

# The Elmerite Order

A Secret Magic campaign

By Moe Lane

## Introduction

Magic is gone, burned away for the greater good of the planet. The world almost ended in the medieval area, when foul things from *Elsewhere* decided to invade our dimension en masse. The only way to fight back was to choose an existing magical paradigm and strengthen it into something that could push back the intruders. It was successful (it also created our modern scientific-rationalist world), but at the cost of wrecking every other human magical paradigm in existence.

But just because something is necessary does not mean it is considered an absolute good, and the descendants of the mages that created the modern world have done what they could to save the lore and traditions of the other magical paradigms. To that end, they have sponsored the existence and development of the Elmerite Order, an ostensible religious organization whose purpose is to sustain what bits of non-mainstream magic remain. And to perhaps even reintroduce some of them, should it prove possible. Or safe: after all, the monsters from *Elsewhere*

were driven out, not destroyed. There is still a need for one predominant paradigm.

**Type of Campaign:** hidden magic, with a certain amount of investigation. The players are members of the Order, with once-powerful magical abilities which they are trying to keep viable. It is very difficult in most of the world to cast spells or brew potions or enchant items openly, so an Elmerite learns quickly how to hide his abilities in plain sight. She also learns how to protect those few 'naturally' magical places left on the planet, because they are valuable, and dangerous.

**Description:** The Elmerite Order specializes in the finding of esoteric loopholes. They're looking for places in current math and physics where magic might be usefully inserted, or even grafted in. Progress is slow, but potentially very rewarding. The tricky part is in creating magical grafts that won't cause the occult equivalent of immune system tissue reaction. The current Scientist paradigm (see below) is robust enough to withstand an egregious violation of the rules, but the mages who are actively trying to fiddle with the metaphysical books at ground zero might not be so fortunate. And, unfortunately: 'ground zero' is not always a metaphor. A misstep by the Order won't blow up a city, but it can certainly blow up a room.

**Background:** So, it turns out that the worldview found in the first edition *Mage: The Ascension* TTRPG is not entirely inaccurate, after all. To wit: magic works, there are various schools of magic that can manipulate it, but one paradigm (scientific rationalism) is so dominant that the others cannot currently operate freely on our plane of existence. Fair enough, as far as that goes.

Where it all breaks down is *why* this state of affairs has occurred. You see, the scientific-rationalist mages (call them ‘Sciencites’ for short) didn’t actually want to hamper the other schools. Also, the other schools aren’t being viciously suppressed by them, either explicitly or implicitly. It’s just that about five hundred years ago there was an incursion into our reality of some highly unpleasant entities, and the only way to fight them was to bolster one school’s operating paradigm to the point where that school could consistently and unerringly define what our reality actually *was*. The other schools reluctantly conceded that the Sciencites had the most robust model, so the Sciencites model was the one that the mages used. It worked!

But it worked at the cost of virtually suppressing pretty much all other forms of magic. This had immediate and unpleasant effects on both esoteric and mundane power structures (it should be noted here that the pre-1500 AD

historical record is at times wildly and even deliberately inaccurate). Despite the best efforts of all the schools, the price for not having an alien evil run wild on this plane of existence was to have a great number of human evils do so instead. And, since the non-Sciencites schools could not actually *use* their power, those schools inexorably withered and died over the course of the next few centuries.

The Sciencite school did not passively accept this, of course, but the boost to their particular paradigm made preserving other paradigms difficult (if not impossible). The best that the Sciencites could do was to document what information and lore that they could, in the hope of recreating the other schools at some point in the future. To that end, in the 17th century a clearinghouse of esoteric (albeit currently useless) resources was created.

This nameless organization was made somewhat public in the 19th century, in the guise of an eccentric Anglican religious order (The Elmerites). Elmerites were faintly scandalous in that they admitted both genders and accepted married lay members, but as no scandal ever accrued to the Order, and it hardly sought fame and renown, the scandal was ultimately brief. The Elmerites were soon permitted to labor in blessed obscurity.

This continues to the current day. The Elmerite Order is not particularly large, as such things go. It can be found throughout the Western world, but largely focuses on what is sometimes called the Anglosphere. In the United States, there are the usual chapter-houses in Baltimore, Chicago, and Providence, but generally the Order prefers to work via written correspondence and electronic communication, rather than by direct contact. For one thing, it keeps them familiar with technology. For another, it minimizes any damage that might happen when reality slaps back. And reality can and will slap back.

Rivals, Opponents, and Enemies: From weakest to strongest:

- Disapproving Sciencites: the Elmerites' experiments *do* try to get around the Sciencite paradigm, and there are perhaps members of that school that are not entirely pleased with that idea in practice (particularly since failed attempts can get energetic).
- Unaware Sciencites: these days, most practicing Sciencites are unaware of their magical heritage. It may be one of the great advantages of this particular paradigm, but a mundane scientist or priest can still prove a nuisance when it comes to 'superstition' or 'diabolical practices.'

- Remnants: most of the remaining non-Scientite mages were eventually folded in with the group that became the Elmerites, but some survived on their own, with whatever few fragments of power they still personally maintained. Their distant descendants sometimes have a distorted view of historical events, and what should be the response to those events.
- Those from *Elsewhere*: the invaders that forced the Sciencites to bolster their school's paradigm in the first place were pushed back, not destroyed. Some of those things are still on our plane, and they cause what trouble that they can. Some of the smarter things from *Elsewhere* have also created cults, which can cause rather more trouble. On the bright side, it's easier to use non-Sciencite magic when fighting those things.

