

The Renders of the Veil

An episode for **WitchCraft**, using the **Cinematic Unisystem** by Jason Vey

QUICK SYNOPSIS

Daniel and the Cipher Manuscript are kidnapped during a brutal assault on the city's Covenants. Amara takes the Cast to Yale, along with the translation notes, so that they can look at that copy of the Voynich MS, and introduces the Cast to a Pariah

named Klauss, whose skills as a linguist might be extremely helpful. But there are other, darker things out there who also want that book and will stop at nothing to ensure that Leviathan doesn't get it...

CUT SCENE

Lightning flashed, illuminating the entire room in an eerie, blue glow for a split second. Then all was dark again. The crack of thunder did little for Daniel's nerves, especially considering the repeated crack of thunder and gunfire...he could no longer tell one from the other.

He raced through the blackened halls of the Carnegie Library, the cipher tome secure in a satchel slung over his shoulder, the translation notes tucked into a pocket. A power outage and an insurrection at the same time. It was almost as though someone had planned this whole thing. But James, running alongside Daniel, assured him that the lightning strike that caused the power outage was coincidental. He'd cast a divination to determine what was going on.

Bad luck, then. Or was it good luck for the Church of Revelations? Things certainly seemed to be swinging their way a lot these days.

The glass front doors of the library shattered in the distance; the alarms startled Daniel until he realized they were probably connected to the emergency generators. Not two minutes later, the pounding of multiple footsteps rang throughout the library, with the barking and acknowledgement of orders reaching the two men's ears. They were fugitives. Fugitives from those who, while they'd never been particularly friendly to the Order, weren't ever enemies, either. The entire world had gone mad. He could only pray that Jamie and Anita were still safe.

Their pursuers fanned out; it seemed as though enemies were around every corner. Daniel ducked into the service tunnels, with James close on his heels.

"We're never going to get out of this," James said, out of breath.

"Don't say that. We have to."

"You didn't let me finish. We're never going to get out of this...together. You go; I'll see if I can't buy you time."

Before Daniel could say anything, James was back out into the library complex, shouting obscenities at their pursuers. There was a bright show of lights as James unleashed his limited offensive spells, and the repetitive cracking of gunfire...then silence. Daniel choked back tears and turned into an office. He popped his laptop down on a chair and began to type, furiously. Some things were more important than escape.

That was when the hand fell on his shoulder, and a voice he never thought he would dread sounded in his ears.

"Hello, Daniel," said Alan. "I'm glad to see you. We have a lot to talk about."

COMING HOME

The Cast returns to Pittsburgh and finds a very disturbing state of affairs. They journey to New Haven, CT, to track down the Voynich Manuscript, housed in Yale's Beinecke Library.

ACTION

Terminal Problems

On the way back from Egypt, the Cast has a visit from Ebonor, who makes cryptic comments about how it's too bad planes don't go faster, and how things are getting exciting on the home front. He seems very gleeful about the whole thing. As is his way, however, he doesn't give any concrete info.

The Cast's plane pulls into the Pittsburgh International Airport on time, a small miracle unto itself, and they de-board with no complications. Unfortunately, waiting for them at the baggage claim is a Gifted man in a well-tailored suit, flanked by two agents that John with a simple Intelligence + Notice Task recognizes as Templars. They approach the group, and Dr. Armedt introduces the suit-wearing gentleman as Shawn Brooks, a high-ranking member of the Order and a close friend.

"Something terrible has happened," Shawn says. "We have a limo waiting outside. I think you'd all best forget your luggage and come with us, quickly. There are enemies everywhere these days."

As if in response, anyone with a Perception + Notice roll at -8 (lots of crowd noise) hears the thwap of a dart gun, and one of the Templars' hands whips out and catches the dart just before it strikes Armedt (if Drake notices the sound, allow him to make the "catch bullets" effort himself). The dart is coated with Dendrotoxin, a neurotoxin distilled from Green Mamba venom. It would be fatal within moments. For game purposes, should one of the Cast be struck by this dart, the toxin is strength 8 and deals 5 points of damage per round to Dexterity and Constitution for 10 rounds. If either of these attributes reach zero, the character dies. Quick applications of healing magic can slow the poison long enough for the character to receive medical attention.

