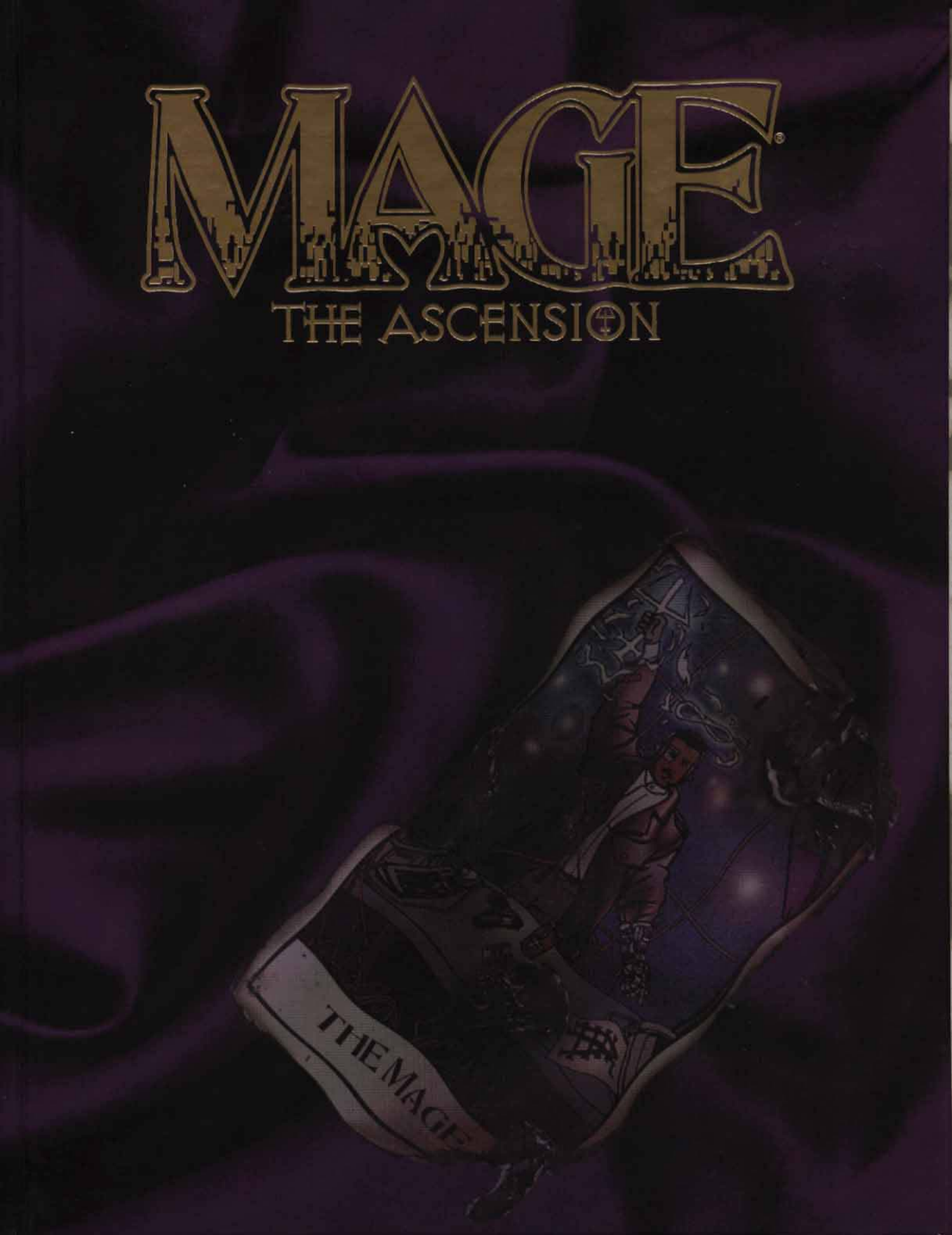
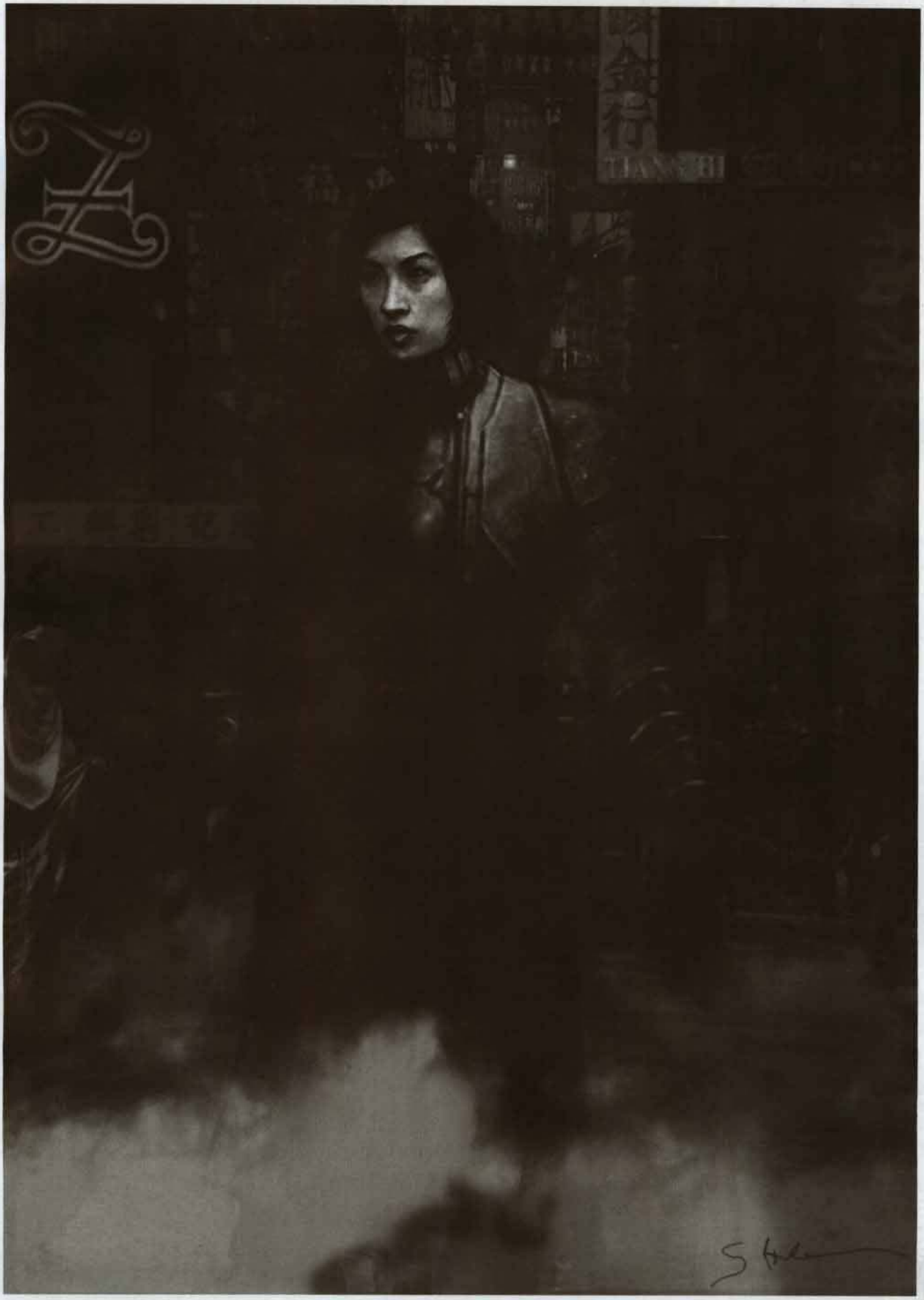
MAGE®

THE ASCENSION





Prologue: Through a Darkened Mirror

They say that magic is dead. It's a convenient fiction, is magic — a quaint artifact of a history that never existed, a fairy tale. Unicorns and dragons, magic swords and ancient tomes are all just children's stories. Nobody believes in any of it. But we're giving that the lie right now as we step through this wall... like so... ah, and those flatfoots on the other side will have no idea where we've gone.

Go ahead and sit down a moment; you'll need to absorb what I'm saying, and I need to catch my breath. No, *don't* pick up that board. I'm not going to kill you or ensorcel you or eat your flesh or any of that crap. So shut up and listen, or you'll have a very short life in the next few minutes, and *not* because of me.

Hang on. I've gotta do something else.

All right. We can hide here a bit without worrying about those cops. They'll be busy on the other side of the block. Gives me some time to bring you up to speed.

The Magical World

You've stumbled through your life with the belief that this is an orderly, rational world, that science can explain everything and that myths and fairy tales are for children. You've worn blinders put on you by a hundred years of engineered history. Everybody buys into it and if you don't, you're a crank, a psycho or a crystal-waver. The problem is, that's just the world people buy because it's safe. It's orderly and mundane and everything's explainable. Everyone can get fast food and a boring job without worrying about crazy things like demons or magic spells.

You're different. You thought you were insane when you looked out tonight and saw what was really going on, right? That incessant pressure in your head had to be a tumor and you were just hallucinating — that's it. Convenient way to avoid the idea that maybe your sudden recognition of magic is really a sudden awareness of the truth that's been hidden all of your life.

Yeah, magic. The world is full of it. Everything from neo-Pagan rituals to kung fu fightin' to bleeding-edge weird science makes its mark on this world. Unlike the days of yore, though, it's quiet, it's subtle, and it's carefully hidden from the eyes of normal people.

See, normal people don't want a magical world. They want a safe world where they don't have to face the perils of demons, dragons, imagination and dreams. Some people just don't fit the mold of "normal," as you've so recently learned. We open our eyes to a world where we can make our own rules and choose for ourselves what we want to believe in. We Awaken to the magic that's been hiding in plain sight.

Don't believe me? You just saw a little magic when we stepped through that wall. I bet you felt something when I made that sigil with the amulet too — hairs on the back of your neck, a sudden feeling like having a word on the tip of your tongue, right? That's magic, too. Just because it's not visible doesn't mean it's not powerful. It's there, and once you've seen it a few times, you'll believe. Once you believe, you'll see it *all* the time.

No, you're not crazy, and neither am I. You've just taken a step into a larger world. Takes some getting used to, but you'd best accept it, because you can't step back through that door. The sudden realization that exploded into your mind will never go away now.

I know how you feel because I know what I'm talking about. Least you can do is listen.

Magic 101

Don't look at me like that. I'm tryin' to help you out here.

All right, you've seen a couple of neat tricks with your own eyes. Just to help push you over the edge, I'm gonna show you what's really up. Don't move; I'm not gonna hurt you. Just watch what I do. Hang on — damned elixirs are always in the wrong pocket.

All right. You know that sort of vibration that you can just feel in your skull, the one that told you something was wrong with that guy back at the shop and weirded you out when we stepped through the wall? Focus on that feeling. I want you to think about the *power* behind that feeling. I know you're skeptical, but not a goddamn bit of this will work if you don't believe. So just remember how we went through that rock like it was mist. Take a deep breath, and close your eyes for a second. Think about that power and open them again.

See it?

Neat, huh?

What you're seeing in my hand is what we call Quintessence. It's basically the energy of magic itself. All of creation stems from Quintessential energy; it's just bound up into what we call Patterns. You're a Pattern, I'm a Pattern, and anything with a representation that we can sense or affect has some sort of Pattern. It can get much more complex than that so I'll keep it short.

When you get this metaphysical kick in the head, you have the potential to do magic. Some people can do magic without ever really seeing the world in this way, but there's no way to separate them out. This Awakening to a wider world, on the other hand, always signals the capacity to learn real magic. You've seen that there's more to the world than you were ever led to believe, and you can learn to remake that world according to your desire.

That's what magic reflects: desire. It's tempered with will and enlightenment, but really, magic comes as you decide to exert change. Magic gives us all sorts of ways to transform the Quintessence of the universe. By changing that energy, we rework, create or destroy Patterns in the world around us. Your magic is a tool. Each ritual, observance or utterance focuses that energy and twists it around. End result: I say a few words in a magical language, and we step through a wall; you concentrate on the power of magic, and you can see it; we believe strongly enough, and it becomes real.

There are all sorts of ways to discuss magic, ways to categorize it and means to learn it. Complex ranks, titles and formulae codify magic to the infinite degree. We'll worry about that excess crap once you've got a handle on some more basic things.

The Price

Obviously, nothing in this world is free. Magic is no exception.

Although magic brings power, it's not all-powerful. A magician can only do what he has the will, belief and training to back up. I never learned to control weather, for instance, and it's such a nastily complex and large-scale task that it's out of my league anyway. You might build a spell to fly, but you're not going to suddenly unweave the concept of gravity. Remember, you can only handle so much at once. I suppose I could build a magical portal to Tokyo, but the effort would be so enormous that it's really just simpler to take a jet.

The other problem is that magic has a tendency to get out of hand. It's not that it's totally chaotic, but it does have side effects. Since magic reflects your desire, it naturally shows off your intentions and your emotions. Cast a spell with the

intent to kill someone, and your magic will show it — it'll be intense, violent and angry. Cast something with lust in mind and it's a totally different picture.

The really blatant stuff runs the risk of Paradox. See, I know from my training and my understanding of magic that I can move through a wall with the right rituals, yet everything that we know about the world says that doing so is impossible. It's a Paradox! So, the more outlandish your magic, the more you run the risk of an outright backfire. Doing something that just nudges reality along its appointed rounds is simple. Going hell-bent on whacked-out spells and drawing down all sorts of nastiness, on the other hand, not only takes work, but it involves some major changes. The more you try to change the universe around, the more likely it is to whip you upside the head in return. Paradox could just crash your magic, or it could cause all sorts of weirdness to afflict you. In severe cases, it even explodes. The moral is to keep your magic subtle and low-key. Trust me, you'll last longer.

The Long Road

Given the problems and difficulty of magic, you'd wonder why anyone would bother. Truth is, there's no going back. Now that you're Awake, you can't close your eyes again. Magic will always exist for you, and you'll find yourself drawn to it. Once you're Awakened, too, you see the world through different eyes. We mages tend to see things that normal people don't, and as a result, we get dragged into the weirdness that you thought only existed in novels.

That's really why I'm doing you a favor here. Just nod and at least pretend to pay attention. You see, now that you're Awake, you're going to find your way into this magical world. That means that you can learn to do magic responsibly, or you can blow yourself apart. Chances are, if you screw up, you get to take someone I know along for the ride. Call it enlightened self-interest, if you will, but I think I'll spare the couple of hours to at least let you understand this mess.

A History Lesson

I first discovered magic many, many years ago, but I was just as ignorant as you. I thought I'd cracked, that I'd seen too much horror and my mind had just broken. It took a few weeks for me to run into someone who recognized my predicament and decided to show me the truth. From my teacher I learned the rudiments of magic, history and society, mystical style. Now I'm doing a favor and passing it on to you.

Magicians have always existed. We're the pioneers and visionaries who do the impossible: the men and women who explore the unknown, take up causes and seek answers to the great mysteries. For the better part of, say, about ten thousand years, these people dug up bizarre secrets, cavorted with strange entities and basically ran around engaging in all manner of experimentation in the pursuit of power, wisdom, security and anything else that humans could want. It's there in history if you look for it — stories like the epic of Gilgamesh, the Bible, the tales of King Arthur. People really did all of those miraculous things, and they still do today.

So, when you've suddenly realized your potential to change the world and opened your eyes to the big picture, how do you learn to use that power? The earliest mages probably had to improvise as they went along. Somewhere along the way, they started talking to one another about how they did things. Mages shared ideas and theories, they concocted reasons for their spells, and they passed down their beliefs from teacher to student. From these roots were born magical orders.

Obviously, when you get a bunch of really powerful visionaries together in one place, they're not going to agree on anything. These magical fraternities fought like angry cats over fine points of dogma, theory and practice. Martial arts masters kicked the crap out of reincarnationist Kevorkians while the Church burned witches at the stake. Middle Eastern seers and alchemists clashed with European knights. Shamanic cultures got eradicated in the crossfire. The sad fact is that every damn one of them was convinced that it had a handle on "the truth."

So I'm getting a little histrionic. Close enough.

Basically, mages warred over who was right, who was wrong and who deserved to guide and shepherd humanity. Everybody had a vision but none of them could agree. Masters and their students formed jealous cabals to defend their hidden treasures, and each group squabbled with all the rest. Somehow, humanity stumbled along, alternately fearing and worshipping these mystics who brought them potent new ways of thinking but also shackled them with conflicting ideas or pure, outright disbelief. This all gets kicked under the rug for reasons that I'm getting to, so just hang on.

A Dark Age

By the Middle Ages, people had developed a substantial bunch of different societies. Europe labored under a feudal system where nobility and the Church fought for dominance as scholars and

mystics evaded scrutiny so that they could pursue knowledge undisturbed. In Asia, great empires that would form China, Japan, Korea and the like all pioneered complex social systems meshed with the budding martial arts and philosophical religions like Buddhism and Shinto. Africa had thriving cities, kingdoms and wizardly advisors before it was decimated with plagues, famines and colonization. The Americas boasted native peoples who built mathematical systems, engineering feats, intricate religions and some frighteningly clever devices. In every one of these cultures, mages pioneered everything from agricultural developments to mechanical wizardry to social change. Sure, some normal humans had great impacts, too, but by and large, mages inspired a lot of the most outstanding, radical changes.

Europe got organized with ambition. There's really no better way to say it; the Chinese mages were organized but never really spread, while the American guys were heavily fragmented, and the African ones had no desire for power. In Europe, the mages involved in the Church found themselves in political warfare, while the more scholarly ones pursued their magic in an attempt to understand and control the universe. Naturally, they *spread*. The wizards tried a great experiment to bring all magicians under one banner but they fell to their own limitations and the temptations of demons, while the churchmen decided to eradicate everyone who didn't think like they did. Every group was so caught up in establishing its own superiority that the humans who hadn't Awakened wound up victims in the mages' wars.

Although mages made some great strides, they left people behind. That pride cost them dearly.

Reason for the Masses

One important thing to remember: Just because you've suddenly seen the world as it is doesn't mean that you can equally suddenly do magic. Everyone Awakens to their power in a different way. For some it's the ability to make things happen according to studied mystical principles, strong faith or well-practiced exercises. For others, it comes as a flash of intuitive genius that leads to feats of science. The defining point is that you wake up and suddenly you believe that you can change the world — *and you can*.

So there were a bunch of magicians running around burning heretics, summoning demons, sacrificing virgins and basically tearing up the landscape so badly that normal people could do little more than hide in their homes. About the same time, a bunch of people start latching on to the idea that most of the

world can be explained in repeatable, rational steps, that reason can arrive at all the solutions and that everybody can benefit from an understanding of the rules by which the world works. Combine the two, and on one side you get magicians who don't give a rat's ass about normal people, while on the other side you get magicians who take up the banner of reason and rational thought and really *believe* in it. Thus was born the Order of Reason.

Although science and rational thought all seem to work on objective principles, the frank reality of the matter is that a lot of science didn't work until these people codified it and believed in it. Working together and sharing ideas, these thinkers put together a way of looking at the universe, but posited that it would work the same for anyone. Sure, their theories were wild and it took a lot of work to learn such insights, but the idea was that, even if you didn't understand how the universe worked, it worked the same for you as it did for the professor, the clergyman or the noble. The scientists just knew the rules so they knew what to expect.

The talented Order of Reason worked much like any other group of mages. They worked wonders with their chosen tool — reason — and they made advances in thinking. They fought a lot with other mages. They had their setbacks and problems. But they hit on one thing that none of the other groups had done: A lot of their policies inadvertently helped normal, everyday people. Rational thinkers built a world where man, not God, was the center. Reason paved the way for tools that anyone could learn to use. Champions of a safe, ordered world took it upon themselves to battle the demons and witches who preyed upon common humanity.

With the support of those people behind them, the Order of Reason's thinkers could disseminate their ideas to the populace. People tested and used their theories, and worked out the kinks. Peasants rose up to depose tyrannical priests or mysterious and dangerous wizards. The revolution snowballed, and suddenly the magicians found themselves on the outs. People didn't have any more tolerance for the groups that had abused them. The Order of Reason pressed its advantage, ruthlessly eliminating anything deemed dangerous for mankind, even as its theorists decided to build a new world where people wouldn't have to worry about spirits or dangerous rogue magic. Technology and science became the watchwords of the day.

What's Left Today

Over several hundred years, the Order of Reason established its stranglehold on society. You sit here in a city lit by electricity, with modern construction materials for

the buildings, truckloads of food brought in from mechanical farms, and you live by their principles. It's not a bad life, if you don't want anything better. The Order of Reason took technology as mankind's savior, and it took the name of the Technocracy.

Today the Technocracy holds all the cards. Though the Technocrats don't actually control the world, they certainly watch it, and they have influence in all of the right places. They protected humanity from extermination by supernatural forces, and built this safe and prosperous world that you see around you.

So why doesn't anybody believe in magic? How come history books dismiss it all? It's part of the Technocracy's program — or Pogrom, as they call it. Back in its early days, the Technocracy decided that magic was too dangerous (and too concentrated in the hands of irresponsible individuals) to be allowed in this world. So the Technocracy instituted a search-and-destroy attitude. Groups of agents, be they knights in the Dark Ages or Men in Black in the modern age, would hunt down "anomalous manifestations" and "sterilize" them. (And, sure, some of the hard-core scientists want to study these phenomena, but one run-in with a wild, out-of-control magical manifestation or a real, honest-to-badness demon from Hell cures them of that.) Anyway, the Technocracy decided that magic was bad for the world, and it set about curing that particular ill. If that meant killing or converting mages, stamping out native cultures and rewriting history itself to eliminate the traces of legend... so be it.

Magic's on the way out. The scientists who think that reason is a safer tool have made sure of that.

Magical Society

Let's get out of here. My warding spell can only last for so long, and I can't expect you to absorb all of this if we spend the evening sitting in a refuse-strewn alleyway. Somewhere that we can sit for a while—late-night restaurants are perfect for that sort of thing. I know one not far from here.

What, you still think I'm spewing a bunch of crap? All right. Watch this.

Pretty damn impressive, huh? You don't see people conjuring fire much these days. It's just too damn hard. You could do it, too, but there's a price. Come on; I can't keep this up, and if you're gonna evade the Technocracy, you've gotta listen and learn. I bet right about now something in the back of your head is kicking you and telling you to agree with me, too. I'll get to that later.

Anyway. The Order of Reason sure put the smackdown on mages of all sorts, and it hurt. The Dark Ages bloomed into a Renaissance of possibility, but the Order got pretty ugly. Mages started to see their native cultures and magical systems dying out as people became more hostile to the very idea of magic. Naturally, the magicians on the losing side had to do something about this, so they finally did what the Order of Reason had done: They got organized.

Essentially, one of the largest magical cabals of the era contacted a bunch of other groups under a flag of truce and put out a message saying, "These other guys are kicking all of our asses, so it's time to cut the shit and pull together." A lot of squabbling and infighting followed, but as one magical site after another fell to the Order's sterilizing influence, the mages of disparate heritages put aside their differences. Eventually they agreed on a coherent system by which they could work together and discuss their forms of magic. This new group became the Traditions, espousing the heritage from cultures across the globe.

The Tradition Council set about consolidating the resources of the Tradition mages and propagating their magical styles. By combining their assets, they managed to stave off total destruction. It was already too late, though. The Traditions still hadn't focused on the common man, and the Order of Reason had too much impetus behind it. One loss followed another, and the Traditions found their mages scattered, on the run and unable to mount serious opposition. The war of magic became a battle of ideologies as Tradition mages tried to convert common people to their ways of thinking, with only limited success. The nascent Technocracy conversely stamped out all traces of magic from every culture it encountered.

The Tradition Council went through several ups and downs, but it suffered some of its nastiest defeats by the modern age. Most of the old Tradition Masters are dead or gone. The technological age has firmly entrenched itself in a disbelief of magic. Contact with the spirit world and the forces of magical energy has become progressively harder and more dangerous. Even the best magicians left have only a moderate understanding of what we're doing. It's hard enough just trying to survive.

The Traditions try to keep magic alive in a world that doesn't even know about it. If you hear that call, you'll become one of us, and you'll join the fight for magic, too.

So why join the losing side?

A Quiet Little War

By now, you may actually be willing to accept that there's such a thing as "magic." You've seen it in action and you've got that nagging itch in your soul that tells you it's real. Still, the Traditions sound like a bunch of crazies trying to dredge up old, dead history while the Technocracy's on the cutting edge. To some degree, such a view is even true.

The fight between Technocrats and Traditions used to be called the Ascension War. It was a no-holds-barred battle to see who'd shape human destiny. Would the Technocracy convince everyone that science was all there

is to the world, or would the Traditions let the world know that reality is as fluid as the air they breathe? By now, you can probably tell the Traditions have lost.

Here's the kicker. Back in the day, the Traditions had it all, and they lost it because of their own pride. The Celestial Chorus tried to commune with God, but it fostered a church that was deaf to the needs of parishioners. The Order of Hermes posited a powerful formulaic version of magic, but it was accessible only to a talented few. Verbena practice a form of blood magic that's downright frightening. Given their relative indifference to normal people, it was only natural that they'd lose out when the Technocracy got the backing of the whole press of humanity.

Once, the Traditions hoped to bring back a mystical way of looking at the world. Mages wanted to release their magical powers again and turn back the clock. They hoped to open the floodgates of mysticism and make magic acceptable. It's too late for that now. We can't go back, so we have to make do with what we can. End of the road. For all intents and purposes, the Ascension War is over.

Monumental Hubris

The Technocracy has fallen into the same trap as the earlier Traditions, though. Originally they just wanted to make the world safe for people. The Technocrats brought in better crops, more stable societies and a world where you wouldn't get struck down by God or carried off by a random beast from the nether realms, where the dead stayed safely dead, and everything fit into neat little categories. The Technocracy gave humanity a taste of that world where nobody had to take risks, use their imaginations or wonder if things could get better. And people liked it.

Every mage thinks that he knows a better way. I can do some pretty potent stuff, and I'm not going to sneeze at it. The Technocrats, though, convinced themselves that their way was not only better, but that no other way could possibly be good. They decided that their judgment was superior and that they would make the decision for humanity of what was right, what was good and what was gone, gone, gone.

People don't want change any more. People don't want to have to think, to use their imaginations, to aspire to anything more than mediocrity or to open their minds to possibility. They just want regular meals and an easy life.

Now, there's not really anything totally inherently bad about regular meals, but the stinger is that the Technocracy doesn't think that people have the responsibility to choose anything else for themselves. The Technocrats believe that only they can make that decision for humanity. The real problem is that, now, nobody wants to

accept *anything* new. Think about how long I've been hammering at you to accept that magic is possible, even with it staring you right in the face and with your own new awareness screaming that you should believe. Now imagine trying to convince six billion moronic couch potatoes of the same thing. Good fucking luck.

And yet, there's the rub, as it were. The Technocracy can't make any new super-science these days against this monolithic tide of apathy. People just won't accept it. Look at the outcry against cloning, or the total *lack* of interest in the space program. Humanity has chosen to live in a world of crap. It's a least-common-denominator dystopia, and neither Traditionalist nor Technocrat can jar these six billion lumps of flesh from their programmed complacency.

That's why the Ascension War *really* ended, kid. The Masses have spoken, and they've chosen absolute slack-ass mediocrity. The war we fight is all about scale these days. The Technocracy still wants to wipe us out, and we've still got nobody to turn to but each other. The way things have been lately, most Traditionalists can't even tell the difference. They still have to dodge and duck just as much as ever to keep from getting ground in the gears of the Machine. What's changed is the fact that we're not so caught up in bringing the entire world around to our way of thinking. You can't convince me that's even worth fighting for any more. What *is* worth fighting for is a world where you can think and believe whatever you want. That's the secret to what magic's all about. Without that freedom, magic is going to die, and it's going to take all the wonder and elegance that exists with it.

The Goddamn Point

Here were are. Just take a booth; they don't care. I recommend an inconspicuous corner where my voice won't carry too much.

All right, I've stuffed your head with magical practices, the Traditions and the Technocracy, this war for humanity and the shaping of reality itself. I can tell from that glazed look in your eyes that you're gonna need some coffee and a few days to absorb all of this, so I'll wrap this up.

You're one of us now. You may turn your back on magic, but it'll always be there waiting in the sidelines. Better you should learn to do something with it than to just let it sit or get out of control.

We aren't the only workers of magic out there. The world is overrun with all the artifice of magic, if you know where to look. It's hidden, yeah, and it's dying out, sure. Still, it's there. We can sometimes show it to people, pull back the veil a little and let them realize that the world is more glorious than they

want to believe. We can protect people from the fantastic creatures and powers. We can even decide to leave this world behind and head out for something new. We can't leave the magic.

All of us have the potential to become something better. We don't know what, exactly, but we all feel the call. You'll start to get it, too, in dreams or hunches or daymares. Maybe the rest of humanity won't wake up, but unlike the cattle, you've got a choice. You can decide to let "rational thought" rule your world, or you can accept the risks and rewards of magic. All you have to do is believe.

The Traditions can teach you, help you to find a way to use your magic and to reach your potential. The Technocracy could do the same, but only on its terms. I can't make that decision for you. The fact that you've Awakened means that you've got the insight to make that choice — or no choice at all — for yourself.

Welcome to a wider world, kid. I hope you survive the experience.

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Dedication

To those who keep the magic alive. You know who you are.

The Disclaimer (As Always)

Mage: The Ascension is a game. It's a game about mature themes and difficult subjects. As such, it requires not only imagination but common sense. Common sense says that words in an imaginary game aren't supposed to be real. Common sense says that you don't try to do "magic spells" based on a creation derived entirely from someone else's imagination. Common sense says that you don't try to dig up agents of the supernatural just because of inspiration in some wholly fictional source. Common sense says that the game is just for fun, and that when it's over, it's time to put it away.

If you find yourself flying in the face of common sense, then put the book down, back away slowly and seek professional help.

For the rest of you, enjoy the unlimited possibilities of your imagination.

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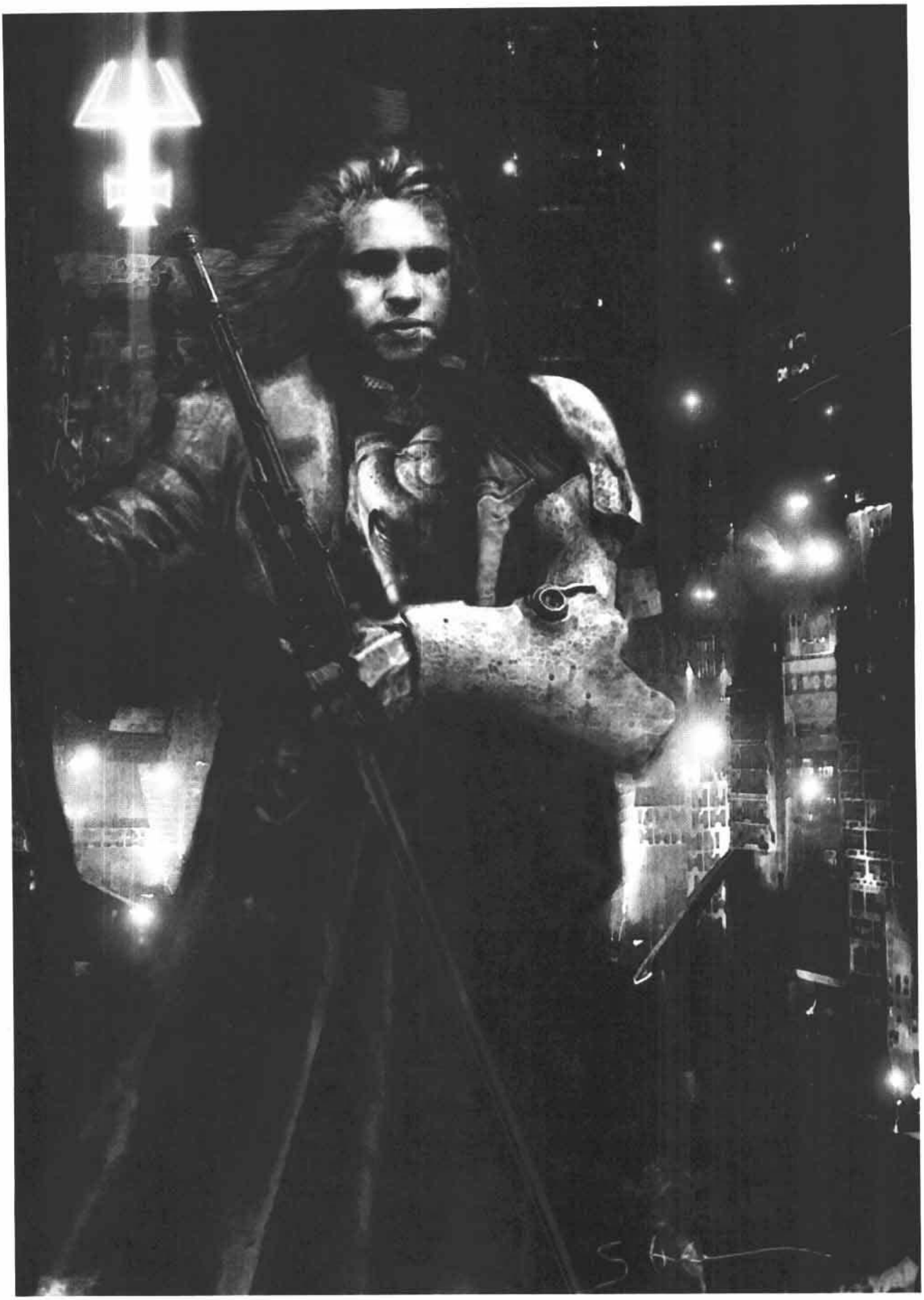


INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world where visionaries struggle to bring wonder to the mundane. Picture a war where the winners decide the fate of the world, and the losers are hunted for their presumption. That world and that war have happened. The old war is over, and it's time for the survivors to take charge. Old age and treachery have failed; now, youth and speed will make their mark in a desperate struggle over the entire human race.

For ten thousand years, humanity has struggled to understand the cosmos, life and reality itself. Seekers of knowledge look for rules to the universe, but only a few Awaken to the understanding that the only rules are the ones created by belief. Forging their own rules through the power of will, these enlightened few cast the shape of tomorrow. Ultimately, they seek to surpass the limitations of the universe, to transcend this reality through Ascension. Their special wisdom sets them apart forever — they are mages.

For the common man, the world includes televisions, automobiles and fast food. Magic spells, ancient pacts, spirit quests and shamanic visions belong only in the fiction of stories, books and Hollywood movies. People tell their tales of magicians and wizards, envision the spells of lost cults and the wisdom held in dusty tomes, then go back to their normal lives. Magic is just a thrill and a fantasy. The world is an orderly place, where what you see is what you get.

Except that it's not. A shadowy world exists underneath the everyday picture. Myths and legends say that only those with the proper insight can communicate with this other layer of the world. Using rituals passed down from antiquity, enchanters and sorcerers commune with powers that no common man can see or believe. These mages see a world far different from the picture of the commoner. Their beliefs shape the very form of that world, even when their actions remain unseen.

In a world where mages vie for their individual visions of reality, this struggle reaches into every belief of mankind. Mages have long guided humans with their foresight, but they also battle for the right to shape their own destinies. For some, their own magic is enough. For others, theirs is the responsibility to lead all humanity down a single, unified path. The very right to believe is the focus of war. Humanity's future rests in the balance as each mage struggles for Ascension, whether as an individual or for the entire world.

Storytelling

As an ancient art, telling stories is a community endeavor. People come together to tell legends and tales, and to learn. A storytelling game like this one lets you and your friends make your own stories. Mage: The Ascension is White Wolf's game of belief, heroism, hubris and enlightenment. With these rules, you can make stories about your own mages and their destinies.

The rules of this book show you how to build a character — an alter-ego in the game — and then tell a story with that character. Each player takes on a role, much like an actor in a play. However, this story isn't pre-scripted; each player describes what his or her mage says and does. In the world of the game, each mage has his share of triumphs and tragedies. The telling of that tale is the fun of the game. Of course, the outcome of the story is no more set than the courses of our own lives. In some cases, then, the rules in this book offer guidance for resolving situations where chance sways the tale. The important thing is to develop the character's personality and capabilities through the course of events.

Remember: The name of the game is storytelling. Rules are just convenient constructions for adjudicating chance occurrences with some consistency and fairness. The rules aren't the point of the game, so they should always give way to a mystical, rousing story.

The Measure of a Mage

In a world like our own, the most thrilling roles are the ones that differ from us in significant ways, while still reflecting some of our key beliefs and desires. Each player in a **Mage** game takes on the role of a magician who can bend the very shape of the world through word and deed. It's an imaginary world not far removed from the one in which we live, but the players have roles of those rare humans who can change that world (and themselves) through an insight beyond anything known to the everyday person.

The Awakening

Although many people study for years to unlock the mystic secrets of the universe, only a rare few open their eyes and Awaken to their individual truths. No one formula or path can dictate Awakening; this awareness strikes where it will, without distinction. The mage discovers that she possesses the ability to shape her own destiny and to turn the world upside-down by dint of will and practice alone.

Awakening can strike suddenly or gradually. Some mages just "wake up" one day, jarred into a new insight through some traumatic event — or no event at all. Others experience a slow heightening of awareness, a winding road of hunches, inklings and feelings that leads to eventual enlightenment. Either way, the supplicant steps into a wider world. Once Awake, there's no turning back.

The Awakening opens a nascent mage to the power to shape magic with his Avatar, but it does not bring practical knowledge automatically. Pushed by visions, dreams or subliminal impulses from the Avatar, many such mages seek out an understanding of their strange new awareness. Through self-tutoring or training in a Tradition, they discover techniques and forms to control their magical powers. Magic, in turn, makes its mark on the mage. Events twist in strange fashions, and the mage finds himself irrevocably set upon a new road, on which mystic events and chance occurrences become the norm.

Seeking

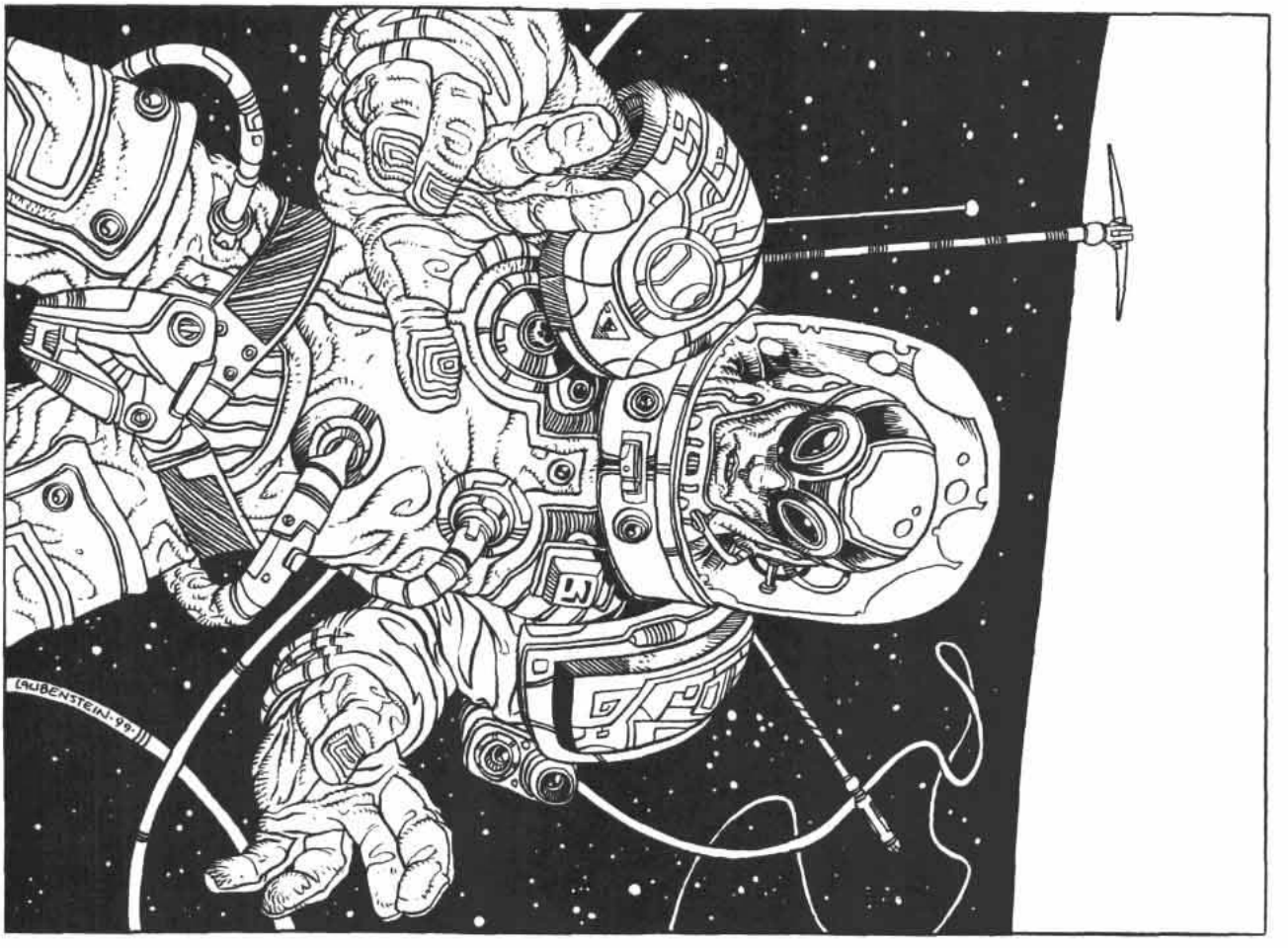
Once Awake, the mage's Avatar is not content to rest. Instead, the mage finds himself driven to greater and greater heights of understanding. Confronting his own fears and frailties, the mage rises to the challenge and passes through the fire to become a tempered, forged soul — or he falls, flawed, in the attempt. In dreams and quests, the mage grasps for higher knowledge instinctively.

Some mages eschew their Seekings for temporal power or material gain. Others cloister themselves from society, the better to explore their inner natures. Regardless, all are driven to justify their beliefs. Although magic brings power, it springs from wisdom. Magic is change, both of the world without and the magician within. From such change, the mage is honed to a more sublime state, willingly or not. Through the fitful Avatar, the mage may find himself driven into a Seeking at any time, striding through spirit-puzzles and dreamlands in a search for inner meaning or the conquest of personal flaws.

Eventually, the mage learns from Seekings and passes beyond the frail concerns of human existence. He puts old foibles and problems aside in the pursuit of a more perfect form. Ascension is the end of this path, but few mages ever go so far. Many never pass through the fires of their own faults. Some are tempted into an easy path to power. Others die before they can muster true understanding. Those who cannot devote time to the practice of magic choose to spend their lives in service, strife or hiding instead. Some put aside Ascension for a different existence as spirits or even gods. Since none return from Ascension, there's no telling where it leads, but the glorious revelations that come with each Seeking show that Ascension must be a potent ending indeed. Perhaps mages believe in this ideal because, in a world of darkness, the greatest enchantment is hope.

Sage, Savant, Scholar

Mages often lead humanity by envisioning new and different ways to shape the world. At the same time, they stand apart, marked by their eccentricities, alien views and magical occur-



rences. Magic follows its shapers, twisting their lives in its turn. Even those mages who help or lead humanity, who gather believers under their banner, are forever set apart from the standard run of mankind. Unable to relate to the Sleeping masses of mortals, consumed by a need for knowledge and driven to the pinnacle of excellence, mages stand apart from humanity as the shining stars of future possibilities.

Many human institutions bow to the strange visions or manipulations of mages. Indeed, magical conspiracies criss-cross the world, dipping into nearly every aspect of human endeavor. At the same time, mages draw their philosophies from human culture, history and society. The two change one another in an intertwined dance. The legacy of past innovation colors the powers of magic for even the most cloistered magician. Magic births new forms while it bows to the strictures of past beliefs. As much as mages would like to claim that they control human destiny, human history shapes mages just as easily.

The Ascension War

Every mage learns to manipulate the stuff of the cosmos through painstaking study, practice and ritual. Naturally, these forms determine what mages can do, how they do these things and what they hold as the "truths" of magical practice. Mages believe in the correctness of their views firmly, and that belief channels their will to transform their visions into reality. Groups of like-minded mages gather to share their insights, while opposing sects decry each other's false practices.

For as long as they have existed, mages have argued over their mystical doctrines. Where faith, science and magic clash, battles erupt. All mages are certain that their mystical ways lead to an enlightened state beyond mere human consciousness, but none can agree on the path to such Ascension. For ages, the Awakened have adhered to their versions of "truth" and battled each other for the right to inculcate all humanity under their dogma. The conflict to bring enlightenment to the world was called the Ascension War.

Over the past few centuries, the Ascension War has raged between magic and science, as the adherents of scientific thought spread their ways throughout the world. Magicians find people increasingly skeptical of and hostile to their ways. Mystics must hide from persecution and a paranoid world that neither knows nor wants their tenets. Magic itself is dying as the world is strangled by static constants. People give up innovation for complacency and daring for comfort. Once, magicians fought to bring magic back to a world in the grip of science; now, they fight to keep their own magic alive.

Science itself stagnates under the weight of its own rhetoric, and true invention dies in the harsh threads of "good enough" and "self-sustaining." The Masses have spoken, and

they choose to be derelict. Their caretakers press on with more science while the spark of mysticism gutters. The idealists who sought to bring Ascension to the world, to give everyone the gift of this superlative understanding, find that the very people they shepherd no longer care. The war for the Ascension of the entire world is over.

And yet, a few mages cling to the idea of returning magic to the world at large. Some want to open the doors of possibility for the Masses. Others want to raise up all humanity with the drive to explore, seek and learn. Still others desire a Renaissance of magic where they can create a new frontier and bring only the best and brightest. For its part, humanity seems content in its womb of safe and sterile technology. In such a world, the battle rages now for the Ascension of the individual, before magic itself dies out.

Hope Amid the Rubble

It may seem that mages fight a lost cause. The Ascension War that drove the old guard may be over, but the youth of the day have a new direction. Where mages once fought across the cosmos over ephemeral ideas, now they fight on Earth for human causes. Even if the world can't be turned back to the days of magic, there are still things worth fighting for. Young mages take up the mantle of leadership in their groups; where once they filled the agendas of their Traditions, now they set those groups' goals. All the human struggles that mages found important—family, friendship, religion, community, learning—still exist, and they're still places where mages might make a greater difference than any other lone human. The Technocracy's hold isn't as firm as it thinks; mages slip among the shadows of superstition, bringing belief back to the masses and subverting the world of science to their uses. With the Ascension War over, more mages ask whether it was an important war, or one worth fighting — or whether it's more important to help individuals where they can, instead of trying to change the whole world at once. Into this new conflict are thrust the mages of the new millennium.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter of this book details a different aspect of the game, from telling stories to creating characters to resolving rules issues. You should skim them in order then read in depth the areas that interest you. Let your imagination guide you. None of these rules are concrete, and all of them are intended to inspire, rather than constrain.

Chapter One: A World of Darkness examines the world in which mages battle for Ascension. And yet, the World of Darkness is more than just the world we see. It also includes the invisible world and the spirit realms where mages fight for abstract magical principles or places of power.

Chapter Two: The Traditions explores the heritage of magical studies passed down through old ways. Each Tradition espouses a unique way to practice magic, codified through centuries of practice and cultural refinement.

Chapter Three: Character and Traits explains the rules for building a character and elaborates on the building blocks

for them. Here you'll find detailed descriptions for describing your characters and defining them in game terms.

Chapter Four: The Spheres elaborates the powers of magic. Mages often divide studies of magic into nine Spheres, each corresponding to a specific facet of reality. The abstract and practical applications of magic are all explored here.

Chapter Five: Rules is the simple set of mechanics for moderating your games. This framework shows how to use ten-sided dice to resolve random events if you don't have a story-related outcome in mind.

Chapter Six: Systems and Drama describes specific ways to apply the rules to certain game situations. Here you'll get detailed descriptions of the types of events that may come up in play, with some suggestions on how to resolve them.

Chapter Seven: A History of the Ascension War outlines the workings of mages from time immemorial to their modern struggles. This broad painting provides a backdrop to place your chronicle in an evolving millennia-old struggle.

Chapter Eight: Storytelling provides advice for Storytellers on shaping compelling and entertaining tales. You'll also discover ways to draw characters into the game and suggestions on themes, moods and classical story elements.

