

Loopholes

A Spellbound Adventure

This introductory scenario is designed to highlight two aspects of the Spellbound system. First, it showcases the narrative nature of magic; the plot revolves around a Peruvian god's attempts to exploit loopholes in an oath it took centuries ago. Second, it mixes elements of both the horror and action genres: the player-characters are powerful magi caught in a chilling situation beyond their complete control. By the time it's all over, your players should have a new appreciation for the dangerous nature of Spellbound magic.

Oh, and if you don't already have it, you might want to pick up a copy of the Spellbound Core Book. This will make a lot more sense once you've read it.

www.Bayn.org/spellbound/core-book.html

The Back Story

The bloody rites of the Aztecs have their roots in the bloodthirsty predations of a Great Spirit known as the Crimson God. He demanded only one thing from those who worshipped him: human sacrifices.

Another American god, Quetzalcoatl, objected to these practices and spent generations maneuvering the Crimson God into a corner. The winged serpent forced his adversary to make an oath: "I will never again do harm, or cause another to do harm, to the creatures that walk the land, soar through the skies, or swim in the lakes, oceans, or rivers." This is the Curse of the Crimson God.

Since spilling the blood of its own lesser spirits does nothing to sate his bloodlust, the Crimson God has simply done without these last few millennia. Recently, things have changed. Mortal men have delivered to him a means to create living creatures that can bleed and feel pain like only mortals can, but are not protected under the terms of his oath.

His minions made contact with an oath merchant by the name of Hans Magnus. This powerful spellbinder owns, among other things, a biotechnology company. He

seduced the magus with promises of eternal life. All he had to do was import some equipment and geneticists to the Crimson God's mountain in Peru.

Hans agreed. To disguise his activities, Hans also had a mansion built atop the god's mountain, directly above the old temple where his scientists would do their work. With the help of the Crimson God's magic, they have engineered a species of humanoid plants... creatures that do not walk the land.

Things were going quite well for all concerned, until the plant people learned how to scream. That was when Hans' conscience started to nag at him. He decided to back out of the deal and began secret preparations to move his men and equipment out of the area.

Just in case the Crimson God double-crossed him, Hans also arranged for a group of magi who owe him favors (many enforced via the Solemn Oath) to fly out to his mansion. Unfortunately, the Crimson God made Hans swear an oath never to reveal the details of their arrangement to others, so he could not tell his friends what he was up to. His invitations stated only that he needed their help. Hans did prepare a message for them and saved it to a file on his computer. If he failed, they might be able to pick up the pieces.

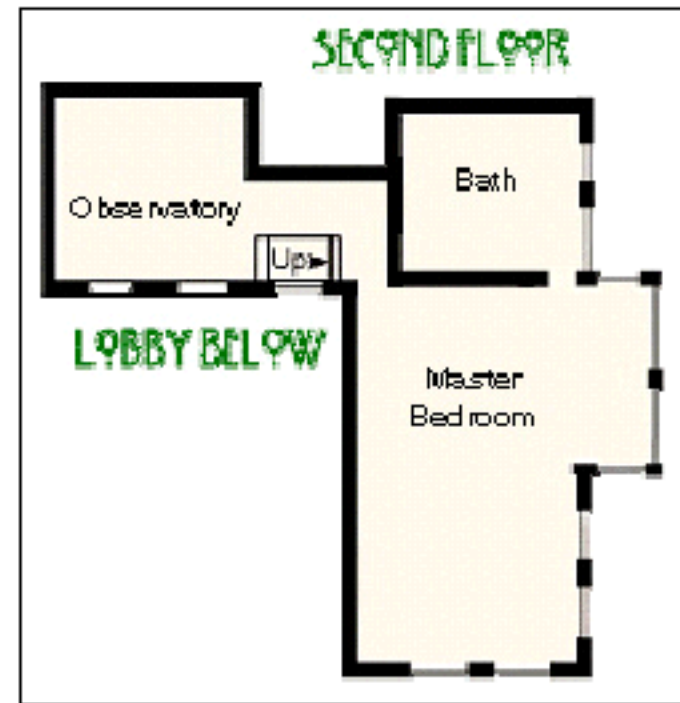
Sure enough, the Crimson God double-crossed Hans. He decided to fulfill his promise to Hans early: he granted him eternal life by placing him in a kind of suspended animation. Hans is trapped in an euphoric dream while his body sleeps an ageless sleep. The god then seduced the geneticists into poisoning the servants, and his leonids (see "Supporting Cast") took it from there.

That was three days ago. Now, Hans' calvary is about to arrive, during a short break in the storm that has swept through the mountains...