## **Part 2: History, Sort Of**

### **History**

At some point in 1500 AD, mages from various magical Orders constructed a barrier called the 'Bastion' to protect Earth from an ongoing assault of things from *Elsewhere*. The Bastion held, and remains stable to this day, but the price was (perhaps inevitably) steep. Most of Earth's powerful mages died putting up the Bastion, and those who were left lost their power unless they happened to be adepts of the Sciencite paradigm of magic - but even those mages had to rebuild their shattered lore and practices. The history of the 'modern' world is the history of that rebuilding. The history of the modern world is also the only reliable one humanity still has.

### **History Is A Lie**

Or history is at least highly subjective. The records of anything that happened before the year 1500 AD is highly suspect at best, and a clumsy *ex post facto* patch at worst. The act of fortifying a single magical paradigm to the point where it could hold off those from *Elsewhere* forced a wholesale rewriting of the laws of reality. When the Bastion formed, most existing magical items imploded or ablated away, drained of sorcerous energy. This was expected, but the wholesale destruction of magic-dependent locations and societies was *not*. At least three magical empires

seemingly instantly winked out of existence, barely leaving behind enough evidence to justify legends. Even modern Sciencites and other mages are not entirely confident that they even existed in the first place. Or whether 'existed' can even be a *meaningful* term, given the wholesale rewritings of reality which occurred.

The difference between pre-Bastion and post-Bastion reality is profound, and only dimly understood at this late date. It is generally agreed that in the pre-Bastion era there were seasons, stars, a sun, and a moon; and that the dominant race on Earth were the reasonably direct ancestors of modern humanity. Everything else is up for grabs.

And that means *everything*. The very shape of the planet may or may not have been altered to fit the Sciencite paradigm, which implies that the Americas, Australia, and Antarctica (and its inhabitants) were conjured out of nothing to fill in the map. This is hotly contested by Mesoamerican and Australian Sciencite researchers who can credibly claim that their regions had been there all along, and it was *Eurasia* and *Africa* which were created out of nothing. Or possibly two (or more) different dimensions with flat Earths were mashed together to form one super-dimension, which is why it is able to withstand



the attentions of *Elsewhere*. The simple fact of it is, nobody knows.

### **Standing On The Corpses Of Giants**

The major reason *why* nobody knows is because the heads of the various Orders which set up the Sciencite paradigm (and turned back those of *Elsewhere*) did not survive the experience. Neither did their heirs, proteges, assistants, and most of their rank-and-file magic-workers. The intent was to only self-sacrifice the top tier, but things went badly. Entire Orders disappeared in a frantic five minutes' worth of desperate effort to stave off ultimate disaster.

The Orders prevailed, but the only mages who survived were apprentices and a few scattered journeymen. Those mages who were part of the Sciencite Order found their techniques and procedures remarkably strengthened, but much precious knowledge was lost, and would require patient experimentation and research to reconstruct. They have spent the last five centuries doing precisely that; the current heads of the Sciencites think they began to surpass their lost loremasters at some point in the 19th Century AD. Today, the only thing that still remains a mystery to them is the methods used to create the Bastion itself. They can repair it, and even replace lost pieces of it, but there is something ineffable in its creation which still

eludes modern Sciencites. Which is partially why the Elmerite Order is supported. There are probably clues in the shattered remnants of other Orders' magical paradigms as to how to construct a new Bastion, if one is ever needed.

### **The Great Sciencite Schism**

One reason the Sciencite paradigm of magic was chosen for strengthening was because it could handle the concept of the 'supernatural,' which in this context means 'can work with the idea of gods and spirits.' Most of the other Orders either dismissed the idea of free-willed incorporeal beings, or else existed to slavishly obey them. Neither worldview was particularly suited for properly dealing with those from *Elsewhere*. The Sciencite ability to recognize the existence of spirits, while still being able to hold them at arm's length, proved to be crucial when setting up the Bastion.

It was the intent of the remaining Sciencites to use their paradigm in the post-Bastion world to repair the damage quickly, but the work proved harder than expected. There was a lot of damage, and not enough Sciencite adepts to oversee the reconstruction efforts, and in many places the survivors were increasingly unaware that their lives needed to be reconstructed at all. It turned out that humans have the ability to ignore even drastic shifts in

reality, provided that the shifting isn't continuous. This led to many successor states forgetting the existence of the Sciencites as a magical Order, and instead treating them as mundane scholars and priests.

It also turned out that many Sciencites, having encountered those from Elsewhere up close and in person, eventually decided that *any* contact with spirits and/or gods was highly dangerous. The pro-spiritualist Sciencites pointed out that it was their knowledge that made the Bastion work, and that their rituals worked perfectly well to keep 'natural' spirits in check. There was enough truth in both positions to keep the dispute going.

While some groups of Sciencites tried to stay eclectic, polarization and factionalism was probably inevitable. It took two or three centuries for the rival pro- and anti-spiritualist factions to openly break, but by the mid 19th century it was clear that the two groups were in schism. It was a largely peaceful schism, at least among the Sciencites; mundane repercussions were considerably more painful. This is also the time period where the Elmerites were formally recognized, and their formation was definitely aided by the schism; the loss of a unified Sciencite hierarchy meant there was no way to effectively tell the Elmerites 'no.'

## **Part 3: The Sciencite Paradigm**

The actual mechanics of Sciencism do not need to be explained too fully. They are more or less identical to so-called 'physical law,' with an additional set of principles that do not so much define the 'supernatural' as they control it. Most people instinctively understand that cause precedes effect, entropy always increases,  $2+2$  does not equal 5 during a lunar eclipse, and so forth. The ones who do *not* either go mad if they are not found in time, or shunted to the Elmerites if they are. The Sciencites do try to detect those unsuited for their particular paradigm. It's partially pragmatism, but also partially out of principle.

Patient centuries of effort have locked in Sciencism as the dominant magical paradigm. The last few areas that could tolerate 'wild magic' were systematically located and corrected by the middle of the 20th Century. There are still places on the map where the Sciencite paradigm does not hold sway, but none of them are larger than a strip mall. Most aren't as large as a four-door sedan.