Chapter Nine: Antagonists lists a host of problems and enemies that plague modern mages. Here you'll find descriptions of some of the other creatures that stalk the night, and of the fearsome powers they bring to bear against workers of magic.

Last, the **Appendix** provides a selection of optional rules to spice the game up with some additional flavor.

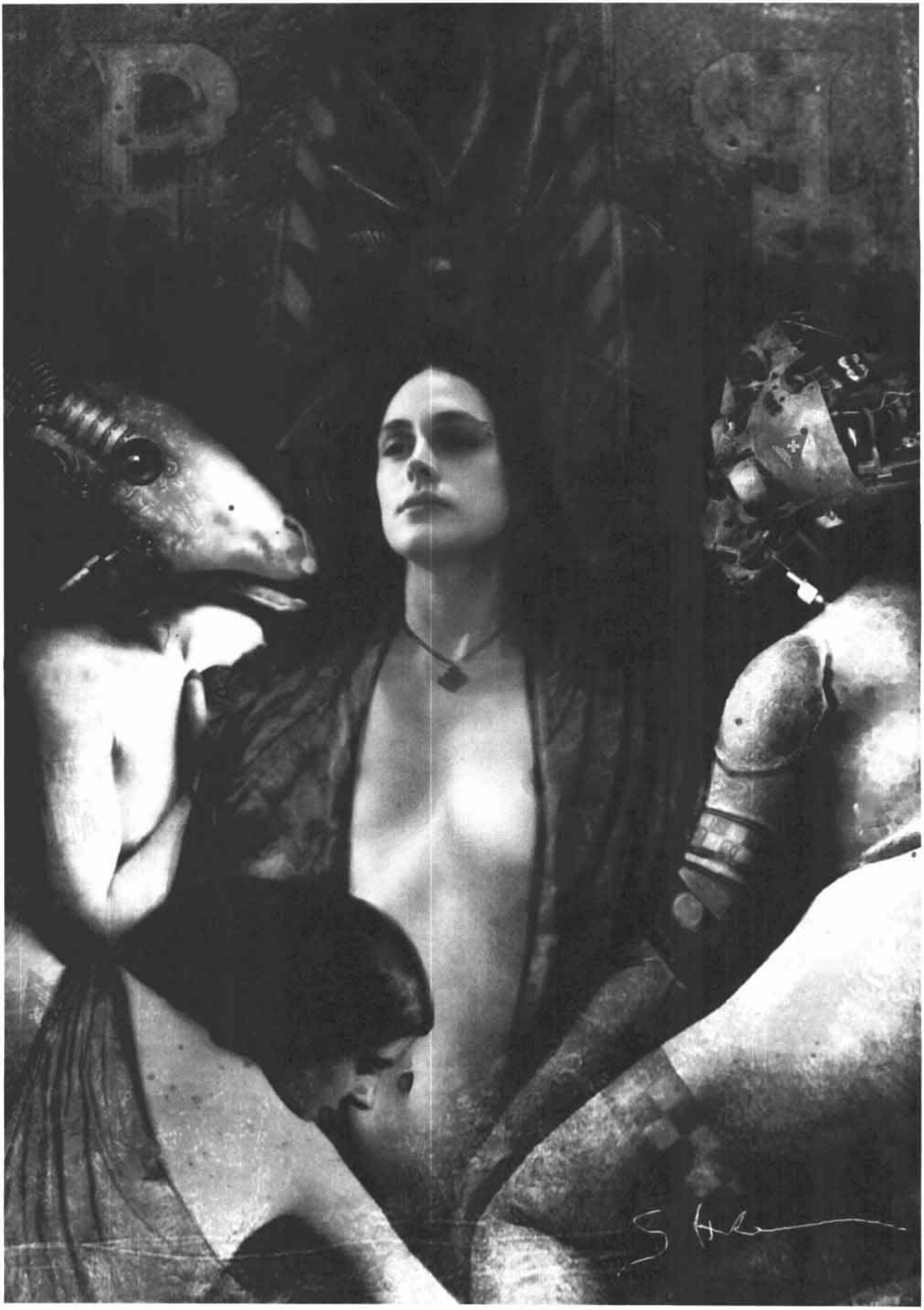
Source Material

Mage draws its inspiration from countless sources of mystical wisdom, erudition and even quackery. Even in the real world, an interest in the mystical has run as an undercurrent through nearly every culture. Look to the pages of history for myriad examples of magical belief.

Among literature, look to the books that posit the full range of human endeavor, or that show the mystic archetypes of magical practice. Try *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *The Book of Five Rings*, *The Once and Future King*, *A Brief History of Time* and just about any historical work you can get your hands on. Magic stems from belief, after all.

Mages don't figure as prominently in film as they do in literature, but there are plenty of examples of people changing the world through force of belief or perception. Check out *The Matrix*, *Practical Magic*, *Dark City*, *Cast a Deadly Spell*, *The Raven*, *Rashomon*, and even less luminary flicks like *Zardoz*, *Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight*, *The Wizard of Speed and Time*, *Legend* or *Crossworlds*. The television shows of *Kung Fu*, *G vs. E*, *In Search Of*, *Poltergeist: The Legacy*, *Friday the 13th: The Series*, *Quantum Leap*, *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* can all provide some interesting (if occasionally oddball) inspirations as well.

The World of Darkness itself is well-captured in many of the aforementioned movies, as well as scenes from films like *The Crow*, *Batman*, *Nick Knight*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Mission: Impossible*.



The Man crossed his leģs and folded his hands. In his lap, the notebook remained closed, a sinģle yellow pencil placed precisely atop. An amicable puzzlement echoed on his face, and he simply reģarded his counterpart for a few moments.

The prisoner chose not to speak. He simply ģlared from the confinement of his chair. Dull silvery bands held his arms and feet in place and the sterile room's beiģe walls and dull brown carpetinģ offered neither inspiration nor assistance. The prisoner ģlared at The Man.

After a few quite moments of indecisive starinģ on both parts, The Man picked up the pencil, flipped open the notebook and cleared his throat.

"Understand that I am not here to hurt you, to break you, or to tell you that you are wronģ. You are here because you made an important choice — you chose to take control of your own life. In doinģ so you took a step that most people never will."

The Man reģarded his notes, then met the eyes of the prisoner. "You chose to indulģe your own fantasies with this ģift. You chose thinģs that hurt other people, thinģs that are danģerous to mankind and incomprehensible to the masses of humanity."

The prisoner ģlowered but said nothinģ.

"I will not tell you that these thinģs are wronģ," continued The Man. "To you they are certainly real. I will tell you that what you've done is careless, and selfish, and hurtful to people. You used this choice to break aģainst the strictures of society, to attack our Order at the expense of common people. And I ask: Was this because you were so consumed with self-revulsion for these choices that you lashed out to distract yourself from your own failinģs?"

The prisoner shook his head violently, but had no words.

Chapter One: A World of Darkness

Pull up a chair and get comfortable. You might as well get something to drink, since this might take some explaining. Countless philosophers and poets have spent their time examining the world around us. There are gas stations and trees and slums and rock concerts and scientific facilities and unexplainable phenomena. Somewhere in the mix of all that is something that we label "the world."

In **Mage: The Ascension**, that same world exists. It has all the modern conveniences, historical foibles and raging debates. However, it's a darkened mirror of our universe, a flip-side touched by a tainted whisper of broken-down reality. It's a World of Darkness, where the streets are a little dirtier, the corporations shadier and the light of the human spirit a dim, guttering flame. In the cracks between sanity and madness, *things* walk those darkened streets. The folk tales and whispered legends are all true. When people line up to see movies about starships, monsters or giant conspiracies, they hardly realize that such things exist in their darkened world.

This World of Darkness is a backdrop for the greatest wars that ever raged out of human sight. While humans squabble over their mundane borders and material concerns, the mystic world exists right beside them, unseen to all but a gifted few. For those who know where to look, an entire realm of spirits, ghost, demons, spells, ancient traditions and hidden wisdom awaits. It's a world of magic.

With the presence of wonder-workers who bend the cosmos to their whims, is it any wonder that reality itself is up for grabs? While all manner of hidden monsters skulk about the fringes of humanity, the rising stars of human endeavor have always been mages — those few who have the will, the enlightenment and the imagination to grasp the unseen, seek the unknown and illuminate the edge of tomorrow. These keepers of wisdom wage their own shadow war, where they determine the future of humanity (they hope) and fight for the right to uphold their beliefs against the tides of sterile conformity. All the while, they must balance the demands of magic with the wondrous and terrible panoply of a maddening, decaying world. They can be the final sparks against the jagged edge of history, as long as they survive their own Awakening into that cold magical night.

The World of Darkness

Although the world of mages seems like our own, it's darkened by the presence of lurking horrors that wait on just the other side of imagination. Mages bend the strings of the universe to their will, and their conflict reaches into the hearts of human society. With so many disparate visions tugging at belief and shaping the world, strife is inevitable. As mages shape the world to suit their visions, the world itself becomes an instrument for their war. The lives of people and of nations are torn asunder as ideology and the pragmatic needs of the conflict twist at the fabric of creation.

Gothic-Punk

The term "Gothic-Punk" best describes the decadent ambience and rebellious fervor of the World of Darkness. Violence blends with elegance as wealth and privilege mix in the panoply of fear and cultural conflict.

In the cracked, squalid cities, people dance and while away the hours in glittering social clubs, trying to ignore the urban centers' decay. The towering buildings of the downtown scene cling to art-graven styles. By contrast, slums roil with strife and warfare, as desperate masses of humanity claw at their pieces of turf. Beyond, the remaining wilderness stands untouched by human tracks, forbidding in its small, pristine sites. People cling to their smothering and protective governments because they fear the chaos bubbling beneath the skin of society. Under the gleaming spires of the Church, the halls of justice and the artifacts of society, the masses strive for lives of comfort and refinement. The Gothic image of looming architecture is everywhere, chased with gold and silver as it watches over the dispossessed.

In contrast to the buildings that stand like juggernauts to humanity's achievements, Punk nihilism echoes in the overpowering despair of dreams destroyed. Ignored by society, the less fortunate rebel. The upper classes revel decadently in their wealth while gangs, criminals, the insane and the deprived maraud through crumbling neighborhoods. The buzz of technology is nearly overwhelming, as disenfranchised groups revolt through shocking displays of brutality, art, faith and mysticism. The world careens down a fast track to self-destruction, and everybody wants an escape.

Through the descriptions of the game, the Gothic-Punk setting provides a distinct ambience. The Storyteller's narration lets the feeling of a desperate, edgy world come through in the action, while the players' reactions reinforce their place in such a desperate setting. Of course, every group has an image of the World of Darkness, and your image can be as Gothic or Punk as you want it to be.

Mages

There is strength — and safety — in numbers. Conversely, there are very few mages on Earth, especially with the recent changes presaging new dangers in the spirit worlds. Skilled Masters from all factions have been forced to abandon Earth, as their magic is too dangerous to perform in this stultifying society. Younger mages must band together for survival, and even those who don't choose sides find that their uniqueness makes them stand out from the crowd. Mages are a society unto themselves.

Since they're so different from the normal humans that surround them, mages naturally polarize according to their own standards. Mages measure one another by their prowess with magical feats, the strength of their destiny and the ideologies to which they cling. A mage's skill with the magical arts determines the respect she can command in mage society, while her style of magical practice helps determine the groups of mages with whom she works. Mystics who carry on the beliefs of ancient societies or cast-off theories fall into the heading of Traditions, while the

philosopher-scientists of progressive reason fall into the ranks of the Technocratic Union's Conventions. Beyond these boundaries are mages too insanely wrapped up in their own beliefs to interact with the sane world (Marauders) and those who sell their hopes of enlightenment in exchange for the power to bring about the dissolution of reality (the Nephandi). Lastly, a rare few mages cling to systems of cultural belief or even to their own self-developed ways of magical practice. These Crafts and Orphans are the rarest of the lot, and perhaps those in the most danger as well. After all, with little organization to protect them, they're the first ones against the wall when trouble comes.

There's no room left in the hectic world for fence-sitters. The few remaining mages who have not chosen sides are either in deep hiding or dead. Most independent mages have since chosen to throw in with the Traditions, and a very few with the Conventions — if only for protection.

The Nine Traditions

To numerous magical traditions, nine is considered an auspicious number. To followers of the Hermetic way, that number represents the mage bearing the lamp of enlightenment through reality. Nine is also the peak of power and experience in a nine-phase cycle; it represents the perfection of mind and spirit. Based on such auspicious symbols, the Order of Hermes, an ancient group of mages hearkening to the magic of Egypt, Solomon, Thothmes and similar structured formulae, brought together the mystic Traditions to form a glorious union.

The Council of Nine Traditions attempted to harness this destiny. Throughout history, unfortunately, it has failed to fill all nine seats of its leadership for any length of time. Eight seats — representing the mundane world and its trappings — has been the rule through most of its history.

For a time, there was hope. Recently, with the addition of the Virtual Adepts, all nine seats were filled. The Council was invigorated by this swing of the pendulum, and its members truly believed that they could overcome the opposition through numerological divination, despite being outnumbered and outgunned. The Council felt that this superiority, along with its greater magical flexibility and emphasis on personal freedoms — the latter more appealing to Sleepers than the conformity the Technocratic Union espoused — would provide the necessary advantage to win the Ascension War.

The Council of Nine serves as a mutual protection from outside threats and as a neutral ground where mages of differing Traditions can exchange ideas or work together toward common goals. The Council built what should be a grand alliance of mystical Traditions, working to create a world where each person is free to choose her own path.

Troubled Times

The Council lost most of its experienced leadership in a devastating invasion, its far-away holdings have been cut off from most communications with Earth, and the Gauntlet between the spirit and material worlds is too dangerous to traverse casually. The global consensus has hardened against mystical magic, forcing Tradition mages to resort to more subtle applications of their arts.

Even worse, no one has heard from the old Masters and Archmages since the last known communiqué from Horizon. Many who were on Earth have simply vanished. A few have been found, but most must flee the stringent Earth realm where their very magical existence incites disastrous consequences.

The mages left on Earth, mainly new initiates, disciples and adepts, have been left to their own devices. These mystics fight a desperate guerilla war against the Technocracy, likely hoping in vain to strike a telling blow and survive to find personal Ascension. However, many have begun to lose hope and drop out of sight in favor of pursuing personal goals.

The Ties that Bind

The Council has never been a unified pillar of strength. Rather, it is nine separate columns that serve to support a much greater whole. Each column is of a different design, but all share common elements, such as the belief in personal Ascension and the freedom for humanity to choose its own path. The Council's flagship goal has long been to restore magic to the world and bring back the mythic ages of old. Most Council mages, however, understand that this goal is a literal impossibility. The world has become so entrenched in science that it no longer accepts magic.

Many idealistic young mages still believe that there is hope, that there is some way to exploit the increasingly obvious cracks in the Consensus and fill them in with magical ways and philosophies, that these flaws can be exploited to restore the magical times of old. Others believe instead that it is necessary to find a new path and a new world. They understand that the old ways are forever gone from the Masses, if not from the Traditions. These dissident voices believe that they must adapt their ways to the Consensus to better exploit its faults. In so doing, the resulting world will have undreamed wonders, and everyone will be free to seek his own path to Ascension.

Many have simply given up all hope, and they fight only to survive. The Masters' disappearance, the loss of contact with the Horizon and the heightened Pogrom and Paradox drive these mages to hopeless despair.

Ascension

The Traditions believe primarily in a balanced interaction between personal Ascension and humanity's overall development (spiritually as well as materially). Mages should be paragons of their philosophies, to serve as examples to Sleepers. If their values are true, the Sleepers will realize it. The Council espouses that no mage has the right to force humanity to conform to any paradigm.

When humanity achieves perfection — at its own pace — reality will advance to the next stage.

Sleepers

Tradition mages generally hold compassion for Sleepers. Everyone, they say, has a right to achieve personal fulfillment without external interference. All cultures deserve enlightenment.

Ironically, this sentiment forces mages to charge themselves with protecting the well being of people who ultimately reinforce the Technocracy's paradigm. Their skepticism reinforces science and makes mystical workings even more difficult.

One aspect of that philosophy that leaves many mages uncomfortable is simply that if the Sleepers choose to support science, then the Traditions must protect that decision. These mages would prefer other, more proactive paths.

Horizon Chantry

The Council of Nine shared a central Chantry called (somewhat erroneously) Horizon, where it held major meetings every nine years and more informal gatherings on a frequent basis. Horizon was the rallying point for all Tradition mages and a symbol of the Council's unity.

All this security and symbolism changed recently when a presumed-dead revolutionary incited many young mages to attack Horizon openly, leading to fighting within the Council Chamber itself. The Gauntlet's thickening compounds the aftermath of this attack further. With little or no reliable contact between Earth-bound mages and Horizon, the symbol has lost much of its power. With the deaths of many Councilors, the Traditions' ideal of unity lies shattered.

Some mages seek to establish a second Horizon Chantry on Earth, where they can again gather, coordinate and reestablish their former unity, or perhaps achieve greater success. Only time will tell if this effort succeeds.

Ranks and Titles

At the Grand Convocation at which the Council formed, the Traditions agreed to a system of ranks and titles to be used across Tradition lines. Ranks rate a mage's relative enlightenment and skill with particular spheres. Additionally, titles may be granted for exceptional deeds, feats of magic, venerable age or even on a whim. However, a mage who cannot support her title will soon lose it.

The most common method to gain a title is through aptitude with one or more Spheres. A mage new to magic is often considered an Apprentice or Initiate, regardless of whether he receives instruction or not. When he demonstrates greater control over a Sphere, he may be elevated to the rank of Disciple. With even greater command comes the title of Adept. The exalted rank of Master is awarded to those mages who achieve the highest degrees of control over a Sphere. A mage who has attained a legendary refinement of her control of magic receives the coveted and rare title of Archmage. Such recognition comes only with the acknowledgement its concomitant responsibility.

An old mage might be recognized as a Master over several Spheres, but most of these powerful mages have retreated from Earth since the Gauntlet thickened, fleeing the prison imposed within the material world. These titles recognize power over understanding, and some claim that this hierarchy encourages hubris. A mage might race to master a Sphere simply for want of power and without care for the enlightenment that should accompany it.

The Council of Nine chose these terms in 1466 to serve as generic modes of address. Today, however, only the Choristers and Hermetics even *remotely* support this decision. Other

What Do These Titles Mean?

For game purposes, these ranks reflect Sphere ratings of one-two (Apprentice/Initiate), three (Disciple), four (Adept), five (Master) and six or higher (Archmage).

Traditions prefer to use their own terms. The Sons of Ether use Student, Scientist, Professor, Doctor and Master Scientist. Several Traditions (Dreamspeakers, Verbena and Virtual Adepts, for instance), bestow no ranks at all.

The Technocratic Union

In the dawn of this new millennium, the world and its people are dominated by the Technocracy in body, mind and soul. Programs instituted to subvert and trivialize isolated pockets of deviancy have come to fruition, the Traditions have been broken, and now this monolith turns its attention to finishing the job. Scientists within the Union see themselves as architects of the new world, a reality they've spent six and a half centuries building. When other factions tamper with the Masses, the Union has the most to lose. For this reason, the Technocrats react with swift efficiency to quell threats to their dominion.

The Modern Day

The frenetic pace of the modern world keeps the Technocracy busy inventing new theories and devices, protecting the populace from dangerous discoveries and expanding the sphere of human knowledge. At the same time, though, the mystic Traditions defy conventional science, the stagnant society of the Masses presses against any creativity or deviance, and science and technology fail under the burden of their own complexity when managed by fallible humans. Technocratic agents respond to this pressure with fervent action — whether hunting down the mystics they don't understand, seeking ways to rebuild flawed technology or even fighting against the excesses of other Technocratic quirks.

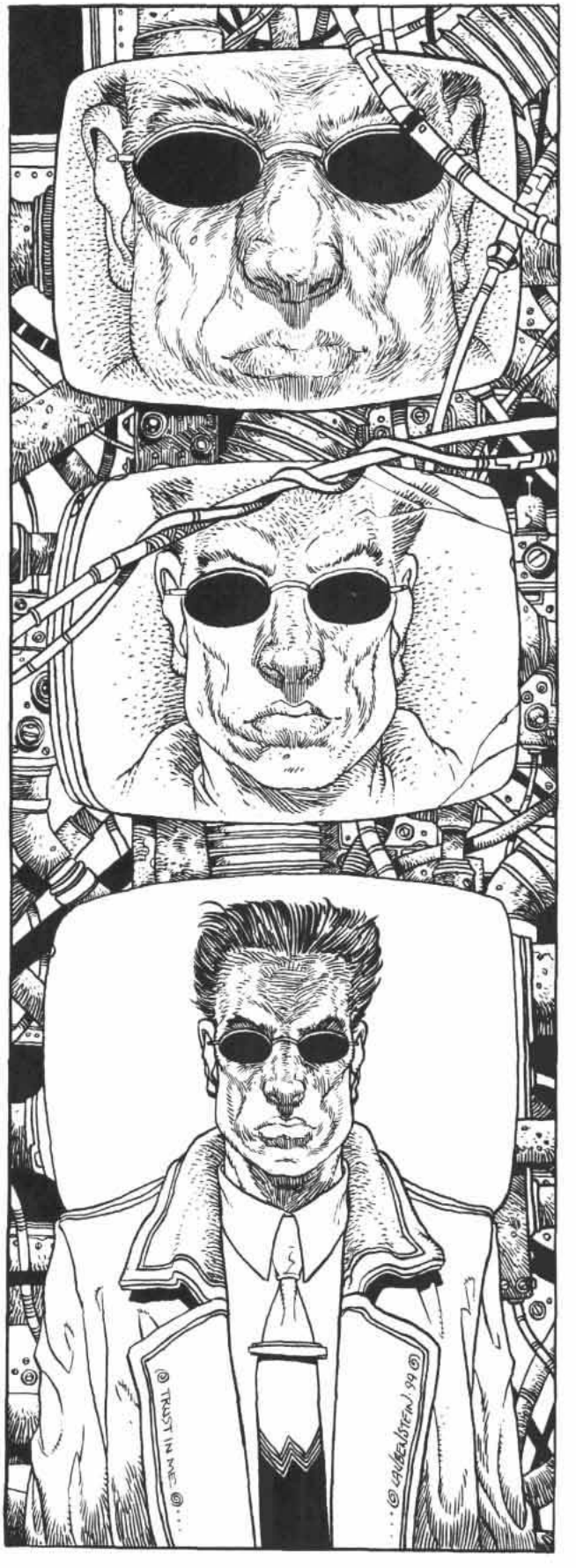
With a track record like that, who cares if a few throwback wizards get steamrollered in the process? Perhaps once, the Technocracy was a noble endeavor, but it was founded in fear, greed and hate, and it has grown long and twisted roots from such tainted seeds.

Scientific Procedure

To the Traditions, the Technocracy's application of science and technology is magical — to the Council of Nine, the ability to cross the Gauntlet, read minds, fly or otherwise transcend human limits is the act of exerting will to manipulate reality. To the Technocracy, nothing could be further from the truth. Union scientists research, build and fight to create and preserve a world in which magic does not exist. To them, magic is a thing of superstition, a regressive evolution in thinking, a non-reproducible phenomenon and a dangerous experiment in uncontrollable forces.

Science is the cornerstone of everything for which the Technocracy stands. It espouses provable, repeatable results, technology that any human can use without danger and a categorization of natural, scientific laws. Science is something not governed by belief, but demonstrated through rigorous experimental procedure.

Similarly, Technocrats don't accept any of the trappings that surround magical beliefs. They don't accept the existence of Avatars. Instead, they acknowledge Genius. They do not connect to humanity's Dreams when they need to pick up needed information. Instead, they Cram a database. To a



Technocrat, all scientific works are separate from her. She may build a teleportation platform, but she does not entertain the belief that the platform works because she wills it so. It works because she researched, constructed and tested it, probably with the aid of assistants. Technocratic scientists see themselves as the most enlightened minds of humanity, able to comprehend sciences far too esoteric for the Masses to understand or use.

Chain of Command

The Union is a vast, shadowy organization with tentacles reaching into nearly every human endeavor. Most mages rarely encounter more than one or two of its arms. Despite appearances to the contrary, the Technocracy is not the omnipresent entity many Tradition mages believe it to be.

The capstone to the Union's hierarchy is the Inner Circle, a mysterious body of scientists few have ever met directly. To most Technocrats, the Inner Circle is nothing more than a letterhead for Union-wide announcements. Since the recent shutdown of deep-space operations, communications from the Inner Circle have been spotty, and most Earthbound Technocrats rely more on personal discretion than mission statements from this exalted body. This change in procedure is something of an inconvenience, since it's believed that only the Inner Circle has the complete Timetable that dictates when new discoveries must be introduced to the Masses.

The Inner Circle sets schedules for monthly Symposiums, where the leaders of each Convention gather to discuss the current situation and plans. When a consensus is reached, a vision statement is prepared and distributed throughout the Union. Again, due to limited communications, these documents don't always get full distribution on Earth. Sometimes, they aren't applicable to current Earthly matters and are ignored in favor of more pressing issues.

Despite appearances, a majority of the Technocracy's operatives — at all levels, in all Methodologies — are not Enlightened. They are Sleepers who are, at the very least, trained in advanced techniques to enable them to make use of advanced equipment. Most of the New World Order's agents in governments and media, or the Syndicate's agents throughout big business are Sleepers as well. There simply aren't enough Enlightened personnel to use them for such low-profile jobs.

Vision

Now that the Ascension War is functionally over and the Traditions are on the run, the Union has more personnel and time available to devote to completing its goals. Each Convention has its own vision on how to achieve these goals, but all work for the same final end.

First, the Union intends to make as much of the Earth habitable as possible. Overcrowding leads to superstition, lack of education, lowered expectations, poor living standards and poverty. With room for all to live comfortably — or at least with a modicum of privacy — the Technocracy hopes to encourage the Masses to improve themselves.

The Union tries to encourage and improve education worldwide; this goal ties into the first. The simple fact is that if instructors have more time to devote to individual students, each student has a greater chance to excel in whichever field of study he chooses. The New World Order has developed many instruction techniques that are well in advance of those commonly used in First World countries.

Once Earth is secure, the Union intends for humanity to move to the stars, to colonize first the Moon, then other planets within the solar system. First, the Void Engineers must ensure that it's safe for humanity to leave Earth — that Nephandi, alien creatures, Marauders and other threats are subdued.

Technocratic doctors reduce and eliminate disease, birth defects and crippling conditions. The Progenitors are primarily behind this program to improve health care technology worldwide. They seek to introduce new medicines, diagnostic and surgical techniques and encourage greater vigilance in watching for health-threatening conditions. By eliminating the specter of illness and injury, the Union hopes to free humanity from its fear of mortality.

Finally, and most importantly, the Technocracy seeks to trigger its vision of global Empowerment. Each Convention has its own particular ideas on how this event might happen, but it appears that the Progenitors and Iteration X are the most likely to work out the technology necessary to accomplish this exaltation of humanity to near-godhood. They seek to increase intelligence via machine or direct human augmentation, and to make further increases possible.

The ultimate result of each of these courses of action is that magic will not only be forgotten, but outmoded. Everything mages could possibly hope to accomplish will be easier to do with technology, and it will be available to everyone. Without the need for magic, the presence of mages should simply dwindle away. Spreading the population across all the Earth, there will no longer be regions remote from human habitation, and thus no safe locales for Bygones to reside or visit Earth. The same reasoning applies to space travel and interplanetary colonization. Once Earth is no longer safe, the supernatural dangers of the world must retreat somewhere, and the Void Engineers hope to cut off their lines of retreat.

With widespread education in scientific principles, there will be no need to explain any aspect of reality through gods, magic or other superstitions. With the Ascension of humanity, even the Technocracy will become irrelevant — an outcome that many Technocrats admittedly dislike. Other scientists believe that it will simply bring all humanity into the Union. Either way, the supernatural will cease to be a threat. On a more ominous note, individuality might become an artifact of the past as well. Perhaps the Technocracy's creations will develop their own intelligence and replace humanity altogether. The latter is a worrisome thought for many.

Marauders

Some few mages go completely mad upon Awakening, or at some point thereafter. Although mental instability is by no means uncommon among the Awakened (given their incredible shifts in viewpoint, it's almost to be expected), a rare few are afflicted with a madness so potent that it colors their very

interaction with reality. Their viewpoints change forever, and they find that the world they see is not the one in which everyone else lives.

Such beings are called Marauders, and they can come from any stock, be it Tradition, Technocrat or Disparate mage. Naturally, a Marauder's condition isn't always noticeable immediately, and a Marauder who seems to be a member of a particular faction could do a great deal of harm by exposing that group's internal workings or becoming important and then engaging in his own twisted agenda. For these reasons and others, most mages fear Marauders. A few magicians even hunt Marauders down, considering them a threat to "controlled" magic.

Aside from their personal little worlds, in which they encapsulate their own visions of a reality different from the external one, Marauders have little to set them apart from other mages. However, with their Avatars twisted by their own delusions, Marauders change the world in ways that aren't inconsistent with their own little wrapped-up realities, and they rarely suffer the backlashes of such change. A Marauder *can* attract Paradox, and the more sane and stable he is, the more likely such a fate becomes, but often such Paradox simply "washes off" the Marauder without effect, when it comes at all.

Thankfully, Marauders are rare in the modern age. Those with the most insane visions, the least ability to deal with the world around them, find that the Earth is difficult for them to touch. Such maniacs exist on the rim of the spirit world, and they have long since left behind any ties to the Earth for which other mages battle. The Marauders that remain are certainly unhinged and dangerous, but more in touch with the external world (such as it is) than their wildly flamboyant cousins of yesteryear.

Nephandi

Few words will polarize a mage as much or as quickly as the term Nephandus. The Fallen Ones are the servants of Oblivion, nightmares and the primal chaos from which the universe was vomited forth upon Creation. Individually, each Nephandus serves a lord or concept of such taint. Collectively, the Nephandi desire nothing less than the utter destruction of all reality. Theirs is a vision not of Ascension, but of Descent.

Nephandi are hated, hunted and feared not only for their dark appetites, but because they are the inversion of all for which mages strive. A Nephandus has his Avatar literally torn inside-out, forever reversing his destiny and turning him into an agent of destruction instead of creation. Worse, any mage can Fall, and the Nephandi are always eager to gain new recruits. Traitors to the Traditions and Technocracy are labeled *barabbi*, and both groups hunt them with unparalleled ferocity, even putting aside animosities to fight the Fallen. Perhaps most horrifyingly, a mage's Avatar is tainted *forever* once he Falls. Only the Oracles would know if such a hideously warped soul could ever be saved.

The Lost Ones, Crafts and Disparates

Some mages deliberately choose not to join the ranks of the Traditions or Technocracy. Others simply Awaken on

their own and learn their magic in unique styles. Others hail from small, cultural enclaves that practice styles of magic less broad than the Traditions' studies. A few even take a hodgepodge mixture of everything and stir it together, making magic out of the potpourri. Collectively, these mages are Disparates — those who do not fit with the order of mage society. Individually, they may be Orphans (mages who Awakened and developed their powers without a mentor) or members of Crafts (small cultural groups).

Recently, elements within the Technocracy have taken notice of the independent Crafts and moved to wipe them out as thoroughly as possible. Even small groups of mages focused on a particular cultural heritage are considered a threat to the Consensus. Most have been scattered or destroyed, or they have joined one of the Traditions for protection from their enemies.

Orphans

The Self-Awakened have increased in numbers, despite such difficulties as the Technocratic Pogrom and aggressive Tradition recruitment drives. More people Awaken spontaneously every day without the guidance of a mentor, and they are forced to find their own way. They lack the organized framework of any faction or many contacts in the magical communities that could be of any use. For these reasons, they're called Orphans.

Old Ascension Warriors see the Orphans as loose cannons; their lack of training and coordination make them a danger to all sides, to themselves and to innocent bystanders. For this reason, the self-Awakened are often hunted and either killed or inducted into Conventions or Traditions as appropriate. Most Orphans prefer to find their own paths, and they often die violent deaths in the process.

In this hectic day and age, any mage outside of the Traditions, Conventions, Marauders and Nephandi categories is an Orphan — or a Disparate, as they're being called more and more often. Indeed, groups formerly recognized as Crafts have splintered to the point that they can claim only a half-dozen mages with scattershot training. Therefore, they, too, are simply Disparates with their own unified cabal.

The Oracles

The powers, goals and even existence of these god-like mages are often disputed. Some claim that Oracles have ascended to a higher plane of existence, others insist that they are but myths. Some powerful beings who rule over distant Realms claim to be Oracles, but they might simply be powerful spirits or Archmages.

Most agree that Oracles do exist. It is known that many Archmages and Masters have departed to deep reaches of the Umbra to pursue a place among the Oracles. None ever return, so their fates are unknown. Supposedly, rejects' Avatars are branded in some extreme and obvious manner, but none have seen such markings or have the faintest idea of what they should look like. Some rumors suggest that there are a limited number of Oracles, and that one must Ascend or die before another may join them.

Given the conditions on Earth, it's unlikely that any mage will ever meet one of these beings (or become one), so most mages consider it a moot point. It's entirely possible that an Oracle's very nature might find the Consensus stifling, or even fatal.

Cabals

Joined by common experience and pushed away from the rest of humanity by their supernatural perceptions, mages tend to gather in small bands called cabals. Historically, those mages who didn't shun company would gather with like-minded magicians, sometimes sharing knowledge or engaging in mutual defense. Obviously, such gatherings tended to fall to internal squabbling, egotism and ideological conflict. Still, some of the greatest victories (and failures) have come from gatherings of mages — witness the Technocratic Union, the Order of Hermes and even the Tradition Council.

In the modern age, cabals suffer less often from internecine squabbles, simply because there are so few mages left and the survivors must take what company they can get. Under a unified banner of shared knowledge, the Traditions have no choice but to tolerate diversity; the Technocracy has long since developed its own policy of shared science. Of course, just because these respective organizations embrace such innovation within their own ranks, doesn't mean that individuals don't have their own problems with their compatriots.

Cabals form for many different reasons. Obviously, mages can relate to people more easily when said people can understand their perspective on living, but it's not that simple. Mages naturally find themselves in strange situations. It's as if, once attuned to the magical world, that world goes out of its way to thrust the mage into an *interesting* life. When multiple mages find themselves in some unusual, arcane circumstance, it's only natural for them to share their knowledge to get out alive (assuming they don't kill one another over philosophical differences first). The company of others who actually *understand* what's going on is immensely comforting to novice mages, and many stick together in spite of their differences in style and dogma. Facing down a common foe also has a way of building bonds of friendship.

As a basic social unit among mages, cabals fill nearly as many roles as there are groups. Most work in groups of equals, although there are exceptions. A few mages prefer to work independently or just to survive on their own. Still, there's strength in numbers, as well as more diverse means to handle threats.

Other Things

Just because the world's a wider place for mages doesn't mean that it always dances to their fingertips. Magic has been part of the cosmos for millennia, and so have the legends of the mystical — goblins, bogies, zombies and stranger things. Although many such Bygones have fled the Earth, still more remain, and mages tend to run into them with alarming frequency.

More complete descriptions of various supernatural "critters" can be found in Chapter Nine.

The Cosmos

Now for the big question: What is reality?

There is the world, and then there's the World — and the difference between them is more than just a capitalization or how much baritone you put in your voice. In the world, you wake each morning and shuffle off to work. Awaiting your return home is the pale glow of television and a frozen dinner promised to taste "just like home made." The World, however, is a place far removed from the stupefying monotony of that existence. A place of miracles and wonders hides behind the fragile façade of brick and stone. The World is the Tellurian, and it is nothing less than everything you can imagine.

The Tellurian

It's a fancy name for reality, the Tellurian, but mages thrive on idealization and identity. By giving something importance, it gains power. It helps to separate the colorful truth of existence from the brown paper wrapping everyone's given at birth. And the Tellurian is a very colorful truth, indeed.

The Tellurian is the universe — a place of vast possibilities and opportunities, limited only by the imaginations of those who inhabit it. Anything and everything that can be dreamed, discussed or described has the potential to exist inside its vastness. Much of such fantasy already does exist, and much, much more has yet to take form. The Tellurian is existence without limits and with hopes given form. It is the material and spiritual worlds as one, where thought becomes action and belief takes shape.

The Tapestry

There is no real way to understand the Tellurian in its raw state of pure possibility. Despite the best efforts of mages, everyone has limits to understanding, and therefore, they cannot truly accept the purity of ultimate chaos. Through metaphor, humans apply an order and structure to the stuff of the Tellurian. They create the Tapestry. Each possibility or dream is given shape as a thread and is woven into the fabric of the world. The talent of the Awakened is to re-weave the threads as needed or desired, and to shape possibilities to their ends. Fundamentally, magic includes weaving the raw stuff of the Tellurian into the world and changing the pattern.

The danger is that too much tugging on the threads can cause them to fray, snap or lose their form. More importantly, the Awakened can change the Tapestry only by changing their place within it. Thus, every pull on a thread echoes a pull back at the mage. A mage who pulls too hard may fall when her thread breaks, or she may lose herself in a sudden snarl. Care must always be taken to watch the pattern of the Tapestry, and not to change it too much at once. No one knows what would happen if it were to become too worn or frayed to hold together, but the best guess is simply... an end to reality.

Fast Asleep

Reason is the festering scab laid down over reality. It's all around, pressing in and suffocating. It can explain everything, but it solves nothing. It's the blanket pulled up around the chins of humanity, to keep them quietly asleep to the truths of existence. It's both a powerful tool and a constraining limit at once.

The world of the mundane, the normals, the Sleepers, is a gray place. Sure, there are sunshine and lollipops, rainbows overhead after it rains and acres and acres of green grass lawns carefully tended on weekends by suburbanites treating weeds like they're worse than cancer. Plenty of colors burst out, but all of it is just a gray blanket over real colors. Magic is something in fairy tales or for that weird lady with all the cats in that smelly shop on the corner of Run Down Street and We Don't Go There Avenue.

This is the reality of the World of Darkness — most people do not believe in mages. They don't believe in magic, in things that go bump in the night, that a man could turn into a monster with but a thought, or that the dead don't always stay all the way dead. Why should they think otherwise? Everything tells them that magic is the stuff of legends, myths and children's stories.

Only it isn't.

Not that the Sleepers of the world notice or care. They have problems all their own. Assured by governments that need to prove their effectiveness that crime rates are down, people still go to sleep each night with locked doors and alarms systems blinking into the night. Work is plentiful, yet you still cross the street to avoid the growing numbers of homeless people just looking to survive. Everyone is getting richer, it seems, except you and your neighbors.

It's not enough that the cities are becoming wastelands that need to be "recovered" from the dense humanity packed into their gray towers. The suburbs, havens of the rich and well-off, are as rotten as any apple left too long on the counter. Behind the façade of perfect lawns and cookie-cutter housing lurks a twisted heart that spawns child abuse, drugs, alcohol, spousal abuse, child porn and murder. There's no safety in the checkerboard of green lawns and blue swimming pools, for the monster of reality has come to call.

Maybe you're thinking that the countryside or wilderness holds the key to peace or safety. You're wrong. The swath of destruction and fear reaches out even into the most remote havens. Antarctica is studied as a source of natural resources. The Amazon still burns. Whales are hunted again in waters safe for nearly half a century. Poisons are still dumped into the streams, rivers, lakes and oceans that sustain us.

It's not a pretty picture, this dream of reason.

The Bed We Made

It's something else out there. It almost seems too crowded to move around without getting the attention of someone who'd like to use an errant mage for target practice. Thankfully, there are still places to hang out or hide in scattered through out the Tellurian. A good number are here on Earth. They're more than safehouses, though. They're repositories of knowledge, neutral ground and places for the advancement of magic. In the old parlance, they're called Chantries.

The Chantries

You're not going to spot a Chantry by how it looks. They come in all varieties from a creaking Victorian house with "haunted" just about painted on it to a Volkswagen van parked in some guy's back yard. Don't go looking for some tower perched on the edge of a mountain with lightning flashing in the background — at least, not here in the Americas. Where once Chantries were fortified homes of magicians, now they're secretive places to hide, or defensive positions closeted away in otherwise normal settings.

A Chantry is any place where mages can lie back, stay out of the fighting and relax for a few minutes. Some rare and hotly contested ones are built around places of power, and they assist in performing magic. Most are just some place for which a mage has paid the rent for the month and stashed a bag of chips in the cupboard.

Nodes

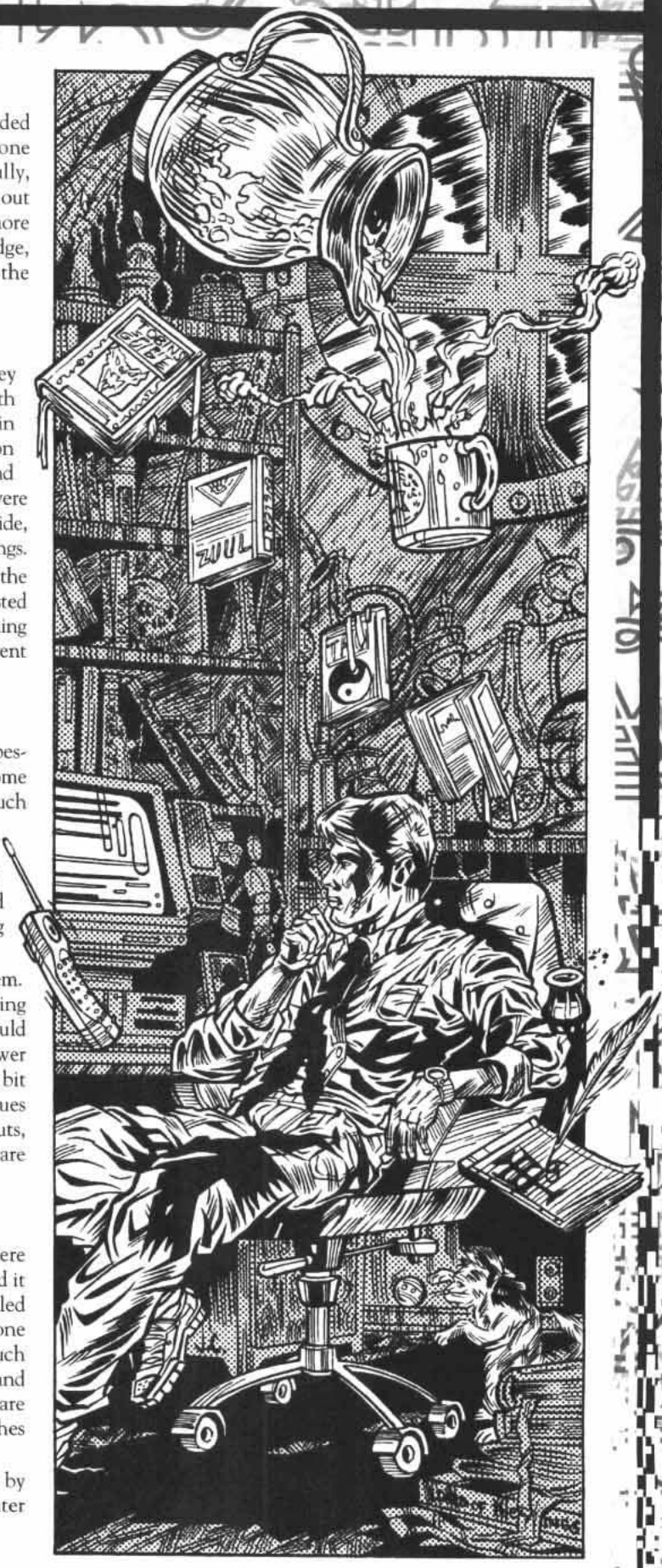
Nodes are places of power. They're places where the Tapestry knots, and the power of the cosmos — Quintessence, as some call it — pools up. When mages set up a Chantry on top of such a place, they can tug the strings of the Tapestry much more easily. Such places reveal themselves through how easy it gets to push the boundaries of magic therein. Better still, many Nodes leave little bits of power accessible in the objects around them. Simple things in the area soak up the power, becoming Tass, magical energy trapped in a material form.

It's possible that Nodes form to reflect what's around them. For instance, Stonehenge could be the result of someone putting a lot of effort into getting those stones up in that pattern. It could be that people build things unconsciously to reflect the power they can barely sense through their sleep. There may be a little bit of both at work, and a mage can sometimes use these subtle cues to spot a Node just by looking at a map. Unusual street layouts, buildings that seem too out of place, or natural features that are a little too regular all point out such locations.

Constructs

Of course, mystical magicians are not the only ones out there looking for Nodes. The Technocracy has its own agenda, and it involves turning Nodes into its own bases of operation, called Constructs or Colonies. Such places are rarely pleasant. For one thing, the Technocracy "sanitizes" the Prime energy in such places, turning it away from the raw potential of magic and harnessing it for static science. For another, such bases are research labs and industrial sites without a lot of room for couches and coffee tables. Comfort is rarely a priority for these guys.

Just like Chantries, Constructs can often be spotted by appearance. Sure, most of them are research labs, computer



colleges or industrial plants, but there's a good chance that the cable van that's parked on the corner and never moves is one, too. What can't be emphasized enough is the fact that appearance doesn't matter. When reality's mutable, what something looks like doesn't actually tell everything about it.

Sanctums

Mages who get good enough (or infamous enough) often build their own personal retreats. Clever mages avoid the obvious things like towers or Masonic Temples; such features attract attention, and that's the last thing Tradition mages want with today's Technocratic eyes in the skies. The trick is to find something that looks unassuming on the outside and transform it on the inside.

A sanctum is a personal space and piece of reality. The mage crafts it on the inside, attuning the place to his magical style and desires, and he ties it into his own vision of reality. A sanctum doesn't necessarily have to be luxurious or spectacular, but it must fit the mage's view of his world. It's where a mage can do his work better than anyone. Experiments, study, astral travel... all that magic is easier for the mage in a sanctum, and harder for everyone else who doesn't fit the mage's paradigm.

The Near Umbra

Enough about Earth; the universe is larger than that. There's a whole chunk of the Tellurian out there that most people never get to see. In nights past, mages would jaunt through spirit worlds and lost lands with impunity. However, as with all potent magic, the days of such travels are mostly gone. You might want to think of it all like something from the comics — dimensional hopping, alternate realities and time travel. The Realms are far more infinite and complex than any simple comic conveys, though.

The Gauntlet

When someone says "gauntlet," you probably flash to one of those big leather gloves that cops or bikers wear to protect their forearms. Well, that's one way to think of the barrier between the Earth and the rest of the spirit realms. The Gauntlet is, however, more like the old punishment meted out to the crews of British warships where a sailor who'd screwed up would be made to run said gauntlet. His shipmates would stand in two opposing lines armed with clubs, and they'd hit him as hard as they could as he ran between them. Well, crossing over from the material world to the spiritual one feels a lot like a lot of people hitting you with clubs, and it gives you a headache just about that bad.

The barrier isn't just there to keep humans from getting out, though. There's a lot of bad stuff in the spirit realms that would like nothing better than to come to Earth and consume souls. It works both ways — the Gauntlet keeps mages in their little playground, and it keeps the Bad Things out. Not that it stops all mages from crossing over, of course. Spirit travel may be more dangerous than ever before, but mages have always been heroes and fools.

It used to be fairly easy to travel across the Gauntlet. Sure, a headache and some metaphysical bruises were typical, but nothing can prepare a novice mage for the trip in the modern age. It's almost like someone slammed down a blast door to keep mage from getting through to the other side — or perhaps it's hardened to keep something worse from coming in. The Gauntlet used to make spirit travel difficult, but now it's painfully injurious to boot.

Even before the Gauntlet's new "edge," spirit travel was hazardous. Few mages could muster the power necessary to drop in on nature spirits or the lands of the dead. From such excursions come quests of legend.

The Penumbra

Once through the Gauntlet, the mage may be surprised by how much things look like the world she just left. That is, she'll notice the difference after she's finished throwing up and biting back a scream from the pain. Just stepping into the spirit realms nearest the Earth's physical form takes the mage far away from any Kansas that she knew. Mages call this near realm the Penumbra. It's the almost-Earth that exists just out of sight but is always in the heart.

The Astral Umbra

One step removed from the Penumbra is the Astral Umbra. Older mages call this place the High Umbra, but that's not quite how most of the new blood think of it. Just as the Penumbra takes emotional context and enhances it to create an ideal of Earth, the Astral Umbra amplifies the rational context.