Perception + Notice rolls reveal the assassin making his way through the crowd, away from the Cast, but Shawn and the Templars advise against pursuit. "Too many people here, and far too dangerous, all things considered," they say. The Cast would be well-advised to follow their advice and get into the limo the Rosicrucians have provided; if they don't, orchestrate a shootout in the airport between the Cast, Combine agents, and Sentinels.

Home, Crap, Home

Fleeing the airport, the Cast gets into the back of a stretch limo, with Armedt and Shawn in a different compartment near the front. The Templars have very little information about what this is all about, knowing only that they were ordered here this morning to provide protection, but that "there was some kind of attack, and the situation is ugly."

The limo goes to the Hive Arcana, which is closed. This is odd because it's the middle of the day on a weekday. In fact, the streets of Oakland look strangely deserted and the power seems to be out up and down the street. As the Cast emerges, the Templars follow them out, and Shawn and Armedt emerge from their compartment. "We've been using the Hive as a safe place and triage," Shawn explains, "with Dana's permission."

The Cast will likely want explanations; Shawn insists that they get inside where it's safe, and everything can be explained.

Entering the Hive, the Cast is practically overcome by the sense of Essence filling the place. There are literally dozens of Gifted about, in various states of physical and emotional health. Among those tending to the wounded are Carrie and Sandra, who look up as the Cast enters. Sandra's face is streaked with tears and she looks twenty years older. This should have an impact, as the Cast have never seen Sandra anything but stoic. Now, however, the girl runs across the room and throws her arms around Anita, sobbing, "I knew them. I trusted them with my Faith and my life. They were supposed to be friends, allies, comrades...how could they do this?"

Carrie, likewise, runs to Kay and the two embrace as Carrie breaks down, crying, in Kay's arms. Jamie sits in a corner, staring catatonic at the wall. Father Bob and Dana are nowhere to be seen (they are upstairs, Dana tending to frightened and wounded Gifted, and Father Bob keeping an eye on Megan).

Allow a few minutes for the Cast to comfort Anita; as she undoubtedly asks Sandra over and over again who exactly did this, Sandra will eventually pull back and scream, "The Sentinels! The Sentinels did this!"

At this point, Armedt says quietly, "I think it's time we all sat down about this."

Shawn nods and says, "The security office is still closed off. With John's permission, we could go there."

Night of Fire

Once the Cast is safely sequestered inside John's office, they are briefed, and the briefing is this: last night, in the midst of a major storm, a small army of Sentinels swept through the city

without warning or care for their organization's secrecy, and began murdering Gifted. Shortly after the attacks began, lightning strikes knocked out power in several neighborhoods throughout the city, which only added to the chaos. According to witnesses and police reports, these assassins simply kicked down apartment and home doors, executed the inhabitants, and left. In some cases, survivors recall the attackers condemning them to Hell as pagans or heretics before "pulling the trigger," as it were.

What is strangest, is that the Sentinels were in some cases able to still call upon their miracles, regardless of the fact that their actions clearly went against everything the organization stood for. There are conflicting reports of Taint, but nothing verifiable. Sandra is a wreck, but she is able to put forth a theory that Leviathan has a foothold in the organization, and that some Sentinels are now getting their Miracles from him, rather than from Heaven. Other than that, she spends a lot of time rocking back and forth, saying "I never thought it could come to this. I left, but I never thought it could go this far," over and over again.

Carrie is able to calm down enough to add that Sandra was staying at her place last night, and the two of them were attacked. They managed to escape and get here, only to discover that Dana, Jamie, Father Bob, and Megan were already here. It wasn't long before others started showing up.

There were several shootouts with police in various neighborhoods of the City. The power still hasn't been restored to a few neighborhoods, Oakland among them.

