

The Circle of Hermes

Credits: Anton Delbarre, Derek Taylor, Wendy Misuinas

Introduction

The Circle of Hermes is an organization of occult researchers that was founded during the Occult Revival at the end of the 19th century. It has five Colleges that each specialize in a particular field of occult research.

When the Second World War had decimated its numbers and resources, the Circle of Hermes founded the Round Table as an effort to unify several organizations that dealt with occult. The philosophy behind this was that such a union would bring strength through numbers, communal knowledge and communal resources.

Because of the academic nature of the Circle of Hermes, the other societies agreed that the Circle would be the most suitable organization to impartially lead the Round Table. To this day the Circle not only organizes and leads the International Round Table, but it also traditionally expands, organizes and leads the Round Table at the local level.

Philosophy

“Knowledge is Power.”

A trite phrase that has been repeated for centuries, people often forget how much truth it holds. The Circle of Hermes is founded on this one simple mantra: knowledge is power. While those outside the organization see the Circle of Hermes as pompous, self-important academics, often of dubious scholarly reputation, those inside the organization know how wrong that perception is.

While all occult and secret societies lay claim to knowledge, the Circle of Hermes is the largest society devoted exclusively to hermetic research, with exacting standards of scholarship enforced through rigorous peer review. There are no slackers in the Circle of Hermes, and anyone who doesn't pull their weight as a scholar will find their standing in the Circle decreasing with each year that goes by.

However, it's often remarked by members that the more successful you are in the organization, the more dedicated to knowledge, research, and tradition you become. Some speculate that it's merely a method to maintain the *status quo*. Others suspect that somewhere along the line, you learn just how powerful knowledge can be.

Structure & Organization

The Forums

A Forum refers to a geographical location in which there are two or more members of the Circle of Hermes who maintain any sort of active presence. A local forum is responsible for the care of any resources the Circle entrusts to it, and for maintaining contact with the organization at large. When a new Forum is founded, the members of the Forum must elect a President to lead the Forum.

Forum Presidents are also traditional founders and leaders of the local Round Table in the Forum's city. In most cities that have a local Round Table, the founder was a Forum President. In some places, particularly in the less tradition-oriented countries such as the United States, the Circle of Hermes has found itself unseated from the role of leaders in some cities. This has not stopped anyone in the Circle from attempting to lead, though it may slow them down.

The Five Colleges

Within the Circle of Hermes there are five Colleges, which represent general fields of occult research. It is not required to join a College, but your College is what gives you something in common with Circle members of other regions. Membership in a College is also a prerequisite to advancement within the Circle of Hermes; other members simply do not take you seriously if you refuse to submit yourself to the standards and peer review offered by a College. Your College is also the mechanism through which you gain access to the "stuff" that an occult organization acquires over time (knowledge, artifacts, contacts, etc).

It is possible to change your College membership at any time.

When you join a College, you gain it's Specialty for free. However, when you leave a College, you either lose the Specialty, or must pay for it with XP, at the discretion of your Storyteller.

Oudemans College

Specialty: *Cryptobiology* (Occult)

Oudemans College studies all lifeforms (corporeal as well as incorporeal) that cannot be classified using orthodox biology. Oudemans researchers have a solid reputation as observers and taxonomists and a strong tradition of not interfering with their study objects. These cryptobiologists have strict policies concerning the preservation of the habitats of the creatures they research, be they sentient or non-sentient. An Oudemans will never hurt or kill a cryptobiological life-form unless there truly is no alternative.

Myers College

Specialty: *Mortology* (Occult)

The researchers of Myers College are often perceived as strange, morbid, and asocial by the other members of the Circle. Myers College tries to study all aspects of death in general. This sometimes leads to strange and dangerous experiments involving extreme conditions such as near-death, undeath, and resurrection.

Gurney College

Specialty: *Parapsychology* (Occult)

Gurney College concerns itself with the study of all types of “psychic phenomena.” It divides these phenomena in 2 broad groups: anomalous cognition (ESP) [telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairgustance, dowsing, precognition, psychometry, *et. al.*] and anomalous operation [psychokinesis, telekinesis, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, life after death, mediumship, reincarnation, apparitions, communications from the dead, *et. al.*] In short, parapsychology means they research almost everything that is occult, but from a psychological angle.

Sidgwick College

Specialty: *Esoterology* (Academics)

Sidgwick college is perceived by most members of the Circle of Hermes as the elite College. Its scholars are widely respected for their academic prowess, yet they are also disliked for their arrogance. Some critics of Sidgwick point to the “esoterology specialty” of this College as proof of Sidgwick arrogance. Esoterology is a term rarely used outside of this College and it basically means “the study of everything that is occult.”