The Mansion

Hans Magnus' mansion is perched atop a remote peak in the lush mountains of Peru. It is accessible only by helicopter, which Hans "borrows" from one of his local companies. It's clean, modern architecture is strikingly at odds with the primitive surroundings.

Inside, it was quite the posh pad, until the leonids trashed it like a rock band on steroids. They smashed their way in through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the Fireside Room, then went ape shit. The power is still on (for the Laboratory), but the lights have all been broken.



Arrival

The pilot sets down on the mansion's helipad and tells the magi to go inside while he ties the chopper down. The walkway from the helipad is enclosed in glass, and provides a spectacular view of the mountain range.

The Lobby is dark and deserted, but perceptive characters may notice subtle signs of vandalism: muddy footprints, torn paintings, and the wind wafting in through the broken windows in the Fireside room. Of course, no one comes to greet them.

Before they have too much time to investigate, they hear a loud crash from the helipad! (If anyone gets cold feet before this, and tries to leave on the helicopter, these things happen before they clear the walkway.) A tree trunk has split and fallen over on the helicopter, crushing it and pinning the pilot inside the wreckage. They see the engine throw a spark onto a growing pool of gasoline...

There are precious few seconds before the entire helipad erupts into flame. This should be a tense scene that lets your players know their survival is on the line. If they're going to save the pilot, someone will have to lift the tree up while someone else pulls the unconscious man out. If they find a way to stop the chopper from exploding,

they'll hear the helipad's support beams giving way beneath them. Just as the last character makes it to the walkway, there's either a crash or an explosion that sends shards of wood and glass raining down around them! (If you want to throw in some weirdness right away, have one of the characters notice fleeting, predatory shadows in the trees around the helipad. Mwahaha!)

The rest of this section describes the mansion's various rooms. Give your players as much time as they need to explore the place. There's plenty to see...

The Fireside Room

The first thing they'll notice about the mansion's living room is that the patio windows have been shattered. However, the storm is blowing rain at a severe angle away from the patio, so the room itself is still quite livable. The furniture has been shredded, and the bar smashed, but the piano still plays okay.

The hard wood floor is covered with muddy tracks. Inspection will reveal two types: large paws and human hands. The odd thing is that they appear to alternate, like they belong to a single creature (the leonids, of course).

The Guest Rooms

Both of the guest bedrooms and the sitting room have been demolished. The remains of clothing and bed-sheets litter the floors. Lamps, televisions, clocks, and mirrors have been thrown around as if by a whirlwind. There are ragged, claw-like tears all over the walls and doors. Amidst this destruction, the magi should still be able to discern that there were people staying in these rooms prior to the vandalism.

The Gazebo (see below) is visible from any of the windows in these rooms. Flashes of lightning provide enough illumination to see... *things* moving in and around it. There's simply too much rain to get a good look.

The Kitchen

There's still food in the fridge (which is still running) and perceptive characters can ascertain that food has been prepared here since the time of the vandalism. In other words, someone's still here. (The secret door to the Laboratory is in the pantry, marked on the map by a pointing hand icon. Don't let your players stumble upon it.)

The Office

Hans' office has been similarly ransacked. Broken books are piled in the center of the room, their pages torn out and their covers gnawed upon. Paintings and photos are strewn all about. The computer monitor on his desk has been smashed in, but the computer tower is safe and sound underneath. A floppy disk is sticking out of the disk drive... and the magi's names are written on the label. (If no one has a laptop, they'll be able to hook the tower up to the television set in the Master Bedroom.)

The Observatory

Upstairs, there is far less wanton destruction. The observatory is an empty room with big windows that look out over the Peruvian mountains. The faint outline of a summoning circle is still visible on the hard wood floor. Anyone with an occult-related Skill can make out the name "The Crimson God" among its many arcane glyphs.

The Master Bedroom

Hans Magnus sleeps peacefully in his bed on the upper floor. This room is conspicuously untouched, clean except for a fine layer of dust. A widescreen television in the corner is the only working monitor in the mansion. Luckily, it has all of the hook-ups needed to connect his computer tower. There is nothing in here that pertains to Hans' deal with the Crimson God.

The Carriage House

This combined servants' quarters and garage is external to the mansion itself; it can be reached by leaving through the front door (or the servant's entrance in the Kitchen) and following a stone path. It is a simple, square, two-story building. The garage area contains the beaten and useless remains of a jeep and two all-terrain vehicles. The living areas are as deserted and trashed as most of the mansion. Perceptive characters may notice a few streaks of blood near the door (from when the leonids dragged the servant's bodies out to the Gazebo).