None of the other Covenants were prepared for a concentrated military action, and with the power structure fragmented as it was, most of them were easy pickings. The sheer bravado of such an action is something that is unthinkable to the vast majority of Gifted, who would never consider so brazenly risking a revelation of the Covenants' existence to the world. The war, as a result, has been one of intrigue, maneuvering, and shadowy assassinations. The Sentinels have taken it to the streets in a big way.

The Twilight Order Chapel House in Mt. Lebanon burned to the ground, and the news reported that the Lava Lounge was decimated when a homemade bomb exploded inside. Before dawn, the attackers faded back into the shadows. The city is in terror that the killings will resume tonight, and the police have put a call in to have National Guard units mobilized. So far, the news media is portraying it as the actions of a terrorist militia. Four different terrorist organizations, Al-Qaeda among them, have attempted to take credit for the attacks. There are rumors that similar events have occurred in cities around the country over the past few weeks.

A Strange Duet

But the worst news is still to come. As the Cast debates over this alarming turn of events, Shawn whispers, "There's more. The Church of Revelations took advantage of the situation. As the Sentinels poured through the city, the Rosicrucians put out a call to Daniel and his partner James to get out of the Carnegie and to somewhere safe.

"At the library," Shawn says, "the two of them were safe from everything except a heavily armed assault. No one could've expected something so brazen to actually happen." He then produces a videotape from his briefcase. "The security tapes from the library tell the story better than I can. We've edited this together from several different cameras."

He plays the tape, which shows Daniel and James running through the halls of the library as lightning flashes around them. The sound is poor, but the clattering of boots on tile can be heard in the background. Occasionally, a gunshot will ring out, and tile near the two of them will explode in dust. They duck into a security tunnel, where James insists that the two of them can't get out together, and that he'll buy time for Daniel to run with the book and notes. He runs back out into the library, where he blasts a few of these dark militia soldiers with a bolt of lightning, before they empty what must be fifty shots from assault rifles into him.

Daniel, for his part, doesn't leave, but sits down at a desk and begins feverishly typing on his laptop. That's when Alan enters from behind and drops his hand on Daniel's shoulder.

"I'm glad to see you, Daniel," he says. "We have much to talk about."

"They're going to stop you, Alan," Daniel says, without turning around. "Anita and John and Drake and Cyan. They're going to stop you."

"We'll see about that," Alan says. "After all, now I have you, the book, and the translation notes."

"And you can't finish them on your own, and you're mad if you think I'm going to help you."

"I might be mad," Alan says, "But you are going to help me."

He then jams a hypo into Daniel's neck. Daniel slaps a hand over the wound and leaps to his feet, then staggers backwards a few steps, before another voice—this one female—rings out in the background.

"It's all right, Daniel," says another cloaked and hooded figure, "Soon you won't have anything to worry about." She steps around so her back is to the camera, and lifts her hood.

"You!" Daniel whispers, but then as he stares into her eyes, his jaw goes slack. She motions for him to sit, and he does, obediently.

"Are you sure about this?" the woman says to Alan. "It's dangerous, bringing another player into the game this late."

"I haven't led you wrong, yet, have I? We need him," Alan says. "He won't be a problem."

"And after he's done his job, we kill him," the woman says. Daniel just sits there, staring admiringly at her, obviously entranced.

Alan nods. "As you wish, lady. I've had enough of his meddling, anyway, and he should prove a most potent sacrifice to bring forth Lord Xalotun."

The two take Daniel by the arms, and drag him out, the woman throwing his computer and satchel over her shoulder as they leave. The tape ends.

Let this sink in awhile, as the Cast slowly realizes that the bad guy has the translation notes *and the cipher tome*. As the hopelessness of their plight grows, the door swings open, and in walks Amara.

"It looks bad up there," she says. "So it is as we feared." By way of explanation, she mentions that Katherine had a psychic vision on the heels of a tale they heard in Connecticut.

That's when she pulls a USB stick out of her pocket and tosses it on John's desk. "Daniel sent me that, late last night. I put it on there and purged the files from my computer. There's another copy of the Voynich Manuscript at Yale, and if we can use these notes to translate it, it could be of great use."