Because of the broad scope of esoterology, Sidgwickians help scholars from all other Colleges, and tend to be insulted when their help is not welcome. Most Sidgwick scholars are well-trained scientists with an extensive academic background, and often reflexively try to debunk or explain occult elements using orthodox science. Even if something is proven genuinely occult, they prefer scientifically sound methods of research.

On the study of ghosts:

There is no College devoted exclusively to the study of ghosts because the study of ghosts crosses all occult disciplines.

Many Circle members who make ghosts their subject end up in Myers College, but it's not uncommon to find ghost specialists in any other College. Each College brings its unique methods to the study of ghosts. By working together on interdisciplinary studies, efforts by members of different Colleges has led to the Circle of Hermes developing some of the widest and most comprehensive resources on ghosts.

All players thus have access to abjurations and exorcisms, though the number and efficiency will be subject to the rules under “Benefits of College Membership” further in this document.

Furthermore, a character's approach to studying and interacting with ghosts, hauntings, haunted locations, and everything related, will be colored by their College and will often bring them into conflict with members from other Colleges. The Gurney member who wants to partially destroy an anchor to study its effects on a ghost is likely to meet strong resistance from the Oudemans member who considers the anchor part of the ghost's ‘habitat.’

Rules for ghosts and dealing with them are found on pages 208 – 216 of World of Darkness. Additional inspiration and information can be found in Ghost Stories and Antagonists.

All of these books are sanctioned for play in the Camarilla Mortals Venue. Storytellers should consult the Camarilla Addendum for details.

Most Sidgwick scholars further specialize in one or more specific fields of occult study like alchemy, magic, occult artifacts, occult tomes, occult rituals, occult religious works, occult philosophies, etc.

Sidgwick College is also home to the Arcane Engineers, a small faction of inventors and scholars who focus on the application of esoteric knowledge and hermetic principals to engineering sciences (architectural, mechanical, computer, electrical, and other). Arcane Engineers practice both reverse engineering, and invention. Arcane Engineers may opt to take a specific form of engineering as their Academics specialty, instead of Esoterology.

Barrett College

Specialty: *Divination* (Occult)

Barrett College studies all means of ascertaining information that cannot be explained by orthodox empirical science. This extremely diverse field of research entails such subjects as geomancy, necromancy, tarot, clairvoyance, prophecies, etc. All fields of research that end with “-mancy” are types of divination. The suffix –mancy is derived from the Greek word *manteia* which means divination.

The Patrician Order

When in 1947, the Round Table was founded, it was decreed that each local Forum of the Circle of Hermes had to appoint a President to organize and preside over the local Round Table.

The Patrician Order is composed of all Presidents and their assistants. A formal association of Forum Presidents, it is largely a mechanism for politicking outside of the academic restrictions of the College. Many a Hermetic who has been frustrated by his College has turned to contacts within the Patrician Order. Relations between the Patrician Order and the Colleges are often heated, as each tries to assert its authority over the other.

Some people call the Patrician Order the sixth College, though this is quite inaccurate. A member of the Patrician Order can belong to a College, whereas no one can belong to two Colleges at the same time.

The Congresses

Each of the International Colleges meet at least once a year in a Congress. Each Congress is comprised of the most influential College members, called Prefects (College Status 5), plus all Forum Presidents that are members in the College.

Congresses are organized by the incumbent Lord Rector of the College. He chooses the location, sets the date, sends the invitations, etc. At the start of the meeting, the Congress elects a new Lord Rector to preside over the Congress, to represent the College in the Senate, and to lead the College. Lord Rectors are elected for a term of one year, and the

incumbent may be re-elected. However, failing to schedule a Congress will not prolong a term of office. If the Lord Rector does not schedule a Congress at the end of his term, the Prefects may schedule and preside over the Congress. Additional Congresses may be scheduled prior to the end of the Lord Rector's term, but this is an unusual occurrence and only happens when there are urgent matters requiring the attention of the whole College.

Congressional Voting

Members of a Congress who cannot attend a meeting of their Congress can proxy their vote with another member of their College. A proxy requires a simple letter (or e-mail) from the College member with the name of the designated proxy holder.

All Congress decisions (like who will become the Lord Rector) are made by 2/3 majorities (for or against), each decision being re-voted until a 2/3 majority is reached. This means Congress meetings usually involve a lot of heated debating, intense negotiating, swearing, dredging up of past grudges and in some extreme cases even bribery, blackmail, or fisticuffs.