### **Who is a Sciencite?**

Generally, Sciencite factions are relatively small, as groups go, ranging anywhere from fifty to one hundred people. They congregate in research facilities, academia, and religious hierarchies. Their members tend to be

unremarkable researchers, and subject matter experts. No Sciencite is poor, but very few are openly rich, either. The goal is to appear affluent, but not ostentatious.

Note that Sciencites are indifferent to the existence of pseudoscience, do not support groups that debunk the supernatural, and have no interest in promoting either religious belief *or* atheism. There's no point. They also do not particularly try to prevent people from discovering the existence of Sciencism as a magical discipline. There's always more work than people to do it.

### **Strengths of Sciencism**

Primarily, the Sciencite paradigm derives its power from being both easy to access (even uninitiated non-mages can use parts of it) and being particularly resistant to 'hostile' paradigms. When those from *Elsewhere* first burned through, it quickly proved obvious that Sciencite mages were best suited to push the invaders back. In fact, it was the Sciencites who put together the conceptual framework that became the Bastion.

In the centuries since, the world has clearly benefited from the technologies Sciencism makes possible. Problems that would have normally only been solved by the personal intervention of a mage can now be handled by 'doctors' or

‘engineers’ or ‘priests.’ And most of those specialists are not aware that Sciencism even exists!

## **Weaknesses of Sciencism**

The primary issue with modern Sciencism is that virtually all of the truly esoteric aspects of the discipline are tied up with keeping the Bastion functional and healthy. If there was no need to keep Earth safe from the attacks of those from *Elsewhere*, the Sciencites could dedicate that energy to create a world heavy with Romance, Adventure, and Maxfield Parrish blue. They are occasionally required to prevent some of their more excitable members from trying to do precisely that.

There is also the problem of the ‘supernatural.’ The Sciencite paradigm strongly privileges detached, impersonal deities over human-like gods. Too-active deities were deemed to be simply too chaotic, and prone to having their own agendas and opinions. This might have been tolerable, except that some of those opinions were on the need for the Bastion - which was naturally a topic not up for discussion.

The Sciencites have been arguing about the need for non-Deist belief structures ever since. Some contend that a limited number of anthropomorphized gods would be trustworthy enough to be useful, while others push hard

for no personalized deities at all. The end result is that Sciencism is weakest when it deals with spiritualism.

### **Outer Sciencism**

Called 'physics' and 'theology' by the uninitiated, Outer Sciencism are the aspects of the discipline that anyone can use. While most disciplines did have *some* techniques which non-mages could access, the availability of Sciencism was a remarkable innovation for its time. Some non-mages even were able to participate in the formation of the Bastion! They all died in the process, but then, so did virtually everybody else involved.

Sciencites do enjoy reliable access to higher 'mundane' technology and scientific knowledge than the rest of the planet, but after the disastrous events of the 20th Century, they typically try to delay new developments for several decades before permitting them to be fully used. The Sciencites are unapologetic about this, too. The Order considers itself benevolent, with some justification - but what it most certainly *not* is laissez-faire. And, like many self-consciously idealistic institutions, the Sciencite Order is more interested in groups than individuals.

## **Inner Sciencism**

As noted above, the Sciencites today focus on the Bastion: how to preserve it; how to repair it; and, hopefully soon, how to replace it if necessary. Most of their mages dedicate their lives to Bastion-related research. The answers they get may be *relevant*, but they typically do not have mundane applications.

Still, some Inner Sciencites (particularly the ones who aren't mages) do engage in 'research' into mundane science and technology. The current basic physical laws seem to be a suitable framework for Outer Sciencism, so no real tinkering is currently being done there, but a lot of useful work can be done that uses the existing laws. Inner Sciencites tend to be about a hundred years ahead of their mundane counterparts, at least in terms of theory and (personal) gadgetry. They don't have secret factories full of ultra-tech, though. If a particular gadget proves to be *that* useful, the general attitude is that the rest of Earth might as well get to have it, too.

## **Sciencite Hierarchy**

They don't have one.

The Sciencites *used* to have one, but the Order's leaders all died while creating the Bastion. Their ideological descendants schismed several times over the next few



hundred years. The current situation is best described as philosophically unified but politically diffuse. All the splinter groups agree that the Bastion *must* stay up and the current paradigm *must* stay reinforced, but past that there is no consensus, and there is certainly no ruling individual, cabal, or even cartel.

This means that there is no ultimate authority to appeal to when one faction of Sciencites comes into conflict with another. If the two factions can't reach an understanding with each other, there's nothing stopping them from actually fighting *except* the aforementioned needs to keep the Bastion secure and the paradigm reinforced. If a shadow war can still be conducted under those restrictions, other factions will not necessarily intervene. This is particularly true when neither side of a dispute is morally vile.

Unfortunately, morally vile Sciencite factions do exist, although few actually thrive as well as they would like. The factions that survive do so by concentrating on using their superior knowledge of the paradigm to get rich, or else take power in relatively isolated areas. The bad news is that the other Sciencite factions will not be inclined to intervene in such a small-stakes situation. The good news is that those other factions will take no issue with any

do-gooders who *do* intervene. Cause and effect: that's the Sciencite way.

### **Dark Sciencites**

These aren't the 'let's use our powers to make mind control drugs and take over this town' sorts; that's just garden-variety evil. The thing that distinguishes Dark Sciencites is their willingness to do evil things in the service of nihilism. These factions want to destroy the Bastion, and let those from *Elsewhere* back in. No doubt they have their reasons for this, but nobody really bothers to ask.

Dark Sciencites factions rarely last long, but when they appear they can have a devastating effect. Proving the existence of one guarantees a response from every other faction within range. The trick, of course, is *proving* it.

