

# chapter two

## history



# History

**T**errance Chastain founded the Seven Dogs Society in 1970. However, the seeds of its genesis were planted decades earlier. The society's work is built on the vision and labors of a man named Jericho Usher. It is with him that the history of the Seven Dogs Society truly begins.

## PRODIGY AND MADMAN

Jericho Nathaniel Usher was born on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1900 in Boston, Massachusetts. A child prodigy, Jericho demonstrated his incredible gifts at an early age. By seven, he was a world-renowned violin virtuoso, performing in dozens of countries. By nine, Jericho was solving calculus problems. At age thirteen, he was an accomplished painter... and also demonstrated startling expertise in myriad and diverse subjects such as botany, architecture, and philosophy. Jericho was also an exceptional athlete, though he seldom pursued competitive activities that would have won him fame in this arena. In 1919, *Scientific American* dubbed him the "Renaissance Man of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." Jericho traveled the United States and the world, corresponding with the brightest minds of the scientific and artistic communities. The entire world was at his feet. Unfortunately, in just a few short years, everything would change.

In the fall of 1922, Jericho was diagnosed with

*Stargardt's disease*, a macular degenerative condition that gradually destroys the vision of those afflicted. A horrifying side effect of the disease included a yearlong struggle with *Charles Bonnet Syndrome*, an odd condition marked by complex visual hallucinations that interfere with normal perception. In fact, Jericho's hallucinations were so vivid and persistent that he feared he was going mad.

In 1923, Jericho became friends with Charles Fort, an American writer and researcher of paranormal phenomena. Jericho became so fascinated by Fort's work that he opted to follow in his footsteps, zealously pursuing all manner of pseudoscientific research. While this period was personally satisfying for Jericho, it eroded his credibility among the scientific community and the world's intelligentsia. In no time flat, Jericho Usher went from wunderkind to crackpot.

The next twenty years were difficult. For a time, Jericho made a living as an architect, but boredom with current architectural trends drove him from the profession. Worse yet, every major university and scientific think-tank looked upon him with disdain. Though disheartened by his pariah status, Jericho's passion for learning never diminished. With his eyesight worsening each passing year, Jericho knew it was only a matter of time before the simple act of reading a book would become impossible. With this

### USING THIS CHAPTER

The information in this chapter can be disseminated in two manners. The first approach is for the GM to allow the players to read everything contained within; doing so will give them a clear picture of exactly what they have signed up for. The second option is for the GM to share only the briefest outline of this chapter with the players. With this second approach, the PCs discover the background of the society during gameplay, learning its history at the same time as their characters. Regardless of how this chapter's information is dispersed, there is nothing in the following pages to ruin the players' enjoyment of the game.

# ◀ ALETHEIA ▶

unknowable deadline looming, Jericho frantically devoured a vast array of subject matter.

By 1946, Jericho's vision had deteriorated so badly that the written word was only a blur. Although he learned to read Braille, Jericho found few books of interest that utilized this writing system. Still in need of an intellectual outlet, Jericho teamed up with a young anthropologist named Terrance Chastain, accompanying him on a series of Mesoamerican expeditions. Chastain was enamored with Usher's reputation and all too happy for the companionship. During their three years in the field, the two became close friends.

Jericho and Terrance returned to the states in 1949. Though the two left the country with little to their names, they returned as very wealthy men. Rumors swirled amongst family and friends that they discovered something during their time abroad, a treasure left behind by some ancient civilization. Shortly after their return, Jericho and Terrance

jointly purchased land in the tiny, Alaskan town of Seven Dogs. On their sprawling property, they began renovating a dilapidated, three-story Victorian mansion they christened *Hepta Sophistai*, after the Seven Sages of Greece. Although the majority of the construction work was finished within the first few years, endless tinkering and expansion stretched the project out for another twelve. Terrance saw to the staffing of the mansion while Jericho assembled an impressive collection of books for the library. During the initial years of this period, Jericho shared written correspondences with Albert Einstein, a professional acquaintance and steadfast friend from years past. The two intellectuals shared a mutual passion for physics, specifically Einstein's quest for a Unified Field Theory, a singular theoretical framework that would unify all the fundamental forces of the universe into a simple equation.

By the mid 1960s, Jericho was completely blind as a result of *Stargardt's disease*. For reasons unknown, though most likely intellectual curiosity, Jericho began





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experimenting with tryptamines, psychotropic drugs that alter consciousness and perception. After extensive experimentation, primarily with dimethyltryptamine and psilocybin, Jericho became convinced he was experiencing more than mere hallucinations – Jericho believed he was accessing another level of reality, a mercurial and alien landscape he named the Otherverse. Although Usher's Otherverse was only accessible through altered states of consciousness, he believed it to be as substantive as normal, accepted reality. Jericho was convinced he was on the verge of grasping some nebulous yet important truth, a truth that would explain the very nature of existence.