The Senate

The Circle of Hermes is led by a six member Senate composed of the five Lord Rectors and a Lord Chancellor, elected by the Rectors from the Patrician Order. The Lord Chancellor serves as the Senate's independent chairman. He is neutral and his job is to make sure things get done and the Senate does not become locked in stalemate or degenerate into endless bickering. The five Lord Rectors are there to implement decisions made by the Congresses and to serve as "leaders" for their respective Colleges. Some of the more experienced members of the Circle of Hermes refer to the Senate as the 'House of Lords.'

Since different Colleges hold Congresses at different times, the composition of the Senate changes frequently. The Lord Chancellor is elected to a one year term, beginning the first of September.

Senatorial Voting

All Senatorial decisions (like the election of the Lord Chancellor) are made by simple majority.

Status

Storytellers are reminded they are empowered to deny a player's experience point expenditure if the player does not provide sufficient justification or meet the criteria set by the Low Approval Storyteller for Status increases.

Forum Status (Local)

Forum Status is Low Approval for levels 1 to 3, and Mid-approval for levels 4 and 5.

Members in a local Forum gain respect over time, through their efforts and contributions to the Forum and the Round Table, and by proving themselves to be intelligent and able scholars. This is a double-sided coin for occult scholars. On one hand, their words and theories hold more weight, on the other hand, they find themselves called on to lead or assist with the most dangerous investigations.

There are many, many ways to gain Forum Status, but some quick ways to lose it are: using any form of violence, acting against the best interest of the Round Table, and pushing any plan that backfires.

College Status (National)

You may hold Status in Colleges other than your own, but if you are not a member of any College you may not hold Status in any College.

College Status is Low Approval for levels 1 and 2, Mid Approval for 3, High Approval for 4, and Top Approval for 5.

Some scholars dream of becoming an authority in their field of occult research. Sometimes a scholars' research does attract attention beyond the local level, but such a reputation does have its drawbacks. Scholars of great repute find themselves plagued by requests for help and advice. It's hard enough to conduct your own occult research and keep up a day-time job at the same time, but it gets really hard when you constantly get calls from across the country asking if you know how to safely dissect a zombie.

Attaining Status 5 in your own College automatically confers the honorific of Prefect. This title is a mark of respect and achievement, not of authority. You may not be a Prefect in more than one College, even if you attain Status 5 in two or more Colleges, because you may only be a member of one College at a time.

Membership

Joining the Circle of Hermes

Membership in the Circle of Hermes is Low Approval.

The Circle of Hermes has a membership requirement of Academics (3) and Occult (1)

Each member of the Circle of Hermes is expected to educate at least one pupil during the

course of his or her life. This rule was instituted as a measure to ensure that there is active prospection for scholars that have had contact with the occult so as to guide and protect these scholars and to keep membership numbers from dwindling.

When a member of the Circle of Hermes finds a scholar that has had contact with the occult, he or she is obliged to find a suitable mentor for the scholar. This mentor must track down the scholar, get to know him and after a base of trust has been built, start teaching him the basics of Hermetic research. When the mentor thinks his pupil has completed the basic education, he reveals the existence of the Circle of Hermes to the pupil and asks the pupil to take the Hermetic Oath. When the pupil has taken the Hermetic Oath he becomes a member of the Circle of Hermes.

Hermetic Oath

I, (Name), hereby swear my everlasting loyalty to the Circle of Hermes and its members with Hermes Trismegistus as my witness.

I shall further the knowledge of the Circle and share with its members all that I find in the course of my research.

During my scholarly pursuits I shall not reveal any aspect of a private life in a manner that could harm its privacy.

I will honor my mentor, show him respect and provide for him when he can not tend to his own needs.

I will treat his pupils as I treat mine and will educate them without reward if my mentor cannot further their education, or if he wishes me to aid him in their education.

I will teach the core of my knowledge to my pupils.

The ignorant I shall teach what is to their benefit, according to my judgment and capacity, yet I shall shield them from what could harm them in any way.

I will not spy on members of the Circle of Hermes or deprive them of scholarly success.

I will abide by the rulings of my Forum and I will respect the decisions of my President. I will not endanger anyone that sits at the Round Table, nor will I needlessly involve myself with the affairs of the ignorant.

I will not have dealings with the supernatural, for that would destroy my impartial stance and render me incompetent as a scholar.

I will train apprentices and should any of them turn against any that sit at the Round Table, I shall be the first to bring them to justice.

No apprentice of mine shall sit at the Round Table until he first swears this oath.

May this oath, if I don't break or confound it, grant me progress in both life and knowledge, and a good reputation amongst all human beings. If I dishonor this oath, may all of this be taken away from me.