### **Sciencites and the Elmerite Order**

Most Sciencites agree that the Elmerites have a purpose, and should not be harassed or suppressed. Many Sciencites acknowledge that they have an obligation to provide help to Elmerite activities, if for no other reason than to preserve information that might be needed in the future. Some Sciencites are generally helpful to the Elmerites in their day-to-day activities. Virtually no

Sciencite is in favor of allowing another paradigm to challenge theirs for supremacy.

Some Sciencite factions encourage their members to interact with Elmerites on a regular basis, and some do not. Generally, Sciencites who liaison with Elmerites are expected to pass along to their faction any information that's useful and/or worrying. How many of them actually *do* that is unknown.

### **Dark Sciencites and the Elmerite Order**

Dark Sciencites will sometimes try to enlist Elmerites in their schemes. They *never* come out and say what their ultimate intent is, though. It's typically couched in terms that sound innocuous, or at worst mildly naughty. This deception does not always help whatever hapless Elmerites get caught up in the resultant mess. Fortunately, Dark Sciencite factions are rare.

## **Part 4: Old Magic**

There were many, many, many systems of magic besides the Sciencite paradigm. None of them work the way they used to, and most of them simply do not work at all. What non-Sciencite magic (usually called 'Old Magic') does work does so in the margins of the world. It's easier to do magic that can be explained away in terms of 'science' (or 'faith'), or magic that doesn't have any witnesses. But it's impossible to ignore the existing dominant paradigm. There's always a cost.

### **The Fundamental Rule of Old Magic**

It's always easier to do it the Sciencite way. Duplicating or surpassing Sciencite results require *something*, whether it be effort, Power, and/or a sacrifice of some sort. The easiest way to do magic these days is either to learn physics, or else how to pray to a fairly impersonal clockwork Deity.

No exceptions.

### **What is Magic?**

The paradigms that survive, however broken, agree on one basic principle: *A Spell is Intent, plus Power*. This means that magical effects (Spells) are achieved by a mage deciding what results he wants (Intent), then

providing enough magical energy (Power) to force that result. If there is not enough Power, the Spell fails. If the Intent is flawed, the Spell is warped. If there is no Intent at all, then the Spell ends.

This has implications. The first is that Old Magic is fundamentally incompatible with Scienticism, which has set things up so that the universe keeps operating even without Intent. 'A watched pot never boils' is a Spell in Old Magic, and a self-evident absurdity in Sciencism. Of *course* the pot will boil, audience or not.

Old Magic can work around this, via three methods.

- **Strength Magic** uses enough Power to override the local paradigm via brute force. Pump enough magical energy into the water, and it won't boil at 212 degrees.
- **Luck Magic** comes up with a valid 'rational' way to achieve a Spell's effect, and then use Intent to nudge things that way. There may be a reason why the pot might *not* boil normally, and the magician can use his arcane abilities to make sure that doesn't happen.
- **Site Magic** finds a location where the Sciencite paradigm is weak enough to allow the free use of Old Magic. There are faerie rings where watched pots do not, in fact, ever boil. If a mage wills it, that is.

Alas, all three methods have severe limitations.

- Strength Magic *ridiculously* wastes Power. The average mage cannot sustain a gross violation of the Sciencite paradigm for any length of time before draining local Power - or his personal reserves. It also becomes more difficult to perform in the presence of anybody subject to the Sciencite paradigm, which very much includes the mage himself. The more observers there are, the worse the difficulty gets.
- Luck Magic is more reliable, and *much* more efficient, but it puts severe limits on what the mage can do. To use a different example: imagine a mechanical lock. It is *possible* that tapping the lock will cause the tumblers to spontaneously reset themselves to the unlocked position. It is rather more likely that inserting a bobby pin and randomly flailing about will have the same effect. It is *much* more likely that using a set of lockpicking tools will give the desired result, particularly if the mage knows how to pick locks... and at that point, the question becomes 'Why use magic at all?' There may still be valid reasons to use it, even then, but Luck Magic is often so subtle that only the mage can be sure that he actually performed any.
- Site Magic has a major, fundamental problem: places where the Sciencite paradigm is weak are *dangerous*, in the precise same way that a weak section of a

castle wall is dangerous in a siege. There are *things* out there that would be thrilled to puncture the Bastion, and using too much Site Magic is an excellent way to attract their attention. Also, most Site Magic locations are very small. Many are barely large enough to encompass a single mage. The largest one can manage six, and getting to use it requires six months' worth of entreaties and security checks. Per session.

## **Enchantment and Magic Items**

There are no magic items left over from before the creation of the Bastion. Every artifact or focus with even a scrap of Power was drained into dust during those five desperate minutes, and no replacements could be made under the new dominant paradigm. Rumors of surviving artifacts have persisted into the modern day, but none have ever been found.

What Old Magic users call modern 'magic items' are not really the same thing. They are items that have had small dollops of Power infused in them. This is usually done to make those items more efficient, reliable, or sturdier. A fireball wand is absolutely beyond the scope of Old Magic, these days. There are plenty of guns out there: use one. The entire *point* of the Bastion is to make sure that those from *Elsewhere* are vulnerable to firearms.

The *good* news? One advantage of operating under the Sciencite paradigm is that as medicine gets better, so does healing magic. Luck Magic and Power Magic both are noticeably easier to use when it comes to various forms of healing, particularly when it comes to observers. People have gotten used to the idea that most things can be cured with the right combination of drugs and surgery. Doing so with magic still requires Power, but not nearly as much as for other things.

### **So, why be an Old Magician?**

The Sciencites at first set up the Elmerite Order out of respect for the other paradigms' sacrifices, but it turns out that having lucky people around is useful. The ability to make sure that things like ten coin flips turn out the way you want them to may sound like a minor power, and it often is, but little effects can add up. An Old Magician makes for a remarkably good spy or saboteur, too. As long as they can think fast on their feet.



