

# THE DEPARTMENTS

At the start of the game, players can say one true thing about their department to give it a little more character. Anything is fair game for this, but just in case you need a little inspiration this section presents some sample questions and things to consider when making your statements.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF LIFE AND DEATH

The head of department is...

- A priest, full of religious conviction, on a mission to convert the whole department.
- An anatomist, who offloads *everything* onto the rest of the faculty so they can get on with their beloved research.
- A rune-inscribed skeleton whose command of necromancy is unsurpassed and whose agenda is... dubious.

The key problem facing the department is...

- The terrible reputation of necromancy. The head of department is adamant that it's *everybody's* job to fix it.
- A lack of raw materials, i.e. corpses. Where might you be able to source a load of dead bodies?
- Spontaneous undead.

The department building is...

- Haunted. No-one knows why, since it's a brand new building funded by a wealthy benefactor who definitely isn't going to meddle in your research, no, no way.
- Haunted. Which is what you get when you take over an old hospital and turn it into classrooms and offices. Oh, and you're sharing with the medical wing. Hope you like experimental biology!
- Haunted. Really haunted. *Notoriously* haunted. Haunted enough that paranormal investigators keep breaking in, ruining experiments, risking Pigsmoke's low profile, and otherwise making a nuisance of themselves.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF MINDBENDING

The head of department is...

- A control freak and micromanager of the worst kind. No deviation from their will is permitted, even if the Dean *has* forbidden them from using their sorcery to enforce compliance.
- The most charming person you've ever met. They're friendly, personable, always there for you with whatever you need... *what are they up to?*
- Known only through the works of others, who manifest the head's will in their actions without even realising.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Mind control as a discipline tends to attract egotists and other assholes, and now the department is overflowing with them. They sabotage your research, steal your best students, and constantly test your mental defences with stupid mindbending pranks. Clearly, you must destroy them.
- An internal power struggle between the two deputy heads of department threatens to drag everyone else into the sucking vortex. Who will you side with? Are you one of the deputy heads? What started this mess in the first place?
- A growing pattern of amnesia, fugue, and other strange behaviour is spreading across campus – and naturally all fingers are swiveling to point at the Department of Mindbending. Except this time it's not you! You need to find out what's going on before the increased scrutiny reveals some *other* secret you're keeping...

The department building is...

- Covered with illusions, to a ridiculous and often annoying level. It seems like every day someone finds a new secret passage or mysterious object cloaked behind some spectral image.
- Unapproachable, thanks to someone blanketing the whole place with a powerful antipathy spell. You've kept this little mishap secret from the Dean so far, but if he finds out the department screwed up this badly heads will roll.
- Another department's building. Naturally, they have no idea you're sharing it with them and they mustn't find out. Think of it as a never-ending opportunity to put your theories into practice.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESIGHT

The head of department is...

- A blindfolded seer of the old school who frowns on the more... *worldly* uses of prophecy.
- An ambitious schemer who meddles endlessly in the lives of others – including yours.
- Foretold by prophecy: They will come to the department in its time of greatest need and deliver it from peril.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Too many wrong prophecies. It's damaging the department's reputation, it's driving away students, and it's *embarrassing*. The department needs to get its mojo back – preferably before the head organises some diabolical 'team away day'.
- An accumulated weight of destiny. There's been so much meddling with fate that anyone associated with the department has a tendency to find themselves hip-deep in exciting times if they aren't careful to avoid it. Worse, they may attract an eager young protege just *itching* to be cast into a life-defining adventure by the death of their mentor.
- Wouldn't you know it, a great and terrible doom is coming. Yawn. Time to make sure it can't happen – or better, get *someone else* to make sure it can't happen.

The department building is...