Benefits of Circle Membership

Members of the Circle of Hermes may purchase the Merit *Allies* at half price. For every dot of *Language* purchased, the player may select a free dialect or variant of the primary language. (Examples: Dutch and Flemish, Modern Greek and Ancient Greek, Cantonese and Mandarin, etc.)

In addition, members of the Circle of Hermes gain the specialization for their College free. Members who do not join a College do not gain this benefit. For further benefits, see **Benefits of College Membership**.

Joining a Forum

When a Mentor thinks that his pupil is ready to join a Forum, he or she arranges a meeting between his pupil and the President of the local Forum. During this meeting, the President briefs the pupil on the most important aspects of life within his Forum and together they work out the formalities that will be followed to induct the new pupil into the Forum.

When an agreement has been reached between all parties, a date is set for the presentation of the new member to the other members of the Forum. During this presentation the new member must take the Forum Oath in front of his new Forum.

Forum Oath

I pledge that I, (Name), am a member of (College), and pupil of (mentor), and am fully trained in the ways of hermetic research.

I solemnly swear that I have never had and never will have dealings with occult beings.

I ask your acceptance into (Forum) and I join of my own volition.

I will never allow any who sit at your Round Table to come to harm, in any sense, by action or inaction.

I will have one vote in my Forum, and I will use it prudently.

I will never represent my Forum in any fashion without being so empowered by my Forum.

From this day forward, I share with this Forum its goals, its allies, and its enemies.

Research in another Forum

If a member, for whatever reason, needs to conduct occult research in the domain of another Forum, he should contact the President of that Forum to inform him of the pending research. This gives the President the opportunity to let one of his Forum members assist in the research. It is common courtesy for visitors to attend at least one meeting of the Forum or the Round Table, and to send a report of the findings to the hosting President.

Relocating to the domain of another Forum

When a member of the Circle of Hermes wants to relocate to the domain of another Forum, she must take up membership in the new Forum. This means that she must arrange a meeting with the President of the new Forum.

During this meeting, the President briefs the new member on the most important aspects of life within this specific Forum, and together they work out the formalities that will be followed to induct the new member into the Forum.

When an agreement has been reached between both parties, a date is set for the presentation of the new member to the other members of the Forum. During this presentation the new member must take the Forum Oath in front of her new Forum.

Joining a College

Though joining or leaving a college is one of the most important choices a member of the Circle can make, the formalities surrounding it are simple. All that has to be done to join a College is to send a Formal Presentation to the Rectorate (the office of the Rector) of the College you want to join. Some people also send a motivation for their choice of College to accompany this Formal Presentation, though this is not necessary. When a positive reply by the Rectorate is received the applicant becomes an official Collegiate of his new College. If a negative reply is received, the Hermetic may re-apply in six months.

Local Storytellers may create the Rectorate reply, as it is a form letter issued by the office as opposed to a personal response.

Leaving a College is done by sending a letter to the Lord Rector informing him of your departure from the College, or by joining a new College.

Formal Presentation

To the Lord Rector of (College),

I am (Name, plus titles within the Circle of Hermes in ascending order of importance). I claim the title of Collegiate as it was conferred upon me by President (Name) on (date), in (Forum). I swear service to my Congress, my Senate, and the Round Table, lest I lose my title of (College) Collegiate, and my place at the Round Table.

Benefits of College Membership

All five Colleges have a hidden libraries, full of reports and publications of distinguished Collegiates. Only College librarians know the locations and contents, and the librarians are anonymous as a security measure. Only the First Librarian of the College knows who the lesser librarians are. Any member of a College can send requests for information on a certain topic to his College Library. All requests are handled confidentially, and the College status of the Collegiate making the request is of great influence in both the speed and the quality (and size) of the response. The local ST is empowered to decide what information, if any, a Collegiate may gain from his Library, and may generate anonymous replies from the office of the First Librarian.

Librarians are Mid Approval with Global Notification. The First Librarian is a Global NPC.

The Round Table

The Circle of Hermes has two equally important pillars, the first being occult research, the second being the Round Table.

For most members of the Circle the title of Forum President is equivalent to “he who sits at the head of the Round Table.” The members of the Patrician Order especially frown upon any President that does not lead a local Round Table.

When a new Forum is founded, the members of the Forum must elect a President to lead said Forum and contact the other occult organizations in the area to organize the local Round Table. Each President is expected to find a consensus between all the local member-organizations on the exact structure, goals, rules, activities and procedures of their Round Table.