The Gazebo

This is where the leonids dissected the servants. Now, it stands as a blood-soaked monument to the Crimson God's inhuman cruelty. The corpses have spent three days in the rain, so the stench of rotting meat is overwhelming. Their intestines have been strung up around the gazebo's support beams. The rest of their organs lie in piles around their feet. A few appear to have been gnawed upon. All the while, *things* move in the characters' peripheral vision, just out of sight.

The Scientists

Hopefully, your players will be good and creeped out by this point. Now, it's time to step up the action! The geneticists will come up from their Laboratory (when the Kitchen is empty) to cook themselves a meal. That's when the Winged Serpents attack! They've been hiding around the mansion for many hours, waiting for the humans to show themselves.

The attack causes all kinds of noise, especially in the pot-and-pan-filled Kitchen. The player-characters hear

human screams and, have no doubt, rush to investigate. They see two men in white coats struggling with a few dozen snakes, or maybe birds, or maybe both. They ought to side with their fellow humans and start dispatching reptiles with abandon. (Anyone who manages to slice one open may notice that they have no internal organs, just layers of uniform muscle mass. Weird.)

Once the serpents are either dead or scared off, the scientists will regain their composure. They'll try to act happy to see the magi and tell a harrowing tale of wild animal attacks and dangerously violent weather. They'll claim that they've been "down in the lab," working on a way to revive Hans. They'll also claim to know nothing about the fate of the servants, though the topic makes them both visibly uncomfortable.

They honestly don't know what those winged snake things were, though they will readily admit that the jungle is filled with bizarre species. ("We're writing a paper about them, actually.") They've been oathbound not to tell anyone about the Crimson God or their real work, so no amount of interrogation will reveal those juicy tidbits.

While they talk, one of the scientists will go over to the bar for a drink, and ask if anyone else wants one. His plan is to poison the drinks the same way they poisoned

the servants' breakfasts. The other scientist will try to get close to one of the magi; he has a syringe of poison in his pocket and will just inject someone if they don't fall for the old poison drink routine.

The ensuing battle should be short and one-sided. Under duress, they will reveal the location of the secret door, but the magi can find that themselves if neither of them survives the fight... they left the pantry door open and their keycard is still in the concealed scanner from when they tried to flee back into the lab. It's sticking out of the pantry's back wall, next to the canned peaches.

Lair of the Crimson God

Now that your players' minds are beset by troubling questions, it's time to start dishing out the answers. The secret door opens into an ancient stairwell, cut right out of the mountain itself. It winds its way down into a what used to be a temple, and a cavern before that. Now, the room is cramped with humming computers, specimen cases, refrigerators, gene sequencers, and all kinds of other thoroughly modern equipment. A pair of cots lie in the back of the room, next to a set of wooden doors.

Anyone with a chemistry- or biology-related Skill can tell that the place is set up for gene splicing, but not which genes are being spliced. There are hundreds of species in the specimen cabinets and refrigerators. However, the low moaning sound that seeps under the wooden doors may provide the answer to that question...

The "Harvest Room," as the leonids call it, is a vast chamber filled with fresh soil and what appear to be 30-40 people buried up to their waists. They are arranged in a grid and labeled with serial numbers stamped onto their foreheads. They writhe and moan as if caught in some half-awake nightmare. Closer inspection will reveal that they are not buried in the soil; they are rooted to it. Just above what would be their waists, their bodies turn into masses of fleshy roots.

An altar is carved into the back wall of the cavern. An idol stands over it, snarling down at the magi with a feral visage. Its saber-like fangs drip with blood. Anyone with an occult-, archeology-, or language-related Skill will be able to translate the inscription above the idol: it is the Curse of the Crimson God.

Once everyone is inside the Harvest Room, the leonids close the wooden doors and barricade them with some of the scientific equipment. They may not be able to

harm the humans directly, but they have no problem letting them starve to death! (If you can't get everyone in the room at the same time, bribe them with Karma. They'll need it!)

The magi will most likely fight their way out, which is as it should be. The Curse of the Crimson God prevents the leonids from harming the humans on purpose, but not in self-defense (because the God isn't *causing* them to do it). The deity itself may make an appearance, but only to scare the magi away. If they're quick, they'll realize it can't harm them and just ignore its theatrics.

Once the leonids are thwarted, the fate of the plant people is in the magi's hands. At the least, they should probably destroy the genetics equipment. Will they also try to put the plants out of their misery? Or will they just walk away and let nature take its course? Will they try to find a way to prevent the Crimson God from starting over with other human pawns?

