

Dictatus Papae

A Game of Intrigue and Espionage In the Medieval Church by Arthur Boff

Disclaimer

This game should not be taken as a slur or attack on the Catholic Church as it stands today. Nor do I seek to insult anybody's religious beliefs. Aside from the details provided in the "Historical Overview" section, which I have tried to keep as accurate as possible, this game should be treated as a work of fiction which deals exclusively (and satirically) with the temporal power wielded by the Church in the Middle Ages as opposed to its spiritual authority.

What Is Dictatus Papae?

Dictatus Papae is a compact game about the secular power of the Church in the Middle Ages. Players take on the role of scheming, worldly bishops seeking temporal power and riches, as well as the underlings and henchmen they deploy to get their way. There is a heavy emphasis on espionage and intrigue; it is through intrigue and conspiracy that one advances oneself in this corrupt world, and it is through espionage that one undoes one's enemies intrigues, shatters their plans, and exposes their crimes. Essentially, this is a game about people committing horrible crimes, trying to get away with it, and spying on each other in order to report the misdeeds of their fellow clergymen.

While there were doubtless a good many genuinely devout, diligent, and spiritually-minded individuals working in the Church in the medieval period, the fact remains that there were also a great many greedy people who abused the power given them and pursued worldly privileges over spiritual accomplishments. These abuses would ultimately spell disaster for the Church in the form of the Protestant Reformation, after which the Church never quite regained the power or pre-eminence it enjoyed previously. Player characters in this game are part of this class of hypocritical clergymen who, if their activities become a matter of public record, might well one day be cited by Martin Luther as examples of corruption within the Church. It is vitally important to player characters that they maintain and bolster their air of integrity; failure to do so makes one hated by the public, an embarrassment to the Church, and a political sitting duck. Don't be surprised if your fellow players' characters exploit this situation!

Unlike many other roleplaying games, *Dictatus Papae* can be played in a co-operative or a competitive fashion. In the competitive game, the GM acts mainly as an impartial referee, and allows the machinations between the player characters to be the primary source of action within the game, although the GM should feel free to throw in a few external factors to keep things interesting and to shake up any peaceful status quo that the player characters reach. In the co-operative game, the GM's role is inherently more adversarial, since the GM has to devise challenges and adversaries for the PCs to overcome; however, GMs should retain the spirit of impartiality proper to a referee, and should resist the temptation to massage events in order to produce an "interesting

story”. This game is intended to be just that, a game, or at most an interesting simulation of medieval espionage, not a vehicle for creating stories.

Historical Overview

The Catholic Church is one of the most ancient institutions in the world. However, *Dictatus Papae* focuses on a very finely-defined period of time, ranging from the coronation of Charlemagne in Rome on Christmas Day, 800 AD, and the election of Pope Martin V on the 11th November, 1417 AD. This might sound awfully specific, but there’s good reasons for selecting these dates.

Charlemagne and the Donation of Constantine

At the dawn of the 9th Century AD, the Papacy took two important steps which would set the tone for its political machinations throughout the medieval period. Firstly, on Christmas Day in the year 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Romans, a move supposedly unexpected even by Charlemagne himself. In theory, there was already a Roman Emperor in Byzantium with a legitimate claim over the Western Empire, but in practice the Western Empire had been in near-anarchy for centuries, and the Pope’s support of Charlemagne’s imperial ambitions reflected the realities of the time.

This was more than just a statement of support for Charlemagne, though: it was an assertion that the Papacy had the power to decide who would be King and Emperor in the Western Empire. The Donation of Constantine, a fraudulent document which emerged at some point between 750 and 850 AD, was a further statement of this claim: it purported to be an official edict by Emperor Constantine I, effectively granting control of the Western Empire to the Papacy, while retaining Constantine’s power in the Eastern Empire (which, by the Middle Ages, had become the Byzantine Empire).

The coronation of Charlemagne and the production of the Donation of Constantine were a powerful statement: an assertion of the Papacy’s right to pursue and maintain temporal power in the West, as well as making nigh-certain a split between the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches (since the Donation gave the Pope powers far outstripping those of any of the Eastern Patriarchs). Combine this with the acquisition of the first Papal States (donated to the Church by the Frankish King Pepin III, allowing the Pope to exert temporal power beyond the normal boundaries of the city and diocese of Rome, and it becomes clear that by the year 800 the Church was no longer a spiritual body: it was a political power in its own right, and one that claimed pre-eminence over every other nation in Western Europe at that.

Campaign Ideas: This time period is crucial for the development of the Papacy – the stakes should be very high indeed in adventures and campaigns set in this era! Vatican-based characters during this time period could become closely involved in the delicate negotiations leading up to the coronation of Charlemagne, or help “prove” that the Donation of Constantine is genuine. Establishing the Church’s temporal authority over the Papal States is another possibility. Characters based elsewhere in the world might find that the new developments cause them serious amounts of trouble: local rulers are going to become concerned about the Pope throwing his weight about, and any characters based in Byzantium are going to find the Eastern Roman Emperor is *far* from happy about this course of events.

The Popes and the Emperors

Once the Holy Roman Empire became established, the Papacy enjoyed a curious relationship with it: the Emperor had the right to appoint the Pope, and the Pope in turn appointed the next Emperor. A very real distinction could be made in this time period by Roman Popes – supported by the people of Rome, and generally independently-minded – and German Popes, appointed by the Emperor (often in reaction to the misdeeds of Roman Popes) and not especially welcome in Rome. Emperor Henry III had to appoint *four* Popes within the course of a decade!

Eventually the Papacy managed to break free of the power of the Empire. Firstly, Pope Leo IX declared that no secular ruler had the right to appoint Popes, and established the College of Cardinals to choose his future successors (a duty the Cardinals perform to this day). Later, under the reign of Emperor Henry IV, Pope Gregory VII asserted that he and only he had the right to appoint people to offices within the Church, as part of a wider series of reforms aimed at strengthening Papal control over the Church. Previously, while the Church theoretically held the power to appoint bishops and abbots, in practice most bishops were appointed by their local secular authorities (who, of course, received their legitimacy from the Pope thanks to the Donation of Constantine, so that was alright). As such, it was felt that these bishops might feel more loyalty towards the rulers who appointed them than to the Pope. Gregory intended to change that; Henry, naturally, objected, and a military stand-off ensued.

Fortunately for the Pope, a revolt amongst the German nobility forced the Emperor to back down. In January 1077, Henry IV came to the Pope's residence at Canossa, dressed as a penitent, and spent three days begging barefoot in the snow for forgiveness before the Pope rescinded his excommunication. This overwhelming victory marked the end of the Holy Roman Empire's attempts to control the Papacy; the Concordat of Worms in 1122, a treaty between Empire and Holy See, forfeited any right the Emperors had previously claimed to grant positions in the Church to its supporters.

The Church took two other major steps during this period of time. Firstly, in 1059 Pope Nicholas II granted land in Sicily and southern Italy to the Normans in return for their fealty, entering into a feudal relationship with them resembling that between king and baron more than that between Pope and lay worshipper. This sort of thing would become common practice for the Papacy throughout the rest of the feudal era, reflecting the Pope's king-like powers in the political sphere. Secondly, the split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, which had been growing ever-wider over centuries, became final in 1054.

Campaign Ideas: There's plenty of sides to choose from in this era, and fence-sitting is frequently not an option. Are the player characters on the side of the Pope or the Holy Roman Emperor? (Remember, early on in this period of Church history both individuals are appointing bishops!) Are they supporters of Pope Gregory's reforms, campaigning against simony (selling positions in the Church), clerical marriage, and other secular influences, or do they oppose them? And what's their attitude to the East-West schism?