Stereotypes

The Scarecrow

“We are the brains, they are the body. Take one of us away and the Round Table dies.”
-*Etienne de la Grange, President*-

The Priory of Scions

“Want to piss off a Sidgwickian? Lock him in a room with a Prioran and make them discuss occult history.”
- *John Sellers, Lord Rector of Myers College*

“I would give my left arm for just a fragment of the knowledge they hoard.”
- *Jan Vandevelde, Sidgwick scholar*

Project Garnet

“You need a good source on xenobiology? Well... there is this Garnet guy in my Round Table group that knows more on the subject than any of my cryptobiologists.”
- *Francesco Casiraghi, President*-

The Round Table

“We are the glue of the Round Table, yet we need it more than it needs us.”
- *Max von Lanthern, Lord Chancellor*

History

The Origins of the Circle

In the early 1880s, Sir William F. Barrett, a professor of physics at the Royal College of Science in Dublin and an expert in experimental thought-transference research, conceived the idea of forming an organization of spiritualists, scientists, and scholars to investigate psychic phenomena.

In 1882 Barret organized a conference in London, attended by F.W.H. Myers, Edmund Gurney and Henry Sidgwick. During this conference he convinced the three dons of Trinity college in Cambridge of the merit of his project. At the end of the meeting the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was created with Sidgwick, who had a solid reputation as an impartial scholar, as its first president.

In 1884, Barrett toured the United States and succeeded in arousing the interest of American scholars in forming a similar Society, which was established in 1885, and in

which William James took an active role. The American Society for Psychical Research constituted the first organized effort for experimental psychological research in the United States.

Most initial members were spiritualists but there was a core of 'professional' The formation of the Sidgwick Group pre-dated the SPR by eight years. Because of clashes in research philosophy, the SPR became wracked by internal strife, causing deep rifts within the organization that led to the birth of several splinter societies within the first few decades of its existence, one of them being the Circle of Hermes.

The Void

During the first half of the 20th century the Circle of Hermes grew steadily and by the start of the Second World War it had research groups throughout North America and Europe. There may have been research groups on other continents, but the few documents that were rescued during the Second World War make no mention of this.

The first half of the 20th century is a void in the records of the Circle because almost all archives were lost during World War II. The few documents that were saved are subjective and fragmentary accounts of Circle history. As such the Senate has decided that it is impossible to give a historically accurate account of this chapter of Circle history.

The Great War

At the start of World War II the Circle of Hermes had a network of precious libraries and artifacts held in major cities all over Europe. This also meant that its ranks were full of Europeans on both sides of the ideological debates. Because of this, the Circle fell to vicious infighting and vast, far-reaching conspiracies that used Circle politics as a means to carry out political vendettas. During this period its numbers fell drastically as its members joined their national armies and were killed in battle, fell to political assassinations, or were locked in ghettos and later murdered in concentration camps.

While the European members fought each other, the American members of the Circle watched in horror, and reached out in sympathy. The Americans launched a rescue effort, smuggling priceless books and artifacts and Allied sympathizers of the Circle out of Europe.

During the war, safe communication between the Eastern and the Western members of the Circle was virtually impossible. With the rise of the Iron Curtain after the war, all communication between the Eastern and Western parts of the Circle ceased. This sustained communication void caused a rift within the Circle along East-West lines. It became impossible to get hold of resources and members on the other side of the Iron Curtain. To this day the western part of the Circle has been unable track down members or resources of its eastern counterpart.

When the war ended, the membership of the Circle was at an all time low. The Circle lost members from nearly all countries, but it was hardest hit by the loss of all its British and German members. The decimation of its membership and its resources led the Circle to a desperate search for allies, recruits and thorough reforms. Led by the now-dominant American membership, and after months of debate through letters, phone calls, and meetings, the Circle instituted the Forums, the Congress, the Senate, and the Patrician Order, in 1947.

Within weeks of its foundation, the Patrician Order contacted other occult organizations, proposing to form an association that would strengthen all of them. It called for a meeting, but only two societies accepted the invitation. In winter, three delegations came together in New York City and founded the Round Table. They drafted the rules of the association and committed themselves to cooperation.

Recent History

The Circle of Hermes focused on building up a strong Round Table within the United States, and has never regained any British or German members, though small pockets of membership remain in western European countries and Australia.

In 2002, the Circle of Hermes and Project Garnet sent a joint team to Russia on a fact-finding mission. After working together to cover western Russia, the team split to cover the eastern portion of the state, with Project Garnet following leads to Taimyrsky Lake in Siberia, and the Circle of Hermes team making its way along the trans-Siberian railway. Half way through the journey, the Circle of Hermes team was pulled from the train and deported for reasons never made clear. The Project Garnet team was never heard from again. The Circle decided to refocus its efforts on the Round Table and recruitment in Western Europe after this disastrous mission to the east.