- Overrun with omens and portents. Crows flock ominously on the roof, menacing the students for cigarettes and lunch money. Clocks run backwards or chime thirteen every couple of hours, disrupting meetings and seminars. The menacing storm never lets up, so the building is slowly sinking into a swamp. It's annoying as hell, but what can you do?
- Filled with books of prophecy written by ex-staff. The twisting stacks and noise-absorbing paper make for some great privacy for clandestine meetings, but sadly the students know it too and you're forever having to interrupt whatever they're up to and chase them out.
- Foretold by prophecy. In the department's time of greatest need, it is said that a building will manifest for them to call home. In the meantime they work out of whatever offices or local independent coffee houses they can claim, and wonder if maybe this prophecy was misinterpreted.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTS

The head of department is...

- An exemplar of an element directly opposed to yours, who is deeply invested in this whole 'war of the elements' thing and consequently makes sure you get *all* the worst jobs.
- An exemplar of your own element, who is deeply invested in this whole 'war of the elements' thing and constantly uses you as a disposable pawn in their schemes.
- An honest-to-God elemental, their thoughts alien and inscrutable. They occasionally speak in their own tongue, but they barely acknowledge the humans around them. How did they even *get* this job? You're pretty certain they've never published a paper.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Elementalist schools are prone to infighting, and the department at Pigsmoke is one of the worst of the lot. How are you supposed to get anything done while you're navigating this tangled web of elemental allegiances? And the duels! It's almost like they're competing to see who can do most collateral damage...
- Students just aren't interested in elementalism any more. "It lacks practical application", they say, then swan off to study alchemy or mindbending or binding – and when your budget's determined by the number of students you teach, that's no good. The department's got to revamp its image and show everyone that elementalism still has a place in the 21st century!
- The department's got a rockstar. They're brilliant, but also wildly irresponsible – and when you're an elementalist playing with the building blocks of physical reality, 'wildly irresponsible' comes with some severe consequences. (And if you're also the Rockstar? Well, it's *rivalry time*.)

The department building is...

- Several different buildings mashed together, knocked through, and repurposed over the decades into a maze of tiny rooms, dead-end corridors, and inadvertently secret doors. People – and things – get lost in there all the time.
- Brand new this year. Clean and spotless and full of the latest modern conveniences. It will, of course, get ruined over the course of the year.
- A smoking crater. What did you *do*?!

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ALCHEMY

The head of department is...

- Far too prone to experimenting on themselves. You don't *think* they're experimenting on anyone else.
- Hell-bent on imposing some genuine scientific method on this mess of mysticism and hand-waving. Are you with them? Or against them?
- Supplying illegal drugs to most of the students and half the faculty.

The key problem facing the department is...

- A lack of raw materials. Alchemy needs all kinds of rare earths and reagents for research and (sometimes) teaching, but you're running short. What happened to the usual suppliers? Can you find alternative sources of ingredients?
- Crime. The Department of Alchemy is both wealthy and well-equipped with potentially intoxicating chemicals, making it a prime target for criminally-minded students – and mundanes! Naturally, you're going to have to put a stop to this.
- Disposal. A lot of alchemical processes create waste; various levels of nasty, poisonous, and/or mutagenic ooze. Dumping it into the sewers isn't going to cut it for much longer, but no-one seems to have a good plan for what else to do with it.

The department building is...

- A dank place of cauldrons, weird clouds, and strange jars containing mysterious ingredients. 'Old school', as the students say.
- Full of modern scientific laboratories and the necessary accoutrements.
- A garish and ostentatious display of wealth.

## CABSA

The head of department is...

- Using their body as a timeshare with a powerful extraplanar entity. You're never quite sure who's driving the meat around here on Earth, or what the mind is up to when they're in control of the whatever-it-is on another plane.
- So terrified of binding agreements that getting any kind of information, commitment, or signature out of them is impossible.
- Someone who insists they're Actually The Devil, but obviously isn't.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Demons. Again. You'd think people would learn after the first few times.
- Outside manipulation. At least two extraplanar entities are using the department in a proxy war for mysterious reasons of their own, and now the Dean's Office is getting involved for mysterious reasons of *their* own. It's getting so you don't even know who your own boss is!
- Favours owed. At some point in the distant past a previous head of department signed the services of the department away in a poorly-conceived deal with some dreadful entity. And now payment is due.