Crusades, at Home and Abroad

On November 27, 1095, Pope Urban II declared a Crusade to reclaim the Holy Land for Christendom. Great armies from Western Europe poured into the Levant, tempted by the promise of conquest, land, and absolution of sins. The Popes had become so powerful that they could order this massive clash of civilisations: their ability to control the outcome was, of course, limited, although this did increase Catholic influence in an area more associated with Orthodox Christianity, as well as giving birth to several orders of warrior-monks answering to the Pope. The Crusades would ultimately fail, although not before the abortive Fourth Crusade, ordered in 1198 by Pope Innocent III, sacked Byzantium – leaving the Byzantine Empire a mere shadow of its former self, and thus seriously undermining the temporal power of Orthodox Christianity.

Meanwhile, heresies at home became a major target of the Papacy. The Episcopal Inquisition (called so because it was administered by local bishops) was established in 1184 to investigate the Cathar heresy in southern France. It wasn't especially effective – bishops weren't always interested in persecuting heretics, and rules against anonymous accusations meant that those who denounced heretics tended to get killed by angry friends and relatives of the accused – but it did come up with enough findings to justify a Crusade against a group of fellow Christians between 1209 and 1229. It would also lead to the formation of the much more powerful Papal Inquisition in 1233.

Campaign Ideas: Oh, come on. Crusades! Templars! The Holy Land! Cathars! Inquisitions! If Dan Brown can cobble those together into a mediocre bestseller I'm sure you can come up with a decent plot idea out of those ingredients.

Avignon and the Antipopes

In 1305, the Roman Curia – the civil service of the Papacy, as it were, moved to Avignon, along with the new Pope, Clement V. The intent was to disentangle the Church from the infighting between the powerful Roman families from whom Popes were usually selected, as well as calming a dangerous dispute between the Papacy and the Kings of France. Pope Boniface VIII had only a few years ago been arrested for sodomy, simony, sorcery and heresy, charges brought against him by King Philippe IV of France. Worse still, the Cardinals of the Colonna family of Rome had collaborated with the French King's plans, and it was the only the pious folk of Anagni who had freed Boniface from imprisonment!

Over time, the lifestyle of the Avignon Popes became more like kings than spiritual leaders, the Cardinals living a suitably princely lifestyle to go with that. Although the temporal power of the Papacy was dwindling at this time from its peak under Innocent III, the Papal income had swelled massively, through the selling of benefices and indulgences, the collecting of tithes, taxes levied to fund Crusades which never got off the ground, and all sorts of other horrible scams, indulged in by every level of the Church hierarchy – for, if you had to go deeply into debt in order to secure a position as bishop, you'd obviously use any means at your disposal to squeeze money out of your new position to clear your debts and start living the high life.

Meanwhile, the Papacy happily co-operated with the rulers of France, to the point where towards the end of the Avignon Papacy the Popes were regarded as mere

puppets of the French Kings. One of the earliest and most dramatic examples of this came in 1307, when King Philippe IV arrested all the Knights Templar in France. Although initially making some efforts to assert control over the situation, Pope Clement V eventually submitted to the French King's wishes and called for the dissolution and destruction of the Templars.

By 1377, Rome and the Papal States were in crisis, with the French appointees of the Avignon Popes being resented by the Italian inhabitants of those lands. Pope Gregory XI decided to return to Rome in order to restore order, and died in Rome in early 1378. The Romans were restless and smelled blood in the water, and demanded that the Cardinals elect an Italian Pope. They did so, choosing Urban VI from Naples. The Cardinals back in Avignon questioned the legitimacy of the election, and elected a Pope of their own, who took the name of Clement VII. Both Popes immediately declared one another Antipopes, issued bulls of excommunication each other, and the Catholic Church entered a schism which would last for nearly forty years.

Two councils were formed in order to resolve the difficulty. The first, in Pisa in 1409, declared both the Roman and Avignon Popes to be illegitimate and elected a Pope of their own, and were ignored entirely by the Roman and Avignon Churches, so that for a time there were *three* competing papacies. The second council, convening in Constance in 1414 and attended by both the Roman and Pisan Popes, had more success. The Pisan Pope attempted to flee in disguise in 1415 when it became clear that negotiations weren't going his way, and was deposed by the council. A few months later, the Roman Pope agreed to resign for the good of the Church. The Avignon Pope refused to acknowledge the authority of the council; however, it had powerful backing (from the Holy Roman Empire, no less!) and the Avignon Papacy became increasingly isolated. The council declared the Pope of Avignon deposed in 1417, and while he refused to acknowledge their authority, he did withdraw to an isolated castle in Spain and became essentially irrelevant for the rest of his life. Having cleared the field of competing Popes, the council finally elected Martin V Pope on November 11th, 1417.

This event marked the end of the schism, the final return of the Papacy to Rome, and the last major event to shake the Church in the medieval period. The next crisis facing the Church would be the cultural upheaval of the Renaissance and the emergence of Protestantism during the Reformation, events which would utterly end the medieval period of history. As a game which assumes a medieval time period, *Dictatus Papae* needs to define which era of history it considers "medieval", and the election of Martin V is as good a "full stop" as any.

Campaign Ideas: The Avignon Papacy is an ideal time for political skulduggery, as is the Western Schism. The Council of Constance, which lasted for nine years, is a fantastic backdrop for campaigns – player characters could all work for a particular Pope, seeking to ensure that their contender is chosen as the true Pope by the Council, or for the Council itself, trying to find ways to convince the rival Popes to stand down. Alternately, a competitive game could see the player characters supporting different Popes and doing their damndest to scupper the other characters' cases!

Beginning a Game

At the beginning of a *Dictatus Papae* game, GMs should decide whether they want to run a competitive or a co-operative game. While a GM can obviously be swayed by a group of players all saying “We want a competitive bloodbath!” or “We want to be nice and friendly!”, the choice is at the end the GM’s alone.

There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that a co-operative game requires significantly more prep work on the part of the GM: because the player characters aren’t generating conflict, discord and action through their mutual backstabbing, the GM has to come up with external enemies and obstacles for the PCs to tackle. The second reason is that there are a number of roleplayers who absolutely hate the idea of a competitive game, just as there are a number of players who feel that competition and intra-party strife in a game is absolutely a-OK. Feelings tend to get strong on this issue; as such, it is normally easiest for a GM to say “I’m going to be running a competitive/co-operative game, let me know if you’re interested” than it is to sit the players down and say “Hey, do you want this game to be competitive or co-operative?” and expect the players to argue it out.

Once the type of campaign has been decided and players are recruited, players and GM should sit down together (in person, or online or something if the game is to be conducted via e-mail or web forum or something) and talk about the following decisions which need to be made.

1. Is this going to be an open-ended campaign, or are there “win conditions”? An open-ended competitive game will often boil down to “last man standing”, and while I do have suggestions later on for how to keep players involved when their characters are knocked out of competitive games, that can get dull. I strongly suggest having a “win condition” for a competitive game: “get the highest Wealth score within six sessions” is a good one, as is “succeed in the mission my masters have given me”. It is acceptable – and probably a good idea – to have multiple winning conditions (in which case the first person to fulfil them wins). In the case of win conditions which involve seizing control of a particular office – having your Bishop become the Pope or the primary Archbishop of the country the game is set in, for example, or making your Henchman a King or Emperor – I suggest adding a requirement that the character in question needs to remain in office for at least a year. (It’s no point becoming Pope if you die the next day.) Co-operative games can have winning conditions such as “Have our favoured candidate named Pope,” or “Overthrow the Church from within”.
2. What time period will the campaign occur in? Earlier on in the medieval period, the bishops will be much more independent of Rome than they will be later on, but will be much more entangled in the politics of their country of residence; once the Popes seize the right of investiture back from the crowned heads of Europe, Papal politics will become much more important. Are your players more interested in Crusades and pillage or the clash of Pope and Antipope? Think carefully about this one.
3. Where will the action of the game take place? Tabletop games tend to require having the PCs be in the same locale, which in turn requires a situation where

multiple bishops will be in the same place at the same time. A King's court is a good option, especially if the GM is knowledgeable about the history of a particular country, as is the Vatican itself. (If the game is set during the Western Schism, you might have up to three different Papal seats to set the game in.) Alternately, a major meeting of bishops might serve as the backdrop. The Council of Constance, which eventually ended the Western Schism, took place for *nine years*, more than enough in-character time to support a long campaign. The choice of time period for a campaign might help you choose exciting places to set the campaign in.