Now for the good news: Once its plans have been derailed, the Crimson God will rescind the "gift" of eternal life it gave to Hans. In other words, he wakes up. Hans' company has already sent another helicopter to check in on the mansion; all the characters have to do is wait for their ride to show up.

Supporting Cast

Lester Talmage can serve as a player-character, if you need another one. Feel free to create your own, too.

Hans Magnus

Oath Merchants make their living by trading favors in the occult underground. Most of these are enforced with the ritual of the Solemn Oath, which holds mortals to their word just as spirits are held to theirs. Hans has used this tactic to build a sprawling, multi-national empire. Since he'll spend the entire game in a coma, he gets no stats.

The Winged Serpents

Quetzalcoatl's swarm of lesser spirits should be treated as a single entity during combat. They can attack each character once per round and defend against every attack made against them. Wounds apply to the whole swarm, but Kill Shots only apply to individual serpents.

Attack (5) Defend (7) Stamina Check (6)

Lester Talmage, the Pilot

Motivation: Do the Right Thing!

Abilities

Brawn:	4	Perception:	3
Agility:	3	Intellect:	3
Will:	3	Charisma:	2
Reflex:	3	Stamina:	4

Skills

Pilot (4) Flying is Lester's favorite hobby.
Boxer (4) Lester was the Navy champ for 3 years.
Chemist (3) Thank you, G.I. Bill!

Magic - None

Lester joined the Navy to get enough money for college. While there, he discovered a talent for boxing and a love of flying. Now, he works as a chemist for Hans' Peruvian company and flies their helicopter as a way to get out of the office. He's a reliable, dependable sort who honestly believes that some things are *just plain wrong!*

Gary & Ace, the Scientists

Abilities

Brawn:	2	Perception:	3
Agility:	2	Intellect:	4
Will:	2	Charisma:	3
Reflex:	3	Stamina:	2

Skills

Genetics (5) These guys are experts in their field.

Medicine (3) They can set a broken leg, too.

Struggle (1) They don't fight well, just dirty.

Magic - None

Gary and Ace are not young men. They're balding, a little thick around the middle, and they both have medical conditions they'd rather not talk about. The Crimson God offered to cure their ailments if they did "something" about the mansion's house staff. So, they put poison in their breakfasts and let the Leonids have their way with the corpses. The murders heavily weigh on their consciences.

The Leonids

Abilities

Brawn:	4	Perception:	4
Agility:	4	Intellect:	2
Will:	3	Charisma:	1
Reflex:	4	Stamina:	4

Skills

Killing Things (4) They can't kill, but they like to practice.

Tracking (4) They can smell the blood in your veins.

Stealth (4) They hide in the jungle... all the time.

Magic - Just their existence.

The behavior of the Crimson God's lesser spirits owes more to visceral bloodlust than any kind of cunning or intelligence. They're not stupid, it's just that they consider violence the best solution to most problems. They are large, jaguar-like creatures with vaguely human faces and five-fingered, clawed hands. Recently, they've been entertaining themselves by eviscerating the plant people in the Harvest Room.

Circe the Inscrutable

Motivation: Help your mentor any way you can.

Abilities

Brawn:	2	Perception:	4
Agility:	3	Intellect:	3
Will:	2	Charisma:	4
Reflex:	4	Stamina:	2

Skills

Hoodlum (4) Grew up on the street.
Tae Bo (2) Mostly for the exercise.
Seer (4) Real magic & the fake stuff.

Flaws

Paranoid - You've always had trouble trusting people.

Theatrical - You tend to be melodramatic, and this whole mysterious gypsy bit has become second nature to you.

Magic

Second Sight (Power 3) You are sensitive to the invisible world, magical energy, and the flow of time.

Hans Magnus taught you everything you know. He picked you up off the street when you were just 12 years old. He told you about the Wild Hunt that comes for magi who practice their art too openly. He taught you to disguise your gift as chicanery, to profit by it and stay alive.

Since Hans sent you back out into the world, you've become quite successful. You even have a TV show on cable television, where you talk to the dead and tell people their fortunes. When Hans asked you to fly to his mansion in Peru, you put your show on hiatus immediately. You owe that man everything.

Rabbi David Goldberg

Motivation: Fulfill your master's oath for him.

Abilities

Brawn:	4	Perception:	3
Agility:	3	Intellect:	3
Will:	3	Charisma:	2
Reflex:	3	Stamina:	4

Skills

Go Unnoticed (3) Avoids conversation.
Notice Things (3) Keeps his ears open.
Fight (4) Pulverizes squishy humans.