Anything that one could want to know about the meaning of the universe can theoretically be found here. Of course, anything in the universe can probably be hashed out with a lot of discussion and soul-searching, too. When belief shapes reality, exploration of thought over a pint of Guinness is just as valid as any Realm of abstract concepts.

The Dark Umbra

This Realm is where the dead end up; where the disappeared disappear to. The taint of entropy infects everything and the awesome weight of universal decay hangs overhead. If the Penumbra is what people want and the Astral Umbra is what they think, then this Realm is what they dread. The cities are crumbling mounds of decay, crawling with the spirits of the dead. Everything in the cities is on the verge of collapse and destruction. The place even smells bad. Everywhere one goes, the dead envy the life of the visiting mage, and they'll do their best to snuff it out.

Domains and Realms

Not *everything* past the Gauntlet is just abstract or horrific. If it were all bad news, why would mages bother crossing over? Sometimes a mage can invest enough thought or emotion into a corner of the Umbra that it sticks. How it works, only the Oracles know. Somehow, though, the belief is strong enough that it pockets off a chunk of the Umbra and changes the rules there. Things work differently and usually to the advantage of the magically active.

The Horizon

Let's skip back a little bit. It's mentioned that the Tellurian is everything a mage can imagine. It's everything *everyone* can imagine. However, there are limits to what humanity can imagine, and at the edge of those limits is the Horizon — the cutting edge of the imagination, as it were. The Horizon lays out into the reaches of space, surprisingly enough, to the edges of Venus and Mars. Much like the Near Umbra is a kind of parallel of Earth, the Horizon parallels the Sleepers' exploration of the solar system. Here's where the most powerful of mages used to set up shop to do battle with each other over the fabric of the Tapestry. The real fight used to be here, with the biggest of the big slinging Quintessence almost directly at each other.

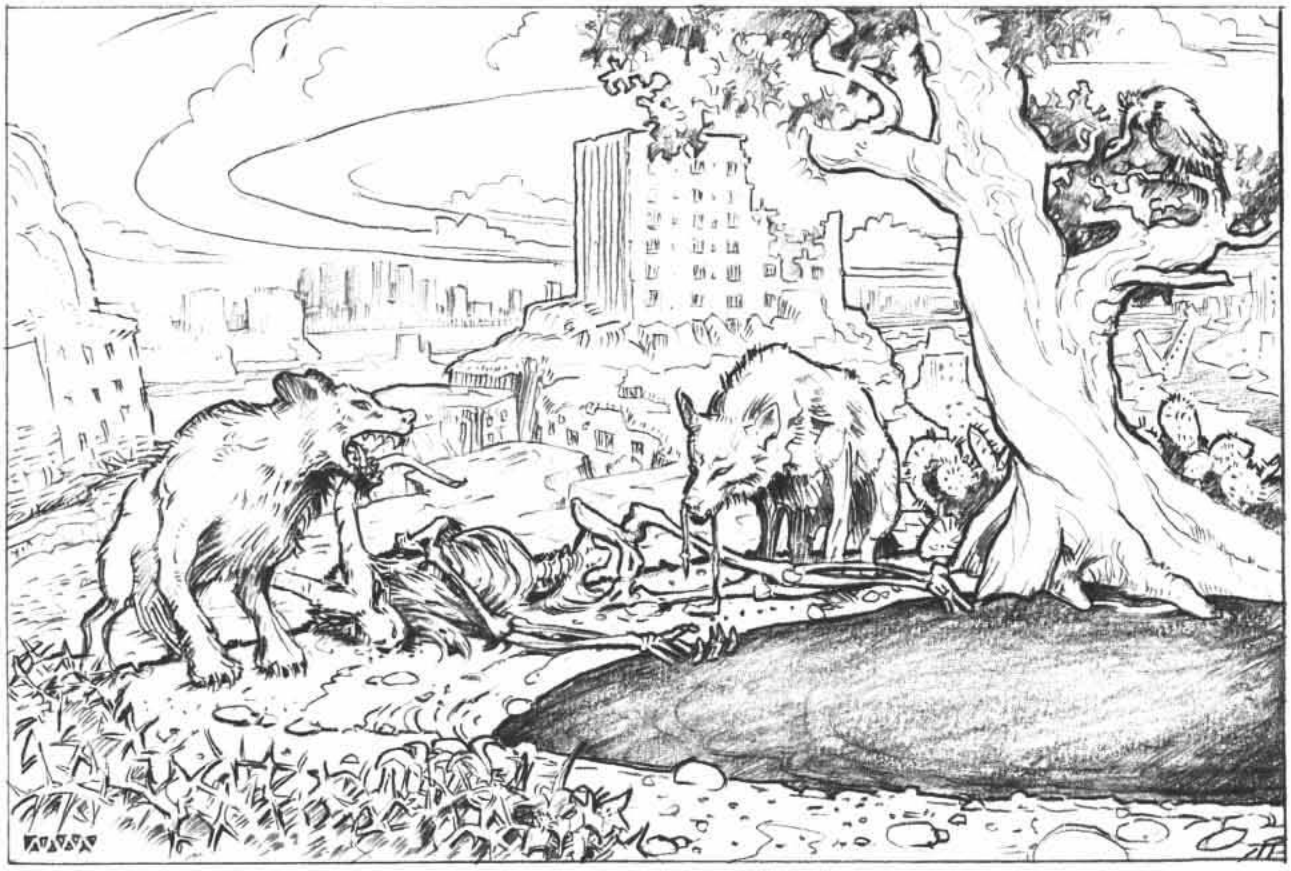
However, space isn't quite the playground it once was. The Gauntlet isn't just harder to cross than it used to be for mages, it's also harder to cross for the Quintessence that Earth provides, which makes things difficult out in the Horizon. The magic that holds the reality together out there is fraying at the edges. Most of the Horizon Realms are starting to look rundown and it might not be long before they start to collapse.

Beyond the Horizon

What lies beyond the limits of human imaginings is the question that seems to drive the more dedicated, or insane, of the Awakened out beyond the boundaries of the Horizon into the Deep Umbra. That's a big way of saying that there's *something* out there, and nobody is sure if it's anything that Man was Meant to Know. Almost everything about the places beyond the Horizon comes from hearsay, for few other than Masters would dare travel there. Survival is tenuous, and only very powerful magic can keep a mage alive so far from Earth.

Otherworlds

Since the Umbra seems to match up with the Earth, it seems likely that it extends out into space to other worlds. Who really knows what's out there? Once past the neighboring Realms of the Umbra, there could be all sorts of strangeness. Alternate Earths. A Mars ruled by four-armed green things. Some dark gibbering madness lurking past Pluto. Everything is possible. Worse, even suggesting it might call it into being. The universe is infinite... too infinite to be safe for exploration or even sanity.



ARMAGEDDON

According to legend, the universe sundered after its creation, with pieces of the One primal essence shattering into the shards that became Avatars. In theory, mages seek Ascension so that they might reunite these shards with the cosmic essence, in effect healing the universe's birthing injuries. Some mages fight for a global Ascension so that all humanity might contribute in this effort.

However, legend also tells of a darker and more terrifying fate: the possibility of Armageddon. Perhaps the cosmos was created flawed. Perhaps the shards of Prime can never re-unite. Perhaps Ascension itself is some lie, and there is no salvation. In the end, it's said, the forces of magic will do battle, and the world will be laid to waste by the results.

Few prophecies and legends exist about Armageddon. Some mages think that it will come if the Technocracy ever truly wipes out wonder from the world. Others believe that it's an inevitable state, or perhaps the work of the Nephandi. A few mages cling to the notion that Armageddon opens the door to a new age, the old world destroyed to usher in the next one.

Armageddon would be a most unpleasant ending, but with the magic slowly dying from the world and reality itself seemingly on a collision course for some horrific end, the specter of total annihilation looms ever greater over all mages.

LEXICON

Mages often converse in their own terms, whether handed down in a Tradition or made up to fill a certain niche. Some come from identifiable magical roots, while others seem to stem from no traceable origin.

COMMON PARLANCE

Acolyte: A servitor of a mage who does not perform magic, but believes in its power.

Arete (AIR-uh-tay): A mage's level of mystical understanding and connection to the Tellurian.

Ascension: The mythical state of enlightenment beyond human comprehension.

Ascension War, The: The conflict to determine whether the world would embrace magic, science or faith.

Arcane: A sort of unconscious "cloaking" effect that some mages possess, rendering them immune to scrutiny.

Avatar: A shard of spirit energy, tied to the human soul, perhaps from the Pure One(s) of the long-ago universe. Through the interaction of the Avatar with the universe, a mage performs magic.

Awakened, The: Blanket term for supernatural entities, including mages.

SPECIAL K

What happened to "magick"? Of the mages left on Earth, few know enough about Avatars and Prime theory to even recognize that the Awakened Avatar allows for a very different sort of magic than Sleeper sorcery. You speak in strange tongues — you make gestures with your hand — your enemy bursts into flames! Was it Awakened magic or sorcery? Who can tell?

When someone changes the world through practice and will, it's magic. Perhaps it was a conceit of hubris to ever think that Awakened mages were somehow special and superior to others with their "True Magick."

Awakening, The: The moment in which one realizes the power to change the universe.

Branding: A punishment in which the mage's Avatar is marked.

Bygone: An otherworldly beast, such as a dragon, that has long since disappeared from Earth.

Cabal: A group of mages bound by some common purpose.

Censure: A punishment in which the mage is warned against future violations, similar to parole.

Chantry: A stronghold of mages.

Coincidental Magic: Magic cloaked in circumstance. Such magic appears like it "could have happened" coincidentally.

Convention: One of five groups forming the Technocratic Union: Iteration X, the New World Order, the Progenitors, the Syndicate and the Void Engineers.

Craft: A cultural faction of mages.

Deep Umbra: The aspects of the Umbra far beyond Earth, in deep space.

Demon: A name for a dangerous creature from the spirit worlds, possibly a spirit, possibly something else.

Dream Realms: Worlds fashioned from dreams kept alive.

Epiphany: A magical revelation or sudden insight into magic.

Familiar: A spirit given flesh, which bonds with a mage to serve and gain sustenance.

Focus: An item, act, phrase, gesture or similar artifice required to perform magic. Through the focus, the mage concentrates belief and will and causes magic to result.

Gaia: The Earth Mother, spirit of Earth as related by various naturalistic mages.

Gate: A magical doorway that allows passage between two places.

Gauntlet, The: The barrier separating the material world from the spirit worlds.

Gilgul: The rite of destroying an Avatar as well as a mage's ability to do magic or to reincarnate.

Hollow Ones: A group that espouses post-modernism, the Gothic subculture and decadence in response to the declining world.

Horizon, The: The magical limit separating the Near Umbra and the Deep Umbra.

Hubris: The overwhelming pride that leads a mage to believe that he may challenge the cosmos itself, and that convinces a mage that his way is "the right way." Such hubris is often fatal, and it lies at the heart of the conflict between mages.

Initiation: A test to pass a young mage from the ranks of apprentice to full responsibility within a Tradition.

Mage: Term for a human who can work magic according to a discrete set of beliefs and practices, and thereby cause the world to change according to her desire.

Magic: The act of altering the world through force of will and practice of belief.

Marauder: A mage given over to dynamism, and tainted by insanity.

Metaphysic Trinity: The universal forces of Stasis, Dynamism and Entropy.

Methodology: A sub-group within a Technocratic Convention.

Mystic: Having to do with magic.

Near Umbra: The parts of the Umbra around Realms and near the Earth.

Nephandus: A mage who has Fallen to dark service and seeks to return the universe to primordial chaos.

Node: A place of power where Quintessence flows freely and strongly.

Oracle: A legendary mage who has moved beyond the understanding of other magicians, perhaps even to Ascension.

Orphans: Mages who Awaken without formal training and who school themselves in their own magical techniques. Each Orphan discovers her own paradigm of doing magic.

Ostracism: A punishment declaring a mage separated from mage society.

Otherworlds: Realms outside the Gauntlet.

Paradox: The backlash of reality bending against magical change. Paradox can strike a mage directly, or it may build up subtly.

Paradox Realm: A temporary Realm created by a huge backlash of Paradox, wherein a mage must unravel the bizarre twisting of the universe to escape.

Paradox Spirit: A spirit entity that hounds a mage as a result of Paradox.

Path: A general term for destiny, or for a particular branch of magical practice.

Pattern: The metaphysical composition of an object, place, person or idea.

Procedures: Technocratic "magic."

Pure Ones: Legendary primordial beings from the dawn of creation; some mages believe Avatars to be pieces of the Pure Ones.

Pogrom, The: The Technocratic purge of supernatural elements.

Portal: A permanent Gate, allowing access to or from (not always both) a particular location. Portals can be keyed to allow only certain access or certain times of activation or any number of security measures.

Prime: The force of energy that describes all of reality's basic composition.

Protocols, The: A code of honor and set of rules held by the Traditions. Many Traditionalists feel desperate enough not to constrain themselves to all of the Protocols.

Quiet: A temporary (usually) delusional state brought on by Paradox and magic.

Quintessence: The energy of magic. All things are created from Quintessence and return to it. The building blocks of Prime energy.

Realms: The various worlds of the Tellurian.

Resonance: Mystical traces and attunements tied to magical actions, emotions, intent and desire. All magic carries Resonance, and Resonance reflects a mage's will in creating an effect.

Rote: A magical process handed down as a common (or at least well-used) practice.

Seeking: The quest for greater enlightenment.

Shade Realm: The Umbral component of a Shard Realm.

Shard Realm: A Realm or world corresponding to one of the nine elements of magic, sundered from Gaia long ago. Each is ruled by a Celestine and is thought to correspond with one of the planets, including Luna.

Sleeper: A person who has not yet Awakened to the fullness of the supernatural world.

Sphere: A particular element of reality that can be codified and manipulated with magic.

Static Reality: The "natural course" of reality, unaffected by the direction of magic. Static reality has become more and more constrictive as the world clamps down to a single paradigm and as reality becomes less accepting of change or magic.

Symposium: A meeting of the Technocracy.

Tass: Quintessence held in a physical object. Such an object can be used for barter, or to power magical effects.

Tapestry, The: A metaphor for reality as a whole.

Technocracy, The: The modern organization and conspiracy dedicated to furthering a scientific and rational basis for the world. The Technocracy hopes to make reality "safe for humanity" by removing random elements and dangerous foibles. It believes that humanity does not have the ability to cope with such elements on its own. As a result, the Technocracy (or Technocratic Union) strives to eliminate magical phenomena and to stop mages, whose powers they do not understand.

Tellurian: The whole of reality.

Tradition: One of the Nine Mystic Traditions, a group of mages sharing similar training and outlooks. The Traditions fight to preserve magic against the Technocracy, and to defend against the depredations of Marauders and Nephandi. These groups are the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus, the Cult of Ecstasy, the Dreamspeakers, the Euthanatos, the Order of Hermes, the Sons of Ether, the Verbena and the Virtual Adepts.

Tribunal: A gathering of Tradition mages to discuss important matters.

Umbra: The spirit world(s).

Umbrood: Any number of creatures and spirits that exist in the spirit realms.

Vulgar Magic: Magic that breaks the "laws of reality," like hurling flame, flying through the air or turning someone into a toad.

Wonder: An object of magical power. Some Wonders are simple objects that perform only a small trick or hold a tiny amount of Quintessence, while others are legendary artifacts capable of phenomenal feats of magic and holding great amounts of mystical energy.

Wyck: A common name for primordial magi and magic.

Titles

Adept: A mage with a fair degree of aptitude and power — though now some of the most powerful mages left on Earth.

Apprentice: A mage who has not been initiated, but who studies the forms of a Tradition.

Bani: An honorific indicating a mage's Traditional affiliation: "Nightshade bani Verbena."

Barabbi: A mage who joins the ranks of the Nephandi.

Celestine: A great spirit, essentially a god.

Consor: A potent ally of a mage, but one who is not a mage himself.

Deacon: A common title for a founder of an established Chantry.

Disciple: The initiated beginners of the Traditions. Disciples can perform limited magic, and they are accepted as Tradition members.

Errant: A mage whose Chantry and cabal have been destroyed.

Fellow: A full member of a Chantry, but not a founder.

Incarna: Greater spirits; the servants of the Celestines. For all intents and purposes, demigods.

Lord: An Umbrood spirit less powerful than an Incarna but greater than a Preceptor or Minion.

Master: A mage of great power and ability, who has reached the pinnacle of one or more Spheres. Such mages are extremely rare on Earth, as most work their highly dangerous magic in the more pliable spirit worlds.

Mentor: A mage who teaches another.

Minion: A low-ranking Umbrood spirit.

Pedagogue: A Hermetic tutor of great fame, usually quite powerful and surrounded by students.

Preceptor: An Umbrood spirit that is less powerful than a Lord, but more powerful than a Minion.

Primus: "First One," used to refer to the founders of the Traditions and the current living heads of said Traditions. In the wake of the destruction of Doissetep and Concordia, many Traditions are without Primi.

Rogue: A renegade mage.

Sentinel: A mage who guards over a Chantry but is not a member.

Technomancer: A mage of a mystic Tradition who uses the trappings of technology, but combines them with mystical understanding. Not to be confused with a Technocrat, a mage who relies wholly on the theories of science and technology.

Tutor: Mages who have become proficient teachers. This term denotes some respect.

Old Form

Certámen: Formalized, non-lethal magical dueling, used to settle disputes between mages.

Curtain, The: The "false" reality in which Sleepers believe. An Awakened entity has passed "through the Curtain" to the wider world.

Custos: A non-mage who works with or for a cabal or Chantry.

Fallen One: A Nephandus.

Grog: A familiar form of the term custos.

Magus: A mage. Plural *magi*.

Postulant: A mage who serves the Oracles and attempts to join their ranks.

Turb: A gang of Grogs.

Vis: Quintessence.

Vulgar Argot

Black Hats & Mirrorshades: The Technocracy.

Bloodwork: Any magic that requires great effort, or that actually requires the use of blood.

Copperfield: Playing off a magical effect as a mere trick or coincidence.

Crystal Wavers: "New Age" magicians who have no understanding of real magic.

Doxed: To have accumulated too much Paradox energy.

Dram: A unit of measure for Quintessence.

Faust: A mage who bargains excessively with spirits, especially dangerous ones.

Freak: A dangerously insane mage.

Fry: To attack someone with magic, most often with the Sphere of Forces.

Goin' Satanic: To Fall and join the Nephandi.

Grayface: A Technocrat or any mage who is excessively Static.

Juice: Quintessence.

Merlin: An old mage, especially one locked outside of Earth.

Mundane: A normal human.

Nuke: An assault from a Paradox Spirit.

Pit Bulls: Derogatory term for werewolves.

Technobabble: A derogatory term for the magic of the Technocracy.

Wyld & Fried: An insane mage, generally a Marauder.

The cigarette's ash fell, unbidden, to the grayish sidewalk, only to be quickly swept away by a gust of wind. David dropped the remainder of the piece and ground it under his boot. Looking down the street, past the thronging people and the sputtering lights, he growled out his protest, muttering, "I still think it's a dumb idea. We know your rep, Mark, but that doesn't mean that you're the fucking bee's knees."

Mark chuckled and a winning smile split his weathered face. "Christ, Dave, you could beat me for the bitter cynicism department. Seriously, though, it'll work especially because nobody would think we'd have the balls. And because Cathrine here can turn their assets into ours."

Hands on her hips, Cathrine shot David a challenging look. "Come on," she said forcefully. "You got a better way?"

David refused to meet her eyes. Finally, he turned back to face the two, looking down at his boots. "Crap," he grumbled. "I don't have to tell you how much I hate this."

"Good," grinned Mark. "When I'm right, I'm right." He clapped David on the back. "So that means that you're in. Let's get down to business." Mark rubbed his hands briskly together.

Cathrine lazily leaned against a wall, scanning the crowd as she sank back against an outcropping and carefully checked a pistol stored under her long coat. The click of the clip's replacement brought David's eyes up.

"All right. Yeah, I'm in," David admitted. "We go in hot, Cathrine creates chaos, we grab the convert and we make it look like a raid, right?"

Mark nodded and started off down the street, his coat flapping at his heels. "You create the fear, I'll create the flash, we grab the guy and Cathrine crashes the club. In and out. Simple."

David shook his head and followed while Cathrine brought up the rear. "I've heard that before," he said with some disgust. "It never seems to work that way."

Chapter Two: The Traditions

It's much easier to be different when there are other people, different just like you, around. Mages are certainly no exception. Those mages grouping together to share common mystic principles developed their own council and unified system of magic. From the roots that they've handed down, they have established magical Traditions. The Traditions have their disagreements over theory and style, certainly, but they have found, especially lately, that it is often more productive to work together — at least on the surface — toward their common goal of defense against forces that would destroy magic and myth.

The Council of Nine, made up of one member from each established Tradition, serves as the official governing force of the Traditions. The Council's purpose is to guide the actions of the Traditions as a whole, to serve as a watchdog for mages' activities and look out for the well-being of mages and Sleepers alike. In truth, the Council has little effect on the daily life of the average Traditionalist. Its ideals tend to filter down to individuals; its active goals tend to be achieved by small groups of disciples taught by mages close to the Council.

On an individual level, the Traditions serve a variety of purposes in a mage's life. The Traditions help a mage to learn, give her moral and magical support and help her understand and define the structure of her beliefs. A Tradition mage can also expect to be part of a group of people who will back her up and shelter her in sticky situations. On the other hand, Traditions usually expect their members to be helpful in return.

In the modern age, the Traditions hold dear the various practices of magic handed down from many cultures and legacies. All believe, however, that it's important to keep magic alive and to give Sleepers the choice of a magical world. From the highest seats of Tradition thinking in the Horizon Realms, to the individual apprentices who dream of a better world, the Traditions defend a world where people can believe in wonder, mysticism and spirituality. The Technocratic Union has no room for such vagaries, and the Masses have chosen to live in a safe and static world.

Not all mages choose to become part of a Tradition, however. Some prefer to work and live by themselves, figuring out solutions to their problems and celebrating success alone. These Orphans don't get the benefits of being part of a discrete group, but they don't have to deal with the more difficult parts of being social, either.

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

Mind, body and spirit are all part of the larger whole of the person, just as the person is part of the larger whole of the universe. Identity, division and conflict are illusions. When the mind and body come into harmony, the soul follows. When the individual does not resist the universe but moves with it, he embraces his nature. From these philosophical roots came the Akashic Brotherhood. By honing the body, the Brothers make a temple for the mind; with the refined mind comes understanding of the spirit. The Brotherhood uses simple tools — exercise, meditation, practice and study — to refine the simple man into a brother of knowledge.

Background

The philosophical and historic roots of the Akashic Brotherhood lie in the beginning times when all people lived in harmony. The first Akashics learned their skill in Do from Dragon and Phoenix, and they disciplined their bodies and their minds through the balance of movement and stillness. As the earth turned and more people came to live near the All, the All fractured and became dissonant. The balance between mind and body, motion and stillness, was disturbed, and the ones who would become Akashic Brothers retreated into mountains, caves and forests to continue their study of balance through Do. Martial arts and exercises perfected the body while rigorous disciplines, chants and prayers cleansed the mind.

As the world fractured and people took up dissonant paths, conflict came in several forms to the Brotherhood. The earliest artificers brought the first vestiges of technology to humanity, thus turning people from their relationship with the immaterial world and strengthening the barrier between the physical and the spiritual realms. Tools encouraged people to focus on only the things they could touch and forget that there was ever anything else; material goods became a goal and replaced the natural fulfillment of personal accomplishment. Even within the Brotherhood, young students took up the study of Do but failed to understand the relationship between philosophy and physical prowess. These warriors saw the Brotherhood's physical skills as an end, and brought disharmony to the group and its relations with others.

Later, Akashic conflicts expanded to include another group of Awakened humans, a band of mages who saw reincarnation as their duty. The Brotherhood did not approve of mages who took into their own hands the power over life and death, and the Brotherhood warred against the death mages — who would later become the Euthanatos — for 300 years. The war left both Traditions scarred. Although neither has entirely forgiven the other for the centuries of bloodshed, they have learned from each other. Neither Tradition (as a whole) jumps quickly into conflict.

As the spiritual philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto and similar religions spread across Asia, the Brotherhood followed. The Shaolin monasteries of China housed their members, as did the mountain-dwelling hermits of Japan, the cloistered priests of Tibet and the mysterious mystics of India. Many common people adopted Brotherhood beliefs in everyday life. This groundswell of common support became the Brotherhood's bane: organized nations, harsh rulers and secret societies resented the Brotherhood's liberating influence on the Masses. Eventually, the Brotherhood found itself embroiled in wars as armies and governments sought to destroy its influence. The Brotherhood's holdings were broken and its members scattered. Hierarchical societies and caste systems, combined with a focus on material living, turned people against the Brotherhood's self-empowering ways.

Still, as an organization devoted to the improvement of the individual, the Akashic Brotherhood survived. Wandering priests here and there kept the Brotherhood's ideas alive while the teachings of the Tradition remained a part of many cultures and families. Technocratic influence may have destroyed the Brotherhood's material strength, but that was never its focus — the Brotherhood's true power came from the *soul* of humanity. Those who needed guidance, who felt the calling of Do, found the Brotherhood. Independent of the modern desires, structures and possessions of the technological age, the brothers and sisters could not be trapped or deprived of the light they kept within.

To the modern Traditions, the Brotherhood now embodies the balance between violence and peace, understanding and conflict, in which the Traditions themselves remain embroiled. The Brotherhood's roots are spiritual, so they cannot be slain with bullets, money or laws. The Warring Fists use their incredible prowess to battle the enemies of the Traditions, while their teachings preach the Ascension of each individual through righteous action. As the modern Renaissance of martial arts and Asian philosophy blends with 21st-century culture and technology, the Brotherhood seeds itself once more in the hearts of common people everywhere.

Organization

Structure in the Brotherhood is loose; enlightenment and destiny are recognized as steps along the path, but all living

things have virtue and value. To the Brotherhood, the idea of placing one thing or philosophy over another is a false division. Therefore, while Masters are respected for their insight, they do not exercise any real weight of authority — they are simply credited for their insight. Akashic acolytes come from all walks of life, but all study the Akashic way of leading a pure and simple lifestyle, at least to some degree. As a Brother progresses to a simpler and more unhindered state of Do and a greater Arete, his accomplishments are recorded and his teachings distributed so that all may benefit from them.

Factions

The Akashic Brotherhood is not made up of Shaolin priests only; neither does it exclude Caucasians or any other group. True, the focus of the Tradition is mainly Asiatic, but the search for balance and understanding is universal. Buddhists, Confucianists and Taoists make up a good percentage of the Brotherhood's ranks. Atheists, pagans and even Christians are welcome — any enlightened soul seeking to find harmony and study the way of Do can become a Brother. (Incidentally, the term Brother is not a slight against the female members of the Tradition. Akashic Brother is simply a title for someone who studies the ways of Akasha, and it is intended to carry no gender bias.)

Although the Tradition seems peaceful on the outside, it is not so from the inside. Disagreement thrives within this Tradition as well as it does within the others. The greatest divisions in the Akashic ranks arise between the younger members who want to make war on their enemies, the Masters who seek only enlightenment and the newly initiated members of the Wu Lung Craft.

Heavily traditional elements make up the **Shi-Ren**, or "benevolent aristocracy." Legalists and political elements who desire greater Akashic influence in worldly affairs form the basis of this group. According to the Shi-Ren, Brotherhood ways can only continue to fade into obscurity if the cultures that spawned them are pushed into history. Although many modern Shi-Ren do not honestly believe that a return to Imperial China is possible, they do feel that it's important for the Brotherhood to maintain a stake in modern politics and culture. They stress the teaching of history and the roots of the Brotherhood; many have Pattern Essences. These Brothers study Mind magic intensely, push for better organization and serve as a public face in diplomacy and political struggle.

In direct counterpoint to the traditional members of the Brotherhood are the **Li-Hai**, who subscribe to Mo Tzu's philosophy of utilitarian morality. These Brothers believe that ancient traditions force the mind into a false sense of morality, one that is not guided by pragmatism. Groundless traditions then cause people to take harmful actions. The Li-Hai argue that all morality must stem from reasoned analysis of what is utilitarian and what is harmful, and they seek to abolish old traditions that no longer have relevance in the modern age. These Brothers feel that the Brotherhood needs to modernize, to accept new ideas to approach the changing world and to learn to work within the systems of tools promoted by scientific society. Although these Brothers continue the practice of Do, they discard elements of Akashic magic that stem from old tradition. Instead, they seek to meld Do and the Akashic Record into a modern, rational approach to health, morality and personal advancement.

The **Kannagara** are ascetics who uphold many old practices within the Brotherhood. These monks' take on difficult ordeals to purify themselves and to strengthen themselves physically and spiritually. All members of the Brotherhood use such techniques to some degree, but the Kannagara believe that the right mind and right soul can only come through right action, and that such action stems from ritual, hardship and practice. Most Kannagara remain cloistered away in Akashic retreats, where they practice daily prayers and devotions. They sometimes journey to the outside world as well, in order to see that which they hope to surpass. As Brotherhood retreats fall to modern expansion or tourism, and asceticism loses popularity, the Kannagara slowly dwindle.

Mystically inclined Brothers form the **Jnani**, a group of yogis who follow various forms of Shinto and Tibetan rites in order to develop spiritually. As monists, the Jnani hope to reconcile the consciousness of the self with the Avatar (which they term the "Buddha-Mind"). Through practices of yoga, tantra, prayer, chant and the ubiquitous Do and meditation, Jnani seek unification with the absolute principle of reality. Instead of seeing reality as malleable, they believe that it stems from one core principle, and that all other veils of illusion stem from the inability to reconcile the self with the absolute principle. These monks engage in spirit-questing, and they seek out internal wisdom to remove the boundaries between the self and the Avatar. Naturally, they command potent Spirit magic. However, they also retain many unusual libraries and practices unknown to much of the rest of the Brotherhood. Rumor says that they have long held several hidden monasteries and that they keep secret catacombs deep beneath the Earth, where one can find passage to Horizon Realms or discover ancient places of power that tap into the consciousness of the absolute.

Young and hot-blooded warriors in the Brotherhood join the **Vajrapani**, or "wielders of the Diamond Wand." To them, enlightenment is like a diamond: hard, unyielding, containing only reflections of the outward world. The Vajrapani give the Brotherhood its moniker as "Warring Fists," for their title stems from the term for both "diamond" and "thunderbolt," whilst the diamond wand of their namesake is the metaphor for supernatural power. These Akashics argue that the Technocracy can be defeated only through powerful action, and they use Do as their weapon. Interestingly, the Vajrapani stem originally from a metaphysical feminine principle, but this fact does not limit membership in this political faction. Indeed, being a Vajrapani is often more a matter of a young and impulsive student getting labeled as such by a mentor (or recognized as a kindred sort by other young warriors). Vajrapani work to develop their martial prowess, and they often seek out conflict with the perceived enemies of the Brotherhood. Older members sometimes drift into other factions, but some do remain active as warriors — the Tradition must have its defenders, after all.

Lastly, the **Wu Lung**, the family of the Dragon, are a separate sect of mages who allied with the Brotherhood very recently. In the past, the Wu Lung and the Akashic Brotherhood fought for dominance over traditional China. Today, with their greatest leaders slain and their heritage diluted by modern China, the Wu Lung have been forced to set aside their grudges and ally with the only remaining inheritors of China's ancient culture. The Dragon

Wizards practice a rigorous and bureaucratic style of magic reminiscent of China's old imperial days, complete with ancestor worship and careful appeasement of the heavenly spirits. Both Brothers and Wizards still seek a means to reconcile their disparate beliefs, using their common roots for a basis. Still, there's a long way to go. The Wizards even practice their own martial art separate from Do. It seems that their faction in the Brotherhood will remain a rather disparate part, forced by circumstance to bow to the greater weight of the Brotherhood in the Traditions. The imperial bureaucrats study primarily Spirit magic so that they can commune with ancestors and answer the mandates of Heaven properly.

Philosophy

A return to simplicity lies at the heart of the Brotherhood's beliefs. Humans clutter up their lives with unnecessary and extraneous objects and desires. How can one understand the natural harmony of the universe by trying to grasp it, own it or control it? The natural place for every individual — the role of Drahma — is apparent when one is not blinded by the illusions of greed, desire and power. The exercises of living give a soul the chance to experience the universe in manifold forms, and so the individual should take this opportunity to gain insight by developing a harmony with the All. Each life is just a step on the greater wheel of Drahma until the individual releases himself from the chains that he forged with his own beliefs and desires.

Failings

Subtlety and Zen-like calm are among the Brotherhood's strengths, but they are also a great weakness. Because the order focuses so closely on personal growth and individual enlightenment, its Masters have no connection to the individual student's personal paths to understanding. Instead of being able to help an Initiate move toward wisdom with lessons or suggestions, most Akashic Brothers can offer only rote physical training, cryptic passages in old books or puzzling idioms that are supposed to lead the student to her own revelation. Some apprentices don't learn well without close guidance, and some mages are unable to move beyond a certain point in their development without help.

The masters can't tell their students what it is they're supposed to be learning, or where or even how they're supposed to find it. As a result, the Brotherhood loses a disproportionate number of young mages due to simple frustration. The ones who do stick with the Tradition are making some attempt to counteract this Zen disease, but they are struggling against the immense weight of time and long-honored tradition. The Brotherhood's very individualistic belief that all people must find their own path paradoxically makes it difficult for the Brotherhood to do more than give aspiring mages a few simple tools. The Masters cannot teach the way to enlightenment, they believe, since each person must find a unique path. Those who are enlightened cannot explain their sublime understanding; those who aren't don't know how to start. The Masters point the way — it's up to the students to follow it, but only if they can understand it.

Theories and Practices

The Akashic Brotherhood keeps its soul in the pages of the Akashic Record, a collection of all of the experience of all Akashic Brothers over all time. Its pages may be paper and ink, but the book is reflected in all levels of the world, spiritual and material alike. Legend has it that it was originally begun by the Ascended Avatar named Akasha, for whom the Order is also named. The Record serves as an inspiration and meditation for the Brotherhood, allowing the mages to access past experience and wisdom. The Record is not, however, a book to simply be read. It presents knowledge in such a manner that the seeker will not forget, in puzzles, riddles, koans or short passages that seem mundane. By diving into the Record, a Brother can relive the experiences of the past, sometimes even coming forth with elements of his own past lives.

The soul of the Brotherhood is in its Record, but for the body and mind there is Do (pronounced "doe"). Literally "the Way," Do is the art of training the body in order to achieve a peaceful mind. Do is the essence of martial art, the root of more mundane arts — its movements allow Akashic Brothers to perform feats that combine physical, mental and magical precision. However, Do is more than just a fantastically deadly fighting style and physical discipline. It is a style of living, a means to develop the fullest potential of the human body by moving harmoniously in natural cycles. Do stylists practice proper balance in nutrition, exercise, sleep, thought, creation and destruction, all guided as important parts of a greater whole. Ultimately, the Do pratitioner brings his body and mind in harmony with the natural flow of life, unhindered by the artificial constructs of development in a world cluttered by extraneous material.

Do pervades every aspect of the Akashic attitude toward magic. As there must be right thinking, right speech, right understanding and right action, there must be right mind in order to achieve right body and right living. Thus, the Tradition studies Mind as its primary Sphere. Without that one block in place, nothing else can be aligned and the mage — or her opponent — is as hampered as she would be with no body. All Akashics thus study Do in some manner, be it through difficult martial arts, internal questing or quiet meditation.

Although Do is the primary structure for Akashic magic, many Brothers add other practices to focus their energy. Like Do, these practices are often Asiatic in origin — feng shui, meditation and calligraphy are excellent ways to direct chi — but all are designed to unify and direct motion and thought toward a goal. The spiritual and magical worlds are not far removed from the physical world. The balanced and enlightened man can, in time, access all layers of the universe.

Stereotypes

Celestial Chorus: Their insight is commendable, but they are consumed with the notion that there is only one path to the All.

Cult of Ecstasy: The body must be perfected before it can be transcended. Still, their minds are not tethered to the material.

Dreamspeakers: The dream-dance echoes in all of us. Their Avatars are pure and they listen to the All instead of imposing their own order upon it.

Euthanatos: It is not for them to determine who is worthy of life; all beings must learn Drahma through experience.

Order of Hermes: How can one understand the universe by trying to control and categorize it? The All is too great to be defined by simple numbers and symbols.

Sons of Ether: They are tied to the idea of their tools as enlightenment, but at least they value the process of learning as much as the result.

Verbena: Pain and struggle are teachers, but not the only teachers. Life is more than blood.

Virtual Adepts: They find newer and different illusions for their amusement, but where is the value in trading one illusion for another?

Hollow Ones: The study of harmony must begin with the belief that harmony is possible.

Still, many Akashic Brothers fail to understand the dichotomy that their Tradition teaches. Convinced of the rightness of their cause in harmony with Do and the universe, warriors of the Brotherhood try to fight or force others into their mold, never realizing that in doing so they turn human against human and create disharmony instead of healing it. The aptly named Warring Fists thus fight a constant war against the elements they hold repugnant. Yet in doing so, they promote the very violence that their teachings despise. For many, enlightenment comes only later, and these monks retreat from the world to find peace instead of conflict.

Specialty Sphere: Mind

Common Foci: Chimes, incense, meditation, prayer sashes or flags, purification rites, weapons.

Concepts: Action movie star, athlete, explorer, martial arts student, sage, wandering hero

Forget the pebble. Forget my hand. Balance and Be.

Celestial Chorus

The Celestial Chorus is one of the most misunderstood Traditions of all the Nine. Although it is a religious Tradition without question, it does not focus on one religion over another. The One and Prime that the Chorus reveres transcends any single congregation's deity. All humanity is part of that cosmic song, the glorious radiance of Pure and Prime. When humanity is united again in this reverence, the Prime shall be whole again, the song manifest and the universe healed.

Background

Like the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus holds that it is one of the first Traditions, not necessarily in its current form but as the embodiment of a philosophy and an exaltation that has been part of the universe since its creation. The Chorus's roots stretch to hymns and exaltations that can be traced back thousands of years; its actual existence as a Tradition dates to approximately the time of Ikhnaton. Since then, though, the Chorus has had an incredible influence over humanity's history, not least because the Tradition fervently maintains that its duty is to protect Sleepers and guide them toward Ascension through the knowledge of the One.

From the earliest days, the Chorus has urged people to seek the song that unites them in contemplation of a better form, a celestial harmony. In some times and places, the Chorus led by example and founded tolerant, accepting and hopeful religions. In others, the Chorus went awry, bringing forward its vision of One through a single way that brooked no deviation. Alternately hierophants and heretics, the Choristers looked to the inspiration of something greater than mankind, a creative force that could unify all people under its influence.

Unfortunately, the Chorus is not always pure and right, not even in its desire to help. The many experiments of the Chorus in fostering a "true way" opened the door to dogmatic schisms with the intolerant medieval churches of Dark Ages Catholicism and Islam. From roots with Grecian and Roman temples, the Chorus slowly evolved into a form closer to the Catholic Church. All Choristers learn about the group's involvement in the Inquisition and in both sides of the Crusades. Although the ideal — keeping the world safe from dangerous influences — may have been there for the Inquisitors, their fervent belief got in the way of their sight and their better judgment. New Choristers are cautioned to keep their minds open, to remain focused on unity and to remember that all paths are trod by the One and Prime. Initiates also learn about the Tradition's ties to the Cabal of Pure Thought, a small group within the New World Order. Although the two groups started out as one, the Cabal of Pure Thought refused the idea that all people, regardless of faith, could be part of its One World.

It was the split of the Cabal of Pure Thought from the Chorus that many believe led to the downfall of the Tradition. Although their power was prominent in the Middle Ages, many Choristers came to be regarded as heretics for their schismatic acceptance of other beliefs as equally valid paths to the One, while some clutched so tightly to their views that they fought even their brethren. The uncompromising drive of the Church, combined with its corruption by material greed, drove people to embrace the Cabal of Pure Thought's ideas of empowering the masses of humanity instead of laboring in hopes of a better afterlife. Eventually, the power of faith waned as the Order of Reason rose. Members of the Chorus fled the crumbling pillars of the Church, as often hounded by churchmen swayed through the Order's material gifts as by the Order's own soldiers.

As the clouds of Reason and Technocracy gathered, the Chorus sought shelter in sub-groups, lay communities, mystery cults and minor offices. The broken back of religious belief could no longer support the Chorus, and members had to hide their miracles amongst the Masses as leaders or supporters of tiny groups. The Chorus' vision remained focused on a holy communion, a Sacred City wherein all humanity could unite its voice in harmony with the Song of Creation, but the goal slipped slowly from their grasp. Ironically, only this common defeat could truly unite the Chorus' disparate factions, and even today they retain a suspicious and guarded relationship within the Tradition. People still *want* to believe. There is a need for something greater, a desire that the Chorus answers in people, and the Chorus fans the flames of faith from that tiny spark of questing.

Organization

The Chorus adheres to a structure more strict than that of any other Tradition except the Order of Hermes. The hierarchy is modeled closely after the early Catholic church, with a system of rank based on seniority within the Chorus, responsibility and magical ability. Communication is easy for the Chorus, because every junior Singer knows who her superiors and inferiors are,

and he can pass information along. However, many of the Tradition's opponents point out that the system of rank encourages the Singers to forget their real purpose and focus on their upward mobility. The point is valid — some Choristers are more interested in recognition than in helping others — but the Chorus defends its system. It's designed to teach new members and allow the more experienced ones to guide the Tradition wisely, they say.

The Chorus is filled with voices from all walks of life and all corners of the world. Anyone with faith in the One and a desire to help can become a Singer. Choristers don't even have to be religious to begin with; they can just have faith that there's something out there that's bigger than they are. It's more important that an Initiate have the desire to achieve harmony than that she believe a certain bit of dogma. However, some people are more drawn to this Tradition than others: Nurses, social workers, people with handicaps, clergy and teachers are likely to become Choristers.

Factions

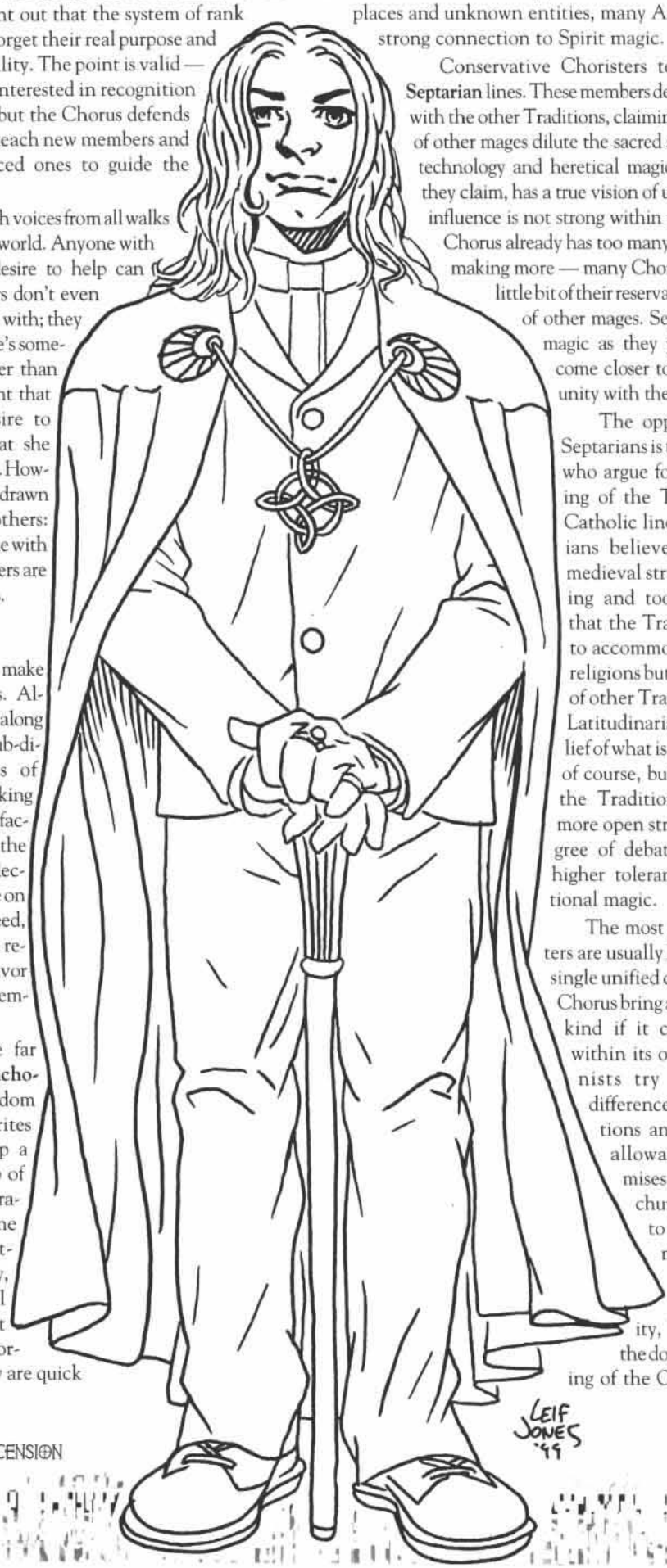
Any number of factions make their home in the Chorus. Although the Tradition divides along lines of religion, it also sub-divides by different ways of approaching religion or seeking divinity. These manifold factions are, like the rest of the Tradition, often a loose collection of people who can agree on only some basic tenets. Indeed, more and more Choristers reject factionalism today in favor of a true unity among all members of the Tradition.

Living alone in the far places of the Earth, the **Anchorites** seek individual wisdom and salvation. The Anchorites do not so much make up a faction as they do a group of individuals who reject the traditional structures. Each one seeks a personal commitment to the divine. Rarely, they interact with the "real world," but most find that the material world is a corrupting influence and they are quick to return to their hermitages. In their communion with wild places and unknown entities, many Anchorites develop a strong connection to Spirit magic.

Conservative Choristers tend to work along **Septarian** lines. These members decry the Chorus' work with the other Traditions, claiming that the influences of other mages dilute the sacred song with discordant technology and heretical magic. Only the Chorus, they claim, has a true vision of unity. Although their influence is not strong within the Tradition — the Chorus already has too many enemies to go about making more — many Choristers share at least a little bit of their reservations about the works of other mages. Septarians study Prime magic as they purify their souls to come closer to their own vision of unity with the One.

The opposite group to the Septarians is the **Latitudinarians**, who argue for a total restructuring of the Tradition along less Catholic lines. The Latitudinarians believe that the Chorus' medieval structure is too confining and too exclusionary, and that the Tradition must change to accommodate not only other religions but the belief structures of other Traditions as well. Each Latitudinarian has a personal belief of what is and isn't acceptable, of course, but they all agree that the Tradition should assume a more open structure, a greater degree of debating freedom and a higher tolerance of other Traditional magic.

The most open of the Choristers are usually **Monists**, who seek a single unified church. How can the Chorus bring about a unity of mankind if it can't achieve unity within its own ranks? The Monists try to reconcile the differences between other factions and religions, making allowances and compromises to build a unified church. Their goal is not to follow any one dogmatic stricture of a "right and true" way to approach divinity, but rather to open the doors to all understanding of the One as equally valid.



Although they meet with considerable opposition, the Monists are persuasive and very tolerant for their Tradition, and they excel at finding allies among disparate groups. They work with the Prime element as a means to exemplify the common roots of all Creation.

The **Alexandrian Society** seeks a reconciliation of religion with science, by bringing scientific thought into the fold of religion. To them, the process of discovery and inquiry is a sacred search itself, and the scientific disciplines are part and parcel of the search for divinity. Although sometimes accused of harboring elements sympathetic to the Technocracy, the Alexandrians believe in each individual's right to find a balance between science and faith. Furthermore, they denounce the Technocracy as a sterile and soulless creation. In studying science, the Alexandrians develop their understanding of Matter, to learn how it reflects qualities inherent to divinity.

The **Sons of Mithras** make up a small but militant faction that embraces the early Roman cult of Mithraism. These soldiers still hold some grudges against the Chorus for the persecution of Mithraism by Christianity, but they serve as stalwart defenders of the Chorus, believing that all have a claim to security in the quest for the divine. Sons of Mithras are still a bit of an underground cult, but they are at least recognized by the modern Chorus. Most Sons study Forces as a manifestation of Mithras, their god of military might.