For Anita, translating the Voynich Manuscript is possible, but could take weeks, and the Cast doesn't have weeks. If a crypto linguist could be found, however, the translation is relatively quick, requiring only a few days of work. "Not a problem," Amara says, if this comes up, "we've got someone waiting there to help you translate it, a young crypto linguist named Klauss. Someone we could've used a few months ago, but we take what we can get."

There's a knock on the door. It's Dana. It seems there's an "Agent Finn" upstairs looking for John. She doesn't know who he is, but he looks military.

Going upstairs, John has a brief reunion with Riley and his wife, who explain that their organization has gotten word of what happened here last night; there's been a lot of supernatural uprisings lately, and they're stretched thin trying to deal. He and a small unit have been dispatched to take command of the local National Guard units to make sure things stay peaceful till this mess is resolved. He'd like John's recommendations for a group of Gifted he can bring in to help counter the enemy.

Carrie, Sandra, and Father Bob all volunteer for the job right out of the gate, and Carrie begs Kay to stay with her; in light of everything that's happened, she wants the two of them to be together. The two Templars and Amara pull John aside and tell him that Max and Lisa have been assigned with a small contingent to guard the Voynich Manuscript and keep it out of enemy hands, but that they should hurry as nobody can hold out against a steady onslaught forever, and Amara is certain there's one coming.

Thus, with everything settled, it looks like the Cast is headed for New Haven! The Templars and Rosicrucians can charter a private jet, in light of current events, for safer travel. They will arrange, they promise, to have a blue 2005 Jeep Cherokee waiting at the airport for the Cast's use, and give John a set of keys to the vehicle.

TROUBLESHOOTING

A TRIP TO YALE

The Cast arrives in New Haven, meets a new ally, and has a run-in with the enemy.

ACTION

So now the characters have the backup copy of the translation notes, but the Cipher Manuscript and Daniel are gone. Their best hope is now to check out the Voynich Manuscript at Yale. The almost-complete translation notes and codex should enable them, using the tome, to decipher relatively quickly what their enemies want with the book.

Arriving in New Haven, the Cast finds the Cherokee waiting for them just as promised. As they head into town, however, they will be disturbed to note that New Haven looks like a war zone. Buildings have been burned to the ground, their remains still smoldering. Cars are overturned and burned out. Bodies lay on the ground. Whatever happened here made Pittsburgh look like a nursery school picnic. Amara swears the place was not like this when she left. She rightly posits that they're they only car on the road, and make a bright, shiny, and easy target like this. The rendezvous with Klaus is within walking distance. She suggests they ditch the vehicle and move with some stealth through the streets.

Regardless of how the group approaches the brownstone where Amara claims the rendezvous to be, they will be attacked upon arrival. It's as though someone was lying in wait for the Cast, and they will be accosted by twenty Combine agents as they arrive. What they don't know, but will soon find out, is that the Combine aren't waiting for them, but for Michele and Klaus, who have been out surveying the neighborhood and talking to Max and Lisa at Yale. Bring the two of them in around the second round of combat (increase the number of Combine agents if necessary), and play it out.

Once the Cast is inside, Michele and Amara can make introductions and introduce complications. It seems there was an incident a few nights ago, before Max and Lisa took over guarding the tome at Yale, when several individuals tried to break in after hours. The guards who arrived on the scene are currently in hospital, babbling incoherently about demons, tentacled horrors, and walking corpses. She's ready to take the Cast to Yale as soon as they are prepared to go.

As for what happened in the neighborhood, the story is similar to what happened in Pittsburgh, but the battle in New Haven became far more escalated and violent, partially because the Covenants here hadn't degenerated as far as the ones in Pittsburgh, and were better able to defend themselves against the Sentinel onslaught. The outcome, however, was no less

tragic and resulted in far greater loss of life and collateral damage.

Off to Yale

When the Cast goes to Yale, they find Max and Lisa waiting for them. They are permitted access to the Manuscript, while Max and Lisa confer with John about moving the tome to someplace more secure...if there is such a place in this town. Moving it to Pittsburgh is an option, but any attempt to move the tome will require stealing the book from the library. If they opt for this tactic, wing it. With the abilities and resources of the Cast, there's no reason they shouldn't be able to get the book out and back to Pittsburgh if they come up with a good enough plan. But it shouldn't be easy, and should require entanglements with local law enforcement, the CoR, and the Combine.