Alternately, you might wish to run an online-based game through e-mail or web forums. In this case, you can have each player character be based in their own diocese in the nation of your choice. This is an especially good setup for competitive games – your fellow PCs might never work out whether that mysterious merchant who rolled into their diocese last month was really the innocent man he appeared, or if he was actually your disguised Henchman on a spying mission!

4. Whose side will the PCs be on? (See the “Allegiance” section in the character generation section for possibilities.) This should be a group decision in a cooperative game – everyone should be in the same side – and a matter of individual taste in a competitive game, of course. The choice of location for the campaign should help the GM and players decide which matters of allegiance are going to be importance.

Once these matters have been decided, the process of character generation can begin!

Character Generation

Dictatus Papae suggests that each player should have multiple characters under their control. Each player should control a Bishop, who will be their primary character, at least one Henchman, an individual who will be able to go out and do the Bishop's dirty work, and perhaps a few Underlings to act as backup.

Bishops

Resource Points: 200. **Skill Points:** 80. **Trait Points:** 30, up to 30 points of negative Traits.

By far your most important character, your Bishop is not merely a churchman with responsibility over a diocese – he is a political figure in his own right. In the early medieval period, he was probably appointed not by the Pope but by the King or Emperor of his homeland, and he is therefore highly likely to be embroiled in local politics. In the late medieval period, he will have been appointed by the Pope, and matters in Rome will have an impact on his standing.

In the *Dictatus Papae* system, your Bishop's main strength will be his Resources – the influence, wealth, power and authority he can bring to bear on a situation. His Skills are likely to be weak: that is why he requires a loyal Henchman to act as his underling. A Bishop may also buy a number of Traits to flesh out his character and give him unique advantages and disadvantages.

It is also important to decide the Allegiance of Bishops; see below for more details.

Bishops begin the game with 60 Health points, unless this total is modified by buying one of the Health traits.

Henchmen

Resource Points: 50. *Skill Points:* 300. *Trait Points:* 20, up to 20 points of negative Traits.

Your Bishop is going to have a retinue of loyal servants, most of whom can be assumed to be normal people working away diligently to cook your Bishop's food, clean his clothes, and generally make his life comfortable. Henchmen are a cut above the rest: they are highly skilled individuals who can be trusted to go off and do the Bishop's bidding, and perhaps perform certain tasks that the Bishop himself cannot be seen doing or does not have the ability to perform. While they lack Resources and rely on the Bishop for funds and materials, Henchmen have high Skills which make them exceptionally efficient. Most espionage work in a *Dictatus Papae* game will be carried out by Henchmen, and thus they will get a certain amount of spotlight time; thus, they can also buy a number of Traits in order to give them personality, as well as unique advantages and disadvantages.

All players get a single Henchman for free and may purchase additional Henchmen with their Bishop's Resource points. Henchmen may not, themselves, have Henchmen, otherwise a player can trivially beat the game by having their Bishop spend most of their points on Henchmen, then have those Henchmen spend all of their Resource points on Henchmen, and then have those Henchmen spend all of their Resource points on Henchmen, and so on, until the player's Bishop commands a massive army of ninja Henchmen who can simply kill anyone who makes trouble for them.

Henchmen begin the game with 60 Health points, unless this total is modified by buying one of the Health traits.

Underlings

Resource Points: 0. *Skill Points:* 20. *Trait Points:* 0.

Henchmen and Bishops can use their Resource points to buy Underlings, Resourceless peasants with few skills who nonetheless may prove highly useful under specific circumstances. The most likely use for Underlings is to act as a personal bodyguard for a Bishop, but clever players may find additional ways to make them useful. An Underling may not have any Traits, because seriously, who cares about the suckers?

Frankly, I only expect people to use Underlings as bodyguards: slap their Skill Points into Attack and Defence, give them decent arms and armour, and they're a fair enough fighting unit. On the other hand, I'm sure clever players can come up with all sorts of alternate uses for them.

All Underlings begin the game with 50 Health points.

Resources

This list of Resources is exhaustive: there's no room in the game for additional ones. These are the really important scores, especially for Bishops. Spend your points wisely.

Integrity: Vital for a political figure, such as your Bishop, this is a measure of your standing with the general public, your reputation for piety within the Church (for Bishops), and so forth. It is advisable for Bishops to have an Integrity of at least 50: if they don't, their political position will become untenable, and they will lose their position (and perhaps their liberty, or even their lives).

Henchmen with high Integrity might be important secular political figures. Henchmen with especially low Integrity are likely to be known criminals and ne'er-do-wells, and it's inadvisable for Bishops to be seen in their company: if one of your Henchmen has an Integrity of less than 20, your Bishop will lose 10 points of Integrity if it ever becomes public knowledge that he employs that Henchman.

Wealth: A measure of financial security and solvency. Bishops require Wealth to maintain the opulent lifestyle they are accustomed to – see the section on Upkeep later on for more details on this – and both Bishops and Henchmen use Wealth to make purchases of necessary items during the game.

When a one-off purchase is required during the game, make a Wealth check. Failure means that you either cannot afford the purchase, or the items are not available at this time, or economic factors mean you can't quite free up enough spare cash to buy the stuff, or whatever. The following modifiers might apply to the roll, and the GM should feel free to add additional modifiers as need be:

Massive investments, like building a castle or raising an army: -80.

Important investments, like building a big house or buying a ship: -50.

Big purchases like a siege engine: -40.

Items which require skilled individuals to manufacture, like plate mail or 2-handed weapons: -20.

Items which you wouldn't buy on an everyday basis, like a fine meal or chain mail: -10.

The sort of item you'd buy on a regular basis: 0.

You are willing to undertake a small loan in order to make the purchase: +10.

You rob a merchant (in uptime) in order to raise money for the purchase: +20.

You set up a bandit raid to raise money for the purchase: +30.

You embezzle the King's taxes or the Vatican treasury for the sake of this purchase: +60.

NB: You may make only *one* roll to purchase a particular type of item in the interval between Upkeep rolls. In other words, you can't keep making an easy roll 200 times to buy 200 chainmail shirts: you have to make a single roll to buy all of the shirts at once, and that's going to carry a hefty penalty with it.

Wealthy Henchmen and Bishops can combine their Wealth ratings to make especially grandiose purchases: however, in this case the Henchman and Bishop will end up both having a share in the purchase. Should the Henchman's Integrity be poor (below 20), and should the details of this mutual investment become public, the usual penalty for being caught associating with scum applies.

Henchmen cannot use their Wealth to help their Bishops make their Upkeep rolls. Seriously, how humiliating would that be?

One last point: if you kill someone and take all their money, your Wealth stat increases by 1 point for every 5 points of Wealth they had – after all, a man’s Wealth is not just the money he owns, but his lands and his station in life and the incomes derived from those, which will go to the dead man’s heir rather than to you. If you convince someone to leave everything they own to the Church before they die, however, your Wealth increases by 1 point for every 3 points of Wealth they had.

Contacts: This Resource represents your connections. A character with excellent Contacts knows how to get in touch with anybody: they might not be on speaking terms with every King and Prince in Europe, but they probably know someone who can get them an introduction.