Children of Albi are essentially the remnants of the Albigensian movement from the days of the Crusades, who cling to the notion that the material and the divine are separate worlds and that only a rejection of the material can allow transcendence to the spiritual. As with other groups that were persecuted during the Crusades, the Children hold a hesitant membership with the Chorus. They hold a prominent division between Church and State, believing the State to be of the material (and thus corrupt) world, and they adhere to sacred scriptures that later Christianity discarded. Children of Albi also study Prime magic to master the secrets of the hidden and holy world in contrast to the corrupt material world.

The **Nashimites** are a Gnostic cult with views similar to the Children of Albi but stretching back even farther. To them, the One holds the capacity for all the elements of creation, and the course of living souls determines its will. Thus, the Nashimites believe in the possibility of a truly maltheistic divinity, for as mankind's soul becomes corrupt, so too does the One fall from purity. Naturally, Nashimites work to spread the ideals of light and compassion to as many people as possible, hoping to raise the souls of all mankind to a higher standard so that the One follows and brings the universe to a better state. Like the Children of Albi, the Nashimites study Prime magic to discern the state of the One.

As perhaps the most mysterious and schismatic group, the **Knights Templar** rejoined the Chorus only recently. Although they protect fiercely their old ways of Christianity, they also hold to unusual rites passed down through the ages and have a conspiratorial structure. The existence of such a structure is not surprising considering the historical "end" of the Templars at the hands of a church and ruler that denounced the Knights simply to seize their money. Modern Templars are warriors of faith who bear arms to defend their Christian teachings, battling the enemies of Orthodoxy and the Chorus. Some Templars still refuse to associate with the Chorus due to the Tradition's acceptance of other religions, but most see the Technocracy as the greatest betrayal of humanity's divinely granted capacity for thought and free will. While other Choristers seek a unification of humanity in pursuit of the divine, the Templars battle for righteousness with unparalleled zeal, supported by their magical swords, hereditary armor, submachine guns and military training! Not surprisingly, Templars master the Sphere of Forces, manifested as the veritable Wrath of God.

Philosophy

Nothing so defines humanity as its capacity to strive for the divine. On some level, every individual is aware of this spark, this higher ideal, this greater power. Even the most evil and depraved monstrosity recognizes this divinity, if only through its deliberate rejection, but unity waits for all. Just as the splintered shards of the One are scattered throughout the world, so too do humans seek a unity of purpose that will rejoin them. The purity of song joins many voices together as one, in a greater harmony that unites them all and creates something new and beautiful that no single voice could make. From such a chorus, there comes a song of a glorious whole. Even strife and discord are washed away by the greater song. So, too, can all humanity be united when the greater unity brings peace, understanding and divine grace to everyone.

Failings

The failings of the Chorus are as obvious as its strengths. On the surface, it might look like the Chorus is made up of a horde of humming people who all agree that there is one deity and that the deity is the One and Prime. However, the divisions between the various religions within the Chorus remain. Catholics and Anglicans still argue, Jews and Muslims still don't quite trust one another and every group has a problem with at least one of the others. They may all ultimately decide that they worship the One, but they can't quite shake their individual religious ideas. Of course, this weakness lies directly in the way of the Tradition's goal of unifying humanity. If they can't agree on their own philosophy, how can they possibly lead all people everywhere into harmony with each other? It is an ironic twist that a Tradition devoted to unity should have a history so scarred with conflict and oppression in the dogged conflict over the form that unity should take.

Theories and Practices

The base creed of this Tradition is that of the universal Aum, the song that was sung before time was time. The One began a song, and that Song split into the infinite harmony that is all of the children of the One. Sleepers and Singers — as the Chorus calls its members — alike are children of the One, and all are part of the Song. Although the Tradition appears to be made up of only Christians, it has many other faiths within its ranks as well. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Pagans also join the Chorus. They continue to practice their religions while understanding that the names they use for their gods are part and parcel of the One force that is the source of all divinity and light.

The strength of this Tradition is its devotion to its highest ideals. The ideal Chorister is everything that a good Christian, a good Muslim, a good Jew or a good Pagan should be: kind, compassionate, strong, faithful and altruistic. Choristers are dedicated to helping their fellow humans, both Sleeper and Awakened, and they stand up against oppression and hate. This Tradition might be peaceful, but it is definitely not nonviolent. Holy war is still war, and holy warriors are terrifying on the battlefield.

Magic is the will of the One, and the singers simply open themselves to it. They become channels for the Song and allow the flow of harmony to fill their spirits and their voices. No human can do more than guide the direction of magic. Mages are simply the hands and the fingers of the One and Prime. Song is the great symphony of creation and a Chorister can release that symphony, if only for a moment, through the mortal vessel as it becomes one with the divine. Because Choristers focus so strongly on a meta-magical and meta-religious idea, their area of expertise is Prime, the Sphere that deals with the very fabric of the universe. Prime is the direct magical manifestation of the One.

On a more physical note, Chorus efforts often take the shape of common church functions, like soup kitchens, free medical clinics or caring for the ill and lonely. If people have their material needs fulfilled, the mages reason, they are more inclined to be generous to their neighbors. Also, it's easier to spread a message to people when the messenger is actually among the people. Standing in a pulpit is fine, but it isn't going to reach the people who really need to hear the song. The fact that they're leading by example is also central to the Choristers' approach to encouraging Ascension.

Specialty Sphere: Prime

Common Foci: Song, candles, prayer, bells, incense, holy symbols.

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: Their songs are powerful individually, but they must learn to work as a greater whole.

Cult of Ecstasy: They see the divine, but they choose the profane.

Dreamspeakers: The One wears many masks, but it is still One.

Euthanatos: Unity lies in life, not in death.

Order of Hermes: Although they touch the Heavens, they choose to traffic with the powers of Hell. They have no respect for their power and so they abuse it without responsibility.

Sons of Ether: Creation is a noble effort, but building things does not make one God.

Verbena: Their beliefs are far from the One; the body may be a temple, but the soul is the true instrument of greater music.

Virtual Adepts: Without understanding the divinity of how they create, they release forms without purpose. They have a gift, but they use it without harmony.

Hollow Ones: They deaden themselves to the Song. If they can be brought to accept the light, then there is hope for anyone.

Concepts: Archeologist, diplomat, kindergarten teacher, knight errant, orator, Salvation Army worker, street preacher, theology student, seeker

The One is glorious and nameless. The One carries all the names ever sung. Listen to the song swelling inside and around you, and you will know the One and the Prime.

Cult of Ecstasy

Many Initiates come to the Cult because of its reputation as a continual party. Popular opinion has it that sex, drugs and rock-'n'-roll are what the Cult is about. When the mages get to the party, though, they find out that there's a very specific point to all the revelry. The Cult of Ecstasy does use things like drugs and music and even sex, but they're just means to an end. The point is to achieve a mental state that transcends the physical world, a trance that allows the mage to see beyond his normal experience and go outside all the lines that keep most people and mages penned in. Cultists take the word ecstasy in its original meaning: a sudden, intense rush of feeling that catapults the subject into an altered state. It doesn't have to be a pleasant feeling, but given a choice, most Cultists definitely prefer it that way. The Cult of Ecstasy breaks down barriers and self-imposed limitations to give people a rush of eye-opening experience.

Background

Ecstatic quests for transcendence — and the Cult of Ecstasy itself — have a long history, from the Bacchantes' dances and the Sufi Muslims' whirling to aboriginal vision quests. Drugs, pain, hunger, intense sexual stimulation, dance and music are the traditional tools for achieving a trance state, and the Cult hasn't really seen the need to change any of them. Members of the Cult have always been visionaries and rebels, even more so than other mages. Prophetic and insightful, they expanded their minds through exhausting ritual and dangerous substances, all in the pursuit of ultimate awareness.

The Cult's early incarnations spread from mystery visionaries in the Near East and India. There, seers learned the power of altered mind states through dance, music and simple drugs. Entire communities took up the whirling, fatiguing practices of seers, while in other areas hermit-like proto-Ecstatics lived as mystery men who uttered cryptic pronouncements and lived apart from the press of mundane humanity. In both cases, the roots of the Tradition came together with people who broke down their own boundaries of perception and comfort in the pursuit of wisdom.

By the Renaissance, the Ecstatics had become recognized by the other Traditions, who labeled them Seers. Ecstatic practices in mad, frenzied passion distinguished them from the conservatism of the times, yet their uncanny knack for foresight let them arrive in the right places at the right times. These Seers embraced the whole of human experience, equating passion with divinity and discarding the stifling mores of the Church. The Seers would accept no limits — not from themselves, from society or from any gods. This liberation both fascinated and terrified the more conservative Traditions, who alternately reviled and wondered at the Ecstatics' practices and powers.

Although the Cult has undergone many changes of name — from Sahajiya to Cult of Bacchus to Cult of Ecstasy — its original focus remains. Cultists seek to surpass their notions of comfortable boundaries, to explode into awareness beyond human limits, to reach an ecstatic transcendence where their consciousness spans all time and space. Today, the tools are different, but the result the same. Music, dance, sex, exercise, drugs — anything that can be pursued to exhaustive, passionate explosions of feeling is fair game. The Cult thrives in the eternal second at the height of an elegant dance, the shuddering sensitivity of total exhaustion and the lateral thoughts of the opened mind. Its message comes to people through this music, urging people to cast aside their banal notions in favor of ecstasy, experience and their own mad visions.

Organization

Flexibility is the Tradition's greatest asset. Because the Ecstatics understand that no boundary is permanent, they are able to see that there are always new ways to achieve goals and new ways to live their lives. As a whole, the Cult eschews structure in favor of encouraging creative, often chaotic rebellion. New experience is good experience — even if it hurts, the mage has learned something about how *not* to do things! The closest the Cult comes to a formal structure lies in its Code of Ananda, the proverbs of bliss that teach joy, compassion, sacred emotion and respect for others' passions in a sort of ethical guide that encourages each Cultist to embrace the differences of others.

Unsurprisingly, the Tradition has little real structure. Individual mages don't have a problem working together — they prefer company, usually — but they don't see the need for a hierarchy or for too much organization. When something needs to happen, it will happen. If more than a few Cultists need to meet in order to solve a problem or come to a consensus, they do so in during a rare Tradition convergence. Chantry houses tend to resemble community hangouts, jam-session rooms or fraternity houses more than magical workplaces, and they're often inhabited by several Cultists and a handful of Sleepers.

Factions

The Cult draws more new mages than any other Tradition, at first, because of its reputation as a gang of hippies. The ones who stay,

though, are visionaries, one and all. There's no real list of the types of people who become Ecstatic mages, because anyone can realize that they're not seeing all that there is to see. The only unifying trait Ecstatics share is the fact that they realize, even if they haven't yet Awakened, that limitations and boundaries can be surpassed.

There exist a few small sects within the Cult, primarily of extremists or those who feel the usefulness of some organization.

The **Aghoris** are a centuries-old faction near Bengali in India, who practice mutilation, pain and destruction as tools to surpass the mortal body. By destroying the shell, they reason, they can encourage the growth of the soul. This rather extreme philosophy denies the Ecstatic Code of Ananda, and most other Ecstatics stay the hell away from these dangerous types.

In Europe and the Americas, some Cultists continue the decadent practices of the late Hellfire Clubs, moving in secret circles of "gentlemen's societies" complete with mutilating initiation rites, intoxicants and damaging drugs and painful mind-games and emotionally manipulative "pleasures." These **Acharne** move among all of the stylish-yet-pained subcultures, especially the modern Gothic movement, spreading their particular joy of damnation with an amorality that sets them apart from Cultists or Hollowers. They, too, see the Code of Ananda as weakness. They practice the Mind Sphere in their pursuit of emotional mastery.

The **Hagalaz** are a violent group of Nordic berserkers, rune mages and tricksters, sometimes with ties to other sorcerous societies that share their passions. Engaging in bloody rune-carving and dangerous traps reminiscent of the Norse deity Loki, they personify the madness that runs through the chaotic side of Scandinavian myth. These dangerous types see the modern world and its religions as weak, and they push to overthrow them with a more militant Valhallan society.

Consorting with the mercurial fae, the **Fellowship of Pan** indulges in rites of sex, drinking, and Muse-inspired poetry and debate. These Cultists maintain ties with the modern descendants of the fae and initiate their members through the wild parties of the satyrs.

Politically active Cultists often wind up in the **Dissonance Society**, a small group that teaches personal responsibility and ethics as a cornerstone for anarchic society. Members of the Society indulge in a wide range of criminal (sometimes almost terrorist) activities and argue for the overthrow of the stifling chains of society. Members of this group tend to have an intellectual streak, using debate and discussion as tools just as much as action.

The **K'an Lu** Taoists contrast with the Akashic Brotherhood as a sect that practices extreme passion and physical pleasure as opposed to the asceticism of the monks. However, the enlightened K'an Lu see the need for a balance between discipline and excess, so they too practice martial arts, meditation, trances and discipline. The contrast between discipline and chaos lets them cut loose from the limits of experience to open their doors of perception in controlled ways.

Modern **Klubwerks** (or "clubkids," or just "clubbers," depending upon who you ask) are Cultists who indulge in the mass consciousness of nightclubs and concerts. In the pressing throng of humanity sharing a common beat, these muses reach out for the primal pulse of the mob. To them, the heartbeat of many people moves beyond the mind of the one; the actions taken in the heat of frenzied dance reflect basic human impulse unfettered by reasoning or prudish mores.

These dancers indulge in all of the club scenes, creating magic in the waves of humanity that throng such venues.

Philosophy

Ecstatic philosophy holds that all limitations are self-imposed. Humans build their own comfortable domiciles in both the physical and mental worlds. To surpass one's limits, one must move beyond the barriers of comfort and tranquility. Although sanity and safety are left behind, the true experience lies beyond — learning comes from new experience, not repetitions of old, tired things. Everyone must strive to push outward and discover their own new ways of learning about the world. The ecstatic state is just a mind open to new experiences because it's released from the confines of self-imposed limits. Once human limits are breached, the person sees beyond the horizon of human insight, to reach a truly cosmic consciousness. Tools like sex and drugs — the Kamamarga, or paths to ecstasy — just open the door. It's up to the individual to step through, to see what's on the other side and to keep on going past where even those crutches take her, to the heart of the Lakashim, the pulse that drives the world.

Failings

All of the Cult's understanding comes with a serious glitch, unfortunately. The Ecstatics' tools generally end up as crutches. If the mage doesn't pay attention to what she's really doing — looking beyond her mind and her life for answers — she runs the very real risk of becoming dependent on her focus to do magic in any way, or even just to live. And that dependency isn't just psychological. A lot of Cultists become addicted to drugs or absorbed by their chosen foci to the point that nothing else can get beyond it into their lives. Cult mages also fall prey to their own chaos. They rebel so hard, or they try to go in so many directions at once, that nothing ever gets accomplished. Chaos and rebellion must be directed somehow, or the energy just swirls around in a sort of tornado and does no one any good.

Theories and Practices

Each Ecstatic has her favorite tools. Some things just work better for some people than others. That said, though, many Ecstatics lean toward some combination of drugs and music. Music is the most powerful tool for changing perception, according to many Ecstatic mages, and it's the easiest way to really get in touch with the primal and spiritual energies within and without.

Even though the Cult of Ecstasy encourages the use of tools in achieving altered states, no Cultist would ever force drugs, sex or any other experience on another person. The point of such states is to increase understanding and empathy, not to kill it. No mage who has felt the pain of the Earth or of the child down the street could bring herself to hurt an innocent. Cultists aren't drug dealers and they aren't pimps. On the other hand, if someone comes to an Ecstatic looking for a new way to see his life, the mage will be more than happy to help him extend his senses in whatever way he's comfortable with.

Once the Cultist is enlightened enough, she can achieve her transcendent state without outside help. She begins to understand that the only tool that's really necessary to move beyond customary boundaries is her own mind. Few Ecstatics truly abandon their foci, but those few that do become sages — they know what the future might hold and they have a better understanding of the entirety of the universe than many mages of other Traditions. The trick is to wean the mage away from the thought that the drug, music or other tool is the experience.

The core of the Cult's approach to magic lies in the belief that the senses can be extended to include just about everything. Once the mage has experienced and understood a thing or a situation, she can reach out and adjust it to fit her will. Other peoples' perceptions can also be altered. Of course that door was always there; you just never noticed it before, right? Changing the way a person sees life or a particular instance is one of the Cult's best approaches to magic. Perception, after all, is reality.

Just as the Ecstatics surpass the boundaries of mundane thought and understanding, they also jump the boundaries of time itself. They understand that time is a human-constructed idea, just like ethics and language. Time remains the Tradition's particular area of expertise, and Cultists seem to have an innate understanding of and control over how they and others perceive the passage of seconds, even years. As a result of their constant gazing into five minutes ago and three days hence, they've developed a distracted look. People usually write this look off as a stoned expression, but the Ecstatic is more likely looking at who his lunch date will be tomorrow.

Specialty Sphere: Time

Common Foci: Music, dance, drugs, meditation, fasting, sex, exercise

Concepts: Deadhead, extreme athlete, exotic dancer, musician, nature boy, transcendentalist, yogi

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: They limit themselves needlessly. There's much to be learned by going beyond moderation.

Celestial Chorus: Too hung up on the "power of denial"!

Dreamspeakers: A dying art, focused only on their past. But, man, they have some seriously good shit....

Euthanatos: We're opposite sides of the same coin. Or Wheel.

Order of Hermes: You can't put numbers on passion. Once they rediscover the joy of Creation, their powers will wax again. Soon.

Sons of Ether: Making science more, better, faster. They just have to get out of the lab more often!

Verbena: There's no need to drag down sex and pain when they can raise you up.

Virtual Adepts: Broad possibilities... the spirit is willing, but the flesh is flaccid.

Hollow Ones: It's a Black Celebration. Morbidity has its limits, though.

You ever been in a real groove. When you're playing or singing or whatever. And you get to the place where you're just going and letting things happen. And it's the best stuff you've ever done? That's where this train is going.

DREAMSPEAKERS

Spirit-talkers, animal friends, brothers to wind and sisters to Earth — these mages walk the boundaries between our physical world and the realm of dreams, gathering wisdom and skill from the spirits that are native to the earth, the sky and the water. Dreamspeakers are often pigeonholed as shamans, and the name fits. They are the intermediaries between humanity and Spirit, communicating between the two worlds, maintaining balance and keeping the relationships between the inhabitants of both realms in their proper state of stasis or flux. Of all the Traditions, the Dreamspeakers have the most difficult role and the strongest centering, grounding influence.

BACKGROUND

In the beginning, there were people in all lands who knew the way to cross to the spirit lands and communicate with the totems of the land, tribal protectors and ancestor spirits. These people shared their wisdom with their tribes or their families, and they were magicians and medicine men among their own groups. They did not speak of the many other dream-walkers they encountered in the spirit realms, though, and they did not gather in groups often. When the Convocation came together to form the Traditions, the mages recognized that these people needed to be a part of the forming alliance, despite how primitive they seemed. The shamans who answered the call became the first Dreamspeakers.

Those Dreamspeakers who joined the Traditions found reason to regret it, though. From the first, the Eurocentric Traditions, led by the prejudices of the Order of Hermes, pressed all of the various spiritual groups into one cachet. The Europeans would not bother to understand the "primitive and inferior" ways of the many visitors and labeled them all as Dreamspeakers. For their part, the Dreamspeakers saw the Traditionalists as selfish, greedy and power-hungry, unconcerned with the sublime aspects of spiritualism and nearly as bad as the Order of Reason. Only the strong vision of the scientific annihilation of their cultures kept the Dreamspeakers involved with the Council — and even that was not enough. By the 1700s, the Dreamspeakers had so splintered in their relations with the racist Traditionalists that fully half the delegation left to return to their native peoples. This schism resulted in the demise of many Dreamspeakers and a rift between Tradition and Council that has not yet healed. By the modern age, the Dreamspeakers have realized that they can survive only with the help of the Council, yet the Council has long turned a deaf ear to them. Prophecy tells that the Council will learn from its errors and finally come to accept the Dreamspeakers — but it may not be in time to save all that the dreamers hold dear.

Of all the Traditions, the Dreamspeakers have arguably undergone the least change. Most members of the group still revere the ancient spirits, old rites and sacred places. They remember the names of gods and the faces of legends. The powerful oral history and vivid dream-craft of the Dreamspeakers lets them retain a great hereditary knowledge of their ways, and some factions see themselves as reincarnations of great shamans or even personifications of spirits in flesh. With drum and fire, chants and fetishes, the Dreamspeakers tap always into the same ancient Dream that has guided them for eternity.

The Dreamspeakers' role has gotten much more difficult recently. The Gauntlet, the curtain dividing the physical world from the spiritual, has become much harder to cross. In cities and places where disbelief is strong, it's almost impossible to pass into the spirit worlds. Even in sacred groves and deserts, stepping into the dream requires more effort than it ever has before. The eldest Dreamspeakers are concerned about this change, and the younger mages see their spirit-council fires as they meet to discuss how best to deal with this new trouble.

ORGANIZATION

Shamanism isn't limited to Native Americans and African aborigines. Every culture on Earth has a few people who can communicate with the spirits of the land, and they all do so in very different ways. Even so, Dreamspeakers all have a deep love for their home, whether they call the entire Earth home or just a corner of it. Many mages of this Tradition are active conservationists, seeking to preserve what's left of the wilderness or even to reclaim some of the land that has been developed already. Their connection to the spirits generally shows itself when the mages are young, sometimes in the form of imaginary animal friends, or it begins to manifest when the mage hits puberty. Most young Dreamspeakers go out on a quest to find someone who can teach them how to understand their visions and make sense of their new lives.

Since the first Dreamspeakers came to the Council, the leadership hasn't gotten much more formal. The Tradition has always been organized loosely at best, deferring leadership to its most respected members almost by unspoken accord. Meetings of the entire Tradition are rare. Before the Gauntlet was strengthened, these meetings would take place in the spirit world, with totems and ancestor spirits sitting in and lending their wisdom as well. Now, however, the Dreamspeakers gather in the physical plane, letting each other know of the time and place of the meeting through dreams and visions.

FACTIONS

Dreamspeakers profess as many different factions as there are forms of spiritualism or shamanism. Among them are:

Keepers of the Sacred Fire, in many ways the Dreamspeakers that most personify the Tradition, remain among

their native cultures to keep their roots alive. They accept that the world has moved on, but continue to support the original practices and heritages of their homes.

The **Solitaries** are isolationists who remove themselves to the desolate places of the Earth, there to survive in pure communion with the land. They exercise a strident drive to separate the Dream from the modern world that would destroy it. Many take young Initiates into the wastes to teach through vision-quests, then return to guide their native societies back to the Dreaming way.

The radical **Ghost Wheel Society** argues that the modern world is simply the natural progress of the world, and that the Dreamspeakers must embrace the medicine of the machine. These rugged few look to technology and its underlying symbols for spirits. The techno-shamans of the Ghost Wheel embrace technology and its benefits, but they marry it to their own vision of spirituality. Naturally, they are treated with suspicion (at least) by much of the rest of the Tradition.

Outspoken activists and warriors join the **Red Spear Society**, which includes those Dreamspeakers who left the Tradition council but feel a desire to remain in contact with the rest of their allies. These extremists take the war directly to their perceived oppressors, and they lash out against anyone who would destroy their way of life. They direct their energy against the Technocracy primarily, but they attack Traditionalists or even Sleepers of selfish and unfeeling demeanor as need dictates.

Lastly, the wandering storytellers of the **Baruti** keep old myths and legends alive. Before science explained the world, stories told of creation, tricksters, discovery, love and mischance. The Baruti retain these stories, and they memorize the new lore of the modern Dreamspeakers as well. In keeping lore and ancient wisdom alive, the Baruti hold many secrets, and they also retain a distinct vision of the unformed world before the coming of science. Indeed, as they say, even though the story cannot be true, it is the way that things happened.

Philosophy

There is infinitely more to this world than the things anyone can touch. Beyond the edges of vision are beings that have been with us for aeons, and they are bound up in the workings and the health of the world. The Dreamspeakers recognize this fact, and they honor the spirits. They are the gatekeepers between the two planes, serving as communicators and go-betweens. If either side of the Gauntlet is neglected, both will suffer, so the Dreamspeakers balance the two. The balance sometimes requires the mage to perform actions that seem irrational or trivial; other times the mage must make a sacrifice to keep the worlds in harmony. Too many people have forgotten the existence of the spirits of the land, and the Dreamspeakers must always remember for themselves and for everyone else.

Failings

Shamanism is a solitary profession almost by definition. There are no group tours into the spirit world. The Dreamspeakers suffer from this lack of cohesion. Because there isn't really a group identity, there aren't any group goals or unified movement toward a specific point. The potential power of the Tradition is diffused into many small vessels instead of poured into a larger, more effective channel. On the other hand, all Dreamspeakers are working on some level to counteract the strengthening of the Gauntlet, the other weakness that plagues this Tradition. With access to the spirit world so limited, the shaman-mages have lost access to much of their magical strength. The Dreamspeakers' inability to even understand one another despite their unification as a single Tradition compounds this loss. They all revere and work for the greater balance of the world, yet their approaches are so

varied and intuitive that they cannot work together effectively.

Theories and Practices

In their hearts, the Dreamspeakers all hear the voice of the world — its invisible pulse, the surge of spirits, the rhythm of nature and the slumbering power of the great Earth. Some answer to totems, others to capricious spirits of natural places. A few commune with the modern spirit of man, the symbols and lines that technology calls forth. In every case, though, magic comes from the Dream, whatever its given name. The Dreamspeakers draw out the images and archetypes known unconsciously by all humanity.

Primitive is not now and never has been a word that accurately or wholly describes these mages. They may use methods that pre-technological societies used to communicate with things other people can't see, but their grasp of reality and the modern world is startlingly strong. In order to understand what is happening to the dream realms and to interpret the messages of the spirits, the Dreamspeakers have to be intimately familiar with the workings of the physical world. Besides, it doesn't do anyone any good if a shaman in Alaska has a message for a Sleeper in Venezuela and can't pick up a phone or send an email to get the message across.

Standing with one foot in this world and one foot across the Gauntlet, the Dreamspeakers have a unique understanding of the consequences of their actions. Not only do they see what happens among people and societies, they see the ripples caused in the spirit world, which almost always last much longer. This dual vision gives the Tradition a deep sense of duty — duty to Sleepers, Awakened and the spirits they deal with. With the fate of two worlds directly on their shoulders, the Dreamspeakers know that they must choose carefully and wisely when making decisions.

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: They start with the body when they should start with the spirit.

Celestial Chorus: It is true that all spirits are One — but not necessarily their vision of One.

Cult of Ecstasy: Wisdom stems from purpose; they must find a reason to break their boundaries, or the experience is meaningless.

Euthanatos: Dark spirits guide their hands, but they labor under a hard burden without complaint.

Order of Hermes: Their supposed Art can command the spirits, but it cannot command the soul.

Sons of Ether: Machines do not dream.

Verbena: They are our brothers and sisters, although they let the flesh command the spirit.

Virtual Adepts: They see the Dream, but they seek to reshape it in their image.

Hollow Ones: Their sadness does not have the basis of our persecuted past. They must learn that others can be more troubled than they and then learn to embrace that outside world.

Specialty Sphere: Spirit

Common Foci: Drumming, chanting, fire, mandalas, sand paintings, bones, amulets, herbs

Concepts: Animal trainer, burned-out city girl, channeler, dream interpreter, ecologist, naturalist, shaman, techno-fetishist, wanderer

I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR YOU. IT IS NOT A MESSAGE FOR YOUR EARS - YOUR HEART MUST LISTEN, AND YOUR SPIRIT WILL KNOW ITS TRUTH. DO YOU WISH TO HEAR IT?

EUTHANATOS

It's hard to accept the fact that, one day, consciousness as every human knows it will end. Death, to most people, is a terrifying unknown that must be avoided at all costs. It's little wonder, then, that people look into the eyes of a Euthanatos and suddenly grow cold. The Euthanatoi know death, and they know that it must and will come. Sometimes, these mages bring death with them. More often, though, they bring the potential for rebirth, for the seeds of creation in the remnants of the past.

Background

Proto-Euthanatoic roots heralded from the earliest cities in and near what would later be called India. The philosopher-priests of the ancient years tracked the cycles of reincarnation and led people through their many lives in the turning of the eternal Wheel. These early mages sensed the greater cycle of life and death, and they guided entire civilizations through their rise, fall and rebirth in new forms. Eventually, their philosophies settled in the Hindu religion and similar god-forms of the area. Dispersed throughout many cities, the roots of the Euthanatoi maintained similar methods and beliefs, but in small, isolated groups of healers, priests and sages.

The Euthanatos Tradition has been accused throughout history of killing in cold blood, killing for the joy of killing and killing to serve its own ends and increase its own power base. One of the greatest conflicts in Euthanatos history is the 300-year battle against the Akashic Brotherhood. Both groups, in the end, were fighting for the same thing — the preservation of life and reincarnation — but the Akashics could not accept the Euthanatos' methods. The Wheel must turn, and the Euthanatoi believe that it is sometimes wiser to end an unproductive or suffering cycle and send a soul back to be reincarnated than it is to allow a stagnant energy to linger and hold back the turning of the ages. From this pragmatism came the need to judge and shepherd the living in times of starvation or plague, but the Akashic Brotherhood did not agree with such methods. The Himalayan Wars between the two groups brought forth a terrible series of killings, not just of individual mages, but of whole reincarnated lineages. Eventually, the surviving sects united as the front of Akashic opposition forced them in contact, and the small groups finally came under a single banner of Chakravanti.

The establishment of Buddhism changed the Chakravanti, bringing to them a new awareness of compassion and a new understanding of suffering. Where the various groups had worked before as fearful mages with the power to heal or destroy, they now learned to understand that very fear in their charges. From these roots the Chakravanti drew up the beginnings of their own moral code. Later, during the formation of the Traditions, that code served as a basis for the Euthanatoi as a whole. Greeks, Celts, Indians and others who served the Great Cycle and believed in the need for strong souls to ease the suffering of others all came together as a whole. The Euthanatos Tradition was born in an incarnation that the other Traditions might label "killers with consciences."

The truth is that the Euthanatoi must kill, but they do not kill for joy or power. The Tradition is based in thanatoic — death-focused — sects of Indian, Greek and Arabic culture. In India, with its frequent plagues and poor living conditions even before the modern era, death was often the best and kindest answer for ill, suffering people. In Greece and the Middle East, death allowed scholars and surgeons to expand their knowledge and help the people who still lived. Even today, Euthanatoi plunge into ancient memories and reincarnated souls to find enlightenment. They cross to the Underworld to experience death, and they uphold a stern code. To the Euthanatoi, theirs is a sacred duty, one that must be carried out, but is so strenuous and terrible that only the most strong-willed can perform it. It's not so much that they take on a right, as they take on a burden: responsibility for pain, for release and for renewal.

Organization

This Tradition is fairly well organized, if somewhat loosely so, with a set system of apprenticeship, mastery and leadership. There are established Marabouts (Chantry houses) all over the world, and the center of the Tradition on Earth lies in Calcutta. The Paramaguru (leaders) often serve as Acarya (mentors) to new arrivals in the Tradition, spotting them through the auspices of Fate while the Initiates hover on the cusp of awareness. From there, training can proceed in many forms. Some Euthanatos groups are notoriously strict in their discipline, while others have a very relaxed and egalitarian attitude. In any case, the Acarya is formally responsible for the Initiate once the agama sojourn is complete, up until the Initiate is recognized as a full mage. Once inside the Tradition, there are really only three ranks: apprentice, member and leader. Recognition comes with wisdom and magical skill, and leaders stand only as long as their followers support them.

In order to truly understand the power of death, the Euthanatoi believe that a mage must have touched it. All Euthanatoi must undergo the agama, or little death, when they are initiated into the Tradition. This sojourn is a brief trip into the Underworld itself, overseen by a mentor and used as a guide. Often, the Initiate is drawn to the Tradition because her Awakening involved some sort of near-death experience or the death of someone close to her. Therefore, Initiates tend to be people familiar with endings and sacrifice in some form or another.

Factions

Euthanatos sects are about as fluid as those of the Dreamspeakers or Cult of Ecstasy (both of whom the Euthanatos carry strong ties to). That is to say, Euthanatos have a great variety of sects and beliefs, and they have a largely open attitude toward philosophical differences within their own society.

Tantrism and Indian culture form the basis of the militant **Natatapas**, who confine themselves to the heart of India and keep the oldest rites of the Euthanatos. All Initiates of the Natatapas come formally through the agama sojourn to join this conservative sect, and they learn historical Hinduism and Buddhism. Naturally, their withdrawn world-view makes them suspicious of other Traditions, but the Natatapas make up a reasonable, if conservative, group.

From the complex rites of Africa come the **Madzimbabwe**. These Euthanatos study their own cultural ties to spirituality and healing. Theirs is a heritage of ghost-calling, soothing and compassion from the old cities of Africa, when it had a civilization before European invasion. Although they differ from other Euthanatoi in religion, the Madzimbabwe remain members of the Tradition due to their shared compassion and duty to help others.

Greek heritage manifests in the **Pomegranate Deme**, who study the mysteries of Persephone and the Greek Underworld. Literal worshippers of the Greek mythos, these mages are now few and far between, and their religion falters. Within a few generations they will probably be a memory as new Initiates join less theological sects.

The last ancient faction is the **Aided**, which stems from death-mages of Celtic heritage. Their order nearly collapsed under the persecutions from Christianity during the Dark and Middle Ages, but allegiance with other Euthanatoi allowed them to shelter some of their members and ideals. Today, they uphold the bloody Celtic rites and sacrifices necessary for the proper culling of the herd (be it human or animal). Like the other cultural factions, the Aided do accept members without a direct tie to their base, as long as those Initiates have some sort of stylistic or inculcated elements that tie with the faction's methods.

Modern chance and probability occupy the **Lhaksmists**. These luck-followers rely on total randomness in just about everything — magic, living, important decisions, whatever. However, they gladly throw themselves into the trappings of modern electronics, feeling a kinship with probability theory and quantum uncertainty. These Euthanatos, who are the ones closest to the Digital Web, watch over the growing webs of chaos spread by the Internet's haphazard expansion.

The exclusive **Golden Chalice** serves as a political assassination group, specifically one that stalks and destroys dangerous individuals in positions of leadership and influence. Their roots stretch back to the Byzantine empire, and they

include elements of various cultures from that era. In the modern age, though, they are more than willing to use high-tech tools as a means to defeat high-tech enemies, and so they mix various poisons and gadgets along with their more traditional magic. Membership comes by invitation only. Recently, the sect has come under scrutiny — if membership is by invitation only, what are they hiding? More to the point, how could they allow the atrocities of leaders like Pol Pot, yet feel justified in moving against lesser statesmen?

One of the more popular sects in the Euthanatos is the **Knights of Radamanthys**. These warriors hire out as mercenaries to the other Traditions, leveraging their command of entropy and their fearsome fighting skills, but only for causes that they feel are just. In this fashion, they advance the Council as a whole, work on Euthanatos cases and still earn the Tradition its keep. Sensible and farsighted, this faction trains in modern combat, ethics and a multitude of espionage skills. Internally, though, most Euthanatos consider it a simple training ground from which veterans can graduate to the true philosophical levels of inquiry, instead of just being "hired gunfighters."

The **Albireo** may be the most important intra-Tradition group, as far as the Euthanatos are concerned. Although any Euthanatos may join, full membership comes only with probationary work. These diplomats carry the face of the Euthanatos to the rest of the Traditions, explain the Thanatoic code, work to uphold the Tradition ideals and police the Euthanatos for internal corruption. Of course, with their privileged stance as ambassadors within the other Traditions, they may well sniff out corruption in those ranks, too.

Philosophy

Death is not *the* end; death is *an* end. There isn't much good in an existence that will serve no purpose, and there is less good in an existence that brings pain or trouble to everything it touches. It's better to end that thread and let a new one take its place than allow it to take up space. Like flowers that grow from a burned forest bed, these threads will be rewoven into the Tapestry. The Tapestry weaves into a great picture, but suffering and sorrow mar that picture. Every man must take up his burden, surpass it and accept the responsibility to deal with this inevitability. That responsibility becomes a keystone for the support of the world, for the willingness to support and shelter others — and to perform the duties necessary to release those who only bring or know suffering.

Failings

There's another reason behind the careful attention these mages pay to emotion: Jhor. All mages gather Resonance from their activities, but this Tradition gathers more of this type of Resonance because its mages deal with the energies of Entropy. Jhor is the physical reflection of decay-related magic. It is common for Euthanatos mages to have sunken eyes, hollow cheeks or pasty skin. As they channel Entropy, even to divine what the fall of a die will be, it comes to rest in their bodies. The accumulation of Jhor isn't always related to the mage's intent when she uses her magic, but a Euthanatos who seems too corpselike bears watching. Entropy is not a force to be used lightly or too often. This Jhor can accumulate and cause Quiet, too, leading the Euthanatos to morbidity and an obsession with death. While any mage can suffer this sort of affliction, Euthanatoi are notoriously prone to it. Euthanatos mages watch one another for signs of too much Jhor. A mage who's fallen into a Jhor-Quiet becomes an emotionless killing machine, and he must be put down. Most Euthanatoi are acutely aware of the irony that they're about two steps from being killed by their own fellows.

Theories and Practices

Euthanatos mages have a variety of approaches to the actual execution of their magic. Most use some kind of device to analyze the balance of a life or a situation, divining the probable outcome of a course of action. This device can take the form of a coin flip — if it's heads, the person can be changed; if it's tails, it's curtains — or a pair of glasses that the mage looks through to see what a soul holds. So many things depend on what Sleepers would call random chance, and the Euthanatos uses that perception to her advantage. However, just shrugging an Effect off by wondering what the odds were of *that* happening is clumsy and unsubtle. A clever Euthanatos begins a series of perfectly believable events that trigger her desired result (a man in a bar takes one drink too many, decides not to drive home and calls a cab — the Euthanatos has effectively gotten herself a ride to wherever she wishes to go). Not all Euthanatos magic involves killing, either — a situation can be changed for the better without anyone losing any blood.

The Euthanatoi must look at the gains achieved by giving someone the Good Death, but they cannot ignore their sorrow, either. Healing is accomplished through excising the diseased material from the healthy, allowing the subject to feel the pain of the knife and then to produce new, clean tissue to replace what was removed. Only through experiencing every phase of the healing cycle — pain included — can the Euthanatoi make a positive difference.

The Euthanatos dedication to furthering the progress of the Wheel doesn't only apply to individual souls. The world itself is constantly changing and moving, and it too becomes diseased. Euthanatos mages find these diseased areas of society and, by addressing individual components of the problem, attempt to end them. Doing so becomes harder and harder, however, as the world degenerates further. There are too many people involved in too many problems, and the Good Death cannot be given to every one of them. More and more often, Euthanatoi find themselves performing delicate adjustments to people and situations instead of simply ending the cycle and letting the Wheel spin itself out.

Like the Dreamspeakers, Euthanatoi have an acute sense of duty. Instead of feeling the consequences of actions in the spirit world, however, Euthanatoi are intimately familiar with the human ramification of anything they do. Each time a death-mage takes a life, she must be certain that it is the right thing to do. The choice is final, and the people left behind must live the rest of

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: In their fury, they brought suffering to many. These wounds still have not healed.

Celestial Chorus: Their vision is narrow; they try to limit others with their religions, but they refuse to take responsibility for themselves.

Cult of Ecstasy: If they look deep enough, they will understand that joy is as transitory as sorrow. Compassion comes in removing that sorrow from others, not in bringing indulgence to themselves.

Dreamspeakers: Unable to move past their history, they are trapped by their great Dream.

Order of Hermes: Pride has brought their fall. Once trimmed, though, the tree grows to greater splendor.

Sons of Ether: Just as we destroy that which no longer has a place, they give rebirth to the remnants.

Verbena: We see the same cycle of life and death, but they place duty to that cycle over duty to people.

Virtual Adepts: Even a thought knows the decay of time. Nothing created by humans can outrun human suffering.

Hollow Ones: Their simplistic embrace of morbidity is just another escape from true acceptance of death.

their lives with the loss of the victim — that's not an easy thing for a mage to deal with. Therefore, the Euthanatos must be able to understand the consequences in order to weigh them against the benefits of the Good Death and make the right choice.

However the mage finds the Tradition, she must understand that the Wheel turns. She must understand that although she can affect some cycles for a short time, she will no longer be in control in the end. Games of chance are common illustrations for new Euthanatoi — the mages practice predicting how the dice will fall or where the ball will land, and they inevitably make a wrong choice. Euthanatoi must accept the inevitability of their own deaths — they must understand the fear in their victims — before giving the Good Death to anything.

Specialty Sphere: Entropy

Common Foci: Weapons, dice, scales, ashes, mantras, mathematics

Concepts: Assassin, gambler, medic, police officer, priest, social worker, surgeon

NEW LIFE, NEW CHANCES — THESE ARE BEAUTIFUL AND MIRACULOUS. BUT THERE CAN BE NOTHING NEW IF THE OLD IS NOT LET GO. THERE IS NO LIFE WITHOUT DEATH; THAT IS THE GREATEST SECRET: THE SECRET OF CHANGE.

ORDER OF HERMES

Grandfather to the Traditions, mystics without peer, holders of Heaven's keys — the Order of Hermes claims many titles. Whether these claims are truth or hubris, the Order has donated more to the Traditions, tutored more Archmages and created more codified magical theories than any other group within the Council. These formalized willworkers stand proudly upon their achievements as high wizards, masters of ritual and spell, sages of great renown and learned builders of artifacts and Chantries. Yet their unity hides powerful political intrigue. Their heyday is gone, washed away in the myths of yesteryear. Their most powerful Chantries are shattered. Their newest Initiates abandon the ancient codes in favor of new ways. The Order has survived for centuries through its intensity and dedication, but the new millennium may be its death-knell — or its rebirth.

Background

Hermetic historians write entire tomes and dissertations regarding the formation of the Order. Most agree that Hermetic roots sprang from ancient Egypt, where native magic and Hebrew Kabbalah melded in a powerfully mystical and mathematical precision. The exclusive wizard-priests of the era in Sumer, Babylon and Egypt built the seeds of mysticism with writing and language. The magic of symbols and their meanings carried into the human consciousness a new way to look at the universe, a way to join and transform separate ideas. Order historians point to a pair of Archmages as the inspiration behind Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom, later called "Hermes Trismegistus" or Thrice-Great Hermes by the Greeks, for whom the Order took its name.

From Egyptian roots, the idea of mystery cults spread across Greece and the Mediterranean. Writings of thinkers like Solomon and Pythagoras infused a combination of mysticism and precision into the magical workings of various groups. Hermes, as a symbol of communication, knowledge and travel and good fortune, served as a popular patron for such circles. The Thothian and Hermetic ideals remained scattered as underground societies for several centuries, occasionally popping up in the consciousness of great philosophers such as Plato. The great turn came in 332 B.C. with Alexander's unification of much of Persia, Greece and Egypt. From this empire, travel and communication allowed the juxtaposition of various sorts of Kabbalah, Gnosticism and Persian religion, creating the first mesh recognized as a true part of the Hermetic Tradition.

Even through the decline of Hellenistic civilization, the fall of Rome and similar catastrophes of civilization, the Hermetic Order thrived. Powerful texts codified alchemy, numerology, theology and sympathetic magic. The Cult of Mercury (Rome's version of Hermes) worked powerful magic in concert and spread Hermetic ideals through the cream of intellectual society.

Eventually, the Order of Hermes came together under the direction of Trianoma and Bonisagus. These founders, a legendary politician and researcher, joined to travel Europe and bring practitioners of the Mercuric and Hermetic ideals together. Trianoma's diplomatic skill wooed many to the group, while Bonisagus' revolutionary parma magica (shield against magic) allowed the suspiciously independent workers of the age to meet in relative safety. These leaders later became the Primi, founders of the Order's great Houses, passing on their magical styles and traditions through their apprentices. From these lineages, the Order crystallized as a single political unit, with each House contributing and contesting in a magical society under Bonisagus' revolutionary codification of their Great Art.

Over the succeeding centuries, the Order experienced great triumphs and setbacks. The Dark Ages saw their height as advisors and mystics sheltered from society and subtly influencing it. Their Great Experiment fell, though, to internal squabbling, elitism and consistent dabbling in Infernalism. Still, the Order restructured, expanding and adding new magical groups constantly. Old Houses fell or were cast aside. The Druidic Diedne were wiped out on charges that the entire House had been corrupted by demons. Their accusers, the Tremere, later embraced vampirism. The Order of Reason, in counterpart to the mysticism of Hermes, struck down many Hermetic cabals and Chantries, but the Order responded by bringing its incredible resources and support to bear in the formation of the Tradition Council. The Order led the recognition of the Spheres as the inter-Tradition magical system of study, but it also found itself pushed away from its desired prominence within the fledgling Council. The Renaissance brought new ideas to the Order but ultimately signaled its collapse as an open force among humanity. The destruction of too many Order bastions forced the Hermetics to withdraw from everyday sight, eventually to be expunged from the pages of history by the Technocracy.

Through subtle influence, the Order works today to introduce minor mysticism and secrets of the Art into mass society. Although far from a complete success, this project still produces a surprising amount of leeway, especially as mass printings of Hermetic works become available. It may be too late for this project to do any good, though. With the fall of Doissetep, the destruction of Concordia and the death or involuntary exile of most of the great Masters, the Order finds its traditional teachers and structures threatened. Novitiates who would barely be counted as Disciples must now train Apprentices with their rudimentary, partial knowledge. Old, carefully hoarded secrets are gone forever in many cases, while mystical items and powerful patrons are destroyed or locked away beyond the hostile Gauntlet. The survivors on Earth can only hope to remember their teachings and learn all that they can. The Order will survive, but it may not be the same Order that it once was.

Organization

The Order of Hermes is, without a doubt, the most rigidly hierarchical of the Traditions. Initiates and Apprentices must serve under a mentor, who teaches the basics of magical theory and practice. After a grueling apprenticeship (traditionally, up to seven years, but often cut short in the heyday of the modern world), the supplicant challenges for recognition as a full magus — a challenge that can end with a return to apprenticeship, or even with death. Once accepted, each mage has his own sigil, a symbol of the individual's achievements. Although all mages theoretically have the authority to vote in Hermetic meetings, politics run at the pace set by the Masters and the ambitious. More than once, political leverage has shoved aside the potential for moral or material growth. Each step up the ladder of the Order reveals greater mysteries but also makes the student more beholden to the Tradition as a whole. Those who achieve Mastery are lauded for their high place and given the respect due their powers, but they can also expect to garner political opponents. Each Master is, in turn, expected to recruit and train a new apprentice or set of students. The cycle continues, with members indoctrinated into the Order's secrets but becoming steadily more embroiled in its internal struggles.

The Order of Hermes has a detailed code of conduct that lays out the basis of internal magical dealings. Among other things, Hermetic mages consider sanctums to be inviolate, they are forbidden from magical scrying upon other Hermetics, they are expected to train at least one apprentice, and they are forbidden from dealing with Infernal entities. Of course, these rules all bow to one simple axiom: Don't get caught. Corruption of many sorts is rife within the Order. Breaking the rules isn't as punishable as breaking the rules in a politically unacceptable way.

Matters may change soon in the Order, though. With the dearth of experienced teachers and Masters on Earth, new mages must learn from the often-fragmentary knowledge of the remaining Disciples. Cut off from traditional support, political factions in the Order find no choice but to put aside their differences or go out in a blaze of glory. The Order finds that it has no choice but to pull together, and its many members are creating for themselves a new vision of the Tradition.

Factions

The Order categorizes its many different magical styles by Houses, groups that follow in the footsteps of a particular founder. There have been many Houses in the past, and although quite a few have fallen, there will be more to replace them.

The mages of **House Bonisagus** keep alive the base erudition and scholarship of the Order's founder. These mages delve deep into magical theory. Many of the great discoveries of the Order come from the tomes of Bonisagus mages. With their exhaustive research into magical sources and causes, such mages often study the Prime Sphere heavily.

House Ex Miscellanea — literally, "House out of hash" — grew from the increasing need to welcome mages whose studies didn't mesh with any other Hermetic House, but who desired to learn and share the Hermetic style. The House formed in the Dark Ages, and it continues to be strong. Today, it takes in necromancers, spiritualists, students of the fae, naturalists, physical mystics, artisans, craftsmen and others who find that their talents might lie in the direction of a different Tradition but who desire the Hermetic structure and insight. Old Houses, lost to the ages, are also included in this formation.