A cursory examination of the Voynich Manuscript could reveal a number of facts right off the bat. The most important of these facts is that the Voynich Manuscript, while it is written in the same script and code, is not the same book as the Cipher Manuscript. There are a number of similarities, but also a number of major differences, mostly in the layout of diagrams and charts, the drawings, and the text layout. However, the nature of the drawings and diagrams insist that the Voynich Manuscript is related somehow to the Cipher tome. Is it another volume? A lost section? A later addition? There's no way to tell until the book is translated.

There will be an assault on the characters while they are at Yale. Such an assault could come at any time; select the most inconvenient. Besides those whose motives match the characters' (recovering another copy of the Cipher tome), the CoR seeks to destroy the Voynich Manuscript. The characters must not allow this to be; the Voynich Manuscript is their only clue to tracking down the Cipher tome before it is used, or stopping the ritual once it has begun.

The translation of the Voynich Manuscript notes will reveal that the key itself is in code, though a crypto-linguist like Klaus can translate the code itself. Once the code is translated, it forms an incantation rather than a codex. When read aloud, the incantation causes a ripple effect over the book, which is then readable in the Queen's English!

The book is intended to be a counter tome to the Cipher manuscript. It is not an artifact in and of itself, nor is it inherently magical. It does, however, list several means to defeat the purpose of the Cipher Tome and describe in detail the purpose of the Cipher Tome and the ritual that the Tome exists to perform. One of the first passages in the Voynich Manuscript reads as follows:

The Old Ones are, the Old Ones were, and the Old Ones always shall be. Deep within the blackest pits of the human soul do they germinate their seed and grow their roots to corrupt and destroy the moral soul of man. The Cipher Tome of Roger Bacon hath fallen into madness. That book that was intended to guard the secrets of the dark realms of shadow and the hidden part of the soul hath fallen to its own purpose. The Outer Dark hath taken hold of the book, and hence exists it to perform those rituals it previously sought from man to guard. The only protection that can be offered is the magickal enchantment cast over the book that maintains the code. That same enchantment, however, shall bind this very book to the Cipher tome and force its secrets into code as well. Let the Codex be split and hidden deep within the Earth, to be sought out should the Cipher Manuscript be deciphered. Let the forces of Light cry out, "This Tome be the undoing of the evil within that book of Darkness!"

—John Dee, 1576

The tome goes on to describe the purpose, components, and necessary conditions of the ritual contained within the Cipher tome, and possible means for defeating the ritual once it begins. The various botanical and alchemical drawings and diagrams point to certain species of plant life that are indigenous to the Twilight Lands, and can be mixed in specific ways to create a potion that when hurled at the apex of the ritual could disrupt the entire process, a sort of magical Molotov cocktail. The methods for creating the mixture involve the formula for producing a vessel of metallic copper, and gunpowder to ignite the concoction. It demonstrates the location of several permanent

portals to the Twilight Lands and general areas of the Twilight Lands where the Night Rose plant flourishes.

The book lays out the conditions for the ritual to summon Leviathan: a large magic circle of summoning must be drawn at the "joining of waters, where exists a centre of magickal power, a place where all the forces of light and of darkness alter nature's balance," and a specific alignment of the planets, dimensions, and stars that upon investigation the characters discover will occur in one week's time! What is even worse is that the ritual also requires a human sacrifice of massive proportions, to the tune of hundreds of people, and "the blood of a Childe of the Light."

What to do next is up to the player characters. An Intelligence + Occultism roll by any Cast Member (except Klauss) will remind them that they have an entire treatise on the Twilight Lands given to them by the ghouls from New Castle. This book, with an Intelligence + Mythos roll, describes the Night Rose in detail, including where in the Twilight Lands it can be found. The book even contains spells for opening a portal to the Twilight Lands, without awakening the Twilight Queen!