## **Part 5: The Dead Schools**

Strictly speaking, non-Sciencite schools of magic are not *completely* dead. They're just virtually useless when it comes to raw power. They're also fairly small. If they weren't subsidized, some of them would be dead in truth. There's only a limited number of people out there with the right combination of esoteric interest and stubbornness who are willing to master the shattered remains of a school of magic, after all. Most of them also have difficulty keeping an actual job. The Elmerite pensions aren't great, but they'll keep you fed and sheltered.

Dead Schools typically don't have enough members in one place to allow for actual meetings. Some don't have enough members to justify an annual convention. Fortunately, the Elmerite Order makes it easy for members of one Dead School to interact with members of other Dead Schools. Officially this is to share resources, but simple socialization is just as important. It helps keep members from getting a little funny in the head. Or funnier in the head.

### **Major Dead Schools**

Below are samples of the major Dead Schools, but no Dead School is very large. Most are either reconstructions

of a pre-Bastion group, or amalgamations of several similar ones. A very few are completely artificial, with no links to pre-Bastion magic at all.

### **Heresies**

A few groups started up to take advantage of **post**-Bastion magic, usually by arguing that Sciencite magic should be taken in a different occult direction. Sciencites call these Schools ‘Heresies,’ with varying levels of exasperation. The stubbornest Heresies usually get treated as Dead Schools, which at least gets them a way to interact with the system, and a pension check.

### **Aristotelians**

(Site/Strength Magic)

There was more than one physics, one cosmology, one *science* before the Bastion. There were crystal spheres and fixed heavens and worlds whose workings a man could *grasp*. It could have been the Aristotelian worldview that got adopted as the fundamental reality of the Bastion, you know. It would have been stronger. Smaller, perhaps, but stronger.

More Aristotelians survived the formation of the Bastion than any other Dead School. This is not something that their descendants boast of, in the modern era. Indeed, for

centuries it was alleged that this was due to cowardice (and whispered that it was due to treason). There was little left of the Dead School by the time the Elmerite Order offered it official refuge and mandated toleration. Today the Aristotelians work to find (and gingerly make) places where their heretical cosmology still works, at least well enough to make useful gadgets and elixirs. They enjoy barely enough success to keep justifying the expense.

## **Dreamweavers**

(Site Magic)

Many pre-Bastion Schools visited other dimensions and planes of existence: heavens, hells, Faerie, Dream-lands, and even stranger places. One School even found *Elsewhere*. That School's name is unknown, for those from *Elsewhere* consumed even that. The other Schools all fell prior to the creation of the Bastion.

The modern Dreamweavers date back to the creation of the Elmerite Order. It studies the old gates between worlds and dimensions, while *avoiding entirely* the ones that led to *Elsewhere*, as they will absolutely assure you. As long as they merely study, all is well. Those interested in *doing* things concentrate on dreams, where they may wage symbolic warfare against inner demons. In some ways the Dreamweavers have the most power in the post-Bastion world, but how much weight is there in a dream?

## **Godbound**

(Luck Magic)

There were gods before the Bastion, and there are gods now - but the gods then were *proper* gods. They were willful, demanding, and active. They commanded, and their worshippers obeyed if they knew what was good for them. In return for their worship and obedience, they were granted boons. Some gods were kinder than others, and some were even kind; but even the harshest gods had pride enough to stand and die with their worshippers instead of submitting to those from *Elsewhere*.

The 'new' Godbound claims to be descended from those worshippers who survived the creation of the Bastion. Are they? The evidence is dubious. But they *do* remember the old rituals and supplications, and have skill at manipulating little superstitions and charms. Things generally work out for a Godbound, in minor ways. They don't win lotteries, but they do find parking spaces and avoid the little mishaps of daily life. As long as they keep giving the old gods what little due they can.

## **Hermits**

(Luck/Site Magic)

Before the creation of the Bastion, magical Schools typically began with a single practitioner with a particular concept of magic, who would then train several apprentices, and they would train apprentices, and so forth. If the concept proved popular enough, eventually a stable group would form, and create an actual School. Some Schools grew powerful. Others simply stayed at a lower level of influence. Ironically, the lesser Schools proved more likely to have adepts who survived the Bastion. The more powerful the mages a School had, the more likely it was to die *en masse*.

The lesser Schools dwindled after the Bastion, but enough of their libraries and lore survived to allow the Elmerites to preserve them in some form in the 19th Century. Today the Hermits are the custodians of that empty knowledge. They are individually responsible for an arcane library, or mostly-dead site of magic, and seek to preserve it for... whatever happens in the future. Hermits are typically known for being skilled at making 'magic items:' their artifacts may be weak, but Hermits are quite good at using every scrap of magical power available.

## **Mad Scientists (Heretics)**

(Luck/Strength Magic)

What is madness? Is it madness to push the limits of what can be done, simply because it goes off a trail laid out by those long since dead and buried? Or is it madness to blindly refuse to even consider the implications of an opposite viewpoint? The Mad Scientists have chosen to say it is the latter, but they are overruled by the dead hand of the Sciencite paradigm. So be it. Some day, the purblind fools will see!

The great advantage of the Mad Scientists is that they can push Luck magic beyond its normal limitations. Their great disadvantage is that their work isn't replicable. Although actually their great disadvantage is that anything a Mad Scientist comes up with which ends up *working* inside the Sciencite paradigm can and will be adopted. For example, asteroids simply did not exist before 1856 AD. After 1856 they *always* existed, and the Mad Scientist who first created the concept suddenly found herself firmly locked into the Sciencite paradigm. This result is something that Mad Scientists simultaneously dread and desire.