The Order's tactical weapons are found in **House Flambeau**. Students of Forces nonpareil, the Flambeau come from a blend of Moorish and Spanish influence. They wield cleansing fire in their crusade for vengeance against the enemies of the Order.

The magic of chance and probability tie easily into the metamathematics of the Order through **House Fortunae**. This rather modern House concerns itself with high numerology, randomness and the spoils of chance's games — money. Unlike Technocrats, though, they recognize money as a *magical* concept and draw out an intuitive understanding of chance events that leads to manipulation of happenstance. Naturally, these mages tend to eschew the Order's focus on Forces in favor of their own line of Entropy.

Powerful internal policing falls at the feet of **House Janissary**. Although the Janissaries don't make the rules of the Order, they do enforce them. These mages watch constantly for signs of internal corruption, for mages who've made the wrong sorts of deals or broken with the ideals of the Order. Then, the Janissaries take care of the problem. But who watches the watchers?

House Quaesitor, one of the original Houses, oversees Hermetic law. While the Janissaries function much as roving enforcers, the Quaesitori hold Tribunals to decide cases of law and punishment, to make new precedents or cast aside old ones and to determine the fates of mages charged with criminal actions. The Quaesitori rarely enforce these dictates directly, but they serve to interpret divine, Hermetic, personal and human laws. Rather terrifyingly, the Quaesitori have the dubious distinction of being the wizards who first discovered the Gilgul rite.

On the outskirts of the Order's practices is **House Shaea**, a group that embraces the early Egyptian trappings of the Order and promotes base linguistics as a key to understanding thought, perception and thus the universe. From these elements the Sheshati indulge in education, learning and eventually wisdom. Although other Hermetics sometimes scoff at them as

simple scribes, the predominantly feminine group maintains records with diligence and doubtless holds many secrets that the other Houses would dearly love to know... or see destroyed.

House Solificati marks the newest group on the Hermetic scene. Several members of the Solificati joined the Order after their Tradition's dissolution in the Middle Ages. Now, the remaining Children of Knowledge, combined with students from Ex Miscellanea, have reunited their former Tradition's strengths and achieved recognition as a full House. The Solificati are alchemists who practice material transformation as a metaphor for the evolution of human to divine. They also experiment with chemical enlightenment, searching for a metaphysical substance to open the doors to higher perceptions. Unsurprisingly, the Solificati have a great wealth of knowledge in Matter, and they study that Sphere more than others.

Perhaps the oddest of the Hermetics is **House Thig**, also known as the Ruby Children or Crucible of Thig. These modern techno-magicians blend technological devices with the symbolism of the Order. Instead of simply building a better computer, a Thig adept will make a magical one. Where a technocrat might rely on technological innovation, the Thig mage binds spirits and mystical powers into scientific forms. Although somewhat outcast among the other Houses, the young up-and-comers of Thig show great promise in combining old Hermetic ways with new world thought. Perhaps because they did not rely so heavily on Masters and old mentors, the Thig have prospered while other Houses have been hit hard in the wake of the Reckoning.

Lastly, **House Tytalus** emphasizes growth through conflict. All motion in the universe comes from the interaction of opposite, polarized forces. House Tytalus takes this imperative to every level of existence, and its members constantly seek questions, challenges and trials worthy of their skills. No Tytalus mage is ever content to sit upon his laurels, or to have "enough" — there's always a higher mystery, one that demands a greater level of perfection and erudition. The Tytali certainly strive to improve the Order, but their methods are often dangerous. Some wonder if their presence doesn't bring more strife than it's worth.

Philosophy

Hermetic philosophy is complex and many-layered. At the heart, the Hermetics profess the drive to perfection. This drive manifests through trials, tests, self-discovery, and the rejoining of fragmented patterns like disparate languages or mathematical conundrums. Ideally, each individual has a Word, a divine imperative that drives the figure's revelations. By exploring the boundaries of that Word and all of its meanings, the individual rises to his inner nature, then beyond. Each step in the process is a challenge that requires a leap of perception but also opens the way to the next path. Eventually, the human passes far enough to become something cosmically divine.

Failings

Although the Order has a great unity and body of knowledge, its political fractiousness and its pride both serve as wedges against enlightenment. Hermetic history is full of decisions made for reasons of ego, for political gain or for the Hermetic belief that their studies elevate them beyond the concerns of other Traditions. Each Hermetic mage passes through the fires of inquiry to achieve knowledge, and this hard-fought wisdom is guarded jealously and treated as a gem of truth. When these ideologies conflict, there's no room to give.

In the past, the Order fought bitterly for greater recognition in the Tradition Council, citing its many contributions and its own mystical prowess. Internally, Houses fought one another for resources, students, even over points of magical theory. Despite the invention of certámen to settle grudges nonfatally, wizards contested and killed one another when their energies could be spent in pursuit of Ascension or in battle against Tradition enemies. The Order has also covered up atrocities and problems solely to hold them as secret leverage in political machinations, and tried to force other Traditions to conform to its own viewpoints. None of these actions endear the Order to other mages.

Internally, the Order often limits its own members due to their political acumen. If a Master wants a particular course of action taken or denied, a Talisman to change hands or a Chantry raised or lowered, the fortunes of other mages can depend on whether they side with him or not. A well-meaning Disciple can find himself censured with little more than a few helpful ideas, and training can be very difficult to garner without promises of later payment in *sa* (essentially, favors). Many Hermetics become so consumed with their own political agendas and personal quests that they lose sight of the progress to Ascension and self-perfection, instead fighting a political war that grinds them down and spits them out. With the destruction of much of the upper echelon of Hermetic structure, this trend may change — or the new blood may simply turn into another old guard.

Theories and Practices

The Order trains its members stylistically according to House, but modern training tends to be somewhat eclectic and based on survival issues. Hermetic theory states that every individual has the spark of divinity and the potential for self-perfection, but few realize it or are ready for it. Thus, it's important to weed out the shining stars from the chaff. Let the un-Awakened go on about their banal lives, and focus the true attention and learning on those who can use it.

Highly concerned with symbology, Hermetic magic calls upon angelic names to open the gates of Creation, often through the secret language of Enochian. With this language of the angels, the Hermetic can unleash sounds and vibrations that resonate with the key elements of the Tellurian, and enforce his will on it. Other Hermetic tools include swords, wands and staves, the traditional instruments to represent violence and power, as well as circles, triangles and other geometric symbols, which can represent direction, measurement or confinement with their simple purity and mathematical precision. Some spirit magic also relies on ancient pacts made in early days. Just as Hermetic mages are fond of trading favors among one another, they often make deals with spirits for tutelage or aid, calling on those spirits later with special symbols or objects. A few symbols like the Seal of Solomon are even considered invested with perpetual power or divine discoveries of universal keys, so they can be used to perform incantations time and again.

Hermetic mages gather and study in Chantries, like other mages, but they are noteworthy in that they're the ones who pioneered the idea among the Traditions. Most Hermetics have a double life: a Hermetic Word and craft name, and a mundane identity. After all, despite the need to master multiple languages, esoteric mathematics and tomes of symbology, Hermetic mages must also be adept at surviving mortal society, especially with the spirit world dangerous to enter. For this reason, Hermetic mages keep their affiliation a secretive sort of allegiance much like the more mainstream societies of Masons and Rosicrucians.

Specialty Sphere: Forces

Common Foci: chanting in Enochian and other obscure languages, pentagrams and circles, Seals of Solomon, specific numbers, staves and wands, swords

Concepts: Arcanist, businessman, diplomat, Federal officer, historian, linguist, politician

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: Although we both pursue perfection, they miss the signs and tools that point the way.

Celestial Chorus: Their fires burned us once, but our pursuits outstrip their simple reliance on an external deity.

Cult of Ecstasy: Without focus or discipline, they are mere children in the Art.

Dreamspeakers: We command the spirits' allegiance; we do not bow to their whims.

Euthanatos: Simple murderers whose works destroy the sacred power of magic.

Sons of Ether: There is magic in their toys, much like our artifacts of old, but they must move past the material.

Verbena: Hedge witches and herb-women.

Virtual Adepts: So close to discovering the magic of patterns, so far from doing anything with it.

Hollow Ones: This is the result of magicians without true mentors.

Ours is the Thunder, the Word and the Inspiration.

As all humans rise to perfection, so too does our Order rise to glory!

Sons of Ether

Not all science needs be the banal and regimented process trumpeted by the Technocracy. So say the Sons of Ether, and they practice what they preach. From the mad, inspirational science of Victorian wonder-workers to the fringes of cutting-edge alternative scientific theory, the Sons of Ether use it all. While other Technomancers pioneer new worlds, the Sons of Ether take the discarded cast-offs of technology and turn them into creations of the imagination. No invention is too strange, no theory is too obscure, for them to tweak it and find a way to use it. Contradictions? Impossibilities? Nonsense — there are only doors that have not yet been opened by Science!

Background

With roots dating as far back as the Middle Ages and a series of changes through the modern day, the Sons of Ether have quite a convoluted background. The most basic foundations lay in the document known as the *Kitab al Alacir*, the Book of Ether, from which early philosophers propounded a science based not on observation, but on belief. Presumably based on the works of early philosophers and translated through several secret forms, the document eventually surfaced in 12th-century Spain, where a pair of enterprising mystics (one a Hermetic craftsman, the other a Templar) took its teachings to heart. They formed a Natural Philosopher's Guild, one dedicated to the study of metaphysics and mysticism. Side by side with the more reasoned workers of the Renaissance, these guildsmen went on to pioneer new creations and inventions. Where the Order of Reason propounded a rational and discernable state to the universe, though, the guild held that creation functioned due to the spark of genius in the individual, that the universe had no limits as long as one did not recognize any.

The Natural Philosopher's Guild survived in muted form among various groups of imaginative pioneers, never really united after its founders' time. However, the end of the Renaissance ushered in a technological age with possibilities heretofore undreamed of by mankind. Those who opened their eyes to these possibilities, who strove to make something meaningful instead of denying opportunities, still carried the flag of the guild until its formation as a recognized part of the Order of Reason. The spark literally came with the development of electricity, as these scientists formed the Electrodyne Engineers.

For the better part of a century, the Engineers advocated the wonders of electricity, the value of perception in experimentation and the power of the questing spirit. Their methods flew in the face of the new Technocracy's more reasoned pursuits. Willing to stride off into the unknown on the backs of wild theories and discredited sciences, the Engineers imperiled the Technocracy's idea of a safe, stable, methodical scientific world. Decrying the Engineers' methods, the Technocracy levied sanctions against them, up to and including publicly denouncing their favored theories. The Technocracy proclamation of the ether as fiction was the final stone. The Convention took upon itself the new moniker "Sons of Ether," and turned to the Traditions for succor.

Over the next several decades, the Etherites alternately advanced cutting-edge theoretical sciences and renewed old ones. From jet-packs to quantum mechanics, chaos math to etherships, they proved their commitment to truly inspired science in numerous ingenious devices. Their adventurers strode the globe as heroes whose exploits, too unbelievable to digest as fact, instead entered popular fiction. And they continued to dream, and to build.

Today, the Sons of Ether occupy a prominent place in the Tradition Council. Although many consider them deranged or just plain unstable, their devices and inventions sometimes work when other magic would fail, and their familiarity with technology gives them an edge in conflict with the Technocracy. As science travels into infinitely more detailed realms, the Sons of Ether find more cracks to exploit. Quantum theory accepts a subjective view of the universe. Dark matter theory posits the existence of an unseen yet massive matter all around — the ether. The Sons of Ether have always renewed the old, and their Tradition's vitality seems to show more of the same.

Organization

Given the fractious and chaotic nature of most Etherites, it's not surprising that their Tradition follows suit. Initiates are brought in from science classes and philosophical discussions, often after propounding on the nature of the *Kitab al Alacir* (once a true Scientist has circumspectly dropped a copy in the student's care). A student who manages to break through the barriers of conventional logic and realize his own theories on the contradictions inherent in the universe can be guided into a mentorship as a true Son of Ether.

Once inducted, a student's advancement proceeds along academic lines. Etherites correspond and publish journals or papers to propound their theories. Publication in *Paradigma*, the Etherite journal of universal science, is the most prestigious of

these works, but other papers and theses can carry weight as well. Those who build useful and interesting theories consistently — especially those who build functioning devices based on them — earn acclaim. The more advanced the student and his theories, the greater his accolades. Sons of Ether eventually acquire titles like Doctor and Master Scientist.

Where once the Great Hall that leads the Tradition was a Horizon Chantry based just outside Paris, the Scientists now meet in more mundane buildings to discuss their Tradition's advancement. Typically, Master Scientists and Doctors staff the Great Hall, which acts as part parliament and part academic circle. However, although a student may serve in the capacity of "gruntwork," every true Scientist remembers that inspiration is an intensely personal path and gives merit to the ideas of any Etherite. In theory.

Factions

Despite their wildly divergent theories, Etherites do tend to clump together. Often, several scientific specialists will share their knowledge of their respective fields to work in concert on a large project requiring all of their knowledge. Etherite factions generally form from such gatherings. Some sub-societies are stable enough to bring in new blood and remain homogenous.

Pioneers of space, the **Ethernauts** explore the reaches of the cosmos, and of other dimensions, in search of new wonders to bring back to Earth. They visit other worlds in their powerful etherships, sabotage the Void Engineers and bring back samples of the strange. With their incredible mastery of Matter, a few of these pioneers have made some theories about shielding their ships from the storm winds lashing the wall between dimensions, and their once-ridiculed craft may become a potent tool in exploration of the Umbra.

The well organized **Utopians** wish to build a better tomorrow on Earth through Science. These Scientists spread not only potent devices to improve the quality of life, but also potent ideas — expressions of wonder, hope and unity. Their social conscience leads them to help others and to make their unusual theories open to everyone.

The few remaining **Cybernauts** cruise the Digital Web and turn it to their whims. These Etherites fervently believe that the Web itself is the next battleground of the enlightened, that the minds of Sleepers will be decided there. Of course, most mages — er, Scientists — have more important business on Earth these days, so the Cybernaut faction wanes in popularity. Still, the Web is a perfect place to try out theories in virtual space, where they're less likely to wreck any real-world surroundings.

Politically, the **Progressivists** want to modernize the Tradition, starting with internal politics and structure and working up to theory and practice. The largely female faction argues that the Tradition as a whole does a poor job of keeping up with the social developments of the years, and that Etheric tendencies to rely on outmoded social constructs as well as outmoded technologies is too limiting to the Tradition as a whole. Most Progressivists want to start by renaming the Tradition and instituting a more democratic leadership.

The term **Mad Scientist** refers to those Etherites with a decided tendency toward the creation of dangerous devices with questionable goals. It's been a sad but true state that the Etherites' genius often comes hand-in-hand with some instability, or with a drive to see the "big picture" in a fashion that misses the point of the exercise. From these Etherites hail such legends as Doctor Frankenstein, whose laudable advances were twisted to unfortunate ends. They are not so much part of a united faction as examples of a recognized phenomenon within the Tradition.

Lastly, the **Adventurers** are Scientists who rely not

only on their command of Science, but their physical acumen, wits and daring to explore new parts of the world, fight "villains" and perform heroic deeds. While many would scoff at them as simplistic, the four-color inheritors of Doc Savage and John Carter do have a certain nostalgic appeal. Modern Adventurers take on a more pragmatic approach, using their fabulous Science to build fantastic (but often concealed) armor and weaponry with which to pursue their crusades against criminals, hypocrites and madmen. Again, they don't make up a real force within the Tradition (there's no "Legion of Super-Heroes") so much as a new breed of scientist.

Philosophy

While Technocrats codify the universe into a static mold explainable by convoluted science, the Sons of Ether reject such a notion as foolish. The universe is far too vast, and its permutations too varied, for any single equation to hold sway over it. Indeed, the very act of observation changes the outcome, as the Technocracy has discovered in its own acceptance of quantum science. Thus, discovery and invention are personal processes, driven by the wonder and inspiration of the individual. Nothing is "impossible" or a "dead end" — it's merely an avenue that someone else decided not to explore. From the "disproven" theories of yesterday, the Sons of Ether create the wonders of tomorrow.

Failings

Given their incredible diversity of theories, it's a wonder that Sons of Ether manage to communicate at all. By definition, their concept of science is highly individualized, more so even than the magic of other Traditions. Every single Etherite has his own spin on — well, just about everything. As a result, it can be very difficult for Etherites to find any common ground to discuss their practices, especially when two Etherites practice mutually contradictory theories (and both are right, of course, as demonstrated by the fact that both of their inventions *work*). Given that the Etherites can barely reach a consensus internally, it's nearly impossible to imagine them as comprehensible to other Traditions. Any three Etherites discussing a topic of magic will come up with five or six different theories on the fly, all equally implausible. This individuality makes it very hard for the Etherites to spread around their more complex notions and impressive theories, and even more difficult for them to adapt to the other Traditions.

Theories and Practices

With the Sons of Ether, magic all comes down to Science! Perception defines the universe and so each scientist builds his own model of reality. From there, the individual can posit theories about the functioning of reality as he sees it, and those theories lend themselves to creations. With intuitive insight, the scientist builds inventions, gives them a spark of power and understands them on a level that no other person can comprehend.

Etheric inventions are, of course, highly personalized. Some are extremely fanciful, while others are more practical or based on "real" science, like a phased-energy point defense system. Each scientist's particular bent on creation influences his style. Thus, some Etherites use large, bulky creations made from 1950s or earlier technology, while others invent new spins on modern technology and make wonderfully compact and convenient devices. A few Etherites also experiment with mental powers, psychic phenomena, and pseudo-mysticism, especially the Adventurer types.

When an Etherite derives a new theory and builds an invention for it, it's common practice to publicize the event through one of the papers or periodicals of the society. That way, every Etherite can examine it, determine its personal validity, and use or change it as desired. For this reason, a great many simple inventions are common among the Etherites. Where other Traditions might rely on rotes to generate repeatable Effects, the Etherites have common gizmos and formulas that have been shared, refined and tested with time.

The use of specialized materials varies with the individual scientist. Some base their works heavily on the use of a unique material — ether being the most common example — while others are more pragmatic. Scientists have been known to use everything from carefully custom-crafted filaments and parts made of plutonium, silver, biomatter or stranger stuff, to devices that simply rely on outdated technology rewired to perform some new function (say, a robot built from common kitchen appliances).

Specialty Sphere: Matter

Common Foci: Computers, ether goggles, engineering schematics, hand tools, mathematical constructs, mental disciplines, scientific meters, specialized alloys, timepieces

Concepts: Astronaut, gadgeteer, medic, natural philosopher, social scientist, theoretical engineer, trucker

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: Their monks teach useful discipline and mental techniques, but they must acknowledge the validity of material sciences.

Celestial Chorus: Respect for divinity is all well and good when it doesn't overshadow one's personal development.

Cult of Ecstasy: They're good for a celebration of a new invention!

Dreamspeakers: Totally incomprehensible.

Euthanatos: Who could get so caught up in death as to want to live it?

Order of Hermes: Repeatable formulae, but too rigid for true inspiration.

Verbena: Didn't witchcraft die out in the Dark Ages?

Virtual Adepts: They're too reliant on one vision, but they do make some useful toys.

Hollow Ones: There can be no inspiration without a spark of spirit.

THE TRUE WONDER OF SCIENCE IS NOT IN ITS ABILITY TO EXPLAIN THE UNIVERSE. BUT IN ITS CAPACITY TO FORM NEW QUESTIONS.

VERBENA

We come into the world bloody and squalling; we prey on flesh and fruit for survival; we grow, learn and adapt; we wane and die, only to feed new life. This never-ending cycle occupies the Verbena, and its constant pulse is the heart of the Tradition. Primordial sorcerers, potent healers, skilled shapeshifters — the Verbena dive into sex, blood and flesh without inhibition. Their passionate understanding of all life fuels an equally primeval magic.

Background

Like the Tree of Life that they use as a symbol, the Verbena have deep roots. By their own lore, the first union of the fragmented Pure Ones — Avatars — with the new world of flesh created the earliest shamans of humanity. Newly formed, the flesh still kept its ties to its primordial state. The combination of soulful endowment with feeling, growing life created the first primal sorcerers. These living shamans, so the Verbena tell, understood their position in the cycle of living. Their connection allowed them to shape their bodies as they willed, to make their own place in life's processes, and to understand the pulsing threads of the Tapestry.

Later, the rise of civilization caused these individuals to spread among many cultures and groups. They carried with them sacred knowledge of the living world, and they spread it where they could. However, people were always uncomfortable with notions like death and sickness, which were as much a part of the natural cycle as health and prosperity. So, even as healers and mystics, the Aeduna — predecessors to the Verbena — had to conceal themselves among secret orders. In doing so, they hid elements of their wisdom in bits of lore, small traditions and common folk-wisdom.

In Greece, Rome, England and even farther afield, the Aeduna spread their mystic ways. Greek legends honored mother-figures and spoke of the thin borderlands between life and death; English Paganism paid homage to varied gods and goddesses of earth and sky with sacrifice and ritual; Romans invested the Earth itself with an identity as a life-giver. The dancing circles expanded and rites of fertility crept into common use.

The rise of Church power in Europe's Dark and Middle Ages shattered Aeduna organization. Fearful peasants were taught to shun their base needs and desires, and an undereducated populace looked to the Church for salvation after the fall of Rome. Church inquisitors persecuted the "witches" and denounced their practices. The already cautious mages fled, hid, turned and died in droves. Their power broken, the few remaining magicians retreated to Horizon realms, underwater labyrinths and secret glades, or practiced muted forms of their magic as wise healers or herbalists without bringing their beliefs into public view. Indeed, the very term "Verbena" came into use as the moniker of a healing herb, applied to the Tradition for its noted herbal poultices, concoctions, salves and remedies and also for its affinity for living, growing plants.

Pagans, naturalists and seasonal celebrations sheltered the Verbena through the Renaissance and a rebirth of interest in occultism only continued to spur their growth in the 1800s. However, many Verbena customs had been lost or diluted, and the additions of neo-Paganism and modern Wicca only came into the group haltingly and under some dissent. By the modern day, the remaining Verbena had adjusted enough to include such members, although teaching in the Tradition continues to go far beyond the notions espoused by such revival groups. Fortunately for the Verbena, they've always had a strong core. Their small covens are very personal, and Verbena are often more sociable (at least amongst one another) than other mages, so they have been able to hold on to many elements of heritage that would otherwise be lost. Interest in crystal magic, herbalism, aromatherapy and similar holistic practices only continues to feed the Verbena Tradition, and those who feel the heartbeat of all life continue to join.

Organization

On the local level, Verbena tend to center around covens — small groups of practitioners and faithful, often in a mystically significant number like three or 13. Verbena covens often include entire families, where possible, and they can splinter or re-form as needed to make groups in different areas or to accommodate new members.

Large gatherings occur on seasonal holidays when many covens will join for special rites. At such gatherings, any properly initiated Verbena may speak, but weight is often given to those with the wisdom of age, insight and strong memories of past lives.

Like everything else about the Tradition, membership is not for the faint of heart. Initiates experience a ritualized (and symbolic) death and rebirth, then undergo a series of ordeals to properly test their mettle and welcome them to the Tradition. Those who don't have the strength to go all the way must remain supplicants or quit. Thankfully, however, the Verbena generally don't kill those who fail their tests. There's often some strife between factions as more progressive Verbena skip over the rituals that the traditionalists consider important, but everyone proves their dedication before admittance.

Factions

Believing that the Avatar embodies a reflection of primal energies, the Verbena tend to divide along lines of Essence. This distinction does not come so much a matter of cataloging the Avatar and its individual foibles, as suiting the natural

drives of the mage's soul. Some Verbena even trace bloodlines in the belief that Avatars tend to reincarnate through familial groups, and there is some evidence that they may be right. However, Verbena are by no means forced into a group as a result of their Avatar's predilections. A mage can always choose an allegiance based on his personal preferences.

Forming the base of the Verbena Tradition are the **Gardeners of the Tree**, Pattern mages who try to keep the old ways alive and pure. These mages keep records, track family lines and trace the heritage of Verbena rituals. Their scholarship is often noteworthy, as they pursue such goals rather doggedly. Conservative Gardeners count as "true Verbena" only those with a blood relation to some ancestral family at the root of the Tradition. More flexible Gardeners content themselves with remembering old rites and propagating the spread of the most fundamental elements of Verbena heritage.

Even more primal than the Gardeners are the **Twisters of Fate**. The mages of the Primordial Essence follow old songs that are heard no longer by other Verbena. Often considered a bit odd even by Verbena standards, they could be seen as a splinter group except that they have little unification. Still, they possess a keen wisdom and many have powerful memories of past lives. They often feel tugged to restore lost ways and to reduce complex Verbena rituals to their base parts.

Moon-Seekers fall under the Questing archetype. Such Verbena are travelers, explorers, those who welcome new ways into the fold. A Moon-Seeker is as likely to use a New Age crystal-waving ceremony as a traditional athame and rune-carving ritual. These Verbena wander far afield, bringing new bits and pieces into the Tradition's repertoire and looking for the acknowledgement of life and divinity in the simple rituals that people create for themselves in the new millennium. These Verbena often have strong ties to the community, and they enjoy learning as much as teaching.

Lastly, the **Lifeweavers** tend to have Dynamic Avatars. These Verbena move far afield, ignore old rites and make things up as they go along. More conservative Verbena often look askance at them, but the Lifeweavers still practice a reverence for life and know the value of sacrifice. These mages enjoy exploring the limits of their practice. They change shapes, work with many different Patterns and generally get their hands dirty mucking around with as much Creation as they can handle. Theirs is the joy of discovery.

Individual Verbena covens and cabals can sometimes be considered factions, although they are usually too small to compare to the broader groups.

Philosophy

Life is the greatest mystery of the universe. Base matter and energy do not grow, think, react and multiply. All life is a cycle that forms the heartbeat of the Tellurian. In the tiny fragments of that web are infinite individuals, all woven together by their shared trials and breaths. To recognize the constancy of life's cycles is to realize its pattern to grow beyond any expectation or boundary, to take any form and to achieve any goal. The process is never easy. Often, it is fraught with pain, predation and death. Life perseveres.

Failings

Bloody-handed sacrifices and disturbing rites are not for the squeamish. Prospective Verbena must have strong stomachs indeed to fit in with the Tradition, and the Verbena can be blunt and uncomfortably open about practices that many would consider revolting or taboo. As a result, the rest of the Traditions tend to keep them at arm's length. The more sterilized Traditions, like the Sons of Ether and the Order of Hermes, consider the Verbena uncomfortably primal. Intuitive groups like the Dreamspeakers and Euthanatos see a greater kinship, but they still look askance at the sheer viciousness with which Verbena can emulate the living cycle.

Since their magic is so very tied to their primal living natures, Verbena have a tendency to get lumped into the category of "Satanist witches" even today. While modern people may not understand, say, Virtual Adept technology or Dreamspeaker cultural songs, they're fairly accommodating. The brutal familiarity with which the Verbena strike home life's truths causes enough discomfort that Sleepers who see their works tend to get frightened — and many lash out as a result.

Theories and Practices

In many ways, Verbena see themselves as guardians of mythic threads — elements of magic that remain intertwined with the more mundane aspects of life. The earliest magicians naturally felt the interplay of life and spirit through their strong connection to Creation and the Pure Ones. Although such ties are weakened and dying, the Verbena still feel a similar pull, and they work to promote such ties wherever they can — in simple actions, beliefs and customs that reaffirm the power of life.

With fertility rites, dances, and simple joy in living, the Verbena open their perceptions to the pulse of all life. To this Tradition, the acts that reaffirm living nature are sacred. Verbena acknowledge and embrace the changing seasons, health, sex and sensuality, raw emotion and instinct dutifully.

In conjunction with their ties to life, though, the Verbena know that life isn't always sanitized, pretty or happy. Blood has raw power due to its symbolic and literal key as a fundament of life, and Verbena tap that power with scarification and sacrifice. Predators hunt and kill their prey, and Verbena believe in the correctness of the natural cycle in such actions. Pain is a teaching tool, not something to be shunned. Therefore, the Verbena are far more comfortable with their feral, instinctual drives than most people, an animalistic nature that can be disconcerting. Most other religions and groups have some line that they won't cross or some belief that they won't violate: a belief that blood is sacred and not to be shed, or that sex is empowered through denial. Not so the Verbena, who embrace all of these passionate techniques.

For their magic, Verbena use anything from bloodletting, to rune-carving, to animal sacrifice, herbal mixtures, transformative rites and even some New Age techniques that have blended into the Tradition. The key is to find a natural element that connects with the Verbena's will. As the Verbena see it, the natural resonance of life never left the world, even if mankind has upset its balance with reckless growth and extinction of many species. Hearing that rhythm, the Verbena does what *needs* to be done — mores or conventions be damned.

Specialty Sphere: Life

Common Foci: Altars, athame, blood, cauldrons, chants, cups, dance, herbs, incense, ordeals, pentacles, runes, sacrifices

Concepts: Artist, biologist, craftsman, diver, healer, herbalist, political activist, priest(ess), ranger, rune-wise

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: As powerful as the mind can be, it cannot deny the body so easily.

Celestial Chorus: The utter gall of their insistence on their one God is revolting. It's about time they faced the fires of their own judgmental Hell!

Cult of Ecstasy: Life can be exhilarating, but it is not always so. Their way is an escape, not an acceptance.

Dreamspeakers: Their plight is so sad, their calling so similar. We speak with the same voice, us to the heart, them to the soul.

Euthanatos: We both understand the beginnings and endings. They need to see the places in between.

Order of Hermes: Sometimes allies, often adversaries. They've borrowed many of our ways, yet they do not recognize our common ties.

Sons of Ether: A living system is the greatest machine of all.

Virtual Adepts: Their sterile world is no substitute for the flesh into which they were born.

Hollow Ones: A hollow tree may appear magnificent, but it rots within.

LIFE IS ALL AROUND US, IN THE WATER, IN THE TREES, IN THE TEEMING VIOLENCE OF PREDATOR AND PREY, IN YOUR BLOOD. IT IS POTENT, WET, DISTURBING, NATURAL — IT IS YOU.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

No Tradition mirrors the modern world so much as the Virtual Adepts. These former Technocrats embrace technology and its ability to empower people, and they strive to make that technology available to everyone. While most Traditionalists concern themselves with antiquated ways and renewal of ancient practices, the Virtual Adepts are on the horizon searching for the cutting edge. The Virtual Adepts ride the wave of the computer revolution, and they use these machines to expand their minds, enable worldwide communication and model novel visions for reality. By spreading computer and communication technology to the Masses, the Virtual Adepts help people enrich their own minds. The spread of information and knowledge makes everyone richer and leads to better versions of the world, leaving behind antiquarian notions, physical suffering and social inequity.

Background

Not surprisingly, the Virtual Adepts sprang from the same roots as the Sons of Ether, beginning as a Technocratic Convention when the Electrodyne Engineers and Artificers of the Technocracy gave birth to an entire discipline devoted to computation, logical thought and the process of storing and interpreting information. These scientists developed machines to process information for humans, to store images or words that humanity described and to expand human senses, memory and computation beyond the normal limits of the mind. Fired up by innovations like the telephone and the difference engine, these visionaries became the Difference Engineers. They worked with complex models of Babbage's difference engine, Lady Ada Lovelace's computational theory and Bell's long-distance communication devices. At the same time, they included the electrical theories of the Electrodyne Engineers and assimilated revolutionary notions from such luminaries as Nikola Tesla. The result, naturally, was a group of scientific dreamers who brought out ideas at a furious rate, fed their own discoveries with their new computational and communication power and reveled in the wild side of cutting-edge theories.

Naturally, the developing Technocracy needed the computers and communications pioneered by the early Difference Engineers, but it deplored their anarchic notions, haphazard development and barely traceable information network. Matters came to a head during the second World War. The idealistic Adepts pushed for Technocratic involvement with the Allies against Hitler early in the war, but the Technocracy hesitated to bring its weight to bear. The Virtual Adepts brought their resources into play for the Allied forces covertly, sowing the seeds of dissension. Having flouted Technocracy-wide policy once, the Adepts rallied to their own secret projects after World War II. Adept research culminated in virtual reality as Alan Turing explained his theories on virtual space, machine intelligence and self-replicating devices. However, the Technocracy shut him down permanently for his overzealous research.

The loss of Alan Turing signaled to the Virtual Adepts the Technocracy's unwillingness to embrace their new technologies. The Technocracy needed Virtual Adept techniques, but it wanted to implement them in its typical slow and monolithic fashion. The Virtual Adepts wanted to explode peoples' awareness with their new developments and make their cutting-edge technology available to everyone. Virtual Adepts around the world recognized Turing's demise as a message from the Technocracy to do as they were told and invent what they were ordered to invent, lest they become expendable. In typical anarchic hacker fashion, the Adepts refused to recognize Technocratic authority. Collectively, the majority of the Adepts fled, and the Convention applied as a whole for membership with the Traditions. The sorely pressed Traditions needed inside information about the Technocracy and a holder for the Seat of Correspondence; the Virtual Adepts needed a sheltering organization combined with the freedom to continue their boundary-pushing work. The two groups had found a match.

Although the Virtual Adepts are still distrusted by many within the Traditions due to their reliance on technology, the Tradition remains a keystone in the arsenal against the Technocracy. Their understanding of Technocratic tools and their ability to turn devices against their technological enemies makes them invaluable in the inevitable conflicts. Ideologically, the Virtual Adepts push constantly for new visions of reality, and they put such visions into practice through virtual space. On the Digital Web, they are masters of all they survey, and they bring out every possible idea for the future world. These elements make them the truly vibrant technological blood of the Traditions, and in many ways, they are the ones

who fit best in the modern world. As more and more Sleepers get online, the Adepts' community grows. Newer, faster, better, *now* is graven in the Adepts' hearts, and they'll bring inspiration from the virtual worlds or go out in a blaze of glory trying.

Organization

Naturally, Virtual Adepts are a fractiously chaotic lot. Their only real "organization" comes in the form of their various member spaces in the Digital Web and in the few who actually bother to run in groups; most bow to no authority. Indeed, Adepts recognize others only by "eliteness." On the Web, where one's gender, race and physical state are all irrelevant, the only thing that matters is the quality of one's deeds. Adepts develop reputations based on their achievements, and younger Virtual Adepts may flock to aid a truly elite member when she puts out the call. Odds are good, though, that a few will do their level best to sabotage the assemblage simply to gain some notoriety.

As a result of their near-total disorganization, Virtual Adepts generally don't bother with long-winded titles or recognition for formal occasions. Indeed, they thumb their noses at other Traditionalists — like the Order of Hermes — who rely on such politics. One would think that training and developing a resource base in such circumstances would be difficult, but it's just a matter of computer contacts, rule by the cool and a little bit of bluster.

Factions

Adept factions change as rapidly as technology, so it can be tough to keep abreast of them. Making matters more complicated is the fact that many Adept groups include both Sleepers and Awakened crackers, so one can't always distinguish the mages from the unenlightened.

The dying **Cyberpunk** movement embraces the nihilistic end-of-days attitude that the future will be darker, dirtier and meaner than the present, if possible. These crackers use heavy weapons, hardcore programming, infiltration and sometimes various drugs to amp themselves to the top before going ballistic on their various targets — corporations, politicians, each other... anyone that they don't like. Not surprisingly, they often rely on Forces to get the job done. As the Virtual Adepts continue to refine a vision of a better world, the defeatist attitude of the Cyberpunks thrashes out its death-throes in the gutter. The Cyperpunk movement as a whole seems to be maturing, heading toward a more educated and intellectual elite that embraces high material technology and cybernetic experimentation in a fashion reminiscent of the Technocracy's Iteration X.

The more intellectual **Cypherpunks** act with the reckless abandon that one would expect of a stereotypical cracker, but instead of relying on guns and a bad attitude, they crank up their computer programs and data-analysis skills. Cypherpunks enjoy collecting random trivia, esoteric data and hidden secrets, then spreading it around to all and sundry. Often, they are quite contrary, and they force people with whom they associate to examine all sides of a problem. From there, the Cypherpunks hope to gain new insight in several directions. Cypherpunks spend a great deal of time in the Digital Web, as one might expect. Naturally, many Cypherpunks study Mind sciences in addition to Correspondence.

The **Chaoticians** use Entropy to study extremely complex and chaotic systems. These Adepts believe that the information process is an inherently unstable one, and they look for understanding in the cracks and flaws of data. Their studies, of course, draw them into fractals, chaos mathematics, unstable systems and so-called hard problems. From these sorts of premises, they figure out the flaws in how things work, or in the world itself. They also delve into how tiny changes can effect large-scale results, and many indulge in a little bit of experimental social engineering.

The growing **Reality Hacker** faction believes that the universe itself has an underlying order, information storage system and language, and they tap into that language to tell the universe how to order itself. Instead of contenting themselves with virtual realities and the Digital Web, these hackers decode the structure of the cosmos. Bending space and gravity are the early expressions of their work, but serious reality hackers get into matter manipulation, alteration of universal forces and all the things that naughty little hackers shouldn't touch. If the universe is built with the ultimate "computer language," then staying up a whole lifetime to hack it is the ultimate rush.

Expressing the purest Correspondence theories, the **Nexplorers** make up a large chunk of modern Virtual Adepts. The Digital Web is prime turf to Adepts, but the Nexplorers hope to forge new visions for a brighter, better world. While all Adepts want to create a "Reality 2.0" into which the Masses can Ascend, the Nexplorers are most concerned with making it an improvement on the current world, not just a system that they control. To that end, they advocate careful construction of Digital Realms and exploration of other sorts. They press for space travel and dimensional travel, among other things, although the Tradition has limited resources in that regard.

Philosophy

Information is the ultimate power and the ultimate tool. Devices, magic, tricks and Traditions can all do great things, but only when guided with

the proper information. Therefore, the Virtual Adepts want to learn as much as possible, to explore and develop as many ideas as possible and to open the world to new knowledge by discovering loopholes, tricks, shortcuts, innovations and dreams. Eventually, people will recognize that information (and their understanding or processing of it) is their key to sensing the universe. Once that happens, it's a simple matter to make a better universe — a Reality 2.0 that can be modeled, shaped, simulated in a virtually real fashion, then embraced and made into a new world for everyone. The best and brightest (and most elite) lead the way, so that humanity can benefit.

Failings

Antiauthoritarianism combined with a respect for only the new means that the Virtual Adepts not only reject society, they spurn the very people they want to help. They treat Sleepers who "just don't get it" with condescension at best, and derision at worst. Strife erupts constantly between competing Adepts as they fight to establish who's on top and who's yesterday's news, and the Tradition recognizes no consistent leadership. Eventually, the Adepts will either implode, or they'll fall into step behind a system of upper-echelon "elite" and lower-class "end users." The Tradition needs to grow up and recognize that along with discovery comes a responsibility to implement said discovery safely.

With the recent crash and whiteout of the Digital Web, the Adepts lost a lot of ground in their most promising area of control. Although the Web is back up, it's now flooded with Sleepers who're getting closer and closer to matching the Adepts in computer techniques. Adepts who once saw themselves as masters of the realm are in for a rude awakening as they realize that once the Sleepers are in, they're in for good. Now that the Adepts have thrown open the doors to let everyone into their playground, they have to accept that people are going to do things they don't like. Many Adepts are unwilling to do so, and they go so far as to spitefully crash or flame various Sleepers who get into the Web. Instead of stagnating in the Web and claiming it as their exclusive turf, these Adepts must focus on the Tradition's purpose as heralds of the new. Otherwise, they'll become nothing more than petty dictators in a world that slips slowly away from their control.

Theories and Practices

Naturally, as masters of the computer, Virtual Adepts excel in all sorts of tele-techniques, information processes and Digital Web exploration. According to the Adepts, information has a flow all its own. Some Adepts even accord information with purpose or motive. In the end, virtual realities are just data; long-distance communication is just pushing information around; even physical existence is predicated on information storage. If one manipulates the facts, the reality follows suit. And, there are always new facts to find....

Stemming from their mastery of information and transference, Virtual Adepts develop strong computer processes to manipulate their surroundings. Although strongest in the realms of ephemeral data, many Adepts can develop hardware and programs to do anything from projecting force fields to shifting their appearance. Such procedures work best in the Digital Web, of course, but that constraint doesn't stop the Adepts from engaging in some judicious reality hacking with the right techno-toys as backup. The Adepts love new gadgets, high-tech devices and anything that gives them a leg up on their brethren.

As one might expect, Virtual Adept "meetings" are more along the lines of teleconferences and projections, often in safe havens of the Digital Web. Initiation? Once a prospective

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: Interesting mental discipline, but too much reliance on the body as the be-all end-all.

Celestial Chorus: I am the God in the Machine.

Cult of Ecstasy: I can party with these guys, and better still, I can leave them with the bill.

Dreamspeakers: Get real. We left caves behind when we got central heating.

Euthanatos: These guys are creepy, but ultimately clueless.

Order of Hermes: A couple have promise; most are too stuck on their "spell lists" to learn new tricks.

Sons of Ether: Our comrades-in-arms!

Verbena: Everything bad about the Akashic Brotherhood, with none of the good stuff.

Hollow Ones: If they'd just lighten up, they'd be OK.

young Adept has pulled off a few impressive moves or crunched some good code, he's one of the group — as long as he's not a total social retard among the techno-geeks. Training? What training? Individual Adepts pull together their skills out of experience and sheer balls, combined with their own beliefs in what's important. It's not uncommon for a Virtual Adept to have a certain lucky charm, a day of remembrance for a particularly worshipped hacker (Alan Turing's birthday is common) or even to talk to a computer like it's a friend, pet or Devil in a box.

Specialty Sphere: Correspondence

Common Foci: Computers (of course), cybernetic implants, hacking rituals, mathematics, programs, sensory gear, surveillance equipment

Concepts: Anarchist, cracker, explorer, musician, punk, scientist, techno-weenie, writer

There's a new world out there, waiting for us to touch it.
I'll give you the senses and open the door...
you just have to step in.

HOLLOW ONES

People are dying, ideals are dying, magic is dying, the world is dying. The Hollow Ones have known as much for some time, and they've accepted it. Now, they know that the world is going downhill, but they plan to enjoy the ride. Reveling in nihilism and a rejection of social mores, the Hollow Ones luxuriate in Gothic elegance and a decadent, romantic languor.

Background

Since they are not functionally a Tradition, the Hollow Ones do not occupy a seat on the Council of Nine, they have no recognition among the Traditions and other mages generally consider them a pain. They don't have the luxury of an extensive library of history, either. Instead, they point to Romantic poets, Victorian spiritualists, 1920s flapper counterculture and modern Goth culture as their architects. Hollow Ones themselves can't agree on their foundations; instead, they're more concerned with what they get out of it. As a hodge-podge subculture, they take what they like and discard the rest; this applies equally to people, philosophies, magic and belief.

Still, Hollowers are a product of the modern age, or rather, a rejection of it. The Hollow Ones despise the frenetic pace of modern life, the too-bright yet tacky technology of mass marketing and the banal stratification of society. Instead, they cling to notions of a more elegant age. Hollowers sip at absinthe, play at poetry, indulge in fetishistic fashion and follow the trends that lead them to death's door. The Reckoning that's at hand only lends credence to their beliefs. If the world's spiraling into destruction, they'll be the ones who are ready for its untimely demise.

Organization

Cliques rule the day among the Hollowers. Instead of forming philosophical factions or Avatar-driven groups, these mages just hang out in small clubs or social groups. Cliques tend to be fiercely competitive and jealous, but they can put aside their differences to work together sometimes. Since Hollow Ones often come from broken homes or dysfunctional families (whether wealthy or poverty-stricken), they indulge in whatever sorts of passive rebellion they can find — and that means hanging out with other people who've survived similar experiences and taken up the same candlestick. There's no hierarchy. There are young Goths and dead Goths, but old Goths are just pretenders. The social cliques that Hollowers form are the only real families they know, and they're fiercely protective of them, but without any political vision, they shrug off any attempts at real "organization." About the closest that Hollowers come to any sort of recognition in their ranks is when they choose someone to speak for a clique, or when they compete for pieces of unusual arcane lore or trivia in an attempt to seem spooky or knowledgeable in occult esoterica.

Factions

As the Hollowers lack organization or much in the way of politics, they aren't terribly factionalized. For the most part, they can be simply divided by their relation to the other Traditions and to magical society. Everything else is a matter of personal preference.

The term **Councilor** is sometimes used to refer to a Hollower who expresses a desire to see the Hollow Ones join the Traditions, but most often such individuals are labeled "sell-out" or "fascist jerk." Some Hollowers think that there's much to be learned from the Traditions, or they desire a sense of belonging; others have friends in the Traditions or are hungry for some political clout. These mages tend to burn out quickly. The Council doesn't take them seriously, and the other Hollowers often ridicule their ambitions.

Those most violently opposed to the Council are the **Revolutionaries**, who may agree that the Technocracy sucks, but think that the Tradition Council is just another oppressive system. These Hollowers want to evade the fighting groups altogether and just die in peace.

The majority of Hollow Ones don't have any recognizable faction. They hang out, enjoy the club scene, spend time with their cliques and shoot the shit on topics ranging from the modern economy to the spirits supposedly haunting the local cemetery.

Philosophy

Although the Hollow Ones don't believe that the world is necessarily doomed, they do feel that it's a pretty crappy place. As a result, they eke out what satisfaction they can get, and they encourage others in their own morbidity. Still, they have an abiding curiosity, a desire to scratch beneath the surface and see how things really work — the squirming guts inside the underbelly of society. Where other mages are driven by one view of magical theory or a certain Awakened goal, Hollowers are as likely to be motivated by a trés Gothic evening of sybaritic relaxation as by the opportunity to dig up some piece of esoteric trivia.

Failings

Some days, Hollowers can't even be bothered to get out of bed. It's an attitude that leads to defeat. Though Hollowers are accepting and flexible, it's hard to motivate them to give a damn about anything. As a result, they accomplish little. They're poster children of wasted potential, yet they won't fit into "normal" society or change to accommodate it. A very few achieve some level of real ability and find a focus to drive toward Ascension or some other goal, but many just spend their nights sitting on their collective asses and doing nothing productive.

Theories and Practices

The Hollow Ones' greatest strength may stem from their lack of convictions. Since they refuse to accept anything at face value, they dig up all sorts of wisdom and incorporate it into their own styles. While Hollow Ones tend to center around anything from late 1800s spiritualism up to modern neo-Pagan nihilistic fetishism, they are willing to try just about anything once — especially if it'll give them a unique angle or a way to impress their clique.

To the Hollowers, Ascension is a far-off goal, one that may never be reached. Sure, they can feel the pull of the Avatar, but if you're going to die tomorrow without achieving anything, why bother? This lassitude gives them the leisure to explore many different avenues, though, and ironically, it leads some to find enlightenment in the oddest corners and cracks. As a general rule, Hollowers don't believe in any sort of global Ascension. People in general are assholes who can't be bothered to get any better, so it's a waste of time to try to change them.

Since they develop eclectic techniques borrowed from many different styles, Hollow Ones have no real magical specialty or typical focus. Many start out with a little light occultism and then veer off into a personal style, studying whatever magic suits their fancy. As a result, Hollowers can use just about anything as a focus, as long as they have some idea of what they think they're doing. A Hollower using a computer had better have some understanding of the machine, while one using Santeria should've at least

Stereotypes

Akashic Brotherhood: They need to get their heads out of their Akashas and see the world for the festering hole it is.

Celestial Chorus: As if I didn't have enough trouble with my parents trying to send me to church and people telling me that I'm going to Hell.

Cult of Ecstasy: Get up, get down, get bent.

Dreamspeakers: At least they realize the world's dying. Now they should quit wasting their time.

Euthanatos: These guys give black trenchcoats a bad name.

Order of Hermes: What a bunch of stuck-up assholes! Them and their phallic symbols.

Sons of Ether: You know, mad scientist chic just doesn't work for me.

Verbena: All right, I can get into the Wiccan experience, but why get so worked up about all of it?

Virtual Adepts: Nice toys. But the one who dies with the most toys, is still dead.

read a couple of books on the subject. Ultimately, they bring a scattered approach to magic that gives them a flexibility the Traditions can't match.

Specialty Sphere: None

Common Foci: Arcanology, blood, crystals, grimoires, poetry, runes, seances, spirituality, Victorian ritual... just about anything, actually.

Concepts: Clubgoer, faux vampire, Goth band member, medium, occultist, poet

I plan to dance on the ashes of this burning world.
Why are you wasting your time with anything that'll be gone tomorrow?