It would seem the Cast's next step is fairly obvious.

TROUBLESHOOTING

HANDOUTS

Opening Passage from the Voynich Manuscript:

The Old Ones are, the Old Ones were, and the Old Ones always shall be. Deep within the blackest pits of the human soul do they germinate their seed and grow their roots to corrupt and destroy the moral soul of man. The Cipher Tome of Roger Bacon hath fallen into madness. That book that was intended to guard the secrets of the dark realms of shadow and the hidden part of the soul hath fallen to its own purpose. The Outer Dark hath taken hold of the book, and hence exists it to perform those rituals it previously sought from man to guard. The only protection that can be offered is the magickal enchantment cast over the book that maintains the code. That same enchantment, however, shall bind this very book to the Cipher tome and force its secrets into code as well. Let the Codex be split and hidden deep within the Earth, to be sought out should the Cipher Manuscript be deciphered. Let the forces of Light cry out, "This Tome be the undoing of the evil within that book of Darkness!"

—John Dee, 1576

Excerpt from the Voynich Manuscript:

Ye Ritual to summon ye Olde One knowne as Leviathan requireth a great sacrifice be held, for the creature requires the souls of hundreds or thousands to sate its unholy appetite and open the gate. Remember ye that Yog-Sothoth knows the Gate. Yog-Sothoth is the Key and the Gate. It is only through Yog-Sothoth that the Gate ye may navigate.

Ye Ritual requireth ye Cipher Tome of Roger Bacon, a secret student of Ye Olde Ones, and ye hidden passages from ye Necronomicon of Abd Alhazred invoking the proper beings from ye Outer Dark. Such passages, located only with Ye Bacon Manuscript, will call upon Yog-Sothoth to unlock the Gate to the Taint Realm of Leviathan.

Ye species of plant described herein are to counter those Twilight growths which must be used in the ritual to call forth the Mad God. Beware ye of the false nature of Leviathan, for even in truth speaketh he lies, and never accept what ye eyes show. Beneath the Surface Leviathan lives. Beneath the surface Leviathan works. From Beneath, Leviathan devours.

The plant for the defeat of Leviathan is known as the Rose of Night. The night Rose grows only in the world of eternal Twilight, high in mountains that seem to correspond to certain regions in the unexplored Eastern half of the New World unveiled by Christopher Columbus. Only in the realms of Twilight does this Night Rose grow and flourish. You shall know this plant by its resemblance as a cross between a black rose as we know on our world, and the nightshade plant.

Alas for you who need obtain this plant; I have found no way to reach the lands of eternal twilight, save through walking the Gates of the Dreamlands, and my adventures there have yielded limited ability to affect the lands of Twilight, and no way to bring objects across the barriers. Other sources you may have to consult for this purpose, though I hear it whispered that the ghouls that roam the charnel yards hail from this dimension. If the fortitude you have to deal with these creatures, an answer may be found.

OPEN THE GATES OF TWILIGHT

Effect: This spell will open a portal between the Twilight Lands and Earth, without awakening the Twilight Queen.

Quick Cast: No

Power Level: 6

Requirements: A Black Rose cut at the stroke of Twilight, to be burned with frankincense and seven drops of blood from the index finger of the caster, pricked by thorns from the same rose. These are to be burned in a silver chalice set at the center of a Pentagram drawn in salt, with red candles burned at each of the points. Finally, a mantra in supplication to Hermes, God of Messengers, and to Hypnos, God of Sleep, and the invocation of Yog-Sothoth, guardian and key of the gate, to be repeated for seven minutes. The ritual must be performed at the site of a known portal to the Twilight Lands.

Effects: The caster and all within the pentagram will experience a sense of vertigo and nausea, and will perceive a strange wave in reality. When the sensation passes, those within the pentagram will be in the Twilight Lands.

Power Breakdown: Number of Casters: One (0), Casting Time: Ritual (0), Scope: Severe (+2); Limited Targets (-1), Duration: Permanent (+3), Requirements: Unusual Ingredients (-1), Summoning: Major (sends caster + others to another dimension) (+3)