## **Thanomancers**

(Strength Magic)

Once the Thanomancers could raise the dead, create abominations of nature, and blight (or bless) the very land itself. They were not considered 'good' magicians, but when things from *Elsewhere* arrived Thanomancers fought for Earth as fiercely as anybody else did. Their greatest spells were fueled by their own deaths, which the Thanomancers themselves considered a rather good joke. Their descendants are gentler sorts, if a touch wistfully morbid. But there is still power in death. A corpse might whisper a secret, or a site can give one final vision of the horrors it had seen.

Thanomancers also tend to enjoy better health than others. They are so hungry for death energy, their bodies instinctively kill the diseases and parasites that prey on mankind. This often makes them rather good doctors - not to mention popular ones in an emergency. After all, Thanomancers find it aesthetically comforting to take a secret to the grave.

## Part 6: The Foes of the World

It takes a special kind of mind to oppose the thing keeping reality itself alive, and unspoiled. Fortunately, most of the fools with that kind of mind do not live long. The ones who do survive usually do so because they lack the power to do anything meaningful. The only way for acquiring useful amount of magical energy is by following the Sciencite paradigm, and the Sciencite paradigm promptly uses that energy to fuel the Bastion, which strengthens the Sciencite paradigm. It's a virtuous cycle that is incredibly hard to circumvent.

Some groups still try. There are **Dark Sciencites**, who as mentioned earlier want to destroy the Bastion and bring in those from *Elsewhere*. A related but distinct faction are **Minions**, who likewise wish to destroy the Bastion but do not spring from the Sciencite paradigm. And then there are the **Blunderers**, so-called because they typically have no idea just *why* interfering with the Bastion is so incredibly dangerous.

Members of the Elmerite Order are strongly encouraged to report any contact with Dark Sciencites, Minions, and/or Blunderers. The Sciencites will generally not object to Elmerites aiding them in suppressing any of these groups, on the principle that many hands make light work, but



Elmerites working alone is generally contraindicated. It's just the way things are. Nothing personal.

### **Dark Sciencites - the Corruptors**

*There is a lot of power caught up in the Bastion. Stored power, accumulated power, even enough power to make a small number of people like unto gods themselves. If that power could be tapped, what glories could be achieved? And if the rest of the universe should burn from this? Well, such is the price of power.*

The above is why the Sciencites carefully discourage *any* attempt to divert some of the energy earmarked for the Bastion, to the point where even discussing the possibility is forbidden. Long experience has shown that dwelling on the idea never ends well. The *temptation* of all that power is likewise too mighty to be safe.

Most Sciencites interested in the topic take the hint. Some do not, and a few manage to avoid getting caught long enough to join the Dark Sciencites. There they use their inside knowledge of the Sciencite paradigm to push at the weak spots, with the small-term goal of gaining raw magical power. The long-term goal? Apotheosis, for as many Dark Sciencites who can manage to feed from the neck of the universe before it bleeds out.

Dark Sciencites often attempt to *manipulate* members of the Elmerite Order, usually by pretending to be regular Sciencites who need help with something.

### **Minions - the Corrupted**

*It's all a lie! No, it's the truth, but made to sound like a lie!  
Or maybe it's the truth, but we don't care! It doesn't matter!  
What matters is, there are dazzling / wonderful / terrific  
Things on the other side of that horrible Bastion. They  
were even here, once. And maybe, just maybe, we can  
bring Them **back**. And I say this again! It doesn't matter  
what They **really** are! They have to be better than any of  
this.*

The Sciencites spent several centuries scouring the world for any possible traces of those from *Elsewhere* that might have managed to survive the formation of the Bastion. And they periodically check *again*, at random times and places, in the hopes of tracking down what fragments still exist. It is generally agreed that the greatest enemies were destroyed when the Bastion was forged, and that all but the weakest were likely excised afterward - but that still leaves any potential number of minor foes.

The fragments of those from *Elsewhere* still present in this reality are not exactly sapient, or living. But they can influence, and definitely possess a malevolent *purpose*.

Each remaining fragment or unquiet corpse eventually accrues around it a cult of Minions. They are either weak-willed or nihilistic, as the strong-minded rarely last long. Still, they can be industrious and even intelligent. Minions try to use the power found in the fragments of those from *Elsewhere* to make useful holes in the Bastion. The chance that any one hole could allow for another major incursion is vanishingly slim. Alas, they only need to succeed once.

Minions typically just try to kill members of the Elmerite Order, and take their stuff.

### **Blunderers - the Untrained**

*'Magic?' You're joking, right? This is the 21st Century! There's no such thing as **magic**. What we're dealing with here is just cutting-edge physics. I could even write out the equations, if you've got enough math to understand them. Everything balances; it all makes sense. We are on the verge of achieving true, no-fooling interdimensional travel! The first practical experiments start soon. And **yes**, we're taking adequate safety precautions. We're not **idiots**.*

The Sciencites might despise Dark Sciencites, and loathe Minions - but they *fear* Blunderers. At least their other foes understand the true nature of the universe, and their goals reflect that. Blunderers are people with magical power, but

no training, and *no idea* what they're doing. Fortunately, the Sciencites manage to catch most potential magicians before they can start poking at the foundation of the universe. Most become Sciencites themselves; the more outre join the ranks of the Mad Scientists. Botched recruitment efforts can create a Dark Sciencite, but that's rare. But the worst-case scenario is when the Sciencites never notice a magician at all, leaving him to do his disastrous research in peace.

The great danger of the Blunderers is that they are *not* necessarily evil, short-sighted, or otherwise flawed. Many of them are admirable people. But they can damage the Bastion in a way that Dark Sciencites or Minions never could, because Blunderers are unconsciously *attuned* to the Sciencite paradigm. The wizards who created the Bastion protected it against deliberate attacks, but they seem to have assumed that any future magic user that came in contact with it *would at least know what the Bastion was*. To use an analogy, there are few equivalents of the little message "Are you *sure* you want to do this?" in places where there really should be.