John looked into the mirror and sighed to himself. "Black jeans, black jacket, black boots, black shades, white t-shirt," he murmured. "Well, it's not standard issue, but it will have to do." John scanned the small apartment he now inhabited, his appraising eye naturally gravitating toward the security of the place. *Nothing like what the company provided me with before,* he thought as he walked to the bed and grabbed his car keys. Throwing the radio an evil glare as it started to blare Rancid Timebomb, he spun the keys with a habitual motion. *Then again, I am not working for them anymore. Probably good to let all thought of the company go. They don't let you go easily, if at all.*" Looking around he finally walked to the door and paused, hand halfway to the door knob. *Move it, John. It's nothing, just the first day of the rest of your life.*

The sun was blinding for the first moment, but the shades automatically compensated. *This is crazy. I'm a Company man, not ready to deal with this.* But then his mind went back to those children, dying in those tanks. *No — the Company is compromised. Corrupted. Never again.*

Walking over to his car he brushed the fender, removing an offensive piece of dust before getting in and staring her up, casting another glare at the radio as Timebomb continued to play. "Fifth Street, Apartment 5. Okay, my new friends. Here I come," he said to nobody in particular.

He pulled out of the lot and started down the street, taking care to drive just two miles per hour above the speed limit. Half way through the turn on the corner of 5th, the world seemed to tilt and explode. Shaking his head, John looked at his passenger door and noticed that it was smashed in. *Shit. Not now, not already!* he thought, but he'd already moved by reflex. He rolled out of his door and moved over to kneel behind the rear wheel. *Should be a two man squad — One to check the inside, one to walk around and check the side. Wait for it... wait... now!* As the first of his assailants rounded the corner of the car, John stood up, lashing out with his fist. He felt more than saw the man start to fall. In a quick and practiced motion John ripped the gun out of the man's hand and turned to look to the other one whom he knew would be at the passenger window. John smiled as the grip of his acquired weapon adjusted to fit his hand and pointed it at the last assailant. "Looking for someone?"

The second man started and spun around, locking eyes with John. "We've been sent to collect you. Please come with us."

John just shook his head slightly. "Now how do you figure that? I have a weapon and you're standing there like a first year cadet with yours still under your arm."

The man smiled slowly. "But I read up on you. I have your file. You do not know how to use one of those." Saying that, the man shot his hand toward his shoulder holster. John quickly thumbed the activator and then squeezed the trigger. There was a short flash and the other man fell to the ground twitching, the whites of his eyes showing. John threw the gun onto the man's chest. "Never assume. I cross-trained, asshole."

Looking up and down the street, John sighed and started off at a jog. "I wonder where the nearest bus stop is..."

Chapter Three: Character and Traits

Just as the World of Darkness provides a twisted reflection of our own world, a dark background in which to tell stories, it is populated with its own people. You take on the role of one of those people, telling that individual's exceptional story. This character serves as your protagonist, just like the hero in a novel or movie. Through your descriptions, you show how that character behaves and interacts with his world. Together with the Storyteller and the rest of your troupe, you build a tableau of that character's life and experience. From novice Initiate to experienced Archmage, you follow the character's exploits and dreams, watching him learn and live through success and failure.

Here, you'll find the steps necessary in building a mage character. Like any good novelist or playwright, you start with a general concept, an idea of the character's persona, motives and history. From this sketch, you can delve into the character's defining points. With game statistics, you assign the character numbers that reflect concrete capabilities.

Traits

Everyone has different capabilities and limits. Every person is unique, as the saying goes, and so it is with **Mage** characters. The roles that you can take in a **Mage** game are as varied as the kinds of different people you'll meet every day. To address these differences, compare the levels of ability between people and determine who's good (or lousy) at something, you define your character with Traits. The character is an idea or concept, a description of the personality, history and motivation for your alter ego; the Traits, are the concrete measurements of the character's qualities.

When you create your character for **Mage**, you assign point values to Traits. Traits describe everything from the character's innate physical strength to her abstract knowledge of magic. Most Traits score between 1 (poor) and 3 (good), but some exceptionally gifted individuals may have scores of 4 (excellent) or even 5 (peak human capacity). Certain **Mage** characters may have learned to enhance their attributes magically beyond even these levels, and supernatural entities may well exceed human limits. A few Traits (most notably Arete, Quintessence/ Paradox and Willpower) work on a different scale, and they're described later. Whatever the case, the number of dots indicates the relative strength of the Trait, and more dots means that you get to roll more dice when calling on that Trait (see the rules in Chapter Five).

Common Traits and Terms

Just about all **Mage** characters draw upon the following Traits:

Name: The character's name could be the magician's given name, or a pseudonym, "craft name" or other assumptive. Some bizarre mages use strange terms or even descriptors instead of simple names.

Player: That's you — the player who takes on the character's role.

Chronicle: Your chronicle is a series of linked stories telling of the adventures and mishaps of your mages. The chronicle's name encapsulates the idea for this ongoing tale. Generally, the Storyteller names the chronicle, though that name may be affected by the sort of story that you and the troupe want to play.

Demeanor: This is the mask that your character uses, not in a literal sense, but in the fashion of how she behaves to the world. Often, Demeanor is different from Nature, since we all show the world a face that's different from our true, hidden selves.

Attributes: Base, raw capabilities are described with Attributes.

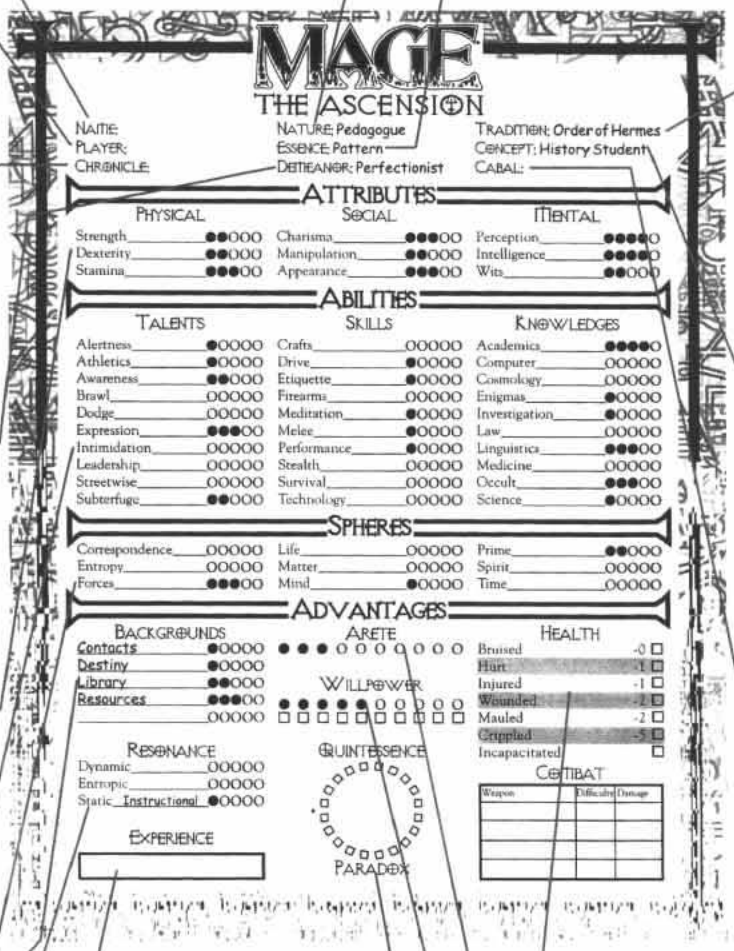
Abilities: Anything your character knows, learns, practices or has an intuitive talent for falls under the heading of an Ability.

Spheres: To better classify and explain magical phenomena, mages long ago categorized various types of magic into Spheres that describe different facets of reality. With enough practical knowledge of the Spheres, a mage can alter parts of reality and make things happen through magic.

Backgrounds: These Traits describe the character's social network and standing in both mundane and supernatural circles.

Resonance: This location holds your character's three Resonance Traits, determining how magic is "personalized" for the mage according to Dynamic, Entropic and Static principles.

Experience: Your character garners experience through story and trial. With experience, you can improve your character's Traits or gain new ones.



Nature: This term reflects your mage's true personality, the feelings and drives that motivate her to behave in certain ways.

Essence: From the Avatar, the character has a particular Essence, a specific attachment to the primal forces of the universe. This Essence shows the way that the Avatar tries to structure the character's magic, and it drives the mage to enlightenment in particular forms.

Tradition: Mages learn their magic from wisdom handed down by others. The way that your mage learned magic, and the beliefs that she holds about the cosmos, are shaped by her Tradition. Each Tradition is a collection of mages unified by a common thread of a particular way of doing magic.

Concept: A brief description of your character's underlying history goes here. Often, the concept is tied to what your character did in "real life" before Awakening, and maybe what the character does now. Concepts range from Eccentric Scholar to Outcast Loner to even Ass-Kicking Kung Fu Master.

Cabal: Since mages tend to come together for mutual defense and study, they often form their own small networks, called cabals. The name of your character's cabal may be haphazard, or it may have something to do with a common goal or power.

Arete: A measure of enlightenment, showing how well the mage understands the cosmos and manipulates its Tapestry.

Willpower: When the chips are down, Willpower measures your character's ability to give it her all. This Trait reflects inner resilience, drive and motivation.

Quintessence/Paradox: The wheel of Quintessence and Paradox is an opposed Trait. As you garner Quintessence, you mark boxes clockwise from the dot, showing that your mage is brimming with the power of creation. Paradox, on the other hand, accumulates counterclockwise from the dot, as the bending, pulling forces of altered reality weigh your mage down.

Health: Mages have a tendency to get into all sorts of scrapes, so the Health chart measures your character's state of being. A few good punches, bullets or lightning bolts will put a dent here, but thankfully, mages can heal with time and magic.

Getting Started

Before you sit down to build a **Mage** character, keep a few things in mind.

• Although mages come from all cultures, walks of life and ages, the systems here are designed for fairly inexperienced mages. Generally, your character is assumed to have Awakened only recently, within the last few years or so. Such novices know a little bit about magic and their own Tradition, and they may have a few scattered facts about other supernatural phenomena, but that's it. The world is a large, wonderful and dangerous place. The wonder of magic hasn't yet worn off, and there's a lot left to see.

• The story of your character should define the Traits, not the other way around. There's no point to a Trait-versus-Trait slugfest; that's hardly a route to enlightenment. Instead, characters should have a solid story, background and motivation. Then the Traits can be filled in according to their predilections.

• You get a limited amount of points to build your character's Traits. This limit keeps everyone from playing a super Archmage with a mastery over every Sphere. This chapter gives some guidelines for such creation, but the Storyteller has the final say on how many points a character may have.

• Higher Trait ratings are better. For the typical Ability or Attribute, a rating of 1 is low and a rating of 5 is wildly exceptional. Just because you don't have a good rating in a Trait doesn't mean that your character will always be terrible with it, though. Most characters will average around 2 or 3 in their primary strengths, with the occasional 4. You can develop your character with experience, too, gaining new areas of skill or improving old ones.

• Remember to work with the other players and the Storyteller when you build your character. Although the moody, vitriolic loner can be fun to play, it's a pain for the rest of the group if your character has nothing to do with the cabal, or worse still if your character is disruptive and hostile to the group. Creating a character who doesn't fit in either makes for boring play (since you have nothing to do) or tears up the game (as you go head-to-head with the other players). Figure out a place for your character in the group and the story.

The Storyteller and Character Creation

Mages aren't just collections of numbers — they're visionaries, believers, villains and heroes. Building a mage character thus calls for attention to details in personality, history and characterization, not just a simple list of Spheres and Abilities.

Although experienced players can build characters on their own, the Storyteller should always have at least a little something to do with the process. After all, the Storyteller's going to guide the world, and he needs to make sure that the characters fit in.

Character Creation Process

• **Step One: Character Concept**

Choose concept, Tradition, Essence, Nature and Demeanor

• **Step Two: Select Attributes**

Prioritize the three categories: (7/ 5/ 3). Your character begins the process with one dot in each Attribute.

Rate Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina.

Rate Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance.

Rate Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits.

• **Step Three: Select Abilities**

Prioritize the three categories: (13/ 9/ 5)

Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges.

No Ability higher than 3 at this stage.

• **Step Four: Select Advantages**

Choose Backgrounds (7).

• **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Record Arete (1), Willpower (5) and Quintessence (equal to Avatar Background).

Spend freebie points (15).

Choose Spheres (5, plus Tradition specialty).

Select Resonance Traits: Dynamic, Entropic, Static.

Sample Concepts

• **Criminal** — jailbird, Mafioso, drug dealer, pimp, carjacker, thug, thief, fence

• **Drifter** — bum, smuggler, prostitute, junkie, pilgrim, biker, gambler

• **Entertainer** — musician, film star, artist, club kid, model

• **Intellectual** — writer, student, scientist, philosopher, social critic

• **Investigator** — detective, beat cop, government agent, private eye, witch-hunter

• **Kid** — child, runaway, outcast, urchin, ganger

• **Nightlifer** — clubgoer, skinhead, punk, barfly, raver, substance-abuser

• **Outsider** — urban primitive, refugee, minority, conspiracy theorist

• **Politician** — judge, public official, councilor, aide, speech-writer

• **Professional** — engineer, doctor, computer-programmer, lawyer, industrialist

• **Reporter** — journalist, news reporter, paparazzo, talk-show host, 'zine editor

• **Socialite** — dilettante, host, playboy, sycophant, prominent spouse

• **Soldier** — bodyguard, enforcer, mercenary, soldier of fortune, Green Beret

• **Worker** — trucker, farmer, wage-earner, manservant, construction laborer

Traditions

• **Akashic Brotherhood** — Philosophical martial-artists, the Warring Fists espouse a union of mind, body and spirit through personal discipline.

• **Celestial Chorus** — The schismatic Singers desire a renewal of the original One, restoring the world to a whole and perfect form with their dogmatic faith.

• **Cult of Ecstasy** — Seeking an altered consciousness through entrancing music, dance and experience, the Ecstatics pursue liberation of flesh and soul.

• **Dreamspeakers** — The Spirit-Talkers embody the harmonious — although sometimes dangerous or terrifying — ways of primal existence in concert with nature and the spirits. They follow the paths of shamans and medicine men.

• **Euthanatos** — Drawing inspiration from Hindu beliefs and responding to the suffering of an overcrowded, uncaring world, the Deathmen (and women) bring release to the pained and death to evil.

• **Order of Hermes** — Rational and studious, the Wizards of the high Order of Hermes practice carefully refined formulaic magic handed down over centuries. Their magic derives from a set of forms built through rigorous application of mystical principles.

• **Sons of Ether** — Laboratories of weird science and fringe technology embody the lunatic inspirations of the Mad Doctors, who pursue the cast-off remnants of discredited science and cutting-edge alternative systems.

• **Verbena** — Primal and deadly, the misnamed Pagans of the Verbena delve into the primal nature of life, birth, blood and sacrifice in their communion with potent forces.

• **Virtual Adepts** — The pioneers of a new vision for reality strive to open the minds of the Masses with their renegade actions as Hackers and virtual world-builders.

• **Hollow Ones** — Drawing from the nihilistic corners of a dying culture, the Soulless use a hodge-podge of their own making in the pursuit of escape while the world crumbles toward Armageddon.

Archetypes (Nature and Demeanor)

• **Architect** — You want to leave a lasting legacy.

• **Autocrat** — You desire control.

• **Bon Vivant** — Pleasure and joy are your hallmarks.

• **Bravo** — Rule stems from strength.

• **Caregiver** — You are a wellspring of compassion.

• **Celebrant** — Some cause gives you passion.

• **Child** — You never grew up.

• **Competitor** — Always struggling for the top.

• **Conformist** — You are the heart of a group.

• **Conniver** — Why work when you can get others to work for you?

• **Curmudgeon** — Nothing's ever good enough, so you point that out often.

• **Deviant** — You defy conventions and "normalcy."

• **Director** — You take charge and bring order.

• **Fanatic** — A cause consumes you.

• **Gallant** — The lights shine brightest for you, the center of attention.

• **Judge** — Balance, truth and justice are your quest.

• **Loner** — You make your own way.

• **Martyr** — Through your sacrifice, others survive.

• **Masochist** — Only pain can teach you your limits.

• **Monster** — Magic is damnation, so bring Hell to Earth.

• **Pedagogue** — Knowledge is the fruit of wisdom, passed on to the worthy.

• **Penitent** — Until you atone for your sins, you are unworthy of salvation.

• **Perfectionist** — Your accomplishments are never enough.

• **Rebel** — Rules? What rules?

• **Rogue** — You plan to be on top, by whatever means necessary.

• **Survivor** — Nothing can keep you down.

• **Thrill-Seeker** — Existence is best lived on the edge.

• **Traditionalist** — The old ways are good ways.

• **Trickster** — Laughter is the best medicine.

• **Visionary** — The world is greater than what everyone else sees.

Spheres

• **Correspondence** — Understanding of connections and distances.

• **Entropy** — Study of chaos, decay and randomness.

• **Forces** — The power of the flashing elements: fire, electricity, light and sound.

• **Life** — Influence over living, growing things.

• **Matter** — Power over base materials and objects.

• **Mind** — Empowerment, telepathy and mental communication and control.

• **Prime** — Understanding of the fundamental power behind magic.

• **Spirit** — Sensitivity to the Invisible World, to places beyond the material.

• **Time** — Control over the perceptions of and flow of the ticks of the clock.

Backgrounds

• **Allies** — Aides and friends who help in tasks.

• **Arcane** — A mystical ability to move about unnoticed by the masses.

• **Avatar** — The strength of the mystical soul.

• **Contacts** — Information sources and rumormills.

• **Destiny** — Some greater purpose that drives the mage.

• **Dream** — A tie to the primordial subconscious.

• **Influence** — Pull over the mortal world.

• **Library** — Access to metaphysical knowledge.

• **Node** — A place of magical power.

• **Resources** — Cold, hard cash.

• **Wonder** — A magical Talisman or Device.

Freebie Points

Trait	Cost
Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Sphere	7 per dot
Background	1 per dot
Arete	4 per dot (Max. Total: 3)
Willpower	1 per dot
Quintessence	1 for 4 dots

Thus, the Storyteller's guiding hand can make sure that all the concepts mesh to some degree, and that every character has something to do. At the same time, the Storyteller can gain inspiration from the unexpected choices of each player and add a few plot hooks according to the character's special capabilities.

Obviously, diving into a complex game like **Mage** can be pretty daunting for new players. The Storyteller should hand out character records and explain to the players how each of the Traits work and where it fits in. The players should check out the sample sheet and peruse the various descriptions of Traits. Those who've created **Mage** characters before need to remember to explain what's important to mage characters and point out options that other players might not spot right away.

Once players know what they're doing, help them to figure out an appropriate concept for the game. The Storyteller should have an idea of what the story's about and where it's going; every good story needs a beginning and an end. From there, the Storyteller can determine how the mages get involved. If the Storyteller wants to run a high-tech thriller, he might forbid primitivist Dreamspeakers or Verbena from the character concepts. It's the responsibility of the player to build a character that will move the story forward, and it's within the authority of the Storyteller to determine that a given character may not be suitable for the game at hand.

Because explaining the character creation process and Traits is a pretty lengthy task, and because it may take some time for the players to come up with a group of working concepts, Storytellers should probably take an entire session to put characters in order. Once the basic story concept is resolved, spend an evening working with all of the players, helping them to build their characters individually and then meshing them as a group. At this point, it may be appropriate to give a short prelude, a "pre-story" to explain how the characters got together, how they Awakened or why they're in the upcoming story.

Step One: Character Concept

A character starts as a basic idea, perhaps an impulse or a core element of identity. From there, paint broad brush-strokes to elicit a concept. The base concept is an outline on which the rest of the character hangs. Ideas spin from this framework, perhaps building on the underlying idea, possibly making notable exceptions to it.

To formalize your character's basic shape, pick a simple concept, a Tradition, a Nature, a Demeanor and an Essence.

Concept

Every human is unique, but the concept of a character lets you get a handle on core motives and design elements. Remember that mages spring from human stock and Awaken into a broader world. Therefore, there's more to a mage than just her outlook on magic. Remember to define who this person was (and is), how she lived and what her relation was (and is) to the rest of the mortal world. Start small, with a basic idea that gets across a simple image or shows one or two talents of the character. From there, you can refine the concept to a sentence or so and use that sentence to decide how the character's likely to progress.

Once you have a concept, refer to it while building the rest of your character. Your concept can provide hooks to the character's development and suggest appropriate capabilities or problems. People surprise us all the time though, and you may be tempted occasionally to do something with the character just to go against the grain. The concept also suggests some possible personality angles and serves to get your creative juices bubbling over the fire of imagination. You can pick one of the sample concepts on p. 87, but those ideas exist only to inspire you. Use your imagination, make something up, and give your mage a unique place in the world!

Tradition

Once Awakened, most mages train in a particular style of magical arts. These heritages determine the sorts of magic that the mage uses, but they shape the mage's outlook on ethics, philosophy, belief, science, worldly matters and metaphysical theory as well. The heroic mages of the Traditions hope to keep magic alive — at least for a few individuals — out of a desire for diversity, wonder or just something better than a banal world. Check out the Traditions in Chapter Two and decide on one that seems reasonable for your character. Remember that the Tradition influences the character's beliefs and guides her magical style, but your character is also an individual who may break from the Traditional "norm" in some ways.

Depending on the nature of the chronicle, the Storyteller may disallow or encourage the presence of certain Traditions, so be sure that you work with your Storyteller in this process.

Obviously, not all mages are Tradition mages. The exceptions fall into several different camps including the Technocracy, the Marauders, the Nephandi and the Disparates. Most of these groups are covered in other source material. However, if you want to make up your own mage's belief systems and magical practices, you can determine how your mage learned and developed a hodge-podge eclectica of magic. Simply note that the character is an Orphan instead of following a particular Tradition.

Essence (Avatar Archetype)

Although mages guide their powers through enlightened will and belief, they are still influenced by the patterns of the universe echoed in their own souls. Each mage's Awakened Avatar grants the mage the gift of magical power, but it also shapes that mage's approach to magic. Therefore, the Essence is a roleplaying aspect that determines the direction of the character's magical inner self. This Essence influences the mage's path to Ascension. Pick an Essence from the list on pp. 94-96. Note that Essences seem to follow set categories. It is easier to choose one of the listed ones than to try to make up a unique Essence.

Nature and Deitieanor (Personality Archetypes)

Just as a character's concept describes her job or place in society, the Nature and Demeanor flesh out the character's personality and motives. Obviously, people are too complex to be described in a couple of words, but you can establish some basic behaviors for your character with these Archetypes. The character's Nature represents her inward self, the hidden persona that reflects the character's true goals and meshes with the Essence to drive the individual forward. The Demeanor is a mask, a façade that the character wears in personality to show to the world. Look over the list of Archetypes on p. 96-101 and choose one for each category.

Natures and Demeanors are important because they lie at the root of the character's behavior. Your character should often act in ways that reflect her Demeanor or further the goals of her Nature. Each Archetype also has certain strengths and failings of personality. A mage can draw upon renewed resolve by relying upon her strengths, but must overcome her failings to reach Ascension. In stressful situations, a mage might regain Willpower by fulfilling the goals of her Nature. Conversely, she will have to confront the weaknesses of her personality during Seekings and quest to overcome her flaws. See the individual descriptions for some details.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Once you've decided on your mage's identity, you can "run the numbers" to define the character. Your mage's Attributes reflect her inherent qualities and personal characteristics. Like other Traits, Attributes are rated with dots, usually on a one-to-five scale. **Mage** characters have nine Attributes in three categories: the Physical Attributes of Strength, Dexterity and Stamina; the Social Attributes of Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance; and the Mental Attributes of Perception, Intelligence and Wits.

Obviously, Attributes depend on the base concept that you established earlier. An industrial worker or Third World miner is likely to be pretty strong and tough (with good Physical Attributes), while a university professor or computer scientist will probably have high Mental Attributes. A politician or revolutionary probably has good Social Attributes. Then again, some people manage to get past limited natural talent with lots of work, but you can't be good at *everything*, so choose well.

Unless your mage is exceptionally unfortunate, she'll have at least one dot in each Attribute. When you begin the character-creation process, you divide up the three Attribute categories — Physical, Social and Mental — and assign a priority to each

area. In your character's primary area, place seven additional dots; in the secondary area, five; and in the tertiary category, three. These Attributes can go up to five dots, the maximum human capability, although you're more likely to have a mage who's competent in most areas and better than average in a few.

Step Three: Select Abilities

After assigning Attributes, your character needs Abilities. These Traits represent learned or practiced capabilities, or the honing of natural talent. Talents are natural capacities of the character, while Skills are practiced and learned faculties. Knowledges represent academic or scholastic study. Your character's concept should guide your selection of her Abilities. A diplomat should not only have natural charm, but training in etiquette and social graces, while a boxer needs a great deal of skill in unarmed combat in addition to a good physique.

Again, you divide the Abilities into three prioritized categories: Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Unlike Abilities, you don't place a free dot in each area. Your mage doesn't know everything, after all. In your primary Ability category, place 13 dots. In the secondary area, place nine dots, and reserve five for the tertiary one. However, you can't place more than three dots into any single Ability right at the outset. You'll have the opportunity to show exceptional prowess by buying more dots with freebie points, or you can improve your ratings through experience points after play begins. However, such exemplary work is the exception rather than the norm.

Step Four: Select Advantages

Even within a given field of expertise, no two people are the same. While a few points of difference in Traits are to be expected, characters really separate out with Advantages. These Traits represent the character's special bonuses and acquired unusual Traits — human social ties, magical heritage, mystic study or just wealth and influence. You'll get different amounts of points to improve each category of Advantages, and you can improve them later with freebie points.

Backgrounds

For measuring a mage's standing in various social groups, check out Backgrounds. A mage might have Backgrounds in various areas of human endeavor (money, property, friends, co-workers, political pull and so on) or magical nature (a powerful spirit, access to magical items or energy, a strong destiny or a connection to the universe). Based on your character's concept, Tradition and Essence, figure out some Backgrounds that would make sense or facilitate the character's role. You can spend seven dots on Backgrounds in any combination that you like. Just remember that if you don't put any dots into it, you don't have it — nothing is free.

Foci

Each mage has a different way of looking at and invoking magic. The Traditions teach fairly unified theories, but the individual practices are unique from mage to mage. Choosing foci — the tools and techniques used to perform magic — for a given mage is an important individual step.

You don't place points into foci. Instead, you pick a signature focus for each Sphere of magic. That focus is the method or item with which your mage is most comfortable and familiar when invoking that form of magic. Thus, you'll have a different item for each Sphere, but each item will fit in some way with your Tradition's beliefs on what works and what doesn't. The advantage is that, when using the signature focus, it's a little easier to perform magic, as long as you can work out a way that your character would use the focus in the spell. Your character can still do magic without her signature focus for a Sphere, but she'll have to rely on other trappings of her Tradition. Without any appropriate focus, she can't do the magic at all — she simply doesn't believe that it's possible to do magic other than the way she's learned already.

As your character grows in enlightenment, she may overcome her dependence on props, removing the need for foci. However, that day won't come for a long time. For now, make a note of the signature focus used for each Sphere of magic, with items or techniques as suggested in the Tradition descriptions.

Step Five: Last Touches

The home stretch — most of the points are down for the character, and you can nearly finish fleshing the mage out. Here you'll take care of the last bits of number-crunching and spend a few freebie points to customize the mage.

Spheres

Each of the nine Spheres of magic describes a fundamental key to reality. By studying the Spheres, a mage gains power over them. The mage can perform feats of will that bend the Spheres to her whim. Combining the Spheres allows a mage to affect greater portions of reality.

All mages start with one dot in a "specialty Sphere," the one Sphere that the mage best understands and for which the character has the greatest affinity. This specialty is determined by the character's Tradition and faction (if you have one see Chapter Two). Furthermore, you can spend five additional dots to improve your character's Spheres — but don't do so yet. No Sphere rating can exceed the character's Arete, so you'll need to spend freebie points first, to raise Arete, if you want any Sphere better than the rudiments. Note that if your character's faction teaches a different Sphere than the Tradition, you should still put a dot in the Tradition's specialty Sphere to represent "basic training."

Some Orphans, especially Hollow Ones, have no specialty Sphere. These characters learn all Spheres equally and get six dots in whichever Spheres you please.

Arete

As a mage's magical will, enlightenment and connection to the universe, Arete measures one's fundamental understanding and ability to control magical forces. Upon Awakening, every mage gains at least a small measure of enlightened vision. Reflect this fact by noting that your mage has one dot of Arete. You can purchase additional levels of Arete with freebie points. This option is

important because none of your character's Spheres can exceed her Arete. Your mage's practical ability to manipulate magic is limited by her basic theoretical understanding of magical principles.

Normal humans do not have an Arete rating. After Awakening, mages gain Arete through special visions and quests called Seekings. This road to enlightenment is a difficult and dangerous one, so only the most exemplary mages have a high Arete. Thus, a normal mage character starts with just one dot of Arete. You cannot raise it above a total of three dots with the expenditure of freebie points.

Willpower

Mages are headstrong and willful beings, as they must be in order to change the cosmos. The Willpower Trait measures that inner confidence and drive. All mage characters start with a Willpower of at least five dots. You may add additional dots by spending freebie points, and doing so can be crucial in the quest for Ascension. However, remember that Willpower, like other Traits, must bow to the concept of the character. Only the rarest, most devoted and most fanatical of individuals have Willpower scores of nine or 10.

Quintessence and Paradox

Rare and valuable, Quintessence is the raw energy of Creation. A mage can channel Quintessence to aid in many magical feats. Your character starts with Quintessence equal to his *Avatar* Background rating, and no Paradox points. Of course, once your mage has gotten into a little trouble, these numbers tend to change quickly! You can buy a little extra Quintessence for your mage with freebie points, in order to give her a bit of a magical edge at first. Later, Quintessence is regained through the use of Prime arts and meditation at Nodes.

Resonance

Near the bottom of the character record are spaces for three Resonance Traits: Dynamic, Entropic and Static. Pick one Trait for one type of Resonance, and rate it with one dot. This rating reflects the sorts of emotions and drives that affect your mage's magic. Each Trait needs to key in with the appropriate type of Resonance. Check out the descriptions of Essence and Nature and Demeanor (you *did* pick those in the first step, right?) to get a handle on your mage's personality and motives, and then choose Traits for a style of Resonance as appropriate. You can make up any sort of description; it's just an adjective that flavors your character's magic. Later, Resonance may increase as your mage becomes more powerful or more hell-bent on a certain style of magic, but for now, this step is just a minor sort of characterization to magic (see also p. 207).

Freebie Points

The last step in customizing your mage is the expenditure of freebie points. You get 15 points to spend on additional Traits, even improving beyond some of the limits described before (up to the normal Trait maximums). However, not every improvement costs the same amount of points. Gaining more Spheres is much more expensive than increasing an Ability rating. See the chart on p. 88 for the freebie point costs of various Traits.

Pay special attention to the use of freebie points on magical Traits. You can raise your character's Arete with freebie points, which will develop her magical talents. However, no character can start with an Arete above three in this fashion. Once you've settled on your Arete rating, you should go back and spend the dots for your character's Spheres. If you've bought Arete above the preliminary rating, you open the door for your character to have better knowledge of some Spheres.

The Spark of Life

After you've put down the dots and come up with the basic description of the character, it's time to work out the details that make her an individual. Your mage needs to be more than a one-dimensional caricature or a skeletal model made of a collection of numbers. Breathe life into your character; give her her own place in the world.

At this point, take a look at the interplay of all of your Traits and ideas. Start jotting down particular ideas or interests that spark in your head. Look at the mage as a whole person, and develop the character's motives from the ground up. Explore the mage's days as a Sleeper, growing up, living and looking to an uncertain future. Your mage certainly considers herself a complete person, so give her the appropriate treatment. Delve into her history, psychology, personality and background. Work up a detailed description of her physique and her habits, and see how all the pieces fit together.

Too many players skip through this detailed part of the creation process, either from a lack of effort or because history and personality aren't "stats" on the character sheet. However, this step is arguably the most important part of characterization. Sure, your character with Melee 4 will stand out from other mages for her great skill with swords, but how did she get that skill? What sorts of weapons does she actually use or prefer? What's her style like? Why did she bother studying so much on primitive hand weapons? Does she do anything else? Your character will be unique not just for having a particular Trait — anyone can have dots — but for having a particular persona. Make that persona stand out, and the character will stand out in the story as well.

Remember that mages are driven, passionate and consumed by the quest for Ascension. Sure, they vary in degree, but one thing they aren't is a "normal" human. Put some force behind the indomitable will that came with Awakening.

Draw from a few final ideas to put the last touches onto your character. What does he or she look like? How does her own personal magical style work, and what sorts of foci does she carry? Choose any appropriate Specialties for your Traits (p. 117), and then decide how your character developed them. Discuss with your Storyteller the sorts of mundane (or not-so-mundane) possessions that your mage might have, and the little quirks, details, habits and mannerisms that make the character more human. And finally, don't forget the all-important development of the character's mundane life. The mage doesn't spend all of her days in a library surrounded by magical tomes and other magicians, after all. She probably interacts with normal people, has family, friends and a job — or does she?

The Prelude

A character with a history, background and concrete set of statistics is ready for play and well-detailed, but it takes a real effort

to see how the character turns out. The smallest quirk could wind up taking on unusual prominence, or a character that seems like an enjoyable role might turn out to be more difficult than imagined. In order to work out the bugs, iron out the conflicts and get a real grip on the character, it's good to start with a prelude: a sort of "test run" in which you build up the character's beginnings as a mage.

A prelude works much like an actual game session, but it's streamlined. Instead of throwing a mage headlong into total conflict, the prelude offers a chance for the Storyteller and player to come to some conclusions about the character. The player gets to feel out the character's role and play style, while the Storyteller can see how the player and character mesh in order to develop some chronicle ideas based on the character's design.

Run a prelude as a quick session of play that covers some highlights or interesting features of the character's life. Unlike a regular game of **Mage**, the prelude needn't bother with dice rolls or statistics; the goal is to get a more finely honed feel for the character, not to struggle against conflict situations. Preludes can work best as a one-on-one session between Storyteller and player, or possibly with a few characters in their formative years. It's here that you'll play out some of the characterization that you decided on, and get a chance to tweak your character's design if something doesn't work out the way you'd planned.

For the Storyteller's part, the prelude is a great chance to see the character in action. Here, the Storyteller gets to see how the particular player takes on the role, approaches problems and develops the character. Throw in some curves, maybe a hint of the future, and it's even possible to plant a plot seed or two for later germination. The prelude will give the Storyteller ideas for later games in the regular chronicle.

The prelude works best if it covers some earlier part of the character's life, often from before or right at the Awakening. Doing so lets the player delve more into the formative experiences of the character, and it's a great opportunity for a novice player who needs to get a handle on roleplaying before diving into the complexities of magic systems and dice-rolling. Pick one or two key events in the character's history, and play through them over the course of an hour or so.

Don't bother with dice or points in a prelude session; just flow with the story and let the player's decisions guide the game. Avoid gritty mechanics and get into the meat of developing a role, making choices and establishing the character's history. That's even good advice for some regular games, too.

Character Questions

It's all well and good to admonish players to build more detailed characters, but it helps to have hooks on which to hang some ideas! Read the following questions and answer them for your character while you're making her. A character isn't really complete until these questions can be answered easily by the player. A player who says, "I don't know," in response to questions about a character's life just doesn't have a handle on that character yet. It's often helpful, then, for players to write out short answers to these sorts of questions.

• How Old Are You?

Some mages Awaken at an early age, as children; others don't Awaken until much later in life. Your character could be one of these exceptions, or perhaps someone who Awakened in the years between. Has your character been a mage for a while, or is this all new?

• How Was Your Life Different?

Even before mages Awaken, they often lead strange lives or endure unusual happenings in their early years, especially if they have powerful destinies. Did your character have an unusually placid life or a very odd one? How was your upbringing, and did your family and friends remark on anything strange about you? Did you notice these events or just think that everyone had quirks in their lives?

• What Was Your Upbringing?

Aside from the magely difficulties of growing up, how did your character's normal life develop? Look at your character's Abilities and see how they might have been learned. Were the character's parents present, or did she come from a broken home? Did she go to school or learn at home? What sorts of values and mores did she learn? Delve into where your character grew up and whether she was satisfied with her life and the consequences thereof.

• Who Are Your Friends and Family?

Since your mage came from *somewhere*, chances are that she has friends and family. Who does your mage count as her friends? What was her family like? Are any of these people still around? If not, why not? If so, do they know about your character's magic? Do they approve of, understand or despise it? For that matter, does your character still have any contact with them? Does your character actually have a good relationship with her friends, or does she tend to just use people? See how your character's network offers opportunities and duties.

• When Did You First Encounter Magic?

Many mages undergo some strange experiences even before they Awaken. Did your character have unusual dreams or visions before Awakening? Did she encounter strange, supernatural creatures? Was someone in the character's family a magician, vampire or other strange being? Or did the Awakening come as a total shock and surprise?

From the first encounter with magic, look at your character's response to this sudden revelation. Many people refuse to acknowledge the existence or presence of magic, even after it's shown to them. How long did it take your character to accept that magic is "real"? Did your character have a feeling all along that something was missing, a hole that was filled with magic, or did she kick, scream and struggle to avoid shattering her safe preconceptions of an orderly world?

• How Did You Join the Traditions?

Once Awakened, a mage-to-be finds many groups vying for her attention — Technocrats, Traditionalists, Nephandi and others. Presuming that your character is a Tradition mage, how did she get inducted into a Tradition? What drew her to a particular group? Did she think that she could get something out of a particular Tradition, or was she raised to respect a certain Tradition's beliefs as a by-product of her own culture and lifestyle? Did your character have a specific mentor, or did she simply "hang around" with Tradition mages and pick up some of their style?

Here you can determine whether your character had or has a mentor, and the relationship between the two. Was your mage's

mentor harsh and cruel, demanding, domineering, helpful, compassionate, distracted, distant, enlightened? Did your character have regular contact with her mentor, or just sporadic letters and mysterious notes? Did the mentor develop your character into a full Tradition mage, or disappear somewhere along the way, perhaps captured/killed/converted by another faction? Did your mage start out with a different group but later change to the Traditions due to the influence of a good mentor on one side or a bad mentor on the other?

• How Did You Join Your Cabal?

Typically, a mage hangs out with other mages of similar mind. How did your mage get introduced to other mages? Did your character's mentor, if any, introduce her to other neophytes? If the characters are of different Traditions, then what common bond caused them to stay together? If they are of similar Traditions, then what diverse elements make them unique? Did your character join due to similar goals, or is she now stuck in a cabal that doesn't really mesh with her own drives? Looking for an answer to this question is a good opportunity to talk to the other players and develop some group concepts or hooks to make the characters mesh.

• How Do You Deal with the Mundane World?

Despite their phenomenal powers, mages must deal with the mortal world. There are six billion humans out there, after all. Few mages have the wherewithal to cross into the spirit worlds and live there, which means that the mage must pay rent, deal with a job and handle all of the various exigencies of everyday living. Does your character still have a job, or does she try to use magic to fulfill her needs? Does she deal well with Sleepers, or see them as "crippled"? What steps does she take to minimize exposure to the Technocracy while maintaining something resembling a normal cover of life? Is she flashy with her magic in front of Sleepers, or has she learned caution? There may only be half a dozen members in the cabal, while there are hundreds of mortals out there with whom the mage interacts every day.

Player Questions

Now that you, as a player, have a handle on your character's background and motivations, it's time to look at some player ideas. The mage's history is known to you (and, presumably, to the character), but you have the chance to build a picture of where the character will go. The mage may have her own drives and desires, but it's you who decides how the mage will fulfill them. Since you have to determine what the mage wants, how she plans to get it and how she'll respond to the trials in the way, you should ask yourself some questions about what you want to do with the character and how you plan to get there.

• What's Your (Player) Motive?

Roleplaying games are all for fun, but we all get fun from different things. Examine your motives in building your character. What do *you* want to get out of this game? Do you want drama? Romance? Social interaction? Pure action? Puzzles? Philosophical conundrums?

Once you've got a few basic motives, decide how your character might achieve them. You've got a well-trained ass-kicker or a seductive socialite, but what are their usual tricks and *modus operandi*? What the character wants is important in

how she gets it. The hope is that your character will make the way to enlightenment eventually, but in the meantime, there are a variety of ways to deal with the world.

• Does Your Character Have a Sense of Her Future?

Some mages have a powerful destiny leading them to some unavoidable fate. Others have a more clouded vision, simply going wherever the winds of chance blow them. Your character may have some idea of her future, or some plan of her own. Some mages like to *think* that they are preordained for greatness and it's not always possible to sort the chaff from the grain! Do you have a goal in mind for your character — something to accomplish or avoid — or is she just drifting?

• How Does Your Character See His or Her Mystic Path?

Most mages had some sort of plan for their mortal lives before realizing their mystical ones. Now, your mage might have a goal in mind for her mystical path — Ascension? Archmastery? Unlocking some fundamental mystery or historical anomaly? Developing her Tradition's base of influence? On the other hand, your mage might try to reject her magical powers, or just ignore her potential. Eventually the mage may have a slap in the face. How will you react to your mage's new development in magic, or lack thereof, and what's your response if it doesn't turn out the way that she intended?

• What Conflicts Wait in the Road of Magical Development?

Eventually your mage will have to choose between her magical heritage and her mortal life, if she hasn't already. The Avatar also has a tendency to manifest in dreams or subconscious impulses while pushing the mage in surprising ways. Your mage may find her magical and moral conflicts taking her away from her Tradition, away from her goals, into danger with her flaws or into the forge-fires that will temper her into a true hero. Your mage can't see everything that lies ahead, but you can make some guesses and think about how your mage will be affected by the inevitable conflicts.

Avatar Essences

Although the Avatar is generally seen as a shard of Prime energy possessed only of whatever consciousness and drives it's picked up through previous incarnations, there is no denying that Avatars do seem to have certain intrinsic characteristics. Mages classify Avatars according to these perceived differences and place them into broad categories. As with all things magical, there is a wide range of beliefs regarding the true natures of Avatars and their actual categorization (or lack thereof). Still, most mages can agree on four general directions to Avatars: Dynamic, Pattern, Primordial and Questing. Theoreticians sometimes further subdivide these groups into more precise types, and add a fifth Essence that has never actually been witnessed in a mage: Infinite. These categories are thought to give some insight into the ways that different Avatars nudge mages toward Ascension, as well as the sorts of goals that such Avatars pursue.

The exact limits and functions of the Avatar remain unknown. Fatalistic mages sometimes claim that the Avatar itself predetermines the mage's actions, or that it tells which faction the mage will join. Reincarnationists point to the Avatar as the source of past lives and argue that the Avatar seeks out a familiar home, so a mage can be determined to follow in the footsteps of his own previous incarnations. Mages struggling just to survive and understand their unique nature generally don't have time to worry about such trivia, though. They take the Avatar at whatever level it's given and get on with forging their own destinies.

Your character's Avatar plays a large, but subconscious, role in her development. Psychologically, the mage is driven by her Nature and Demeanor, and by the motives and desires fostered in the course of living, as with any human. Once Awakened, though, the Avatar pushes its own direction through dream-messages, subconscious urges and emotional patterns. The mage may find herself engaging in behaviors indicative of her Avatar: jumping from one interest to another with a Dynamic Avatar, seeking ordered perfection with a Pattern Avatar, looking for hidden meanings in everyday occurrences with a Primordial Avatar or forging ahead into new hobbies with a Questing Avatar.

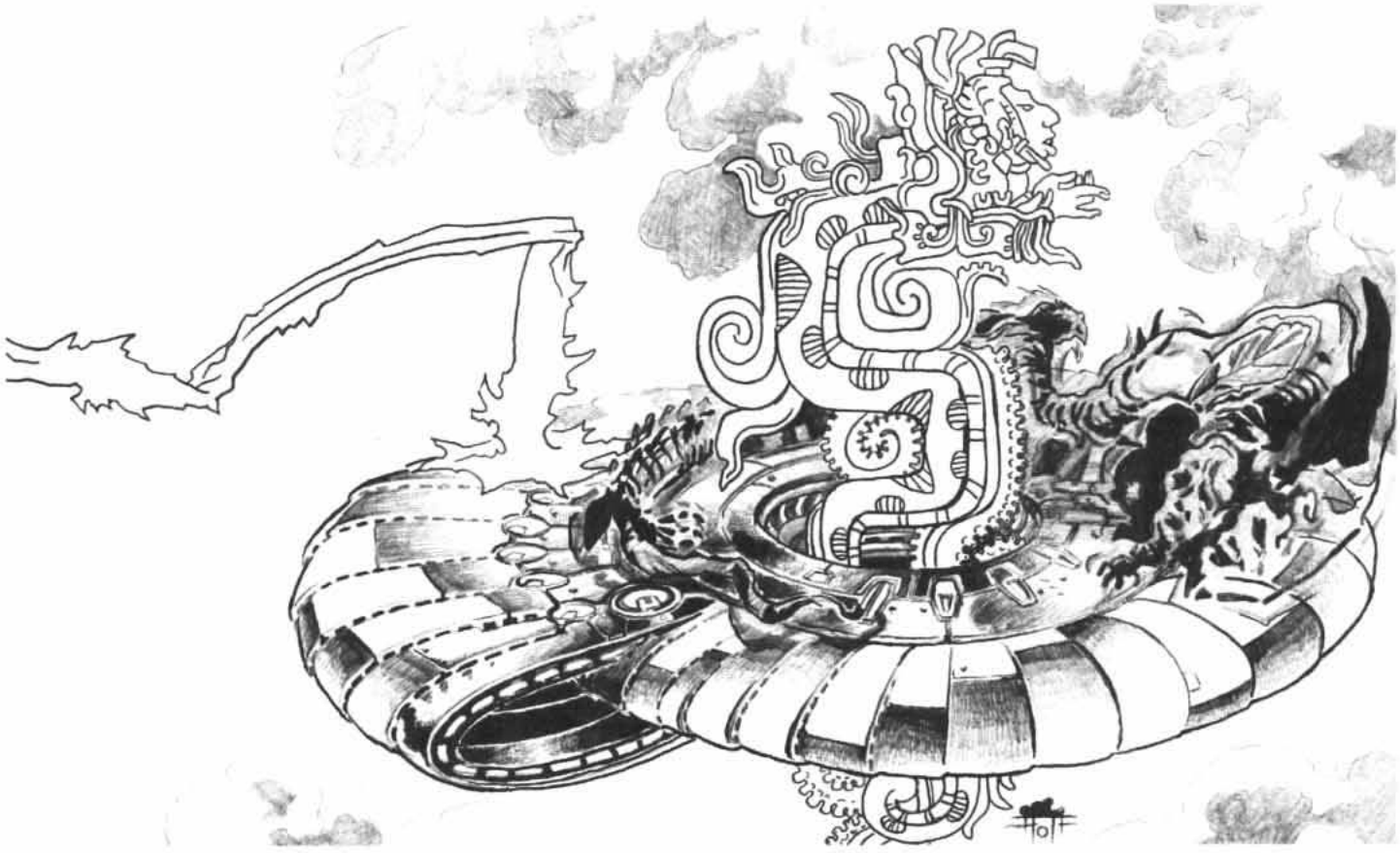
Most often, Avatars only show themselves through soft, barely-noticed whispers and flashes. A mage's Avatar might sound like a reasonable voice in the back of her head, or come across as a sudden urge to do something. Rarely, strong Avatars will actually manifest, creating a material form and then dealing with the mage directly. Ultimately, the mage may or may not believe in or be aware of the existence of her Avatar, but it's there as an unseen influence that pushes toward a vision of Ascension.

The various Essences describe an Avatar's specific composition in Prime terms. Although Avatars carry different sets of memories or goals, most (if not all) can be classified according to the way that they operate. These methods, fractured as they may be, form Essences. Your mage's Essence determines the basic motives and methods of her Avatar, and it determines what sorts of metaphysical systems she's most comfortable with.

Dynamic

Just as mages are forces of change, so too are Dynamic Essences the incarnation of that change. The Dynamic Essence pushes a mage in new directions constantly, unable to settle and simply interested in the raw creation of new ideas, experiences and horizons. Even mages with a powerful Destiny may not be able to see their road with a Dynamic Avatar. The paths taken by such explorers are many and varied, and they often defy conventional wisdom. Dynamic mages are true heralds of randomness and inspiration, as they bring forth concepts never before imagined. Though powerfully unpredictable and often moving "outside the box," the Dynamic Essence also finds it difficult to focus on a single task or goal.

