wilderness or exterminated, imported slaves were brought in to take their place as cheap labor. Many sorcerer-priests from the Dahomey or Yoruba kingdoms arrived in this first wave of slaves, their arcane knowledge still pure and fresh in their minds. Europe was torn by religious wars, and the Inquisition scoured both Europe and the Americas in search of heretics and sorcerers.

Initiates from either the Voodoo or Lodge traditions may have played a role in this setting. The brutality of the conquest attracted a number of evil spirits and In-Betweeners, and a number of terrifying situations could be presented against the backdrop of a wild, untamed land. The Golden Age of piracy also started during this period. Swashbuckling adventuring could be combined with the occult elements of the Shadow War.

### The Age of Slavery (1700-1860)

During this period, slave plantations became the dominant economic factor on the American continents. Millions of people were brought over, many of whom died after suffering years of hellish mistreatment. Voodoo in its myriad

forms was born during this period, as was the nation of Haiti. The Lodges’ internal struggles reached a high point that ended in the Enlightened-sponsored revolutions in North and South America and the severe weakening of the European monarchies. Throughout this time, the power of the Corruptors grew by leaps and bounds, twisting the high-brow ideals of reformers and revolutionaries and worsening the lot of both slaves and freedmen.

Religion was slowly replaced by Reason during this period. Belief in the power of witchcraft and sorcery was on the wane, and by the 1850s it became the province of the superstitious and ignorant – just as the Lodges had planned. Meanwhile, Voodoo became an important political force in Haiti and a secret underground movement throughout the rest of the continent. All the major participants in the Shadow War faced each other during this period.

Possible characters during this period include “illuminated” Europeans, fierce Maroon warriors, the last remnants of the pirates of the Caribbean, slaves with mystic abilities, and In-Betweeners fleeing the persecution of the Lodges in Europe. Warriors, rebels, smugglers and scholars all navigated the Caribbean, searching for many things and often encountering the unexpected.



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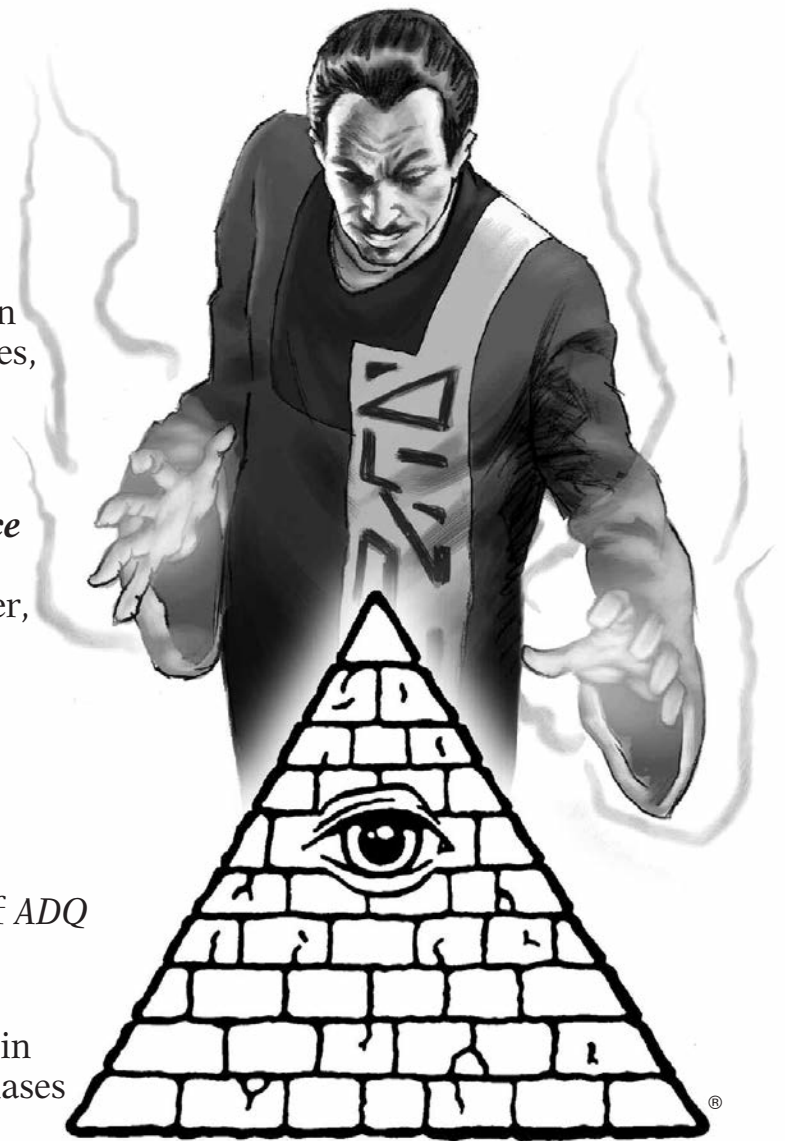
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