Jericho's entire life was a search for truth. All his studies, all his setbacks, all his experiences were the universe's way of guiding him to a higher purpose. Jericho long believed this. However, he had never been certain what this purpose was, how everything was connected. His discovery of the Otherverse gave him the clarity that had long been missing from his life. The Otherverse became Jericho's Rosetta Stone. *Charles Bonnet Syndrome*, Fort's anomalous phenomena, and Einstein's Unified Field Theory were all pieces of a much larger puzzle, one that Jericho was seeing in its totality for the first time in his life. Jericho said as much to Terrance, but never elaborated sufficiently for the other man to make any sense of it.

During the closing years of the sixties, Jericho was convinced that he had at last discovered the truth he had long sought, a truth he felt would define humanity's ultimate place in the universe. While under the effects of powerful psychoactive drugs, Jericho would often disappear for days on end. Curiously, he always did so without being noticed leaving and without being spotted in any surrounding location, a feat made more remarkable because Jericho was now completely blind. His reappearances were equally mysterious; he would suddenly walk out of a random room, with no explanation of where he had been or how he had

managed to re-enter his home. Like a man possessed, Jericho began to feverishly make modifications to the house, despite his handicap. These architectural changes were made to the unoccupied western annex of the house, and Jericho made Terrance promise to never trespass there. Terrance agreed, though this was mostly to humor his friend who he feared was either going senile or insane.

After months of erratic activity, Jericho told Terrance that he had at last discovered the elusive truth he had been seeking. In overly cryptic fashion, Jericho informed Terrance that the final stage of his journey was upon him, a journey Jericho could only make alone. Terrance paid little mind to such talk, deeming it the ravings of a deteriorating mind.

It was important to Usher that others take up his work and follow in his footsteps once he was gone. To facilitate this, Terrance was given three things: a set of written instructions scribbled on a single sheet of notebook paper, a series of genealogies handwritten on reams of loose-leaf parchment, and nearly fifty pages of aged vellum bound between leather covers. Terrance Chastain was tasked with seeing to the continuation of Usher's work, even though he did not even understand the nature of what his blind partner had been working on for so many years. Though skeptical, Terrance agreed to attend to his friend's wishes.

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, in the year 1968, Jericho Nathaniel Usher disappeared forever and without a trace.

## THE ANNEX

Initially, Terrance honored his friend's odd request to stay clear of the annex. However, with Jericho's disappearance, Terrance saw no reason to continue doing so. In early 1969, Chastain walked the annex corridor for the first time. What he saw shook him to

his core. The hallway's nine doorways did not lead into the nine adjoining rooms. Instead, each opened to a strange and distant location. One doorway opened to the Mayan ruins of Lubaantun, one of the Central American sites visited by Terrance and Jericho years earlier. Another led to an archaeological site on a desert plateau. One doorway led to a frozen landscape and another to a jungle. Two doorways led to bathrooms that did not exist anywhere in the house, and another led to a junkyard. The final two doorways opened to unfamiliar libraries.

After closer inspection, Terrance realized that these doorways acted like one-way windows; he could see through these portals but those on the other side could not see him. More so, these doorways were not mere windows – they were gateways bridging distant locations to the annex. Terrance also discovered that the nine rooms the doorways were supposed to lead into were still in the annex, though they could only be accessed from the outside by crawling through the rooms' windows. Interestingly enough, once within one of the rooms, Terrance could enter the annex hallway as normal; it was as if these fantastic gateways only existed when standing in the annex's hallway.

After a few weeks, Terrance finally mustered the nerve to walk through one of the doorways. He chose one of the libraries as his destination, feeling it to be the safest choice. Once through the doorway, Terrance found himself inside the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the National Library of France. As he surmised, the portal was indeed one-way, disappearing from sight once he had crossed the threshold and entered the library. Terrance could not return the way he came.

During Jericho's final years, Terrance thought his friend's eccentric and erratic behavior was due to old age, worsening health, and a dangerous drug habit. The annex proved there was more to Jericho's madness. Jericho Usher was clearly onto something,

but what?

After returning from Europe, Terrance began executing Jericho's instructions.

## A SOCIETY BORN

The first of Jericho's directives called for the formation of a society to continue his work. When it came to determining membership, the instructions dictated that the society's membership must always number seven, and that all members must be chosen from the genealogies Usher had personally prepared. Should something ever happen to one of the society, a replacement was to be chosen by Chastain as soon as possible to maintain an active membership of seven. To aide in the recruitment process, Usher had mapped out various family trees. Most went back a few centuries, though some reached as far as 150 BCE. Impossibly, all of the genealogies extended to the year 2012. With a mixture of surprise and awe, Chastain conducted his own research into the genealogies and proved them to be legitimate. Somehow, Usher single-handedly traced family lines back hundreds and thousands of years, and predicted births that would occur years, even decades, after his death.