Subtle dynamism shows up by causing the mage to feel curiosity, impatience and flashes of inspiration. Such an Avatar may appear as a strange shadow, a half-formed concept or a jagged abstraction, changing form constantly. Over time, the appearance,



goals and emotional tools of a Dynamic Essence often change. Even mages who heed the directions of these Avatars find that the completion of one task simply opens the door to others. Dynamic Avatars do not rest, and their mages can rarely keep up.

Pattern

When other mages create new methods, Pattern mages refine and reuse these methods until they become stable and well-defined. The Pattern Essence cements magic into reality, gives shape to the poorly executed and repairs the flawed. Instead of seeking new and dynamic means of change, Pattern Essences stabilize existing elements or methodically build on solid foundations. Naturally, such Essences are vital to stability, learning and society. As the Essence most driven by a need to form connections, the Pattern Essence fits naturally into such a role.

Mages who feel the push of Pattern often experience periods of crystal clear lucidity. They are commonly rational thinkers driven by a strong desire for familiarity and most comfortable with clearly defined archetypes. These Avatars may manifest in dreams as authoritarian figures, repeating patterns or fantastic machines, but they usually keep the same appearance from instance to instance.

Primordial

All things came from a great morass of unformed creation at the birth of the universe, be it the emptiness before a divinely inspired genesis or swirling chaos before a big bang. The universe will return to such a state ultimately. Primordial Essences reflect the raw elements of such creation and destruction. Driven to seek new experiences, yet always comparing them to the past, these Essences resonate with the humming vibration that underlies all creation. Conscious of the keystones of the universe, the Primordial Essences thus seek the root of all things.

Most often, Primordial Essences take on very clearly defined archetypes, roles deeply seated in the subconscious. Such mages are driven by deep and overwhelming emotional urges or needs, but they also seem to experience the heights of grand passion more powerfully than anyone else. When manifesting, Primordial Avatars often take the roles of spirits, animals or gods, typifying the most basic elements of reality in the shells of recognizable forms.

Questing

As a sort of balance between other Essences, the Questing Essence seeks knowledge and new frontiers with purpose and with a final goal in mind. Not content to rest on foundations already laid, the Questing Avatar pushes to some goal and does not flag or change direction. Once a destination is reached, the Questing Avatar sets a new goal and heads off again. Mages with this drive find themselves consumed by the need for a journey, the need to be in motion with a goal to achieve. These Essences seek a union of the other elements, and they strive to find a wholesome balance by treading the roads that lead between other Essences' paths.

Emotionally, Questing Essences are driven and visionary. Such mages often focus on a new idea and pursue it to its conclusion, then settle on a new project. The Avatar ensures this constant progression by keeping the mage interested in the

final steps, with a need to know, understand and experience. In appearance and demeanor, such Avatars most often appear in a form carrying elements similar to the mage's companions or even herself. The Essence leads the mage through the internal dialogue that opens doors of self-discovery, and sends the mage on quests to understand herself and her world.

Personality Archetypes: Nature and Deitheanor

Everybody adopts roles and masks. We play the parts necessitated by circumstance every day. Depending on the situation, we may be children, lovers, warriors, students or teachers. Even in the underlying principles that make up "you," there's room for change. Are you the same person that you were yesterday? Last month? A year ago? Ten years ago? For that matter, are you the same person when talking to someone you don't like as opposed to enjoying a conversation with friends?

As a way of looking at your mage's personality, we give you personality Archetypes — broad definitions of various motives, beliefs and ways of dealing with the world. A mage typically has a single Nature, representing her innermost emotions, and a Demeanor, the mask that she presents to others.

Archetypes are not designed to limit or pigeonhole your character. Rather, they are ways to get a handle on the character's motives, a sort of "default setting" from which you can play. The Archetypes allow you to play the character without having to fiddle with motive or direction constantly. Instead, you can take a brief look at the character's Nature and Demeanor to come up with a course of action that suits the character. Don't be limited by these conveniences, though. People surprise us all the time, and your character should be more complex than a simple phrase.

Each Archetype has a particular strength and weakness. The strength is essentially a "strength of character," the passion that moves the mage. The mage can draw inspiration from her passion. The weakness is a character flaw that must be overcome if the mage is ever to achieve Ascension. From this flaw, the mage might find a new inner resolve as she fights to overcome her problems, or she may fall to her own hubris.

Because a mage draws strength from her convictions, her Nature can also serve as a means for her to replenish her innermost defenses. A mage who fulfills her Nature in some meaningful fashion (hopefully with strong roleplaying and a great deal of work!) may regain Willpower points, as suggested.

Architect

You desire to leave a mark on the world by building something that lasts. You try to create things of value — objects, buildings, philosophies. Not only are you a founder and a builder, but you intend to have a legacy that brings strength and a better life to those who follow after you.

Your strength is **Purpose**. You have a vision that will make the world better (for someone) after you've passed through. Your deeds will hopefully live on and help those around you.

Your weakness is **Obsession** with your ambitions — you focus blindly on your plans. To Ascend, you must defeat this fixation and open yourself to new possibilities and achievements.

— Regain Willpower whenever you create or establish something of importance or lasting value.

Autocrat

You want control. To this end, you take charge, structure events around you and build in rigid hierarchies and procedures. Firmly convinced that nobody else has what it takes, you step in to guide and direct.

Your strength is **Leadership**. You have a natural penchant for authority, and this confidence causes others to recognize you as a leader to be respected or feared. You are ready to make the tough choices demanded of a true leader.

Your weakness lies in **Dictatorship**. Though you have the will to lead others, you do not necessarily have the interests of the group at heart. You lead for the sake of leading, not to any given purpose. You must look without to find a reason to lead — or follow — if your leadership is to mean anything. Before you can master others, you must master yourself.

— Regain Willpower when you take charge over a new group or organization.

Bon Vivant

Hedonist, sybarite, sensualist — these names and more describe you. Since we only live once, you live for the party! You aren't necessarily averse to a little work or waiting, but you want to have fun at the end of it all — a *lot* of fun. If you can have fun all the time, so much the better. Everyone should enjoy life. You certainly plan to do so.

Love of life is your great strength. You cling so feverishly to the joys of living that you are loath to give them up, and you infect others with your happiness and passion.

Your weakness is **Hedonism**. As the old saw states, you can resist anything except temptation. If you're not having a good time, you're looking for one, and this desire for gratification can lead you away from duty or enlightenment.

— Regain Willpower whenever you have a really good time and truly enjoy what you're doing, especially if you can get others to share your joy.

Bravo

It's a tough world, but the Bravo got going early. Nobody else will look out for number one, so you cultivate strength and power. With that power, you can do what you want, you can survive and thrive, and you can garner respect. Since the world revolves around the powerful, you respect only those who hold similar views. You might be a thug who roughs up everyone to test their mettle, or you might be a careful manipulator who pits your enemies against one another. Either way, you live by keeping the upper hand.

You have a great reservoir of **Strength**. Setbacks that would daunt others are just challenges for you to prove yourself. Since you've accepted that it's a hard world, you'll tough it out by whatever means are necessary.

Unfortunately, your **Anger** often leads you into conflict. Unwilling to help others because you want to get ahead, you alienate people, cause problems and get yourself in a rut. You must learn to compromise and to deal. Life is not a zero-sum game.

— Regain Willpower whenever you gain the upper hand in a long-running conflict, either through personal strength or the accumulation of power.

Caregiver

Since the world is so dangerous and hurtful, you've taken it upon yourself to look out for others' welfare. Perhaps you were once hurt, or you've seen too much suffering. Either way, you never want anyone to have to endure that pain again. You give of yourself to help others, and you mollify pain, take up others' problems and lend a caring shoulder to those in need.

Your **Compassion** is your strength. Your willingness to share makes a community, so that everyone can draw strength from one another. Even though you can't help everyone, you make a real difference for the few that you do encounter.

Your weakness stems from **Smothering**. Although you really want to help others, sometimes the best help is to let them take their knocks and overcome their own problems. Unless you learn to let go, you'll keep your charges from making their own meaningful accomplishments, successes and failures.

— Regain Willpower whenever you protect or nurture someone else.

Celebrant

A cause is at the heart of your soul, and that cause gives you joy. True enthusiasm drives you in a love, even a passion, for your chosen expression. You might be an activist or an artist, a scholar or a performer; your calling gives you a deep and abiding satisfaction. From this pleasure you are driven to move ever forward.

Passion is your strength: You love your chosen cause so much that you will push beyond the limits that would stymie others. You truly enjoy and care about your work, and you inspire others as well.

Your weakness comes from **Intemperance**. Given a choice, you will indulge in your chosen pursuit above others. This immoderation can be unhealthy and distract you from broadening your pursuits and horizons.

— Regain Willpower when you can follow the heart of your passion, especially if you convince another person to see the source of your joy.

Child

In response to the dangerous world out there, you never grew up. You rely on others to take care of you. You might just be incompetent, or perhaps you really are still a child. Immaturity is part of your nature, but so is innocence. You rely on others to care for you, but you also inspire them to be strong for you.

Your strength lies in your **Innocence.** Unexposed to the depths of the world's depravity, or unwilling to accept it, you are a beacon of what's best in people. Others are attracted to your innocence, often to protect and nurture you. Even hardened souls find that you bring out some measure of their own inner compassion and trust.

Because you do not accept worldliness, your weakness is **Immaturity**. You can't make up your mind, you take people at face value and you're unprepared to deal with the world if you don't have someone holding your hand. You'll need to stand on your own if you're ever to accomplish things of true merit.

— Regain Willpower when you bring out the caring, nurturing side of someone.

Competitor

Life is a challenge, and you are there to meet every contest. You don't necessarily have to "win" — and you can work with a team or see that everyone benefits — but in the end, you're in it for the excitement of overcoming the challenges. You rush to meet any obstacle, and you strive to succeed — and exceed.

Your strength stems from **Striving**. You're never satisfied with "enough," you want "newer, faster, better, best." Everything's a chance to stretch your talents, learn something new, adapt and overcome.

However, you have a problem with your **Competitiveness**. Life is not a game, and there are no winners or losers. You must accept that events can be more than just challenges, and that life experience can be grand just by living instead of fighting for it. Otherwise, you'll fight so hard that you'll never have a chance to breathe.

— Regain Willpower when you succeed at a challenge that requires extended effort on your part.

Conformist

Others have already paved a safe way for you to go, so there's no sense in fighting or risking everything. You'll just take the blazed trail to success, thanks very much. You aren't averse to a little struggle, but you follow the plans and the footsteps already laid out, and you try to fit in with the group. There's no sense being on the outside or losing everything in some pointless exercise in rebellion, after all. You're happy to follow, to rely on the good old ways and to throw in with the group.

Your strength comes from **Cooperation**. You work well with others, and you encourage people to function in groups. In a community, you can achieve more than any separate individuals.

A **Low-Self Esteem** is your real problem. You aren't willing to risk going outside the boundaries or against the flow. You'll do what the crowd does, even when it's dangerous or stupid. Sometimes you have to find your own path, and sometimes the group doesn't always show the best way. You need to find the strength of your own convictions instead of relying on someone else's vision.

— Regain Willpower whenever you advance the cause of your group, especially when you get everyone to pull together.

Conniver

There's no sense in doing all the work when someone else can do it for you. As a result, you're adept at planning, manipulation and getting others to do things for you, whether with or without their knowledge and consent. You might play elaborate cons and dodges, or perhaps you just set up situations where you can avoid the hard work or have it all fall into someone else's lap.

It takes a quick and **Clever** mind to arrange matters as craftily as you do. Though not necessarily a leader, you do manage to keep your side moving, and your elaborate plans can even get your enemies working for you.

You must overcome your weakness of **Envy** if you're ever to be truly satisfied. You're not really lazy, you just find it easier to get what you want by tricking others. However, doing so gives you no real satisfaction, since you don't achieve anything yourself. You must find that satisfaction by accomplishing something of your own and learning to be happy with what you achieve.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to avoid work or problems by tricking someone else.

Curmudgeon

The world isn't good enough for you, and you make that plain. You hold everyone to high standards, and you are quick to task them to greater and greater exertion. Anything can have faults under your scrutiny, and you're not afraid to say so. It's never good enough, dammit!

Your **Critical Eye** is your greatest strength. You're adept at finding problems or flaws and identifying them. From there, it's possible to improve, to innovate and to make things better.

Your problem is your **Lack of Imagination**. You're so caught up in finding what's wrong that you don't see what's right, and you don't bother with how it *could* be better. You fail to acknowledge that problems often indicate places where new growth can occur. You must learn to be open to new possibilities instead of shooting them down.

— Regain Willpower whenever you find a serious flaw or problem in something, especially if it stems from someone doing something really stupid.

Deviant

There's no real way to categorize you; you're a freak, a sideshow and an outcast. Whether by choice or by nature, you fit into no niche. You just don't mesh with the way that everyone else works, and you're unique for it. But it can be lonely, and you risk persecution for being so different.

You have the power to **Shatter Boundaries** because you aren't held to the limits imposed on everyone else. You do things that other people wouldn't even think of, and you forge new paths as a result.

Your **Perversion**, though, drives you to test boundaries and walk outside the established norms constantly. Sometimes it's okay to be normal. Instead of beating your head against the wall of society, you need to learn to fit in occasionally.

— Regain a point of Willpower any time you are able to "walk on the wild side" without retribution, and indulge in your truly deviant nature.

Director

You desire order. Whether by taking charge, building organizations or educating others, you seek to eliminate chaos and randomness. You want things under control so that you have a nice, evenly predictable world, where you fit in easily and shape things to your desires. By bringing separate visions together, you unify a group in search of classification.

From **Organization** you develop a hierarchy and a system under which everyone can prosper. Your aid establishes leadership, clear goals and a concrete means to accomplishment.

In order to really unite a group, though, you must overcome your **Lack of Tolerance**. Your vision of order isn't the only one, or even necessarily the "correct" one. You must compromise and learn that not everything will go your way, and that a little chaos and creativity is a good thing.

— Regain Willpower whenever you influence a group in the orderly completion of a task.

Fanatic

Duty calls you to a purpose higher than yourself. Out of a sense of love or devotion, you support a cause with total zeal. Your chosen cause occupies your entire life, and everything you do is devoted to furthering that cause.

You draw strength from your incredible **Dedication**. In pursuit of your cause, you will give up life, hope, morality — anything to achieve your goal.

Your **Stubbornness** consumes you and keeps you from recognizing the merit in other ways, though. You are so convinced of the correctness of your cause that you can't compromise. You must learn to open yourself to other possibilities, lest you burn yourself out.

— Regain Willpower whenever you accomplish an act that furthers your cause significantly.

Gallant

Flamboyance, artistry and glamour are yours! You seek to be the center of attention, and you're a shameless peacock in pursuit of your amoral gallantry. With word and action, you make yourself noteworthy and you crave the affection and attention of others.

Artistry is your great strength. In the pursuit of attention, you will break boundaries and seek powerful forms of self-expression. You can find what keys into your audience's souls and open the floodgates of adoration.

Your weakness is **Flamboyance**. In order to get others to notice you, you'll take unnecessary risks, do stupid things and generally make a fool out of yourself. You need to tone it down and let people accept you for who you are.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to gain the attentions of others through some significant act, deed or show.

Judge

With careful insight and discernment, you hope to separate truth from the myriad multitudes of experience. Presented with facts, you make careful conclusions, hopefully to improve the system for everyone. By solving problems and cutting

through extraneous matters, you get to the heart of disputes, resolve them and help people move on to more important matters. You ensure fairness and, often, justice.

Your strength comes from **Justice**. When you are truly concerned with the matters at hand, you apply impartial logic and wisdom to seek a true resolution and one that is fair to all concerned.

Because you **Lack Vision**, though, you must step outside the boundaries. Sometimes there's no clear-cut case of right and wrong. Your logic and objectivism cannot free you of the need for personal experience and subjective development.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to put together clues or build an argument that allows you to solve a mystery or problem.

Loner

Whether by choice or design, you stand out from the crowd. Although you're not necessarily any different from anyone else, you just don't find any common ground with other people, or maybe you just don't like them. You're most comfortable when you don't have to deal with others to get your work done.

Self-Reliance is your major strength. You get by just fine, thank you, without help from others. No one can bring another to Ascension. It must come from within.

Your weakness is your **Lack of Empathy**. All things and people have value. By interacting with others, you can find a rewarding place in the world.

— Regain Willpower whenever you achieve something significant on your own, especially if it helps to forward the goals of your cabal or faction.

Martyr

When matters are so terrible that only the greatest sacrifice can hope to achieve anything, you're there, ready to make that sacrifice. You'll give of yourself to make things better and to save others, without ever a single thought to your own welfare. Discomfort, pain and even possible death do not dissuade you from trying to make a better world, and from trying to lighten the loads of others.

Your strength is **Sacrifice**. With your devotion to others, you make a better world. You give others opportunities by giving up your own.

This same **Self-Deprecation** leads you into trouble. You need to develop a sense of your own worth, not just by giving up of yourself. If unchecked, you will give, give, give until you are consumed by others' needs.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to sacrifice yourself in a real and positive way to benefit someone else.

Masochist

To heck with helping others through sacrifice — you just need to feel suffering. Perhaps you're overwhelmed with guilt, or maybe you want to push yourself to the ultimate limits. Either way, you exult in striving through personal suffering.

Your strength is **Devotion**. You will drive yourself to incredible limits to see what you're made of. Better than anyone else, you know your own capabilities, and you will push to your limits and beyond.

You have a problem with **Self-Destructiveness**, though. If left unchecked, you'll destroy yourself when you finally take on too much. You need to learn that pain isn't your only measure of accomplishment.

— Regain Willpower whenever you push yourself to the limit in a new fashion and discover a new form of pain.

Monster

There is evil in this world — and you are it. You're a beast through and through, and you don't bother with civilized niceties. Your best tools are pain and suffering, and you're not above using them to secure your own base impulses.

Your strength stems from your **Mirror of Villainy**. As a creature of evil, you showcase the virtue in others by contrast. You drive people to rise above your example and to fight against the evil that you represent.

Your real problem, of course, is your **Depravity**. You have no conscience, no higher aspirations and no hope. You need to get a vision of a better world, or you'll Fall.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to indulge in a specific atrocity.

Pedagogue

Nothing fulfills you like teaching others. You want to raise the young, inform the unworldly and spread knowledge and enlightenment. Through words and writings, you hope to bring the illumination of study to everyone. After all, you know so much and are so well-informed that it would be a disservice not to lend your wisdom to others.

Your strength stems from **Knowledge**. Even if you're not terribly bright, you are always eager to share, to learn more and to teach others what you know and they don't.

Your weakness is **Logorrhea.** Once you get started, you don't stop, and you'll bore people to death with useless trivia. Some knowledge is useful, but not everything all the time!

— Regain Willpower when you see or hear of someone benefiting in a discernable way from the wisdom that you've shared.

Penitent

You are consumed with guilt. To make up for some sin, real or imagined, you take burdens on yourself, try to make up for your miserable existence and generally suffer vociferously while flogging yourself for your slights. Nothing can erase your shame, though, and you strive constantly for some sort of absolution, both in the eyes of others and from your own conscience.

You gain strength from your **Responsibility**. You take up burdens and accept their weight willingly. When others would shirk blame or duty, you are ready to accept what's come to you.

Obviously, your problem is **Contrition**. Until you come to terms with your grief, your desperate need to make up for your past will drive you to distraction and prevent you from making gains for the future.

— Regain Willpower whenever you achieve significant absolution for some grievous deed that you did or imagined is wrong. A sufficiently strong redemption may result in a change of Nature.

Perfectionist

There's the best, and then there's everything else. You plan to be the best, and you'll hold for nothing less than that in everything you do, say, and experience. You keep the highest standards, and you make similar demands of the people around you. Exacting attention to detail is your hallmark; constant striving for the top is your way.

Your strength is **Exactitude**. Because of your unswerving desire to get things absolutely right, you have an incredible attention to detail and a consuming desire to make the best out of every situation that you dive into.

You have a problem, though, with **Incompleteness**. You are unwilling to let go of a task until it's perfect or totally unsalvageable. You need to learn to accept "good enough" so that you can move forward instead of working on the same things all the time.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to accomplish a significant achievement without the slightest hesitation or flaw.

Rebel

"The system" is your enemy, so you take it upon yourself to break the rules and try to remake society in your image. Walking the fine line between perversity and anarchy, you bring a chaotic viewpoint to life, trying to tear down the old ways so that something better can be done. You may not have a good idea of something better. You just know that you're not satisfied with the status quo, and you plan to change it.

Individuality is your strong point; no one is going to force *you* into a static mold!

Your weakness, however, is your **Lack of Direction**. Your power has no focus, and it cannot come to fruition without a goal.

— Regain Willpower whenever your rebellion against the status quo turns out to be for the best.

Rogue

You learned one important lesson: Look out for Number One. Nobody else is going to give anything to you, and they're all just as set on getting ahead, so you have to take what you can get. Screw the rest! You're not going to be pushed around or ordered by others. You're going to make sure that you've got your own little piece of the world.

You have a strength of **Valor**. You'll fight against anyone who tries to control you or jeopardize your survival, and you will struggle against adversity to make your own safe place in the world.

Your problem lies with **Selfishness**. You're greedy, plain and simple. There's no room in your world for sacrifice or making room for others. You need to open yourself to the worth of others to understand love and community.

— Regain Willpower whenever you manage to gain something significant through your self-centered nature.

Survivor

No matter what, you'll always pull through. You have only a simple goal of survival, and you're good at it. The world can throw anything against you but you'll just keep on going. You don't need anything or anyone; you can get along just fine. When a curve is thrown your way, you just deal with it and get on living.

Few others have your **Perseverance**. No matter what the odds may be, you come out breathing, if not winning. How many warriors can say the same?

Your weakness if your **Lack of Trust**. You must open yourself up to the world to transcend it.

— Regain Willpower whenever you survive a difficult situation through your own cunning and perseverance.

Thrill-Seeker

You live for the next high, the adrenaline surge, the rush of victory. Over the next horizon and in the next battle you'll find the exhilaration that comes from challenge and the surge of really feeling alive. Only on the edge can you find real satisfaction, and that's where you live.

You have the strength of **Daring**. You'll rush in where others fear to tread. Danger? Risk? Life's nothing without them, and you're up to any challenge.

Your weakness is **Recklessness**. Until you learn to weigh risks, you put it all on the line every day of your life. Some things are too valuable to be wagered so carelessly.

— Regain Willpower whenever you undertake and succeed at some very dangerous task, especially when your life, position or important friends and possessions are at stake.

Traditionalist

You are an orthodox and conservative individual. What was good enough for you when you were young is good enough for you now. You oppose change for the sake of change — what point is there in that? You find the status quo preferable to uncertain risk.

Consistency is good to have. With the world in a state of perpetual flux, someone must hold the center. That someone is you.

Excessive **Complacency** kills, however. A mage must summon the energy to enact new possibilities, rather than succumb to stasis.

— Regain Willpower whenever you are able to protect the status quo and resist change.

Trickster

The universe has no meaning; life is a comedy, experience a procession of the absurd. You revel in this chaos, drawing humor out of senselessness and bringing a smile to tragedy. You can't face a world without reason or caring, so you invent your own meaning and plaster that leering, grinning face over everything. Better still is when you can convince others to see this artificiality. As much as you try to deny the disorganized truth, you still see it, and you hope that others see it too. You make them laugh, but like any good clown, you make them learn, and you make them cry.

Empathy is your strength; with it, you can cheer up others and find the banana peel in your cabal's path. When you stop joking, this empathy can be put to other more constructive uses.

Your weakness is **Hypocrisy**. Focusing the attention of others on happiness leaves a deadly potential to ignore the

dreadful. You must make sure that your tricks and jokes teach and instruct instead of simply diverting.

— Regain Willpower when you manage to lift others' spirits, especially if you can deny your own pain in the process.

Visionary

Dancing through your head are truly wondrous sights — worlds without name and fantasies beyond number. You can see these strange possibilities and elucidate them, opening the doors for others to live in a better, different world. Perhaps you seek something more than the mundane, or maybe you have a particular idea that resonates with potential. Either way, you give people inspiration for the future, in new and exciting ways that build on (yet differ from) the old. So determined are you to see your vision made reality that you fight to impress it on the world regardless of the cost.

Inner truth is your quest, and **Imagination** is your strength. With this vision, you may guide others who need such wisdom desperately.

Your weakness is your **Pride**, pride in your ability to see and understand what others cannot. You must learn humility to Ascend.

— Regain Willpower whenever you are able to convince others to believe in your dreams and follow the course of action outlined by your vision of the future.

Attributes

Your **Mage** characters, like any other human (or nearly-human) beings, have innate capabilities, weaknesses, limitations and strengths. Attributes gauge such potentials. With the simple 1 to 5 rating system, Attributes show not only how well a character performs in a given area, but elaborate on that character's potential compared to others. Most people have Attribute ratings from 1 (poor) to 3 (good), with a rare few holding 4 (exceptional) or 5 (world-class) capability. In rare instances, heroic mages or otherworldly creatures may exceed the limits of human potential, as well.

For each of the Traits listed, we offer some suggestions for Specialties. A Specialty defines an area of a Trait in which your character is particularly good. Feel free to customize your own Specialties with your Storyteller. In general, your character may have a Specialty in a certain Trait if you have assigned her four or more points in that Trait. You may also choose a Specialty with less than that, just for the purpose of character definition. Although you won't receive any special bonuses on your dice rolls when your base rating is less than four, the early choice of a Specialty for your character helps you to describe your character more specifically, her goals and her history (see "Specialties," p. 117).

Physical

A character's Physical Attributes define how strong, agile and resilient she is. If you want to create an action-oriented character, you should take the Physical Attributes as her primary

category. Such characters might include those who have military or police experience, Akashic Brothers, athletes or blue-collar workers. The character's history plus her focus on physical health help you decide how many points to assign to these Traits.

Strength

Hot smoke burned Donald's nostrils and filled his lungs with soot. Flames shot up the curtains and cast a devilish glow on the walls. The fire licked at him like a starved dog. Donald anticipated the bite at any moment. He had to get out of the room, but the earthquake had dropped a beam over the exit. Just a couple of inches; that's all he needed to squeeze through the crack. His magic wouldn't help him — he'd used up all his juice surviving the quake. So, Donald wrapped his arms around the beam and put his back into it.

The points you assign to your character's Strength Attribute represent how much brute strength she has. Strength determines how much weight she can lift, carry or push. It directs how far she can jump. Furthermore, it expresses how hard she can hit another character or object, as well as how much damage she can do during hand-to-hand combat. When determining the damage your character inflicts with a hand-to-hand attack, you add her Strength score to your damage dice pool.

Specialties: Iron Grip, Powerful Arms, Reserves of Strength, Fists Like Anvils

X Abysmal: Lift 20 lbs.; you're nigh unto dead.
• Poor: Lift 40 lbs.; you're a wuss.
•• Average: Lift 100 lbs.; you're Joe Average.
••• Good: Lift 250 lbs.; you're a stud.
•••• Exceptional: Lift 400 lbs.; you're an Atlas bodybuilder.
••••• Outstanding: Lift 650 lbs.; you're a freight train.

Dexterity

The boat motor choked to a stop. The ensuing silence held a brooding menace. It and the unmistakable taste of dark magic made the hairs stand up on the back of June's neck. Something had gone terribly wrong. Someone had made it go terribly wrong. And then she heard the sound, like distant thunder — the roar of the falls. The boat gathered speed, heading straight for destruction.

"Damn it!" June hissed, rushing up to the deck. She assessed her options. Perhaps she could swim to shore. Perhaps she could fight the current. She wasn't at all sure she'd succeed. But there, just ahead, she spotted a vine hanging out over the water. If only she could make the leap and grab onto the vine before the boat sped deeper into the white-water, she might have a chance. June crouched at the bow with one hand on the rail....

The Dexterity Attribute measures a character's overall athleticism. It expresses a character's general physical prowess, including grace, speed, physical reflexes, hand-eye coordination and agility. Dancers, mechanics, artists, speed skaters, gymnasts, surgeons and good bartenders all have a high Dexterity.

Specialties: Lithe, Swift, Feline Grace, Lightning Reflexes

X Abysmal: No coordination; you have trouble just standing up.
• Poor: Clumsy; you trip on your own shadow.
•• Average: No klutz; you don't embarrass yourself often.
••• Good: Smooth; you have athletic potential.
•••• Exceptional: Graceful; you impress.
••••• Outstanding: Liquid; you inspire.

Stamina

The dunes stretched as far as the eye could see, but Haman knew that a road cut through to the north. He'd had a hard enough time escaping the crazy Son of Ether who had wanted to experiment on him with all those whizzing, whirring, whining contraptions. His head still ached from the din. His arm still hurt from the injection. There'd be plenty of time to find out what the bastard had done to him once he got back to the chantry. For now, he just needed to keep going so he would get back.

Haman had never appreciated the expression "cotton mouth" as much as he did at that moment. The wind blew hard, harsh as sandpaper on his dusty skin. One step after the other, lift foot, put it down. Haman wanted so badly to lie down and sleep. He had no idea how many miles he had walked or how many more he had to go. All he knew was that to stop was to die.

The Stamina Trait represents your character's ability to withstand physical stress. It is a measure of her body's resilience, toughness and adaptability. It expresses how long your character can continue to exert herself and how much physical punishment she can withstand before suffering trauma.

Specialties: Tireless, Tough as Nails, Resilient, Pain Resistant

X Abysmal: Dying; your body is falling apart.
• Poor: Wimp; you're tired after brushing your teeth.
•• Average: Couch potato; you can run a mile, if you have to.
••• Good: In shape; you work out regularly.
•••• Exceptional: Stalwart; you swim in Arctic conditions.
••••• Outstanding: Formidable; even torture can't break you.

Social

In general, mages are social creatures who need one another to survive. They have their politics in the chantries and among those in their same Traditions. Each **Mage** character has Social Traits that represent how well he maneuvers in social situations. Representing a character's social graces and general attractiveness, these Traits express the character's ability to make an impression on other people. Characters who are performers, politicians, models or con men will have high scores in the Social Attributes.

Charisma

Tina followed her mentor into the conclave, glancing around at all the strange faces with more than a little trepidation. She felt like a debutante appearing for the first time in an unforgiving, closed society of demigods. Her mentor had warned her about the hazards of making enemies in this crowd. With a deep breath, she lifted her chin and put on her most charming smile. The first introduction, of course, presented Tina with the challenge of winning over the Hermetic mage, Marcus.

"How do you do?" Tina deferentially dropped her gaze. "I've heard so very much about you."

"All good, I hope," Marcus replied, crushing Tina under the hard scrutiny of his ice-green eyes.

Tina didn't bother to lie, "Your... discipline is legendary, sir." She peeked up at the man and caught the twitch of a near-smile on his lips. She'd said the right thing.

A character's Charisma score shows how charming and likable she is. It represents her ability to flirt, please, compliment and impress others. She may do so through a look or a conversation, though having the Charisma Trait doesn't necessarily grant the character a silver tongue. She may stumble over her words, but do it in such a charming way that everyone forgives her and likes her all the more for her clumsiness at expressing herself. It also may indicate her ability to get along with people from all different walks of life. A charismatic individual doesn't necessarily get people to do what she wants through looks or force of personality; rather, she causes people to like her and to *want* to help her.

Specialties: Sex Appeal, Winning Smile, Inspires Protection, Social Flexibility

X Abysmal: Belligerent; people actively dislike you.
• Poor: Socially inept; you offend others often.
•• Average: Acceptable; you don't turn people off.
••• Good: Likeable; you make friends easily.
•••• Exceptional: Congenial; you impress immediately.
••••• Outstanding: Irresistible; you can't lose.

Manipulation

Charles put a scowl on his face. "I can't believe you would do this to me," he murmured to the young woman. Turning his back on her, he wrapped his arms around himself. "Shit, Geri."

"I... Charles, it was only one conversation. I swear I didn't tell him anything he didn't already know."

Charles suppressed his smile. "You confirmed it though, didn't you?" Charles had needed some special information spread to the right people, and his beautiful messenger had complied. But, the final play had yet to be made. "I'm so screwed." He put his hand over his face. He felt Geri's hand touch his shoulder and forced a flinch.

Geri pulled her hand away and said contritely, "I didn't mean to get you in trouble, Charles. Tell me how I can fix it."

This Trait has many nuances. It covers a character's ability to get others to bend to her whim, to spot when someone else is manipulating her and to hide her true motivations. In many ways, it also represents a character's honesty and frankness. On one hand, a character with a low Manipulation score will have more trouble getting others to see things her way or to do what she wants them to do. On the other hand, the same character will probably seem more honest because she doesn't have the ability to hide her true feelings. She may want badly to bluff, but her poker face sucks. A character with a high Manipulation score, however, can use guilt, blackmail or cleverly chosen arguments to control someone without that person becoming aware of it. Doing so often involves dishonest methods. Manipulation is used to trick, bluff, fast-talk and railroad another character.

If your character is attempting to manipulate someone, her target doesn't have to like her. Manipulating someone differs from using Charisma, in that manipulating doesn't have to involve winning over the target's affections. Hate can be a powerful motivator, and a skillful manipulator can get even her enemies to do what she wants by using subtle or deceptive methods. A botched Manipulation role may alert the target to the fact that your character is attempting to bamboozle her, which could result in resentment and future distrust of your character.

Specialties: Persuasive, Seductive, Well-Reasoned, Guilter, Deceiver, Conniver

X Abysmal: Dispiriting; people ignore you.
• Poor: Transparent; you have no poker face.
•• Average: Inconsistent; you fool some of the people, some of the time.
••• Good: Guileful; you have a few good lines and methods.
•••• Exceptional: Convincing; you play people and usually win.
••••• Outstanding: Conniving; you always get your way.

Appearance

Dewy had a mission at the World's Ether Fair. He needed aid to pursue research on his invention, the Mass Super-Condenser. His turn at the podium arrived. It took him a moment to get the papers in order, then he pushed up his glasses and peered out at the judges. "Good afternoon, fellow Etherites," he began.

That's when Miss Lana Tulane entered the room, making her presence known by carelessly dropping a book. All eyes turned. As the entire room watched, Lana blushed and apologized. Several men rushed to pick up the book for her.

Dewy sighed. Once again, Lana had managed to steal his thunder. He finished his presentation, but he had lost the interest of the crowd. At the end, they asked no questions. They thanked him, assured him they'd consider his proposal and then called for Miss Lana Tulane to please come up and give her presentation. Dewy fumed and plotted his revenge.

The Appearance Attribute represents your character's overall attractiveness. It includes her physical beauty, her grace and those indefinable qualities that make a person appealing. This Trait has little to do with verbal expression or social smoothness, but it defines the first impression the character makes, even before she has opened her mouth. Though we would like to deny it, a person's physical appearance affects how others treat her. A beautiful character will not always get special considerations from everyone, of course. On the contrary, there may be some who abhor the beautiful people.

This Attribute affects not only a character's ability to flirt the newest member of the chantry into submission, but it also improves first impressions, aids in making a musical or theatrical performance more affective and adds to a character's ability to convince others in a debate. However, simply a high Appearance score, doesn't give a character the social graces to use it properly. Someone with a low Charisma Attribute looks good standing around, but she ruins the effect as soon as she speaks. Some first impressions may rely on an Appearance + Ability roll while later actions use a Charisma or Manipulation + Ability roll.

Specialties: Sexy, Respectable, Expressive, Otherworldly, Earthy

X Abysmal: Hideous; you barely pass for human.
• Poor: Ugly; you need a paper bag to get a date.
•• Average: Unimpressive; you blend with the wall.
••• Good: Attractive; you get second looks sometimes.
•••• Exceptional: Beautiful; you could work as a model.
••••• Outstanding: Exquisite; you stop traffic.

Mental

The three Mental Attributes define your character's mind. The scores you choose for these Traits reveal your character's memory capacity, intelligence and alertness to details in her environment. If your character is a scientist, university professor, doctor, journalist, air-traffic controller, stand-up comedian or any other concept that requires quick mental acuity or high IQ, then you'll want to make the Mental Attributes your primary category.

Perception

The caller had said his name was "X" and that he had information Casey needed. He had named the meeting place and insisted on anonymity. Casey couldn't pass up the opportunity. He waited in the cool stairwell, hoping desperately that it wasn't a set-up. Pitch darkness clutched at Casey, putting his nerves on edge as footsteps echoed up the stairwell toward him. This was it — the moment of truth. X stopped on the landing below.

An electronically altered voice spoke out of the darkness, saying, "I know who broke into your sanctum, Casey, but I need something from you in return."

The scent of lilacs drifted up from below, tickling gently at Casey's nose and his memories. A smile touched across his lips, and his fears drained away like dirty bath water. He knew that perfume. "Tell me what I can do for you," he answered.

This Trait expresses your character's ability to notice details in her environment. Sometimes, the character actively applies her perception, such as when she's searching for something specific. The majority of the time, however, it's an intuitive awareness that allows her to catch details via one of her five senses. Although she may see, taste, smell, feel or hear something that others would overlook, it doesn't mean that she has the experience or knowledge to identify that thing.

A character's Perception score helps her find, spot or recognize things. This awareness includes spotting an ambush, noticing that lost keys are peeking out from behind the dresser, finding clues in piles of useless junk, hearing the hesitation in one's answer to your question and catching secretive glances exchanged by two people who are hiding something.

Specialties: Alert, Insightful, Intuitive, Thorough, Experienced

X Abysmal: Oblivious; you wouldn't notice an elephant if it sat down beside you.
• Poor: Inattentive; you don't pay much attention to what happens around you.
•• Average: Heedless; you catch the gist of your surroundings.
••• Good: Sensitive; you're aware of moods and textures.

•••• Exceptional: Alert; you have a keen awareness of your surroundings.

••••• Outstanding: Intuitive; you sense things most others never would.

Intelligence

Peering still at the illuminated phosphors of the screen, Cathrine brushed an errant strand of hair back for the third time before turning away and rubbing her temples. In her mind's eye, the numbers and symbols still flickered. For the last two days she'd fought over the code in most of her spare time. Unlocking the original encryption proved difficult enough. Once she had the file open, it proved to be a mass of disorganized data. She had to sort through it all to find the key numbers that would let her unlock the meaning behind it.

Leaning back in her chair, Cathrine thought back to some of the flickering numbers. The patterns were there, just out of grasp of her conscious mind. The numbers hadn't been bit-twiddled or reverse-encoded or tweaked in a fashion that she recognized... until she stopped and thought about what a Technocrat would do. No Technocrat would ever encode a file without error-correction. In a sudden blast of inspiration, she spun her chair back in front of the monitor and flexed her hands as she prepared for a night's work.

The dots in a character's Intelligence Trait define what most people would classify as "smarts." This Attribute represents her facility for solving problems, remembering facts, evaluating situations, reasoning and making leaps of logic. It expresses her innate ability, though it doesn't necessarily mean that she had years of education. A person can have a powerfully logical or deductive mind and still be a store clerk who didn't finish high school. Other factors play into a character's career choice, though any character with a college education or an intellectually demanding position should have that ability reflected in her Intelligence score.

This Trait deals with calculating skills and the character's memory threshold. It doesn't necessarily imply that the character has common sense, street smarts or wisdom. A very intelligent person could also be the one who trusts the shady character in the alley, who pulls out her wallet to count her money in front of the crack house or who keeps misplacing her car keys. On the other hand, intelligent characters are the ones who come up with creative and thorough solutions to problems, who see situations from multiple sides and who learn quickly.

Specialties: Book-Smart, Creative, Analytical, Logical, Subject Authority, Good Memory

X Abysmal: Moronic; you can't rub two neurons together (IQ 60).

• Poor: Thick; you have trouble with child-proof lids (IQ 80).

•• Average: No dummy; you were a "C" student (IQ 100).

••• Good: Smart; you do the hard crosswords for fun (IQ 120).

•••• Exceptional: Brainy; your intellect leaves most others in the dust (IQ 140).

••••• Outstanding: Genius; you solve universal mysteries (IQ 160+).

Wits

The situation soured quickly. Minx cowered behind a couch with the newly Awakened girl, trying to think fast as she looked into the girl's large, blue eyes. Those eyes held terror. Damn, *Minx thought.* I have to get her out of here. *A brick came through the front window and soon the agents would follow. Minx glanced around the house.*

"This way!" Minx whispered. She scurried toward the kitchen door, pulling the girl along by the hand. The back door tempted, but Minx knew they'd catch her if she left the house. She pulled the back door open, but kept the girl from fleeing. "No, not that way." Instead, she headed for the basement. The two crept down the stairs, listening to their pursuers' footfalls cross the house and go straight out the back door. Minx and her charge hid in a shadowy corner. They waited until nightfall, then slipped out under cover of darkness.

Your character's Wits score represents her ability to think *quickly*, to react with expedience to critical situations and to creatively find solutions to immediate problems. This Attribute Trait reveals a character's level of adaptability to changing circumstances and her cleverness in extracting herself from difficult situations. Unlike the Intelligence Trait, it expresses a more immediate and pressing mental acuity. It's not about how much you know or could know, but rather about how quickly your mind reacts to surprises, ambushes, cutting comments and the unexpected in general.

Specialties: Ever-Ready, Witty Conversationalist, Intuitive, Combat Reflexes

X Abysmal: Dense; you just can't keep up with changes.

• Poor: Slow; you're an easy target.

•• Average: Paced; you figure things out eventually.

••• Good: Snappy; you often have just the right response.

•••• Exceptional: Sharp; you can handle almost anything.

••••• Outstanding: Instinctual; you don't even break a sweat in a gunfight.

Abilities

During character creation, you also choose and assign points to your character's Ability Traits. These Traits represent the more specific Talents, Skills and Knowledges that your character possesses. They describe her level and field of expertise in the subjects that she has pursued during the course of her life, as well as the natural talents that she has developed. For dice rolls, you use these Abilities in combination with the Physical, Social and Mental Attributes to create your dice pool and determine how successfully your character accomplishes a particular task. This combination represents more accurately how your character's innate abilities enhance or detract from the skills she has learned. For example, a person may rely on her natural Dexterity to walk along the top of a stone wall, but if she attempts to sneak along that wall without making any noise, her chances of success increase greatly if she has learned how to move stealthily as well.

The 30 Abilities listed here, in three categories (Talents, Skills and Knowledges) offer a jumping-off point for making your character unique. Many of them are broad, general categories that you can customize for your character by choosing a Specialty, even if you're not yet assigning 4 points to the Ability. Choosing a Specialty early means that your character has a particular interest in this area, and (though it gives you no special advantages on your dice rolls) it helps you define your character's interests and goals more clearly. Furthermore, with the approval of your Storyteller, you may come up with new Abilities and Specialties that fit your character but that aren't represented by the ones listed in this chapter.

Talents

These Abilities represent the intuitive talents that your character possesses and has honed over the years. Your character has developed certain instinctual abilities through the course of her job, education or lifestyle. These abilities come to her naturally, and she usually doesn't have to choose consciously to invoke them, though she may employ them quite insightfully in certain situations. Talents result from her other studies, and they are side effects of how she lives her life. Her experiences and personality dictate which of them she possesses. For example, an ex-ganger will be more alert to his surroundings than a debutante from the social set, merely because the ex-ganger has always had to watch his back.

Unlike Skills and Knowledges, you take no penalty to your Attribute dice pool if your character attempts an action that involves a Talent. Talents merely stem from developments of the character's natural Attributes in concert with special tricks, traits and instincts.

Alertness

Something nagged at Mark's mind as he made his way out of the gas company building. The crumbling facility certainly didn't inspire comfort in its visitors, but that wasn't the problem. He paused to collect his thoughts as he wondered what it was that made him feel particularly edgy, and he pulled his coat a little tighter against the ever-present chill.

Squinting briefly, Mark watched the woman who'd been working with her car in the parking lot, changing the flat front tire. He couldn't readily make out her features but something about her movements was wrong. The drag on her leg... Mark's military mind immediately recognized the sign of someone wearing a concealed piece in an ankle holster, and he quietly turned back into the building to find a different exit.

Your character's Alertness score describes how intuitively aware she is of her surroundings. Such a character naturally pays attention to her senses and has learned to note changes in her surroundings and environment. Generally, it relates to physical aspects of the area and a character with a high Alertness may be more likely to spot an ambush in the shadows, notice a particular person's perfume, hear the snap of a twig or taste the taint of poison in a drink. She has honed her senses to the point where she instinctually notices things without having to *look* for them. More often than not, the Alertness Trait pairs with the Perception Ability in creating dice pools.

- • Novice: You notice the oncoming car when it blows its horn.
- •• Practiced: You often eavesdrop.
- ••• Competent: You keep an eye on things.
- •••• Expert: You don't miss much.
- ••••• Master: You sense changes in barometric pressure.

Possessed by: Criminals, Bodyguards, Journalists, Detectives, Hunters

Specialties: Concealed Weapons, City, Forest, Followers, Ambushes

Athletics

Jared had been a long-jumper in high school. Standing at the edge of the roof, pursued, with options that boiled down to jump or jack-shit, he really hoped that he still had it. He debated. He pondered. He backed up and paced off the approach.

Crash! The gun-toting gangers nearly broke the door off the hinges as they plowed through it.

No class, *Jared thought. He took only a moment to glance back, then focused on the leap. He set up, set his target and set himself in motion. One, two, three... six, seven, leap! Jared threw himself into the air. His arms and legs flailed as he flew forward. In seconds, it was over. Jared landed with a roll on the far roof. He had made it, but dodging bullets wasn't going to be as easy.*

This Talent describes the basic athletic ability that your character has developed through physical training, sports or other rigorous physical activities. It differs from the Physical Traits (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina) in that it takes your character's natural athleticism and adds the benefit of any training or sport aptitude to her innate physical potency. Athletics governs your character's ability to jump, climb, throw, run and do any other athletic feat for which she may need to have trained or learned specific methodologies.

- • Novice: You're good at *watching* sports.
- •• Practiced: You played basketball in high school.
- ••• Competent: You learn new moves with ease.
- •••• Expert: You put most other athletes to shame.
- ••••• Master: You defy the laws of physics.

Possessed by: Athletes, Kids, Dancers, Actors, Trainers

Specialties: Acrobatics, Dancing, Flexibility, Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, specific sports

Awareness

Though she'd been about to head home from the coffee shop, Lee Ann stopped short as the hairs rose on the back of her neck. The idle chatter of the shop faded into a background buzz in her mind while she turned slowly to survey the area. The outdoor plants waved under the low breeze as people went about their lives obliviously, but a chill rose on her skin. She felt, rather than saw, a presence. Something was moving through the crowd, unseen and unheard, without substance yet nevertheless very much real and possibly dangerous. Sliding around the doorjamb, she ducked toward Kyle's table. She couldn't see it, but if it was spying on them or planning something malicious, she wanted a little help.

Unlike Alertness, which measures a character's sensitivity to mundane events, Awareness is a gut reaction to the presence of magic. Usually, only mages (and a few other creatures like spirits and ghosts) possess this particular Talent. Once attuned to the supernatural, such students of the arcane just get hunches, chills, or sudden flashes of inspiration. Magic calls to magic, and the character recognizes instinctively when something's just not right in the area. Of course, knowing that something's wrong doesn't mean that the character knows what it is; that's the province of proper knowledge.

A mage can use Awareness deliberately if he suspects that something is mystical, in order to determine a general impression of the item or creature. However, the Storyteller rolls Awareness sometimes to determine whether a mage notices a strange event or magical Effect that's not immediately visible.

- • Novice: You sometimes get strange feelings or vibes from certain places or people.
- •• Practiced: You've felt the supernatural all around you, and you're sure that there are "things out there."
- ••• Competent: When you concentrate, you can feel the ebb and flow of magic in things, and you sometimes even pick out specific types of Resonance.
- •••• Expert: The very world around you hums with the power of the supernatural, and you are keyed to its harmonies.
- ••••• Master: From the tiniest spell to the grandest spirit, you've seen and sensed them all. You can feel the tug of magic from across a city or pick out the subtle flavors of an enchanted object with but a touch.

Possessed by: Psychics, Gypsies, Mystics, New Agers, Paranormal Researchers

Specialties: Talismans, Spirits, Effects, Mystical Places, Resonance

Brawl

The jerk had it coming. Michele grabbed that finger he was pointing at her and pulled it around behind his back, stepping to one side and widening her stance. Smooth and graceful, she positioned herself and thrust his wrist up between his shoulder blades. In the flash of an eye, she had wiped the smug look off his face and planted him flat on his belly on the floor — right where he belonged. Straddling him, she asked, "Do you have anything else to say?"