Flaws

Simple - You're not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

Magic

Golem - You're a creature of living stone. That makes you stronger than mortals and invulnerable to most weapons.

Proxy - You appear to others as your master, the kabbalist David Goldberg. In reality, you are a walking statue.

Over a decade ago, your master lost a magical duel with a spellbinder named Hans Magnus. One of the terms of his surrender was that your master swear an oath to do Magnus a favor at some point in the future. Now, you have a chance to rid your master of this burden.

The Proxy ritual that makes you appear to be your master also allows you to fulfill the oath on his behalf. Hans Magnus asked your master to fly to Peru without an explanation, so you have gone in his stead. That way, he can remain secure in his fortress, in case it's a trap.

You just hope these other people don't want to talk to you too much. You may look like David Goldberg, but you know nothing of Jewish mysticism!

Professor Ezekiel Wellington

Motivation: Fulfill this bloody oath to Hans Magnus!

Abilities

Brawn:	1	Perception:	4
Agility:	2	Intellect:	4
Will:	4	Charisma:	3
Reflex:	3	Stamina:	3

Skills

The Occult (5) Spells, gods, spirits, etc.

Soft Sciences (3) Archeology, psych.

Jack of All Trades (2) Reads a lot.

Flaws

Arrogant - You assume that all non-academics are idiots and treat them as such. (Plus, there's the British accent.)

Magic

Sign of Kaka-Guie (Power 4) A protective symbol that can be traced in the air or drawn on flat surfaces. It repels magical creatures of all kinds.

Evil Eye (Power 2) Inflicts ill fortune with a quick gesture and a baleful stare. (Causes one action, that the spell-binder can see, to fail automatically. If underpowered, it just slaps a Penalty Card on the action.)

Prometheus' Gift (Power 7) Allows the caster to start fires with his mind. Non-flammable substances are immune, and the magus must be able to see the target.

You owe Hans Magnus a favor from way back, one that he magically compels you to return. When he asked you to fly to Peru on short notice, you had no choice but to obey, even though it was the middle of Finals week! You just want to get this whole thing over with as quickly and painlessly as possible.

Rave, the Werewolf

Motivation: Repay Hans Magnus for saving your life.

Abilities

Brawn: 4	Perception: 4
Agility: 3	Intellect: 3
Will: 2	Charisma: 2
Reflex: 4	Stamina: 4

Skills

Hunter (5) Brother Wolf taught you well.

Criminal (3) Sneaking, stealing, etc.

Pharmacology (3) Mostly narcotics.

Flaws

Feral - Prefers to solve problems with overwhelming force.

Crazy - Talks to his invisible spirit guide a lot (see below).

Magic

Spirit Guide (Power 2) Brother Wolf is your teacher and friend. Only you can see him, and he speaks to you in your mind. His knowledge of the spirit world is invaluable.

Werewolf (Power 7) When you take on the aspect of the wolf, you gain claws, fangs, heightened senses, glowing eyes, and ferocious combat abilities.

You are a new breed of shaman, equally at home in the forest or on the street. Brother Wolf keeps you one step ahead of the cops and you help him control the evil spirits that infest the city. It's a relationship that works.

But it almost ended before it began. You got caught in a bear trap the first time you channeled the Wolf, and a man named Hans Magnus saved you. Now, Hans has asked you to come to Peru to help him, and you didn't think twice about it. Whatever he needs, you'll do.

Rowan Tanaka, the Samurai

Motivation: Fulfill your oath to Hans Magnus.

Abilities

Brawn:	2	Perception:	2
Agility:	4	Intellect:	4
Will:	3	Charisma:	3
Reflex:	3	Stamina:	3

Skills

Shaolin Kung-Fu (4) It's about control.

Computers (3) You program a little.

High Finance (3) It pays the bills.

Flaws

Greedy - You can't pass up a chance to make a fast buck!

Commanding - You are accustomed to being obeyed.

Magic

Guardian Blade (Power 8) The spirit bound into this sword has protected your family for generations. It is always nearby, even when you try to get rid of it. When you're threatened, the spirit possesses you and the sword leaps into your hands. If you can't control it, the result is usually more blood than you ever want to see.

The blade's warrior spirit also manipulates events in your family's favor, and you have grown quite wealthy as a result. A few years ago, you executed a profitable merger with a company owned by Hans Magnus. As part of the deal, Hans demanded that you swear a magically binding oath to do him a favor at some future date.

A few days ago, Hans called in that favor. He asked you to fly to Peru and help him with a "very important task." Whatever it is, you have to help him any way you can. The oath's magic prevents you from even thinking otherwise.