If you wish to ascertain whether your character has a suitable and currently available contact for a particular situation, make a Contacts check. The following modifiers may apply, as will any additional modifiers demanded by the GM:

You are trying to make contact with someone who might introduce you to a legendary outlaw whose life depends on his location and identity remaining obscure to the authorities: -40.

You are trying to make contact with someone who is willing to perform illegal acts for a fee, or is an expert in their field, or is especially prestigious, or who lives in a foreign country: -20.

The person in question is obscure, or lives far away from your sphere of influence (but within your home country): -10.

The person in question is part of your profession (so a clergyman if you are a Bishop, and whatever your day job is if you’re a Henchman): +10.

The person in question lives in your diocese or home county: +20.

Extra Henchman: It costs 50 Resource points for your Bishop to have an extra Henchman at game start. Your Henchmen cannot have Henchmen on their own. That would get very silly very quickly. They can have Underlings if you like.

Underlings: A unit of six Underlings costs 20 Resource points to acquire at game start.

Skills

This ain’t an exhaustive list of skills by any means: feel free to make up new ones.

Attack (Base = 10%)

Countered by: Defence.

See the “Contested Rolls and Combat” section for how this works.

Defence (Base = 10%)

See the “Contested Rolls and Combat” section for how this works.

Disguise (Base = 0%)

Countered by: Observation.

Allows the user to pretend to be somebody they are not. You cannot disguise yourself as a specific individual so thoroughly as to fool someone who knows them by sight;

however, in these days before photography and widely-reproduced portraits, you can make a go of duping people who've never met the person you are pretending to be.

Eavesdropping (Base = 5%)

Countered by: Observation.

Eavesdropping is the skill used to overhear conversations and observe their actions without them noticing that you are doing so, but whilst you yourself are within sight. Whereas someone who is Hiding can spy on people who are not aware they are there, an Eavesdropper can pretend that they aren't paying attention to someone else's private discussion while sitting at a nearby table in an inn.

Healing (Base = 0%)

The judicious use of leeches, prayer, and spurious amputations in order to help a sick person. A successful Healing check applied to a sick or poisoned character gives the character a bonus to their next Health check equal to the amount by which the Healing check was passed. A successful Healing check applied to an injured character doubles the rate at which the character heals.

Hiding (Base = 5%)

Countered by: Observation.

This is the skill of concealing yourself, somebody else, or some object somewhere where you, they or it will not be found by prying eyes or heard by curious ears. If you want to sit somewhere for a long period of time and remain unseen you should use this skill instead of Sneaking.

Investigation (Base = 10%)

Countered by: Obfuscation.

This skill represents the boring parts of any espionage mission or investigative process – the legwork that doesn't need to be covered in detail. Talking to minor NPCs, reading up on someone's background, finding out what rumours are floating around, finding out what way the proverbial wind is blowing, that kind of thing. This skill is used to find out what is publicly known about an individual's activities, but not the specifics of why they are behaving that way, or anything that occurs in private. For example, a successful Investigation roll might let you work out that Bishop Theodore is currently in Paris to visit Count Ambrose, but won't let you know what the Bishop and the Count discuss behind closed doors.

In addition, this skill counters Rumourmongering.

Negotiation (Base = 5%)

Countered by: Negotiation.

This skill is used in discussions with individuals and small groups in order to persuade them to do you a favour or support your cause. It can be countered by the individuals you are trying to negotiate with, if the proposal is clearly not beneficial to them, and can also be countered by other people attempting to negotiate with them – at the same time, or later on. It's difficult to find someone who can stay bought. Having the facts on your side should give you favourable bonuses to Negotiation rolls. So should fat bribes, and proposing something which is in line with someone's agenda.

Obfuscation (Base = 10%)

This skill counters Investigation. Unlike many other counter-skills, this is rolled *before* the relevant active skill is rolled. Obfuscation is the art of moving in mysterious ways: successful Obfuscation makes it more difficult to find out what your character is up to beyond the obvious. If Bishop Theodore is in Paris to visit Count Ambrose and successfully Obfuscates, investigators will not find out that he is in town to visit Count Ambrose, although – unless the Bishop travelled incognito – they’ll know he’s in Paris for some reason.

A successful Obfuscation roll imposes a penalty to Investigation rolls of your business equal to the amount by which you succeeded your roll. A failed Obfuscation roll means that you have blundered in some way and let your cover slip: investigators can claim a bonus to their Investigation roll equal to the amount by which you failed the roll.

Observation (Base = 10%)

Countered by: Observation.

A marvellous counter-skill, used to detect those using Disguise, Hiding, Sneaking, and Eavesdropping. It can also be used to tail people if they are travelling through a large crowd, or to “stake out” the place where they are staying from across the street: the target may roll Observation to counter this use of the skill.

Oration (Base = 5%)

Countered by: Oration.

The marvellous ability to convince a mob of peasants to burn a woman they have known all their lives because she is a witch. This skill is used to sway large crowds. Having the facts on your side can help, as can playing up to the crowd’s prejudices and agendas: both these things should give you nice bonuses to your roll.

Poisoning (Base = 0%)

Countered by: Health *and* Healing.

This skill allows the user to prepare and administer poisons. Murder by poisoning is difficult to pull off correctly: it’s nigh-impossible to make sure the dose goes to the correct target unless you administer it personally, and to add insult to injury it might not even kill them. A poisoned individual loses 10 points of Health immediately. They may then make a Health check: if they succeed, they are able to vomit up or bleed out the poison and no longer suffer any of the ill effects of it. (An emetic or leech applied immediately after the poison is administered can give a +20 bonus to this Health check).

If they are still poisoned, they will lose 1 Health point every day until they either die or pass a Health check. Poisoning victims may make only 1 Health check per week to shrug off the effects of poison. They cannot heal or regain Health points in any way until they pass the Health check. If a physician can make a successful Healing check they can give the patient a bonus to their next Health check equal to the number of points by which the Healing check was passed.

Rumourmongering (Base = 20% of Contacts Resource)

Countered by: Integrity *OR* Investigation.

This is a somewhat risky way of raising the stakes when you are about to make a horrible accusation about someone. Using this skill allows you to spread a malicious

rumour about another character. This rumour does not immediately hurt their Integrity – nasty things are whispered about important people all the time – but if the rumour later proves (or “proves” in the case of untrue rumours) to be true, the Integrity loss from the misdeed or failing exposed is increased by 5 points. However, should the rumour be proved (or “proved”) false, the Integrity of the target will receive a 5 point bonus!

So, for example, if you started a rumour that Bishop Theodore practices usury, and it is later shown that this is the case, he would lose 45 points of Integrity instead of the usual 40. However, if instead he managed to prove that he didn’t practice usury, he’d receive 5 points of Integrity.

On discovering that nasty rumours are spreading about them, characters may attempt to counter with Integrity OR Investigation. A successful Integrity check (modified by the degree to which the rumourmongering check succeeded) will simply stop the rumour in its tracks – people don’t consider it credible. A successful Investigation check allows the rumour to continue, but allows the defending character to find out who started the rumour.

Sneaking (Base = 5%)

Countered by: Observation.

This can be used to follow people across country, or through sparsely-populated streets in towns, or to sneak into places where you are not meant to be. It is important when Sneaking to keep on the move: if you wish to remain in one place for a prolonged period of time without being seen, you should use Hiding.

Traits

Some Traits are suitable for Bishops, some for Henchmen, some for both. (B) next to the name of a Trait indicates that it is for Bishops only, (H) indicates that it is for Henchmen only, and B/H indicates that both Bishops and Henchmen can buy it.

Note that unless they buy one of the other Health traits, all characters get the Normal Health trait for free.