A Blunderer would stereotypically consider members of the Elmerite Order to be ridiculous cranks who don't have any clue about how the world works.

## **Part 7: Those From *Elsewhere***

According to the operating parameters of the Sciencites (and the beliefs of the Elmerites), *Elsewhere* cannot be described, quantified, or even properly conceived. The oldest records say that there are alternate dimensions where the physical laws are close to Earth's to allow for mutual comprehension. *Elsewhere* is not one of those dimensions. It is alien to us in ways that can barely be even alluded to. But one thing is certain. *Elsewhere* and Earth cannot coexist in the same dimension. One or the other must be erased.

There is some dispute as to whether or not *Elsewhere* can be properly described as 'malevolent' or 'aggressive,' as both of those concepts are human ones. It may simply be that *Elsewhere* is filled with volition-free forces that blindly attempt to rewrite neighboring universes whenever some fool pokes holes through the wrong dimensional barrier. As a practical matter, the difference between *directed* and *reflexive* annihilation is effectively moot. Endless vigilance is required either way.

### **Can Those From *Elsewhere* Think?**

The answer to that is complex. Those From *Elsewhere* absolutely do not think like humans do. In particular, attempts to trick or taunt one simply don't work. They are

incapable of understanding the *concept* of confusion, let alone suffer from it. But they aren't clockwork automatons, either. Those From Elsewhere react to stimuli. It's just that you don't always know which stimulus one of them is reacting *to*.

## **Those From *Elsewhere***

It is considered a poor idea to too-carefully describe the various monsters, forces, and entities that have managed to transition from *Elsewhere* to Earth (and then not instantly implode). Too much focus on their nature and abilities can encourage a separate, and much more dangerous, obsession on *Elsewhere* in general. Such obsessions do not end well. The term 'Those From *Elsewhere*' is generally thought to be as safe a name as possible.

Officially, nothing as antithetical to our reality as Those From *Elsewhere* could hope to survive here long before a swift and thorough implosion. In practice, these entities can survive from forming a sort of crust that insulates them from Earth's physical laws. To use an analog, the chemical compound chlorine trifluoride reacts with steel to create a thin, stable metallic fluoride layer. This allows it, theoretically, to be put in a steel container and left there - as long as it is not disturbed.

But that in no way makes the situation either stable, or safe. It should be noted that chlorine trifluoride can ignite sand, asbestos, air, and water, and produces clouds of hydrofluoric acid when 'mixed' with water. Prior to the Bastion, it in fact was what magicians referred to as 'universal solvent.' The Sciencites deliberately went to some trouble to preserve it in modern inorganic chemistry, solely because it was such a *good* analogy to what happens when *Elsewhere* reacts with Earth's reality for too long.

## **Powers**

The central power of Those From *Elsewhere* is their limited ability to ignore some physical laws. They can be shot or destroyed, because that was hard-wired into the Bastion. Unfortunately, the proto-Sciencites who set up the system could not quite define away *everything*.

Those From *Elsewhere* can do the following things:

- **Entropy control.** Those From *Elsewhere* can easily increase entropy, and can reverse it with some effort. This latter ability can be triggered externally, which can act as an idiosyncratic type of temporary healing.
- **Energy-Matter creation.** It's hard to work out whether Those From *Elsewhere* can *destroy* matter, but they

can definitely create it. This will have a nasty effect on the space-time continuum if it goes on for too long. They more or less constantly create small amounts of matter while in our dimension.

- **Probability manipulation.** Simply put, the closer you are to Those From *Elsewhere*, the greater a chance of low-probability events occurring. This is another ability that can be provoked from the outside. Some Minions or Dark Sciencites who try can even manage to half-control the effects.

There are two categories of Those From *Elsewhere*: Survivals, and Incursions.

## **Survivals**

Survivals are those entities that managed to survive the formation of the Bastion. Most were wiped out at the moment they were cut off from *Elsewhere*, but some were able to find temporary protection. By now, 'temporary' may be a misnomer. Any shielding that hasn't yet collapsed under the weight of reality is unlikely to break apart on its own.

The Sciencites constantly scour reality for Survivals, and they have definitely removed all of the ones that are *currently* large, powerful, or too willful. The bits that remain are not exactly 'cunning' or 'subtle,' because those are



human concepts. In fact, as mentioned before, they're not precisely sapient. But they generally if passively collect human Minions, and Minion groups invariably devolve into long-term conspiracies to destroy the Bastion. Generally *acting* like a Survival is fully self-aware, powerful, and malevolent is rarely a bad idea.

## **Incursions**

Incursions appear whenever there's a temporary hole in the Bastion. Adepts who were born and raised in the Sciencite School often react with stark terror when they first find out that there *are* holes in the Bastion, but if the dimensional barrier was impenetrable once formed then there'd be no need to continually reinforce the Sciencite paradigm. So, when holes form (before they are swiftly, and usually automatically, closed), bad things will ooze through them.

Most implode on the spot. Some of the larger ones can create temporary shells to protect themselves from our reality, with an emphasis on 'temporary.' If left alone, a very few of them will survive long enough to become functionally equivalent to Survivals. Worse, they generally have a higher power level. Obviously, it's considered a good idea to destroy Incursions before they get that far. Unfortunately, the problem with monster-hunting is that

you're hunting, well, monsters. Incursions are powerful, and aggressively react to threats.