The second, and most important, of Usher's instructions tasked the society with its purpose. The vellum manuscript, dubbed the *Usher Codex*, was to be given to the seven, and they were to use its insights to continue Jericho's research. The manuscript was an odd mixture of colored images, pencil sketches, and scribbled notes in the margins. Encoded within its forty-seven pages were the secret truths uncovered by Jericho, or so Terrance believed. By solving the mystery of the *Usher Codex*, Chastain believed that the society would discover whatever secrets Jericho had learned. Curiously, the codex included prescient references, with Jericho giving first hand accounts of many events that occurred after his disappearance.

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Equally perplexing was the fact that laboratory tests dated the vellum to approximately the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though the handwriting and sketches were clearly made by Usher's own hand.

Continuing Jericho's work involved more than interpreting the *Usher Codex*. The society was to investigate and catalog anomalous phenomena and unexplained events. In his written instructions to Chastain, Jericho wrote, "*forteana, anomalous phenomena so named for my dear friend Charles, are echoes of higher truths; by solving these little mysteries, we can approach the greater ones.*"

Terrance often wondered why Jericho did not simply come out and say what he meant. Why the obscure clue dropping? Though bewildered, Terrance nonetheless followed his friend's instructions as best as he was able.

The third and final of Usher's directives detailed the support the society was to receive. Firstly, the vast wealth accumulated by Terrance and Jericho was to be used to fund the society and support its members; they would want for nothing. Secondly, the house in Seven Dogs would be made available to the society; it would serve as lodging and headquarters, and the house's massive library would be at their disposal. Thirdly, Terrance was to assist the society in any way possible.

As instructed, Terrance scouted potential members from the genealogies. Private detectives were hired, and interviews were conducted. It took nearly two years for Terrance to assemble the society. A priest, two new-agers, and a quantum physicist joined because they were already seeking the truth, each in their own fashion. Two others joined because Jericho Usher's life and story intrigued them. The final member was a homeless man who simply wanted a roof over his head and food on his plate. In late 1970s, nicknaming themselves the Seven Dogs Society, this

eclectic group began their work.

It didn't take long for the society to realize the commonality they shared. Although the seven were chosen from different genealogies (Jericho had researched and transcribed dozens of family trees) they all possessed startling, otherworldly abilities. Some were gifted with ESP, others could see into the future, and some had capabilities that seemed to defy definition. Although each possessed one or more unusual gifts, each had no inkling at the outset that they were not alone in this manner. The Seven Dogs Society, presumably by the design of Jericho Usher, was itself an example of the anomalous phenomena the society was tasked with investigating.

The society suffered its first setback in the fall of 1972, when a fire claimed a third of the house library. Among the casualties was the *Usher Codex*. Only four of the pages were saved from the flames; all others were lost.

The origin of the fire was never determined.

The society spent the next thirteen years pursuing Jericho's work. Paranormal phenomena were investigated and cataloged, the clues in the surviving manuscript pages were researched, and the locations beyond the nine doorways were explored. Jericho's puzzle was not yet solved, but the society was making progress.

In 1984, while conducting research at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, a missing page from the *Usher Codex* was found. How the page survived the fire was never explained. Likewise, the society never discovered how the page ended up in the foreign library. However, this development gave hope that other pages somehow survived the flames.

In December of 1999, the seven society members disappeared forever, presumably departing on the

same path walked by Usher over three decades earlier. Exactly where they went, Terrance would never know. Once it was clear the society was never going to return, Terrance turned to the genealogies to form a second iteration of the Seven Dogs Society.

It took Terrance over two years to reform the society. Unfortunately, this incarnation proved extremely short-lived – within a year, all seven members were dead. While walking the annex hallway one evening, Terrance discovered their bodies rotting in the jungle heat on the other side of one of the doorways. Chastain feared that someone or something had left the bodies in clear view for him to see, perhaps as a warning. This thought so unnerved Chastain that it took him weeks to gather the courage to travel through the doorway and tend to the society's remains. Inspection of the seven corpses revealed a bullet wound to each head.

## THE PHOENIX RISES

One month ago, Terrance Chastain, now 85 years of age, finished assembling the society's third incarnation. The player characters are among the seven new recruits. In all likelihood, this is the last formation of the Seven Dogs Society. Chastain is too old and establishing the society yet again would be exceedingly difficult for him.

Jericho's truth awaits.