Note also that this is in no way an exhaustive trait list. Feel free to make up your own and confirm them with your GM!

Health Traits

Normal Health (B/H) (0 points).

Health points are a means of tracking the current state of a character’s physical well-being. Henchmen and Bishops, being somewhat more important to the game than Underlings, begin with 60 Health points as standard. When you lose Health points, you regain them at a rate of 1 a day unless you are suffering from poison or some kind of disease.

Robust Health (B/H) (5 points).

You are hale and hearty, and start the game with 70 Health points.

Miraculous Health (B/H) (15 points).

You are in fine form! You may start the game with 90 Health points and heal at a rate of 2 Health points per day.

Poor Health (B/H) (-5 points).

You're unfit, unwell, or otherwise not in peak condition. You begin the game with 50 Health points.

Frail Health (B/H) (-15 points).

You're not at all well. You begin the game with a mere 40 Health points, and when you are injured you heal at a rate of 1 Health point every 2 days.

Dark Secrets

Heretic (B/H) (-20 points)

You are a Cathar, or a Bogomil, or a Satanist, or some other variety of horrible heretic. Just about the only good thing about this is the sense of community: you get a bonus of 30 points to your Contacts Resource, because you can rely on your fellow heretics for aid and support. Of course, they'll ask you for favours from time to time too, but that's fine, right? All helps the cause, eh?

You will lose 90 points of Integrity if you are exposed as a heretic. (If you're still in the game after that, *wow*. The Church probably changed its doctrine a little so that it didn't have to execute you.) You can reduce this loss to a far more manageable 40 point penalty if you name and shame all your fellow heretics. Sending former friends of yours to be burned at the stake is going to make you a marked man: other heretics will try and kill you in revenge.

Jewish Bishop (B) (-10 points).

You are of Jewish descent, and you probably have some Jewish relatives who haven't converted to Christianity. It isn't going to wreck your career if this gets out – after all, you've clearly converted – but people are going to look at you differently. If your heritage is exposed during the game you will lose 20 points of Integrity and learn first hand that racism isn't cool.

Secret Lover (Female) (B) (0 points).

You have a lady friend. She is presumably of a suitably high social class (one night stands with the lower orders aren't worth keeping track of), and therefore can use her connections to your advantage: while you are maintaining your relationship with this woman, you can claim a bonus of 10 points to your Integrity OR your Contacts OR your Wealth Resource.

Of course, being caught hurts. You'll lose the bonus due to the lady in question's loss of status, and you will be expected to put her aside. You will also lose 20 points of integrity.

NB: It's a matter of historical dispute as to whether Bishops ever married before canon law made it illegal in Pope Gregory VII's reign (beginning 1073), since it was theologically frowned upon since the 4th Century AD, so if you are playing in the early medieval period your GM might decide that it's OK for Bishops to be married. In that case, this flaw assumes an extramarital affair.

Your lover is an NPC controlled by the GM. If you are horrible, distant, or simply don't pay any attention to your lover, the GM may have them break off the relationship at any time.

Secret Lover (Male) (B) (-15 points).

You have a gentleman admirer, of a similar social class to yourself. He can use his connections to your advantage – while you are maintaining your relationship with him you can claim a bonus of 10 points to your Integrity OR your Contacts OR your Wealth Resource.

Of course, if you get caught it's curtains. Your lover will have to flee and never see you again, or he will be put to death for sodomy. Yes. Put to death. That's what they did back then. Naturally, you will lose the bonus you had for associating with him, and you will lose a punishing **50** points of Integrity. If your Integrity reaches zero I highly suggest eloping with your boyfriend, otherwise they'll be putting you to death too. Being gay in the Middle Ages was horrible.

Your lover is an NPC controlled by the GM. If you are horrible, distant, or simply don't pay any attention to your lover, the GM may have them break off the relationship at any time.

Special Friend (Opposite Sex) (H) (10 points).

The Henchman's equivalent of the Bishop's Secret Lover (Female) Trait, this relationship is perfectly legitimate and nobody really has a problem with it. Awesome! You get to add 10 points to your Integrity OR your Contacts OR your Wealth Resource to represent your boyfriend or girlfriend's influence. Your lover is an NPC controlled by the GM. If you are horrible, distant, or simply don't pay any attention to your lover, the GM may have them break off the relationship at any time.

Special Friend (Same Sex) (H) (-15 points).

This is the Henchman's equivalent of the Bishop's Secret Lover (Male) Trait. This is a problem because you are not living in the 21st Century: in the medieval period, your relationship with your partner breaks the laws of God and Man. You get to add 10 points to your Integrity OR your Contacts OR your Wealth Resource to represent your partner's influence, but if you are discovered your partner will be put to death and you will lose 50 points of Integrity (and will be put to death also if your Integrity drops to 0 or below because of this).

As with the rest of these quirks, your lover is an NPC controlled by the GM. If you are horrible, distant, or simply don't pay any attention to your lover, the GM may have them break off the relationship at any time.

Woman (B) (-30 points).

You, er, have the wrong bits to be a Bishop. I don't know how you became a Bishop. But you're not supposed to be one. This is all very wrong.

If you're caught, you'll lose 60 points of Integrity. If you're still in the game at that point, then you're clearly well-loved enough to change the Church's view of women in the clergy: you are allowed to remain a Bishop, but in this incredibly patronising

token female way, and it will be awfully difficult to claw your way back to your former heights.

Henchman Careers and Origins

Actually Important (H) (10 points).

You need an Integrity rating of at least 50 to take this Trait.

You are a minor member of the nobility. You get a 10 point bonus to your Integrity and may always gain access to the court of the King or Emperor to whom you owe fealty. However, you have little secular power – you’re only a minor mover and shaker.

Career Criminal (H) (5 points).

You cannot begin the game with Integrity greater than 30 if you take this Trait.

You are a goddamn crook. You have contacts with the criminal underworld in your home town or city, and can make contact with crooks elsewhere in the world reasonably easily. You get a 10 point bonus to your Contacts score when you are trying to seek out fellow criminals.

Guild Membership (H) (10 points).

To take this Trait you must have Integrity or Contacts equal to or greater than 40.

You are a member of a trade guild, an association of craftsmen who keep their trade secrets to themselves and exert considerable influence within towns and cities. You get a bonus of 10 to your Contacts skill when trying to get in touch with someone of importance in a town or city, and can always be assumed to be able to find a fellow craftsman. In addition, you get a free skill, at a base rating equal to half your Contacts, Wealth or Influence score (whichever is highest), in a skill appropriate to the Guild – Baking, Glassmaking, Stonecutting, Masonry, that kind of thing. A little specialised, but you never know when it might come in handy.

Note that there was no such thing as a “Thieves’ Guild” or “Assassins’ Guild” or “Beggars’ Guild” in the Middle Ages, and if you’re convinced that there were you should read less fantasy novels. If you want to be a career criminal I’d take the “Career Criminal” trait.

Known to Be Jewish (H) (10 points).

You are Jewish. The world knows it. People hate you for it. You may not buy the Actually Important or Royal Blood traits. If you also buy the Guild Membership trait you should have a Disguise skill of at least 50%: you are part of the Guild under a cover identity. The only job permitted to you is usury.

So, given how much being Jewish sucks in the Middle Ages, why is this a positive trait? Because having his own tame usurer is very, very, very useful indeed for your Bishop. Every time your Bishop makes an Upkeep roll, you gain 5 Wealth points. More importantly, you can act as a front for your Bishop’s own usurious practices: your Bishop can provide the capital to help expand your loan-peddling business, protection from persecution, and perhaps a few heavies to collect debts, and in turn

you legitimise his own loan shark activities by attaching your name to them. Effectively, your Bishop can get the 20-point bonus to his upkeep rolls for practicing usury without any legal repercussions, and in return he can shield you from the prejudice and bigotry that endangers you and your family. Pretty sweet deal, huh?