### **Fighting Those From *Elsewhere***

The great advantage Sciencites (and Elmerites) have when fighting Those From *Elsewhere* is that bullets work. *All* forms of kinetic energy poisoning work, in fact. They had better, since the Sciencites specifically tweaked the laws of physics to make sure that shooting a Survival or Incursion was always going to be a viable strategy.

The flip side is, Those From *Elsewhere* can fight back. Sciencites have their own difficulties countering esoteric attacks. Warp local reality enough, and their defenses falter. Fortunately, Elmerites have magical attacks and defenses that do *not* rely on the Sciencite paradigm, which gives them arcane opportunities when fighting Those From *Elsewhere* that Elmerites do not often enjoy in their day to day lives. Many Elmerites are happy to take advantage of that opportunity.

## Part 8: Campaigns

The Elmerite Order is a magical campaign world where magic is almost useless when compared to technology. It is so useless, a secret society was created and subsidized to keep the remnants on life support. So why play a magician in it at all?

Well, magic doesn't have to be powerful to be interesting, dangerous, or entertaining to play. A low-power magical campaign can be useful for keeping players from immediately wiping the floor with their non-magical opponents. Plus, in the world of the Elmerite Order, even the smallest bit of magical power is considered highly valuable. *Keeping* such a campaign low-power will unfortunately necessitate limiting player rewards, but that's a known issue for gamemasters.

### Campaign Frames

Below are four frameworks for an Elmerite Order campaign. They're not meant to be mutually exclusive, but they're all distinct worldviews. Note that, in each case, it is assumed that the Sciencites are essentially benevolent, and do not start the campaign opposed to the players. How long this lasts, as always, depends on the campaign and the party.

## Research

*The old Lore may be gone, but a lot of fragments remain. We should track them down. There may be useful stuff in there, or at least something that people will pay for.*

In this framework, the players take on the roles of occult researchers and archeologists, trying to track down what pieces of the old magic survived the Bastion. Why? Oh, scholarly interest, to be sure. That there is a thriving underground market in authentic magical detritus is purely incidental, and it is absolutely *insulting* to imply that the party is motivated by such crass considerations. Assuming that the check doesn't clear, mind you. If it does clear, the client can imply whatever he likes.

Activities: research, exploration, investigations, dealing with rival archeologists, espionage, betrayals, running car chases / gun battles through European city streets as one group or another tries to escape with the Macguffin. While an Old Magician might be almost powerless when compared to her pre-Bastion ancestors, in the modern day the ability to weigh the dice through Luck Magic can be remarkably handy in an adventure. Spy organizations in particular will happily hire contractors who are *reliably* lucky, and just as happily disavow them when a job goes sour. It's all part of the Great Game.

## **Revival**

*We didn't destroy the other forms of magic because they were bad; we destroyed them because we needed their resources to build the Bastion. Hey, guess what? **The Bastion's been built.***

This can start out as a Research campaign, then get more elaborate as the players discover something *really* good - and more importantly, something that won't hurt the Bastion. The Sciencites typically prefer to incorporate truly useful rediscovered Old Magic into the existing paradigm, whenever possible, but it is not intrinsically opposed to magic that can't be easily adapted. Again, as long as it doesn't hurt the Bastion.

Activities: research, exploration, investigations, tracking down other surviving groups, infiltration, experimentation, incorporation and/or suppression of rival groups, depending on whether or not they're actually cults. Players can operate fairly openly in this framework; the Sciencites prefer that anybody ready to challenge their paradigm ends up in one of the Dead Schools anyway. The Sciencites will not subsidize or assist the party's activities, either. That includes mundane legal issues, should it come up. Bringing magic back is strictly something Old Magicians should be doing on their own time.

## **Defense**

*The Sciencites are good at a number of things. **Subtly** dealing with magical dangers is not one of them. If you don't want to throw a nuke at a problem, you're better off coming to us.*

This is the framework for putting big holes in monsters, or disrupting the summoning ceremony before its climax, or other incidents of civically mindful violence. The Sciencites literally designed the universe to make sure that kinetic energy always works when it comes to killing Things From *Elsewhere*, from the skittering blob crushed under one work boot to the greater abomination vaporized by a hydrogen bomb. The party will probably get called in to handle things at the flamethrower level or above. One thing they're *not* supposed to do, however, is seek to *understand* - and that includes conventional Old Magic that's just being misused. If they have to send in the Mages in Black, it's assumed that things are going to get messy.

Activities: pummeling, slicing, stabbing, shooting, immolating, freezing, folding, spindling, and mutilating - well, avoid the last one, because it's psychologically unhealthy. The party probably drives Lincoln Continentals and wears black suits, complete with sunglasses. When

they're on the job for the Sciencites, money and legal cover is no issue. When they're freelancing? Well, save the receipts. Evidence of a bona fide monster kill is often good for a retroactive expense account.

## **Temptation**

*We could... do more. And we should do more, too.*

*Despite their lofty, oft-stated 'ideals,' the Sciencites are just too heavy-handed when it comes to anything involving Those From **Elsewhere**. Yes, there's a risk involved, but there's always a risk to everything.*

The above frameworks assume that there's some give to the system. But what if there's not? What if investigating Old Magic, trying to bring it back, or even killing monstrous incursions came with a price? In such a case, the Sciencites will be a *lot* more restrictive about what Old Magicians will be allowed to do. The safety margins will be made deliberately wide, and regularly reviewed. That sort of thing can feel *constraining*, particularly if the party knows what they're doing is really and truly safe. From there it's just a few steps down a possibly dark road.

Activities: pick one of the other frameworks, and add 'avoiding Sciencite oversight.' Players will likely want to avoid actually breaking with the Sciencites, if only because it would be an excellent way to be recategorized as an

active threat. But this is one campaign setting where the players will have a vested interest in keeping a low profile. Particularly if the Bastion has already been damaged, which will invariably make the Sciencites even more inflexible about taking further risks.

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