The department building is...

- Mortgaged from a powerful extraplanar entity. Most months it's fine with money, but sometimes it changes the terms of payment – always at short notice, and always to something inconvenient.
- Only loosely tethered to Earth. Open the wrong door at the wrong time and you may find yourself on another plane entirely; never mind what might make the journey in the opposite direction.
- Constructed and maintained by half a dozen bound entities. They'll make whatever structural changes CABSA faculty require – but they also hate you, so be wary of surprises and loopholes in the letter of your instructions.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF PARAVETERINARY MEDICINE

The head of department is...

- Utterly convinced that all creatures are lovely and friendly and good-natured at heart. Even – *especially* – the angry, dangerous, balls of teeth and venom. And they will judge the hell out of you for contradicting them.
- A tweed-clad, upper-crust buffoon whose interest in exotic creatures extends exactly as far as hunting them for sport. How they got the job is a mystery. How they *keep* it when almost the entire department desperately wants rid of them is a deeper mystery still.
- Crawling with insects. It's, uh... a bit creepy. A lot creepy. And don't look too closely at their office. Or their lunch.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Overcrowding. Not of people, but of creatures – housing and feeding such a vast menagerie is consuming all of the space the department has, not to mention the cost in both dollars and time. And the head of department keeps acquiring *more*.
- Disease. It's not infectious to people *yet*, but it's nasty and it's magical and it's jumping between other species with ever-increasing speed. If the Dean's Office finds out they're going to cull the whole menagerie – and how can you research creatures you don't have?
- Oh God, it's loose. We weren't even supposed to have it, and now... we don't.

The department building is...

- Alive, literally. It may or may not look like a normal building, but the whole edifice is a living, thinking creature. It mostly sits idle, but sometimes moves or flexes according to its own strange instincts – or when suitably persuaded.
- Alive, metaphorically. Every room, every dark corner, every closet or wardrobe or desk drawer, contains something alive and – to the right kind of person – absolutely fascinating.
- Alive. Sort of? In a new and interesting way? It's not life as anyone currently understands it, but there's a wealth of research papers in it if you can keep the other departments from claiming it's an extraplanar entity, a sentient artefact, an alien, or somehow otherwise taking it away from you.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTEFACTS AND RELICS

The head of department is...

- On a dig in the middle of nowhere whenever you try to get in touch with them, and looming over your shoulder whenever you wish they weren't.
- Probably a thief. Well, *definitely* a thief if you're a long-dead sorcerer with a tomb full of magical artefacts, but only probably a thief if you e.g. bring a tasty lunch to work. At least as far as anyone can prove.
- A magic amulet which drives its nameless owner around like a car. It's got a bizarre grasp of time, only writes in an obscure dialect of Middle English, and it's almost certainly up to something untoward. But it's still better than the other candidate.

The key problem facing the department is...

- Turns out if you keep relics in close proximity they can set up some dangerous magical resonances. The department has a *lot* of sorcerous oddments in a very small space, and the effects are starting to show. Silver lining, though: plenty of material for research!
- An audit. The department's always been a bit *laissez faire* about letting people borrow artefacts, and now the supposed inventory bears almost no resemblance to what is actually in the reliquary. Better fix that before the Dean finds out!
- The... thing. Someone built it, certainly, but even they're not sure exactly what it is, what it does, or how it does it. All anyone really knows is that it's doing *something*. Better hope it's nothing bad!

The department building is...

- A pinnacle of geomantic engineering. It's a phenomenal place to work... but all the other departments want it too, and they're planning to deploy paperwork, money, and accusations that you're not a real department in order to get it.
- Someone's idea of a 'test', aimed at teaching students how to safely raid the various storehouses of goodies that ancient sorcerers tended to leave lying around. Health and safety limits how dangerous the traps can be, of course, but they can still ruin the day of a careless student – or a new hire.
- Old. Very, very old, and built on top of itself over and over again. It's got basements on sub-basements, secret doors, hidden levels, and long-forgotten archives. Who knows what could be down there?