If your Bishop accepts a loan from you, then either you or he must lose 10 Wealth points (depending on whether your Bishop intends on paying the money back). You may only do this once per game year.

If you ever run out of Wealth points, you can no longer practice usury – you're bankrupt, and people know it. On the other hand, if you let your Wealth grow and grow and grow, it is going to be more and more tempting for other people to kill you and snatch your money. It is a fine balancing act you must perform.

Royal Blood (H) (40 points).

You are of the Royal family of the nation in which you reside. You aren't likely to gain power – 1D3 + 2 people will need to die for that to happen – but if you do you'll get an immediate 20 point bonus to your Integrity, Wealth, and Contacts resources, as well as all the power and majesty that comes with Kingship. Even if you haven't, you can expect to be granted an audience by pretty much anyone you care to name, and you have a 20-point bonus to your Integrity. You may also use your Royal privileges to protect your Bishop: in any instance where your Bishop has to accept an Integrity penalty, you may take on part or all of the penalty instead.

Perks for Bishops

Cardinal (B) (30 points).

This Trait is only available after 1059 AD, and you must have an Integrity of at least 50 to buy it.

You are a Cardinal, which means you are a Bishop or Archbishop who can vote in Papal elections. If you have an Integrity of 80 or over, you will definitely be considered for the Papacy if you are willing to accept it. In a competitive campaign, you win the game if you become Pope and survive for over a year.

Episcopal Inquisitor (B) (15 points).

This Trait is only available after 1184 AD.

Technically speaking, once the Episcopal Inquisition began in 1184 all Bishops were empowered to lead investigations of heresies and preside over trials of heretics. Possessing this trait means you are good at it. Your Negotiation and Oratory skills each get a bonus of 10 points when used in the course of heresy trials.

Papal Inquisitor (B) (30 points).

This Trait is only available after 1230 AD.

The Pope has empowered you to investigate heresies across Christendom. You can take control of any heresy trial that is not already being presided over by a Papal Inquisitor, and you get all the benefits of being an Episcopal Inquisitor; after 1252, you are legally allowed to use torture, regardless of the feelings of the secular

authorities. (Prior to 1252 Inquisitors may ask the secular authorities to torture suspected heretics instead, but they might refuse if they are soft and squeamish.) You also gain access to the Dominican Order's extensive records on heresies, giving you a 10 point bonus to your Investigation skill when investigating heresy.

Personal Confessor (B) (15 points).

You are the personal confessor of somebody very important – your Archbishop, or your King, or your Emperor, for example. If you want to convince them to adopt a particular policy, you can simply make a Persuade roll and if you succeed they'll do it. You can only do this once a year, however.

Papal Confessor (B) (60 points).

You are the personal confessor of the Pope himself. You want him to adopt a policy? Make a successful Persuade roll and he's happy to do it. You can only do this once a year. (Note that you can only gain this position through taking some seriously scary disadvantages, suggesting that you yourself need to confess far more than the Pope does. This is deliberate for the purposes of delicious comedy.)

Allegiance

Bishops can't sit on the fence: they're political entities who need to be sure of who their masters are. Players should sit down and think about where their loyalties lie; in a co-operative game you can do this as a group, but naturally in a competitive game this is a private matter.

Precisely which matters of allegiance are important depend on the time period of the campaign and which aspects of Church history the GM decides to bring to the fore; here's some suggestions.

Rome vs. Home: Before Pope Gregory VII reclaimed the power of investiture for the Papacy, local kings appointed Bishops in their own country. As a result, a good many Bishops felt more loyalty towards the rulers who had rewarded them so than towards the Church that they in theory were now a part of.

Church vs. Empire: If the campaign takes place in the tenth and eleventh centuries, there's going to be tension between the people of Rome (especially the noble families) and the Holy Roman Empire over the control of the Papacy. Emperors are going to be constantly appointing German Popes in order to impose their will on the Vatican, and the Romans are constantly going to be bumping them off and replacing them with Romans. While strictly speaking a Bishop's loyalty is to the Pope, many Bishops – especially those within the Empire itself – are going to have been appointed by the Emperor himself, and others still might feel inclined to side with the power with the greatest political and military might.

Pope vs. Antipope: The Western Schism is, perhaps, the time when allegiance is the most important. Are you supporting the Pope in Rome, or the Pope in Avignon? Or the Pope in *Pisa*?

Catholic vs. Heretic: It isn't impossible that a few characters might actually have spiritual priorities. It's against the spirit of the game (which is one of rampant

cynicism and megalomania), but it's possible. Go on, play a heretic. Your fellow players will appreciate it, especially in a competitive game...

System

Rolling the Dice

Dictatus Papae works on a percentile system, as noted previously. To make a check, simply consult your rating in a particular skill or Resource, modify it based on situational factors, roll percentile dice, and try and get equal to or less than your skill or Resource rating. Easy!

If you make a roll of 1 to 5 on the dice, and your roll is equal to or less than your modified skill value, you have rolled a critical success. You may add 5 points to the relevant Skill or Resource unless the roll was for an Underling – they're not important enough to bother tracking this sort of thing. Your GM may decide to give you some nebulous additional in-character bonus for critical successes as well, but I don't advise it: a bonus to your skill or Resource rating is good enough. (This does not apply to Health checks.)

Once a skill roll has been made with regards to a particular task, you need not – indeed, *cannot* – repeat it until circumstances materially change. If you failed, you failed, if you succeeded, you succeeded. End of story.

Contested Rolls and Combat

Frequently, characters are going to be opposing one another's rolls. People like to do horrible things to each other, I can't help that!

All skills have an opposing skill or Resource which can be used to defend against them. Unless stated otherwise in the skill description, when an opposed roll is required, first the "active" character – the one who is attempting to do something (whether it be "kill this guy" or "spy on the meeting") – makes his or her roll. If they fail, then they've failed. If they succeed, the passive character – the one who is trying not to be killed or overheard – must make a roll against the relevant opposing skill or Trait, with a 2 point penalty for every point by which the attacker won the roll (so, if I had an Attack skill of 50 and I rolled 40, you would have a -5 modifier to your Defence skill when you make your roll). If the defender makes the roll, the active character's task fails; if the defender fails the roll, the active character succeeds. In situations where the passive character should not necessarily know that something is afoot, the GM should roll for them in secret.

In a combat situation, the defender's Health score is reduced by 1 point for every 2 points by which the defender failed his roll. Every 2 points of Health lost translates to a penalty of -1 to take any physically intensive actions, including defending yourself from further attacks. When your Health score reaches 0, you die.

Combat Against Multiple Opponents: In combat against multiple opponents, attackers must split their Attack score equally between as many opponents as they choose to target – so someone with an Attack score of 90 could attack a single individual with a skill of 90, or two opponents with an effective skill of 45, or three with an effective skill of 30, and so forth. Similarly, when defending oneself against

multiple assailants, one's Defence skill must be distributed equally between as many opponents as choose to attack you – so if you have a Defence of 80 and you are attacked by four people, your effective Defence against each of them is 20.

The Combat Sequence: Combat is turn-based. At the beginning of each turn of combat, the players and GM should note down in secret what each participating character under their control intends to do, and then reveal their intent simultaneously. Attacks are taken to occur simultaneously, and penalties for Health loss only apply once the round ends – so it is possible for two characters to kill each other simultaneously.

Guarding People: In addition to attacking in their turn, an individual or unit can choose to position themselves to guard a weaker combatant. Attacks declared against an individual being guarded in this way must be used against their guards instead, and the individual being guarded cannot attack anybody. Bishops are strongly advised to use this option when they have their bodyguards handy during a fight.

Combining Skills: A group of Underlings who have trained together as a fighting unit may combine their Attack and Defence skills and Health scores to effectively act as a single, highly effective entity in combat. Not only does this reflect the additional efficiency they gain from having trained together, but it also makes combat swifter. For example, a group of six Underlings with Attack and Defence scores of 20 each and Health scores of 50 each would have a total Attack and Defence of 120, and a total Health of 300. Whenever its Health score drops by 50, one of the Underlings dies, the total Attack and Defence scores of the unit are recalculated (so it now has Attack 100, Defence 100, and Health of around 250). This means that a unit with an especially badly-hurt member can be mildly worse off in combat than a smaller unit whose members are all healthy, but I feel that that's actually kind of realistic.

Different Bishops' Underlings are assumed to have trained separately, so you cannot pool your Underlings with those of other Bishops to create an unstoppable super-army. Only up to six Underlings can combine their skills at once: greater numbers have trouble acting together as a coherent unit.

Equipment for Combat: Weapons give bonuses to your Attack skill, armour to your Defence skill, following this simple scheme:

Weapons:

- Two-handed weapons: +20.
- Crossbows: +15.
- One-handed weapons (short swords, longswords, maces and so forth): +15.
- Bows: +10.
- Knives and poorly-maintained weapons: +5.

Armour:

- Plate mail: +20.
- Chain mail: +15.
- Leather armour and poorly-maintained chain or plate mail: +5.

When combining the skills of Underlings, bonuses from weapons and armour are only counted *once* – in other words, the bonus is added only after the base Attack and Defence scores of the unit members are added together. A unit of six people with Attack skills of 20 using two-handed swords will have a combined Attack skill of 140, not 240. Only the *lowest* applicable weapon and armour modifier applies: so don't put an unarmed, unarmoured man in the middle of a bunch of guys with two-handed swords and plate mail. They'll just be a liability.

You may note that this combat system is simple and bloody. It is intentionally designed so that a fair fight is as dangerous to the initiator as it is to the intended target. The lesson here is that you should *never* willingly get into a fair fight. Make it as unfair as possible, in your favour, or steer clear of it! Choosing the right moment to initiate violence is the key to deploying it effectively.

Upkeep and Income

Maintaining the lifestyle of a Bishop is expensive. On a regular basis determined by the GM (I suggest every year of game time, assuming that each session of game time covers a decent portion of a year, but do what you like) a Wealth check must be rolled for the Bishop: failure of this check means that the Bishop's financial affairs have deteriorated, and he must reduce his Wealth score by a punishing 10 points. This is seriously bad news, since it makes additional failures more likely, and will therefore make the Bishop in question even more desperate to find means of income! On the other hand, a critical success on one's Upkeep roll adds 5 points to a Bishop's Wealth rating.

The yearly Wealth check is modified by the Bishop's income and regular expenses. It is assumed that the expenses of running the Bishop's household servants and maintaining his primary Henchman are covered by the income he derives from his diocese in tithes. Additional sources of income modify the Bishop's effective Wealth rating for the check as follows:

- Taking responsibility for additional dioceses: +5 per diocese.
- Being given control of a barony or dukedom by a King or Emperor, or being granted equivalent lands in the Papal States: +10 per barony.
- Successfully soliciting donations from wealthy individuals: +5 per individual donating.

There are also additional means of income a Bishop might pursue which breach ecclesiastical law. Any Bishop caught practicing the following crimes will lose Integrity points equal to the bonus the below practices give to their Upkeep rolls (so being caught manufacturing relics means you lose 15 points of Integrity), and will usually have to stop that line of business immediately. This is where plausible deniability and using your Henchman to provide a front becomes important.

- Manufacturing and selling relics: +15.
- Selling indulgences: +10.
- Selling offices within the Church: +10.
- Demanding a fee for performing ecclesiastical duties (births, marriages, deaths, Confession, that sort of thing): +5.

(Doubtless players will be able to come up with entirely new and despicable ecclesiastical crimes to commit, but GMs should be able to use the above as a guideline.)

Selling offices within the Church and demanding a fee for performing ecclesiastical duties come under the category of “simony”, and are not as harshly persecuted within the Church in the early medieval period. In games set before the reign of Pope Gregory VII – before 1073 AD – a Bishop does not need to cease practicing simony if he is exposed, and only takes half the usual hit to his Integrity.

Especially desperate Bishops may wish to use their Resources and Henchmen to break secular laws as well as ecclesiastical ones. This is a dangerous game to play – but it’s profitable. Getting caught doing this is going to make you lose Integrity equal to *twice* the bonus it gives you on your Upkeep roll (so, being caught supporting banditry will make you lose 40 points of Integrity). You will also have to immediately cease the line of business, and will have to defend yourself before the authorities. (If you make an immediate Integrity check the Church will save you from the secular courts, but they will still try to find out whether you are guilty and may defrock you if you are found guilty).

- Hiring out your Henchman as an assassin: +30.
- Practicing usury: +20.
- Aiding bandits: +20.
- Running a brothel: +20.
- Fencing stolen goods: +15.

Again, players will almost always find some new and disgusting way to break the law for profit, and GMs should use the above for guidance.

Lastly, some expenses:

- Employing extra Henchman after the first: -10 each.
- Employing groups of Underlings: -5 per group. (0 if you let their weapons and armour become poorly maintained, -10 if you want them to have plate mail and two-handed weapons.)
- Maintaining a mistress in a suitably lavish lifestyle: -10.
- Paying fines due to crimes: -5 to -20, GM’s choice.
- Paying off debts to loan sharks: -15.
- Being blackmailed: -10 to -25, GM’s choice (based on consultation with blackmailer if the blackmailer is a PC).

A Bishop may avoid the need to roll a Wealth check by simply withholding moneys owed to his superiors in the Church. To do this, the Bishop must convince his superiors that the income from his lands and holdings has been low this year, and therefore he cannot send as much tithe as he would like to: a normal Persuasion roll is required, with a +10 bonus to the Persuade skill if the Bishop has some especially convincing piece of evidence, or a suitable bribe, or perhaps blackmail material on the

superior in question, and a -10 penalty if the Bishop has failed a previous attempt to convince his superiors that he is too poor to pay tithe.

Whether his superiors are convinced through persuasion, blackmail or bribery is irrelevant: what is important is that if the attempt fails, the Bishop must make the Wealth roll as usual, with a -5 penalty to the Wealth rating because the Church authorities are paying special attention to the Bishop's account for that year. If the attempt succeeds, the Bishop need not make the Wealth roll, but the GM must note down that the Bishop committed fraud during the year in question. Intrepid PCs or NPCs may uncover this terrible crime, which will obviously have terrible repercussions.

Keeping Up Appearances

Integrity, while entirely optional to Henchmen and irrelevant to Underlings, is vital to Bishops. When your Integrity reaches zero, you are as out of the game as surely as if you had died. Exactly what form this withdrawal from the game takes is a matter for you to decide with the GM. If your last scrap of Integrity was lost because a vicious crime you committed was exposed, for example, it would be appropriate for your character to be arrested by the secular authorities, the Church washing its hands of you. Alternately, if it was an ecclesiastical matter which caused your downfall the Church could defrock or even excommunicate you, destroying your position in society and leaving you without income or resources.

Conversely, a good Integrity is vital for furthering political ambitions you may have! An Integrity of 50 is required to become a Cardinal. A player character cannot be considered as a candidate for a position such as the Archbishop of Canterbury unless they have an Integrity of at least 70. To be even considered as Pope when the time comes to choose a new pontiff, a character needs to have an Integrity of 80 or greater!

Events which cause an individual's Integrity to change must be played through: you can't lose or gain Integrity in downtime. Indeed, half the point of most Dictatus Papae games will be to maximise your own Integrity while destroying that of your opponents.

Some things which can change your Integrity score:

- Successfully prosecuting a heretic: +5.
- Disproving a malicious rumour about you: +5.
- Successfully prosecuting a heretic who has a prominent position in society: +10.
- Undertaking a pilgrimage: +5 if there was no risk to you (say, going from London to Canterbury with a small army of bodyguards), +10 if the pilgrimage was risky (going from London to Canterbury on your own), and +15 if the pilgrimage was very dangerous (going to Jerusalem while it is out of Christian hands).
- Inspiring a Crusade: +20.
- Exposing the misdeeds of a fellow Bishop: an Integrity bonus equal to half the amount they are penalised.

- Having your misdeeds exposed: Some appropriate amount determined by the GM. If you've been getting a money from your illegal activities, whether it's a regular income (ie, help on your Upkeep rolls) or a one-off thing (in other words, help on a single Wealth roll), you'll lose Integrity points equal to the bonus the crime gave you if it is merely an ecclesiastical crime, and equal to *twice* the bonus if it's actually a secular crime.
- Being declared a heretic: -20, and you'll have to publicly repent of your heresy.
- Being officially rebuked by your superiors: -10.
- Being officially rebuked by the Pope himself: -20. (If you are playing during the Western Schism, this only counts if you actually owe fealty to the Pope in question).
- Being excommunicated: -60. If your Integrity isn't wiped out by this, you can overturn the excommunication by undertaking a dangerous pilgrimage – you don't get the usual Integrity bonus for doing so, but you should still play it out. (If you are playing during the Western Schism this only applies if you actually owe fealty to the Pope who excommunicates you.)

The Integrity of Henchmen should be tracked as well. Henchmen being much more diverse than Bishops, the things which cause them to gain or lose Integrity should reflect their place in life. A merchantile Henchman, for example, should gain Integrity from pulling off impressive business deals, and lose it if his financial status is called into question. A Henchman who is a bloody-handed criminal, meanwhile, should gain Integrity if he or she successfully constructs a reputable, apparently law-abiding cover identity, and lose it if their misdeeds become known. Henchmen whose Integrity reaches zero can remain in the game, but they can never gain additional Integrity, and they will be hunted by their creditors, or people seeking the King's reward for their head, or whatever implacable external threat the GM deems appropriate. The Disguise skill comes in very handy at this point.

Once an Integrity penalty is awarded, it cannot be "reversed" by later events. If you lose Integrity because some horrible crime of yours came to light, you don't get the Integrity back if you exonerate yourself – mud sticks, and the damage to your reputation has been done. Conversely, an Integrity bonus can be lost if it later turns out to be based on a false premise: for example, if it turns out that you didn't go on that pilgrimage to the Holy Land at all, but hid in your castle and ate pudding for a year and sent a lookalike in your stead, you'd lose the Integrity points you'd earned from faking the pilgrimage.

GMs should bear in mind that the burden of proof in medieval court cases was less than that in the modern era – they simply didn't have the forensic methods required to come up with the sort of damning, unassailable evidence which we have these days. Witness testimony is very important, and thus discrediting your opponent's witnesses (preferably before they even take to the stand) is vital to winning a court case. GMs should also note that a conviction in court isn't always necessary to cause someone to lose Integrity, and won't necessarily always cause as much Integrity loss as you might expect. If the general public, or the Church, or high society in general are convinced of your guilt, it doesn't matter if you are exonerated in Court, and if they are convinced of your innocence a conviction won't damage your reputation as much as it might do.

The Campaign Itself

How Would a *Dictatus Papae* Game Work?

I have every confidence in the ability of GMs to structure their own campaigns. That said, here's how I would run a *Dictatus Papae* game: by chopping things up into discrete little phases, running a little like this:

Phase 1: The Conclave Phase

Named after the tastefully behind-closed-doors gathering of Cardinals which chooses Popes, the conclave phase is an opportunity for player character Bishops to speak civilly to one another and decide how they would like to deal with the situation they are presented with. Perhaps they are having a quiet word at whichever Royal, Imperial or Papal Court they spend their days; alternately, if they are geographically dispersed, they are exchanging letters.

In a co-operative game they might well have been given a mission from whichever superiors they answer to, Papal or otherwise, in which case this will give them an opportunity to formulate a plan of attack. In a competitive game, this will be the phase in which alliances are formed, threats made, and conspiracies hatched. In other words, this is where most of the intrigue happens.

Phase 2: The *Sub Rosa* Phase

Black ops time. This phase is for all those sneaky little actions which characters might get up to which they wouldn't want the general public knowing about. Often Henchmen rather than Bishops will be the prime movers in this phase, scuttling about and doing their masters' bidding. They might be venturing forth as a party if it's a co-operative game; in a competitive game they might still be acting in concert against a common foe, or perhaps two or three Bishops' minions will gang up to foil another PC's plans. This is where the espionage happens, as well as whatever intrigue is left over from the Conclave phase.

Phase 3: The *Ex Cathedra* Phase

This is for bold actions taken in the full light of day, mainly by Bishops, although the occasional high-Integrity Henchman might take action here. Declaring people heretics, exposing the perfidious treachery of the Holy Roman Empire, getting the Pope to declare a Crusade against Belgium, anything which involves Bishops or Henchmen standing up and taking action publicly happens here. Often, the intrigue and espionage of previous phases will have been devoted to setting things up for this point: here, in the *Ex Cathedra* phase, is where you get the big payoff.

What's the Timescale?

Personally, I'd have the three phases covering an in-game year, and ask for Upkeep rolls between Phases 3 and 1, but that's me. You do your own thing, man.

What Happens When a Character Drops Out?

Depends on the character!

If an Underling is killed or leaves a Bishop or Henchman's service, they can be replaced in downtime with a successful Wealth check – although the player may

decide that their Bishop can no longer afford the expense. An eliminated or retired Henchman should be somewhat more difficult to replace, and GMs are encourage to devote at least part of a session to the search for a new Henchman.

Bishops are a different matter. In a co-operative game, the player in question can simply make a new Bishop and move on – perhaps inheriting the previous character’s diocese and Henchmen and Underlings, or coming up with entirely new supporting characters as is their wish. In a competitive game, however, that player has *lost*. They can’t just jump straight back into the fray with a new Bishop. Here are some suggestions as to what you, as a player whose Bishop has just been defrocked, murdered, or burned at the stake might decide to do for the rest of the campaign.

- Keep playing your character’s Henchman. Your Henchman is going to want to find work to replace the income and support they have lost thanks to their connection to the Bishop – they will lose 5 points of either Wealth or Integrity (your choice, depending on the nature of the relationship between the ex-Bishop and the Henchman in question) *every game session* until they find a Bishop – or perhaps some NPC patron – who is willing to take them on and pay their upkeep. You’ll get to interact with the other PCs’ Bishops on a whole new level as you try to convince them that they simply can’t manage without your valuable services. Who knows? Perhaps you’ll end up attaching yourself to the winning team!
- Play a dedicated NPC. Collude with the GM and come up with a character who can enter the characters’ lives at this point and cause a ruckus – or perhaps take control of a previously-encountered NPC nemesis of the PCs. Any major, regularly-encountered NPC can be injected with a new and deadly lease of life when placed under the control of a player.
- Play incidental NPCs, other player’s Underlings, and other bit-part characters. Be the GM’s friendly NPC assistant.

That’s All Folks

This is a 24 Hour RPG produced for the Modus-Operandi.co.uk competition in Easter 2007. If you enjoy espionage-themed gaming, why not visit Modus-Operandi.co.uk for a wealth of resources – and don’t forget to browse the other competition entries, hosted on 1km1kt.net!

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