The man coughed and shook his head. He groaned, "No, ma'am."

The Brawl Talent represents your character's hand-to-hand combat prowess. The Brawl Ability covers everything from scratching, clawing and biting to martial arts. Unarmed combat comes in many forms, and your character may have picked up her techniques on the street, in bar brawls, in the boxing ring or in a dojo. She may have trained and studied hard, or she may simply have lived a lifestyle that gave her enough experience to take care of herself in a fight. The Brawl Ability assumes that your character isn't using any weapon aside from her body.

- • Novice: You can throw a jab or poke someone in the eye.
- •• Practiced: You hold your own when necessary.
- ••• Competent: You've fought regularly and usually won.
- •••• Expert: You could be a contender.
- ••••• Master: You've made fighting into an art.

Possessed by: Military, Police, Akashic Brothers, Thugs, Assassins

Specialties: Boxing, Wrestling, Disarming, Dirty Fighting, Kicks, Self-Defense, specific martial arts

Dodge

Cochrane sighed as he walked through the deserted parking garage to his car. Never in his life had he been so humiliated. He didn't understand why Markov insisted on treating him like a personal servant, but Cochrane had had enough.

The car came out of nowhere, squealing around the turn and speeding straight for him. Cochrane lurched to one side, twisting away. He landed with a hard jolt to his body, but the car missed him. So, Cochrane thought, eyeing the license plate of the retreating vehicle, it seems Markov's tired of me too. So be it. *He got up, brushed himself off and went home to call Librescu. Maybe the Hollow Ones would be more appreciative of Cochrane's particular talents.*

When someone's shooting at, throwing a punch at or trying to tackle your character, the Dodge Ability tells how well she can get out of the way. It represents her skill at diving to one side, taking cover or otherwise maneuvering to remove herself from danger.

- • Novice: You crouch reflexively, arms over your head.
- •• Practiced: You have taken a self-defense class.
- ••• Competent: You dive, bob and weave with grace.
- •••• Expert: You rarely get hit.
- ••••• Master: You tip your head to avoid the bullet.

Possessed by: Criminals, Police, Street Kids, Martial Artists, Boxers

Specialties: Cover, Sidestep, Footwork, Leap

Expression

Layton lowered his voice, "This story ends, my darling Lisa, two days later when Carma went in search of her lover. She found him on a desolate expanse of road, lying with his feet in the ditch. Even from a distance, Carma could tell.... He lay there so still and so empty. The man she had loved was gone, and all that remained was an empty shell. She didn't dare spare herself the horror of seeing him. One small hope pushed her forward, but his blood painted the concrete black in the moonlight and his dead eyes stared off into space, into the universe he had explored and loved so much. Carma knew, in that moment, where to find him. She lifted her eyes to stars."

The silence following Layton's story rang in Lisa's ears. Though Lisa fought them, tears escaped and slid down her cheeks. Her heart broke for the woman in the tale. She didn't know Carma, but she felt the pain of loss as distinctly as if it had been her own. She whispered, "I'll see what I can do."

The manipulation of words comes easily to characters with a high Expression score. This Talent covers the ability to use words (either verbal or written) to sway others, to evoke emotions and to get a point across to an audience. A politician character might use this Talent to make his speeches so moving that he wins voters, whereas a poet character might use this Talent to write poetry that touches the heart and makes his readers feel with him. This Ability ties directly to the Social Attributes. A Talent for Expression can help a character motivate others, tear down someone's ego with biting criticism, charm an audience or manipulate a person into doing something he normally wouldn't do.

- • Novice: You express stuff.
- •• Practiced: You have a good vocabulary.
- ••• Competent: You choose your words well and make your point.
- •••• Expert: You touch people with your words.
- ••••• Master: You could found a new religion.

Possessed by: Actors, Writers, Poets, Politicians, Priests, Brown-nosers, Celestial Choristers

Specialties: Acting, Poetry, Prose, Improvisation, Conversation, Inspiration, Game Design

Intimidation

Billy grumbled, "Look, I'm jus' sayin' I really don't think she's got her shit under control. I'm not tryin' t' slam your girlfriend. She's nice and all, but she's gonna bring us all down if she keeps this shit up. Know what I mean, man?"

Billy's throat clenched when Duke lifted his eyes and turned his head slowly — too slowly. A sense of impending doom scrambled up the back of Billy's neck, like rats escaping a sinking ship. Under the scrutiny of Duke's hard eyes, Billy experienced the unmistakable urge to flee right along with the other vermin.

"You listen to me," Duke growled. "I don't give a fuck what you think. Know what I mean? Man? Get outta here."

Billy was already on his way.

People have many fears, so they can be intimidated in many ways. It can occur subtly without your character even realizing she's doing it. Perhaps her strength of character alone makes her an intimidating figure. Perhaps her physical stature intimidates. In certain instances, she may wish to intimidate someone actively as well, through verbal or physical assault. The Intimidation Talent represents your character's awareness of her ability to overshadow others and her skill at using this factor to get her way, draw information from an unwilling target or frighten others away from taking action against her.

- • Novice: Your bark is worse than your bite, and it shows.
- •• Practiced: You intimidate those smaller than you.
- ••• Competent: You make people think twice before acting.
- •••• Expert: You don't try; people just avoid pissing you off.
- ••••• Master: You scare vicious pit bulls.

Possessed by: Bullies, Executives, Military Officers, Bouncers, Gangsters, Gypsies

Specialties: Physical Scariness, Grit, Bluffing, Implied Threats, Crudeness, Fearlessness

Leadership

Marcia stood slowly and lifted the crystal wine glass in her hand. She spoke up, "Here's to Blackwell. We're all going to miss you, love." The

sobs quieted a bit and all eyes turned to Marcia. She drank from her glass and licked the bitter fruit from her lips. Her gaze traveled from person to person, her own sorrow, sympathy and strength revealed openly. They all lifted their glasses and toasted. She waited until they had finished, then said, "And now, we have to go on. The crisis isn't over, and we can't afford to lose anyone else. We have to stick together, work together and help each other. It's what Blackwell would have wanted."

"What should we do?" someone asked.

Marcia replied simply, "I have a plan."

Some characters have a knack for taking the leadership role with others. They exude a certain quality that makes people follow their orders, listen when they speak and embrace their agendas. The Leadership Talent has more to do with Charisma than it does Manipulation. It represents those indefinable qualities of appearance, mannerisms, vocal tone and eye contact that makes one a leader. A high score in this Talent doesn't necessarily mean, however, that the character makes all the right decisions for her group, only that her people will follow her like lemmings off the edge of the cliff, just because she *seems* to know what she's doing.

- Novice: You could be a scout leader.
- •• Practiced: You have held office in college clubs.
- ••• Competent: You exude an aura of confidence.
- •••• Expert: You inspire loyalty and excitement in your followers.
- ••••• Master: You could lead a nation.

Possessed by: Politicians, Gang Leaders, Corporate Executives, Chantry Heads, Police

Specialties: Oratory, Expertise, Nobility, Tense Situations, Friendly

Streetwise

A cigarette flared in the darkness. Andy moseyed that way. He pulled up beside the street rat and lit a cigarette of his own. "Hey," he greeted simply and received an equally taciturn reply. Blowing his smoke up into the night, Andy said, "Heard the Head's got a boner for yellow meat."

"Yeah," grunted the grungy kid. "That's the word. Man's boy was stuffed in the grinder. Sushi."

Andy nodded, "Ugly shit. Any green comin' down on it?"

The kid huffed quietly, glancing down the alley. "Fuck yeah," he murmured. "Chitown gigolo moved in last night."

The conversation turned into silent smoking, then Andy pushed away from the wall. "Gotta go," he grunted. "Take it easy, man." He restrained his smile until he'd turned the corner. So, he thought. Zephyr's hired a hit-man to go after Lu. This should get interesting.

He tossed his cigarette into the gutter and hailed a cab.

The streets have a language and a rhythm all their own. This Talent allows your character to fit in on the streets, gather information from the street rumor-mill and take advantage of other street resources. It gives your character the necessary knowledge and understanding to tap the black markets successfully, to stay safe and to blend with the people who belong to the street.

- Novice: You're not trusted entirely, but you can talk to people.
- •• Practiced: You're accepted, and you can find what you need eventually.
- ••• Competent: You know how to earn respect on the streets.
- •••• Expert: You blend with the gangs and the drug dealers.
- ••••• Master: You haven't heard it, it hasn't happened.

Possessed by: Homeless, Criminals, Reporters, Detectives, Vice Squad, Free-Clinic Doctors, Cultists of Ecstasy

Specialties: Rumors, Drugs, Gangs, Petty Theft, Local Slang, Weapons

Subterfuge

"Are you lying to me?" Mary-Joan asked bluntly, straightening her jacket's satin collar. She looked up at the new apprentice, gauging him. How many times had she stood in this same situation? She knew about secrets. Everyone had them — even the most distinguished Choristers. This "altar boy" hadn't learned the fine art of hiding his yet.

"No, Lady," the young mage replied, averting his eyes.

Mary-Joan decided to let him believe that he had hoodwinked her. She put a hand on his shoulder, "I'm glad to hear that," she lied back with a smile. "I think you have a bright future in the Choir."

This Talent represents your character's ability to conceal her true motives and act in a manner completely different from how she truly feels. Usually, a character will use this Talent to manipulate people, to hide an emotion that would not be well-received or to fit in with those around her. The Subterfuge Ability also allows her to recognize when others are acting contrary to their own feelings or are pretending to do something for reasons other than their true motives. Characters with a high score in Subterfuge have a knack for secrets, double-dealing and intrigue.

- Novice: You can pull off the occasional lie.
- •• Practiced: You hide your true feelings well.
- ••• Competent: You put on a believable act.
- •••• Expert: You have no cracks in your performance.
- ••••• Master: You're the last person anyone would ever suspect.

Possessed by: Politicians, Lawyers, Teenagers, Actors, Con Artists

Specialties: Seduction, Impeccable Lies, Hidden Emotions, Politics

Skills

Skills include those things your character has learned through training and practice. Usually, they involve some sort of physical interaction with a tool or the use of a learned method. These Traits require a conscious effort and practice to improve. If your character attempts an action involving a Skill in which she has no points, then your Storyteller may allow you to roll with a dice pool made up of the appropriate Attribute alone, but she increases the difficulty number by one.

Crafts

The machinery in the workroom whirred and buzzed. Unlike most people, Rafter needed the background noise to think and to create. She ran her hand down the smooth surface of the steel plate, sensing every minute warp and imperfection. "How would you like to be immortal?" she muttered absently to the piece. "I hope you're

ready, baby, 'cause I'm gonna give you wings to fly." She flipped down the face-plate of her mask and fired up her blowtorch. The first stage of her greatest masterpiece had begun.

The Crafts Skill includes anything related to working with your hands, such as engine repair, electronics, plumbing, carpentry and the creative arts. Your character can even create a lasting work of art with enough successes. If you put points in Crafts for your character, then you must choose a Specialty for her, even though you won't get any roll bonuses until you have four dots in it. Because this Skill encompasses so much, the Specialty helps you define exactly what your character has learned.

- • Novice: You can handle the simplest projects.
- •• Practiced: You know little tricks to improve your work.
- ••• Competent: You make things others want to buy.
- •••• Expert: You amaze people with your work.
- ••••• Master: Your artistry sets you apart from the mainstream.

Possessed by: Mechanics, Artisans, Artists, Designers, Inventors, Quakers, Sons of Ether

Specialties: Home Repair, Vehicle Repair, Clothing, Appraisal, Pottery, Watercolors, Carving

Drive

When faced with a choice between a brick wall, a narrow alley and a car full of armed gunmen, Missy chose the narrow alley. "Just like threading a needle," she reassured herself as she guided the speeding car into the tight passageway. Sparks flew past her window as the left-front panel scraped against hard stone. Missy kept her eyes straight ahead and prayed there weren't any dumpsters or children waiting to leap into the beams of her headlights. Finally, she saw the end of the tunnel, so to speak. The alley opened onto a parking lot. Just as she sped out into open space, she heard the crash and crunch of metal on stone behind her. Glancing in her rearview mirror, she spied the gunmen's vehicle wedged askew in the alley. During the leisurely drive home, she debated what kind of car she wanted to buy next.

Although a character can usually handle a car without specialized training, it takes some level of the Drive Skill to handle a car in dangerous situations, tough terrain or really nasty traffic. The higher your character's Drive score, the more expertise she has with different driving conditions as well as different kinds of vehicles. You should establish with your Storyteller what kind of experience your character has, because a person skilled at riding a motorcycle may not have the first clue about driving 18-wheelers.

- • Novice: You can drive an automatic transmission.
- •• Practiced: You can drive a stick and handle rush hour in New York.
- ••• Competent: You're as good as a professional chauffeur.
- •••• Expert: You could be a stunt driver.
- ••••• Master: You and your Porsche share one mind.

Possessed by: Cabbies, Truckers, Chauffeurs, Racers, Bikers

Specialties: Off-road, Motorcycle, Fancy Maneuvering, Losing Tails, Sudden Stops, Skids

Etiquette

"So there I was, man, up to my eyeballs in Paradox and these freaky spirit things were closin' in." Brandon gestured with the pipe in his hand. Things seemed to be going well. His new friends had gone silent, listening to his story. They all stared at him through their drug-induced hazes — expectantly. Brandon opened his mouth to continue the story, but someone interrupted.

"Dude," the Cultist named Blue said, "you gonna hog that bowl all night? Pass it on!"

Brandon blushed all the way to the roots of his hair and handed the pipe to the girl on his left. "Sorry," he uttered.

Someone else jumped in, "Did I ever tell you guys about the time...."

Etiquette gives your character the knowledge and grace she needs to do all the right things. This Ability helps your character when she's trying to impress others, fit in unobtrusively, be diplomatic or haggle. A character with a high score in Etiquette understands the nuances of proper behavior in both mortal and mage society. You may choose a Specialty for her that represents the culture with which she's most familiar.

- • Novice: You manage to stay out of people's way.
- •• Practiced: You know some of the lingo and don't insult anyone.
- ••• Competent: You impress others with your ability to blend.
- •••• Expert: You're the epitome of tactfulness.
- ••••• Master: You'd make others feel like oafs in your shadow, but you're too smooth to let someone feel that bad around you.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Debutantes, Leaders, Celestial Choristers

Specialties: Street Culture, High Society, Boardrooms, Mage Society

Firearms

Nothing happened. Reny pulled on the trigger again, but still nothing. He stared down at the gun in his hand as if it were an alien.

Susan reached over and efficiently flipped off the pistol's safety. "Try it now," she said with a chuckle. "Like this." She raised her gun and aimed it at the target. Boom! Boom! Boom! In three quick shots, the paper man had a neat, tight shamrock in the middle of his face. Boom! Susan grinned and lowered her weapon. "My lucky day. A four-leaf clover."

Paradox keeps mages from using their magic to deal with every situation. Sometimes, a good, old-fashioned revolver does the trick very nicely. Leading the dangerous lives they do, mages learn to defend themselves in a variety of ways. This Skill represents your character's familiarity with various firearms, from pistols to heavy machine guns. It doesn't, however, include heavy artillery such as mortars or tank guns. Someone skilled in Firearms can recognize, clean, load and shoot most types of small arms. This Ability is also used to unjam a gun (using Wits + Firearms).

- • Novice: The bullets come out of *that* end, moving very fast....
- •• Practiced: You spend time at the shooting range.
- ••• Competent: You've had to use your gun in a firefight or two.
- •••• Expert: Marksmanship is more than a hobby; even skilled gunfighters come to you for tips. The gun is an extension of your hand.
- ••••• Master: Your gun is an extension of your eye. If you can see it, you can hit it.

Possessed by: Police, Military, Survivalists, Hunters, Gangers, Hit men

Specialties: Fast-Draw, Gun-smithing, Sniping, Automatics, Shotguns, Handguns

Meditation

Beatifically still, Lee Ann breathed in deep, even suspiration. Despite her usual casual attire, the cold seemed to roll off her as if she were sheeted in a layer of perfect contentment.

"I'm still fuh-freezing!" moaned Kyle, his arms wrapped about his body. "Isn't there an easier way to do this?"

"Hush," Lee Ann said in a quiet voice, without even opening her eyes. "The important things are rarely easy. For now, just breathe."

Concentration and dedication are paramount in the working of magic, and a little serenity doesn't hurt either. Through Meditation, a character centers her mind, stills her thoughts and casts off the cares of the world for a time. Meditation allows characters to focus their thoughts and concentrate on specific problems or tasks. Thus, they draw their awareness inward to ignore harsh conditions or injury. (See p. 111 for some uses of this Skill.)

- • Novice: Those gurus on the street sure make it look easy, right?
- •• Practiced: Meditation helps sometimes when you're agitated.
- ••• Competent: A staple of your lifestyle, meditation keeps your mind clear.
- •••• Expert: Even under highly adverse conditions, you can find your center.
- ••••• Master: You could practice Zen archery unruffled in the midst of a raging firestorm — with your teeth.

Possessed by: New Agers, Martial-Artists, Psychological Patients

Specialties: Stress Management, Clarity, Biofeedback, Zen

Melee

The cowboy had bad news written all over him. He was itching for a fight. Standing from his barstool, he pulled a switchblade out of his pocket and flicked it open.

Vern should have known better than to antagonize the man, but with a name like Vern, you have to keep your testosterone on high. "Come on," Vern egged, wiggling his fingers. He backed toward the pool table, and, when the man advanced, he grabbed a pool cue.

The fight lasted longer than Vern had expected, but he couldn't use his magic there — too many bystanders. Relying on his training, he wielded the cue like a staff and slowly dissuaded the cowboy from cutting him to ribbons. By the end, the man was face-down on the pool table, and Vern had suffered only a cut to his leather jacket. That hurt more than anything, of course. The jacket had sentimental value.

In close proximity, a melee weapon — such as a knife, club or sword — can be just as lethal as a gun. This Skill describes your

character's expertise with a variety of bladed and blunt weapons. It includes the use of clubs, knives, daggers, rapiers, stakes, katanas, axes, staffs, nunchaku or any other such weapon. Thrown weapons, though, operate under the province of Athletics.

- • Novice: You know the right way to hold a knife.
- •• Practiced: You've had experience with street fighting.
- ••• Competent: Sword, axe, club, severed limb — if it's a weapon, you can use it.
- •••• Expert: Carving up your opponents is just like cutting a Thanksgiving turkey.
- ••••• Master: You flick your wrist and heads roll.

Possessed by: Assassins, Gangers, Martial-Artists, Police, Duelists, Adventurers

Specialties: Knives, Swords, Improvised Weapons, Stakes, Disarming, Axes, Throwing

Performance

"Mum's the word!" the announcer shouted, and the band ran onto the stage. Lights flashed and lasers skipped over the anonymous faces of the screaming crowd.

Klaus strutted across to his microphone and put a big kiss to it for his fans, with a shrieking, "Mmmmmwah! Hello, everybody! We're Mum and we're gonna rock your universe!" The drumbeat kicked it off, an echoing bass heartbeat felt in every stomach in the auditorium. The other instruments joined in, providing the hum of blood and the crescendo of adrenaline. Klaus grabbed the collar of his T-shirt and tore it straight down the middle.

The crowd went wild. In that blend of adoration, exultation and sheer screaming ecstasy, there was magic.

Whenever your character attempts to perform something in front of an audience, this Skill governs her success. It covers all performance arts, such as singing, dancing, playing an instrument and acting. She will undoubtedly have a Specialty in one area, but truly talented performers may have developed expertise in several. This Trait not only represents your character's skill with the act itself, but also her ability to work the audience. Combined with the Expression Talent, the character can not only sing, dance or act, but can evoke strong emotion and improvise or create powerful messages for a given medium; with Subterfuge, the character can easily feign specific emotions or motives — perfect for a strong actor.

- • Novice: You sing and the audience doesn't boo.
- •• Practiced: You're relaxed and comfortable on stage.
- ••• Competent: You have a following of groupies.
- •••• Expert: You wow audiences with your talent.
- ••••• Master: Your performances draw awe-filled standing ovations.

Possessed by: Vocalists, Actors, Musicians, Dancers, Mimes, Celestial Choristers, Cultists of Ecstasy

Specialties: Dancing, Singing, Rock and Roll, Acting, Stand-up Comedy, specific instruments

Stealth

Oz melded with the darkness, seeking its comforting embrace during the long night ahead. He barely breathed, barely blinked. At times, especially when the screams of outrage and pain rose like hot nettles into his throat, he found his own stillness nearly unbearable. But this, he reminded himself silently, this is the cycle of renewal, just a step in the process. He was a believer. He watched, for his own edification and because it was too late to save the victim.

Still, the insane cruelty of the killer made his stomach uneasy. Had the world changed so little that it still produced a man who could systematically torture and kill another? The blood flowed across the floor, one small stream of it passing no more than an inch from Oz's toe. He didn't move. He didn't flee. And when the time came, he emerged from the shadows like Death and released the killer's soul too. He, unlike his victim, had no time for terror and knew no pain.

The points you assign this Skill determine how well your character can sneak and hide. It applies whether your character is moving or not. In many cases, your Storyteller will ask you and your opponent to roll as in a resisted action. The player with the most successes either succeeds in avoiding detection or detects the other. For simplicity, however, the Storyteller may simply set the sneaking character's difficulty number equal to her opponent's Perception score. If she succeeds, then she manages to remain hidden. If she fails or botches, then she gets noticed.

A particularly crafty Storyteller will make your Stealth rolls for you and let you sweat over whether your character is actually hidden or not.

- • Novice: You can hide behind big things.
- •• Practiced: You sneak like a teenager escaping the house.
- ••• Competent: Shadows are friends to you.
- •••• Expert: Even dry leaves and branches do not betray your passing.
- ••••• Master: Ninjamatics-R-U.

Possessed by: Assassins, Reporters, Thieves, Eavesdroppers, Spies, Commandos

Specialties: Hiding, Silent Movement, Shadowing, Crowds

Survival

Remy tended the small fire and listened to the sounds of the animals in the swamp; the distant roars of the 'gators, the birds calling their mates and the hummed songs of the insects. He almost didn't notice that Shima had wandered off until it was too late. Lurching to his feet, he rushed after her and grabbed her by the arm just in time.

"What are you doing?!" Shima turned on him and demanded.

"Have you lost your mind?" Remy hissed. "I told you to stay with me."

"Go to Hell. I have to piss."

"You piss where I tell you." He glanced around and picked up a thick, dry branch. He tossed it up ahead, in Shima's intended path. Slowly, the branch melted down into the quicksand. "Any questions?" Remy asked.

Every person has a special environment in which he's particularly comfortable. With this Skill, your character has learned all the little tricks necessary to survive in the environment he knows. Dangers abound everywhere and often a person unfamiliar with the terrain won't know how to avoid these dangers. Whether the environment is natural (such as a jungle or a desert) or urban (such as cities or sewers) it can be treacherous if you don't know what you're doing. You should choose a Specialty for your character to reflect what type of

environment she knows. When your character uses Stealth in an environment foreign to him, you cannot roll more dice than his score in Survival.

- • Novice: You know enough not to drink stagnant water.
- •• Practiced: A few camping and survival trips are under your belt.
- ••• Competent: You could lead an inexperienced group into your environment and bring them out alive.
- •••• Expert: You avoid even major discomforts easily with your skills.
- ••••• Master: You know your environment inside and out.

Possessed by: Military, Outdoors Enthusiasts, Park Rangers, Homeless, Mountaineers, Nomads, Verbena

Specialties: Urban, Forest, Desert, Tropical, Jungle, Mountainous, Arctic, Medicine, Hunting, Foraging

Technology

Slamming the cover shut on the fuse box, Cathrine backed up, pulled the lever and gave the box a swift kick.

After only a moment's hesitation, the lights in the room came back on. The generator patched into the box hummed merrily, and the rest of the onlookers rushed to check the computer systems, monitors and speakers.

"Amazing what you can do with a strip of tinfoil, isn't it?" Cathrine smirked. "Too bad they don't make them like they used to."

Skill with Technology covers all manner of repairs, electronics, mechanical aptitude and other gew-gawgery with devices. Characters skilled in Technology can not only use all manner of devices, but they can also repair or modify such items. Of course, tools and diagrams are most helpful in this endeavor, but sometimes there's no help for it but to trust to luck. Characters without this Skill can probably operate a toaster or a microwave oven, but they wouldn't even know how to change the oil in a car.

- • Novice: Fuse boxes, broken toasters and oil changes are your purview.
- •• Practiced: You've done some electrical or mechanical hobbying, and you put together all sorts of useless crap in your garage.
- ••• Competent: Electrical and mechanical engineering are well within your range of skill, and you can repair many objects or make new ones.
- •••• Expert: You can even program a VCR.
- ••••• Master: If it works on a technological principle, you can break, build, repair or rewire it.

Possessed by: Engineers, Repairmen, Technocrats, Inventors, Saboteurs, Security Specialists

Specialties: Electronics, Mechanics, Engines, Tinkering, Security, Technomagic

Knowledges

Knowledge Traits represent your character's areas of scholastic and mental expertise. Most often, they require your character to have studied the topic involved actively, and for this reason, they are described in collegiate terms. Although most of them require formal training, your character may have learned them through self-study and reading. You should clarify with your Storyteller if such is the case, because your character may have the benefit of the information without the prestige of a degree. In the case of Medicine, for example, she may know how to set bones, but she may not have the certification to practice medicine legally. Your Storyteller may cap how many dots you can purchase in an area of Knowledge without pursuing a formal education.

If you have no dots in a Knowledge Trait, you cannot even attempt a roll involving it without direct Storyteller permission. If your character doesn't speak Russian, for instance, she can't fumble her way through a conversation with just her wits.

Academics

"So... what do you think?" Montreaux twined his rooty fingers together, glancing around nervously at the people studying his latest painting. He watched as Jack Black turned away with a harrumph of disapproval. His expression of anticipation crumpled as others slowly followed Jack's example — all but one: Gerard.

Deep-voiced and academic, Gerard spoke with authority. "Montreaux, you have captured the whimsy of a Monet watercolor, here, where you have explored the evanescent effects of light. You evoke, with your use of broad areas of color, the desolation and loneliness expressed by Munch. You pull taut the lines of sexual irreverence just as Picasso did during his Rose Period. Your use of Realism against a background of Impressionism, particularly in the pigeons and the fruit, strikes me as reminiscent of the Expressionist compositions found in a Gauguin. Tell me that you have studied the great works and sought to emulate them, or I shall surely die of wonder."

Blinking, confused, Montreaux replied, "Umm?" He looked around for someone to explain to him what Gerard was saying, and he saw that the others had all turned back with renewed interest.

Study in Academics represents your character's expertise in the "liberal arts and sciences." It covers many possible fields, and you should work with your Storyteller to choose a Specialty for your character. Academics includes the theoretical and sometimes practical study of anthropology, music, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, literature, art and any other of the so-called "soft" sciences. Although you may choose a Specialty, your character will still have a basic knowledge of all other topics that fall in this category, simply because learning one often leads to learning bits and pieces of others. If college-educated, your character will have had to take electives, after all. Furthermore, this Trait represents an overall level of education and familiarity with the academic world, such as the politics and traditions of universities.

- • Student: You've read all the basic high school books on the arts.
- •• College: Casual intellectual discourse is no problem for you.
- ••• Masters: You could publish a paper in an academic journal.
- •••• Doctorate: New theories and techniques result from your studies.
- ••••• Scholar: You're recognized as one of the foremost experts in your areas of study.

Possessed by: Professors, Artists, Musicians, Writers, Trivia Buffs, Literary Critics

Specialties: History, Arts, Music, Literature, Medieval Studies, Architecture

Computer

Cathrine's fingers flew across the keyboard, tick-tacking in the commands almost as quickly as the prompt appeared on the screen. She held back the urge to call on some of her incredible toys. This time, she couldn't afford to use her magic. This time, she had to do it the normal way. Of course, all things being relative, she knew she still had an advantage.

The screen flashed blue and Cathrine's heart missed a beat. She held her breath. Had she hit a glitch she hadn't anticipated? But then, the logo of Dextron Inc. formed on the screen, and Cathrine smiled. She'd made it in. All she had to do was find and delete the records on Solomon. When they went looking for the hacker, they'd never suspect her. They'd start by looking for a Sleeper, and all because she hadn't left the signature use of hypertech.

Computer operation and programming fall under the sway of the Computer Knowledge. Though the Technocracy makes great use of computers, today's highly information-based society relies on them a great deal as well. Those characters with low scores in Computer may know how to manipulate their way through simple software, whereas those with high scores can program, build their own and hack.

- • Student: You can play computer games.
- •• College: With some help files, some reference manuals and a little time, you can install or work through most software.
- ••• Masters: Programming is one of your talents, and you craft utilities to your own standards.
- •••• Doctorate: Not only do you write code, you can hack or debug other peoples' products, and you're familiar with the most recent and efficient innovations of computers.
- ••••• Scholar: You *created* the most recent computer technology.

Possessed by: Hackers, Programmers, Office Workers, Students, Virtual Adepts

Specialties: Programming, Hacking, Code-Breaking, Viruses, Data Retrieval, Internet

Cosmology

Pushing Kyle forward, Lee Ann struggled to get purchase on the slippery "ground," such as it was. The hideous Realm into which they'd stumbled wasn't at all friendly, and unless they found an exit soon, they'd run afoul of more of its hungry inhabitants. Despite Kyle's inexperience, Lee Ann didn't plan to let him slow her down.

"Wait a minute... that door, shouldn't it be the other way around?" Kyle asked as he struggled to stay on his feet.

Lee Ann blinked and regarded the portal that Kyle indicated. Sure enough, it was wider at the bottom than the top — a definite change of pace. She knew that the symbolism of the Realm linked to its passages, and she grinned unexpectedly.

"Nope," she replied to Kyle's query. "It's exactly what we need."

Mages spend a great deal of time studying other worlds and dealing with spirits. The Cosmology Knowledge represents this sort of education. Of course, the ways of the Umbra are diverse and strange, and there's no way to guarantee that what works in one place or time will work again. Still, certain landmarks and traits are mostly reliable, and some spirits have a habit of meddling with mages more than others. From such benchmarks, the mage can make guesses about aspects of the universe and its denizens.

- • Student: You've heard that there's more than just Earth.
- •• College: You know the names of a few Umbral places and spirits.
- ••• Masters: Having visited the Umbra, you're no stranger to other worlds or creatures.
- •••• Doctorate: Spirits drop in to chat with you.
- ••••• Scholar: Spirits ask *you* for advice about the Umbra.

Possessed by: Umbral Explorers, Shamans, Werewolves, Armchair Theorists

Specialties: Spirit Names, Realms, Deep Umbra, the Gauntlet, Nodes

Enigmas

The clock continued to tick as Mark rubbed his eyes. He'd always hated logic puzzles, but he knew he'd seen something like this before. That old puzzle about getting the fox, the goose and the other thing across the river... whatever it was...

It all boiled down to recursion, he guessed. There was an underlying pattern that could be repeated to build an answer. Quickly, he started sketching out combinations on the hem of his coat, using the nearly empty pen that he'd had in his pocket. Then, he started hopping from tile to tile and hoped that the spirit guarding the place wasn't feeling too trigger-happy.

Mysteries are stock in trade for magic-workers. Some magicians make an especial study of puzzles, riddles and mysterious circumstances, though. When gut instincts fail and logic can't offer a solution, the character with a broad knowledge of Enigmas sees clever solutions, hidden meanings and the motives behind such tricks. The Enigmas Knowledge can be used for figuring out the best way to approach a puzzle, the answer to a spirit's riddle or even just the morning crossword.

- • Student: How'd those riddles go in *The Hobbit*?
- •• College: Towers of Hanoi, foxes and geese and a plethora of riddles all fill your head.
- ••• Masters: You can puzzle out the motives of spirits and madmen.
- •••• Doctorate: You do crosswords in pen — in 10 minutes.
- ••••• Scholar: You *are* an enigma.

Possessed by: Detectives, Analysts, Game Players, Philosophers, Psychologists, Raving Nutcases, Really Annoying Old Masters

Specialties: Deduction, Riddles, Quick Solutions, Historical Puzzles, Codes and Ciphers

Investigation

"Did you move him?" asked David, crouching down beside the corpse. The smell of blood and other final bodily excretions put a mask of distaste on the Verbena's face.

"No," replied the other man. "I found him and called you immediately."

David nodded and pointed to an odd discoloration on the dead man's arm. "This arm has been moved. These discolorations show the pooling of blood in the dead flesh. They should be on the bottom, but here they're on the top. Something was taken from that arm.

Here, a ring is missing. See the wear-mark it left?" David looked up into the barrel of a gun. "Hmmm. Tell me, Victor," he said. "What was so special about the ring that you'd kill for it?"

Whenever your character investigates a crime scene, looks for clues or performs more detailed forensic exploration, the Investigation Knowledge is invoked. This Trait implies that your character has learned to read specific clues that give her information. More than just the ability to notice things, it shows that your character has learned specific methods for discovering the truth. She may have studied Criminology or Forensics, for example. It's more than just noticing a clue, it also involves interpreting that clue.

- • Student: You've read plenty of detective novels.
- •• College: Beat cops and amateur stalkers are in your class.
- ••• Masters: Experienced detective work is under your belt.
- •••• Doctorate: You could profile crimes for a living.
- ••••• Scholar: You rival Sherlock Holmes.

Possessed by: Detectives, Police, Coroners, Profilers, FBI Agents

Specialties: Forensics, Crime Scenes, Poisons, Weapons

Law

Climbing vines draped the white house on Marshall Street, their cheerful green painting a contradictory backdrop to the black limousines. The vehicles proceeded down the long, curving driveway to the front door. Each in turn, the judges entered the house. The last car brought the defendant, his advocates and his guards.

The judges had already seated themselves at the front of the courtroom by the time the defendant entered. One from each of the Traditions, they waited with stiff impatience. It appeared that they had already made up their minds about the verdict, but the defendant deserved to have his case heard. That was the law.

Wescott set his briefcase upon the table and opened it. He knew he had a tough job ahead of him. Clearing a man so carefully framed might well prove to be his greatest challenge. At the call for Wescott's opening statements, the advocate pulled a bloody heart from the plastic bag in his case and held it high. The entire room gasped.

A character with a high score in the Law Trait knows local or national laws well enough to manipulate them to her benefit. She can find loopholes in the law, prosecute a defendant with aplomb or advise people on how far they can go without breaking the law. Furthermore, this Knowledge can represent an understanding of the Protocols and allow a mage to use the laws of the Traditions to her own advantage.

- • Student: You watch late-night civil court shows.
- •• College: You may have done professional law studies, or else you've done a lot of reading.
- ••• Masters: You could have your own law practice.
- •••• Doctorate: Your reputation for winning precedes you in court.
- ••••• Scholar: You could find loopholes in a contract with the Devil.

Possessed by: Lawyers, Criminals, Police, Legislators, Judges, Bounty Hunters, Quaesitori

Specialties: Criminal, Civil, Tradition, Police Procedure, Contracts, Corporate

Linguistics

The Etherite from Paris stood slowly. "Je suis désolé, mais je vous trouve absolument bêtes. Vous ne comprenez pas l'importance de mes travaux." He strode out of the room.

"What did he say?" Preston asked, looking toward the Etherite's interpreter.

"He said," the interpreter answered, "that he must excuse himself. He's not feeling well. And if you will excuse me, I believe I should go tend to him." The stick-legged man hurried after his companion.

Blandine chuckled softly from her end of the table. She spoke French and knew the interpreter had smoothly covered his friend's insult. She assumed he had rushed off to entreat the Etherite to make amends rather than lose every chance of making an alliance on this side of the Atlantic. Moments later, she excused herself as well. She had a card to play in this little game.

All characters are assumed to be able to speak, read and write their own native tongue. Any other languages known are represented by this Knowledge. Additional dots in Linguistics give a character a broader range of languages. You determine, with your Storyteller's approval, what languages you want your character to speak. These languages can come from any country, either modern or ancient, and they generally include written forms as well. A high level of this Knowledge often indicates a broad, general knowledge of language theory, and your character may take "Linguistic study" in place of a language, thereby studying the underpinnings of language itself.

- • Student: One extra language.
- •• College: Two extra languages.
- ••• Masters: Four extra languages
- •••• Doctorate: Eight extra languages.
- ••••• Scholar: 16 extra languages.

Possessed by: Linguists, Diplomats, Foreign Nationals, Spies, Tour Guides

Specialties: Hieroglyphs, Latin, Local Dialect, Written Expression, Slang, Ciphers, any modern language

Medicine

"It's because of my knowledge of the human body that I can do what I do, Maphis. Do you doubt me?" Jodi chewed coyly on a fingernail. "You see, there are certain locations where, if you disrupt the natural order, you can kill a person within moments." Her dark eyes slid down Maphis' body to his chest. "The heart... the ventricles are like valves. Close them and the whole system panics. Feel it?" Jodi smiled as Maphis gasped and pressed himself back against the wall. "Such terror in your eyes," she commented, releasing the organ from her magical control. "As it should be. I can squeeze specific muscles and make your body do as I wish. Or... I can render you completely vulnerable." With a gesture, she sent her magic to press Maphis' jugular closed. The mage's eyes rolled up into his head and he collapsed to the floor, unconscious. Jodi laughed while she unbuttoned his shirt — just for demonstration. She was still laughing when Maphis awakened. "So," Jodi asked, "do you understand now why you have to pay very... close... attention... when I address you?"

The Medicine Trait gives your character an understanding of the human body, for both constructive, reparative and destructive purposes. It represents knowledge of medication, ailments and first-aid. At higher levels, it allows diagnosis, treatment of disease, surgery and the use of highly technical medical equipment. A character with Medicine is not necessarily formally trained or licensed, but she can practice with the best of them as long as she's careful not to let anyone know! Of course, this Knowledge can also represent a character who is a certified medic, doctor or nurse.

- • Student: You know basic first-aid and CPR.
- •• College: You can handle basic trauma and diagnosis.
- ••• Masters: General practice is within your range of skill.
- •••• Doctorate: Surgery, specialties and the big bucks all await your practice.
- ••••• Scholar: At the cutting edge of medicine, your skills are in demand throughout the world.

Possessed by: Med Students, Lifeguards, Nurses, Doctors, Paramedics, Euthanatos

Specialties: Research, Pediatrics, Emergency Care, Pathology, Poisons, Surgery, Pharmaceuticals

Occult

Xian made a conscious effort to loosen her death-grip on the steering wheel, flexing shaky fingers. She glanced over at her passenger. "We're lucky to be alive, aren't we?"

Terry nodded, his gaze locked on the passing landscape. "They let us live." He drew a deep breath. "I've seen giant wolves like that before. They're supernatural. I don't know why they let us go. Our magic wouldn't have helped us if they had chosen to attack."

"Their eyes..." Xian whispered. She shivered, imagining for a moment that she could still feel them watching her. She pressed on the gas pedal.

This Trait describes your character's depth of occult knowledge, including mysticism, curses, magic, folklore, Umbral lore and various other lore related to the strange creatures and occurrences in the world. It doesn't necessarily imply that everything your character knows is correct, but it does give her insight to weed out the total nonsense. (Although she may still think that voodoo doesn't work, for example, she does know the general way others think that it does.) A character with a high level of Occult also knows a good amount about mages and magical practice, though again such knowledge may be incomplete or inaccurate. It's better than nothing, though!

- • Student: You have some friends who are into weird stuff.
- •• College: Curiosity has gotten you into the occult, but it's bigger than you've imagined.
- ••• Masters: Bizarre phenomena haunt your dreams, and you can place the significance of all manner of symbols and artifacts.
- •••• Doctorate: You're a true believer, and you can usually weed out the crap from the valid.
- ••••• Scholar: Not much surprises you anymore.

Possessed by: Occultists, Pagans, Parapsychologists, Exorcists, Pulp Writers

Specialties: Voudoun, Witches, Ghosts, Death Mythology, Infernalism, New Age, Folk Tales

Science

Habeeb adjusted the rubber gloves carefully, pushing his fingers deeper and tugging them up over his wrists. The crinkle comforted him. It sounded clean and precise. The scientist had prepared the samples and run them through the equipment. If he had done everything right, he'd know for sure whether the soil around Monchello's farm had been contaminated. Carrying the slide to the microscope, Habeeb sat and peered through the eye-piece. The chemicals had selectively highlighted certain properties and there, among them, was the parasite. Habeeb sighed. So, it was true. Someone had caused Monchello's illness on purpose.

This Knowledge describes your character's familiarity with the physical sciences, such as biology, chemistry, physics and geology. If you choose a specialization for your character, she still has a broad understanding of all the sciences, but her expertise lies in a particular field. The Storyteller sets the difficulty number of any rolls based on Science according to the complexity of the task. Science can cover a great diversity of topics, from astronomy to physics to chemistry to biology and beyond. Practical applications of Science may require the use of Technology or Crafts Skills.

- • Student: You survived high school science.
- •• College: With a broad general picture of science, you're familiar with most prominent theories and a few experimental procedures.
- ••• Masters: Overseeing or setting up new projects and experiments is within your capabilities.
- •••• Doctorate: Discovery is your watchword, progress your goal.
- ••••• Scholar: You may soon solve science's greatest mysteries.

Possessed by: Scientists, Drug Designers, Engineers, Technicians, Technocrats, Pilots, Sons of Ether

Specialties: Chemistry, Biology, Geology, Aeronautic Engineering, Astronomy, Metallurgy, Physics and many, many more

Specialties

To represent extreme dedication in a narrow field, or just to show a special interest or concentration of study, you can pick specialties for your character's attributes and abilities. The specialty is a role-playing tool, but if your character has a rating of 4 or more dots in the base trait, it gives a game benefit as well. When you roll a dice pool involving your specialty, you get to re-roll any 10s and include the re-rolls in your successes. If the re-rolls score 10s, they can be rolled again, and so on. (A botch on a re-roll does cancel a success as always. The perils of overweening pride in your special knowledge....) As an additional option, the Storyteller may allow you to declare additional specialties for each dot past four in a given ability or attribute (so you could have two specialties with five dots).

Backgrounds

Throughout your character's life, as described in her background, she will have acquired contacts, material belongings and personal strengths that aid her. She hasn't learned them and she can't train for them; they stem from happenstance, social ties and history. This broad category of Traits covers everything from the friends a character has made to her innate magical power. It's a catch-all category, and you assign points to your character's Backgrounds during character creation just as you do Attributes and Abilities.

Your character's Backgrounds have direct ties to her history. Thus, they help you to flesh out your character. As you choose and assign point values to these Traits, the Backgrounds help to define the character's exact nature. With the help and approval of your Storyteller, you establish how these Backgrounds fit into your character's life.

Allies

William sneezed. "Excuse me." The realtor's offices had a dusty, dry interior that bothered his sinuses. "I'm interested in taking a closer look at the old plantation house out on Honeysuckle Lane," he explained.

"Oh, yes!" the realtor said, grinning. "I had a call yesterday warning me that you might be coming. I'd be very happy to show you that house. It's a magnificent structure, sturdy and with a style unmatched in these parts. I think you'll like it very much."

William smiled. His friend who knew the owner of the real estate company had worked fast. "How much are they asking for the house?" he queried.

"Well," the realtor replied with a friendly wink. "I have it on good authority that we can make you a deal you won't be able to refuse."

Allies are people (or other beings) who are willing to help your character. They may be friends, anonymous sponsors or someone for whom your mage did a favor at one point. Each dot that you purchase in this Trait gives your mage one ally or increases the usefulness of one particular ally. For example, if you put three dots in the *Allies* Trait, your character can have either three allies who are somewhat useful or one ally who is extremely helpful. Or, she can have one one-dot ally and one two-dot ally. You determine this allocation with your Storyteller and give your character's allies names, professions and personalities. Allies are generally Sleepers; more esoteric sorts of creatures fall under a different heading. Also, your allies may know that you are into some unusual things, but they are rarely in on the whole picture of mage society or even the facts of magic. Allies are more useful as warm bodies to give you a hand or a place to crash.

An ally can give your character access to information she wouldn't normally have, access to products and services or even more direct aid. Your Storyteller may wish to create statistics for the ally and actually play the ally in the game as a character. Note that your allies have personalities and goals of their own, and from time to time they may cause problems, ask for favors in return or do things that further their own interests.

- X No allies — you don't have any friends at all.
- • One ally of moderate power
- •• Two allies or one more powerful ally
- ••• Three allies or a combination of more powerful allies
- •••• Four allies or a combination of more powerful allies
- ••••• Five allies or a combination of more powerful allies

Arcane

Flynn studied his reflection in the glass. Behind him, a never-ending stream of people walked either one way or the other, brushing shoulders, laughing, talking, glowering. Flynn noticed new wrinkles at the corners of his cherrywood eyes. He straightened the blue-black locks that writhed on his forehead and fixed his embroidered collar. Just tired, he told himself. I'm just tired. Slowly, his gaze shifted down to the diamond ring displayed in the window. He sighed.

The hammer in his pocket felt heavy as Flynn drew it out. He swung it toward the window, sending a bolt of magic along to increase the impact. The window shattered with a satisfying crash and the scream of alarms. Flynn reached into the window and took the ring. Shouts surrounded him, but he simply stepped back and blended into the crowd. As he walked away, he heard someone say, "It was that guy! That guy over there! Wait... where'd he go? I had my eyes on him just a minute ago. He went that way."

Mages walk the edge of what normal people consider reality. Because of their magical nature, they sometimes escape the notice of Sleepers. Their very existence is an anomaly, and some of them just evade notice. This effect manifests differently for different mages.

Although the *Arcane* Background doesn't make mages invisible, it makes them less noteworthy. An *Arcane* mage seems nondescript and not particularly noticeable. Features just seem to slip away from memory, and the mage just never seems to get caught on film. Records disappear, people forget the mage's name or even assume that discussions are about someone different, and witnesses can't garner more than "That guy. Girl. Whatever." The mage doesn't trigger these effects actively; they just happen. The mage can, however, consciously dampen the effect and allow others to see her as she truly is.

You add your character's *Arcane* score to any Stealth rolls you make, and your opponents reduce their Perception or Investigation dice pools by a number of dice equal to your score in *Arcane*. Note that *Arcane* only helps when the mage is inconspicuous or absent; if the character is screaming, waving around a sword or otherwise drawing attention to herself, *Arcane* doesn't help. Of course, people might give conflicting descriptions later or be hard-pressed to remember her name. When your character is directly involved in combat, this Trait gives her no benefits.

Note also that a character with specific, extremely unusual traits — like purple hair, a peg leg or huge size — will not be able to conceal those traits; they stand out too much in peoples' minds. Still, "that one-armed guy with... uh... hair... of some color" is a start.

X You're just as noticeable as anybody else.

• You blend in with the crowd.

•• You're easy to forget.

••• You're difficult to follow.

•••• There are scant photos, papers or records of you, and people can't even agree on what you look like.

••••• In other people's minds, you don't even exist.

Avatar

Azure slid down the wall until her rump landed on the cool tile floor. The room echoed with dripping water, and the steam rising off the hot spring held an ethereal glow. Azure didn't feel too well. She could sense the disturbance in her body — internal injuries. No Quintessence. No Tass. Azure had come here, home, to regenerate her power so that she could heal.

Closing her eyes, Azure focused on the spinning crystal in her head. She knew the risk. Relaxation might bring unconsciousness, but she had to meditate. Focus, *she repeated over and over, like a mantra. Azure wondered briefly if she would ever wake up.* Focus. Focus. Focus. *The crystal exploded with rainbow colors and expanded to consume Azure's consciousness. She followed the white path, dancing along with butterflies and rabbits, toward the purple grove she knew waited at the end.*

All mages have an Awakened Avatar, and through that Avatar the mage alters reality. However, not all Avatars are created equal. The strength of your character's Avatar affects her Quintessence score directly (see "Quintessence"). It also determines how much Quintessence your character can reabsorb at any one time. It is wise to put at least one dot in this Background. Mages with extremely weak Avatars cannot channel Quintessence at all, which can make many magical feats difficult or impossible.

Whenever your character's Quintessence score drops below her score in this Trait, she can meditate at a Node, for at least one hour, in an attempt to rebuild her Quintessence levels. You roll a dice pool based on Meditation (Perception + Meditation; difficulty 7) for each hour spent at the Node, and the number of your successes determines how much Quintessence she regains. No matter how many successes you roll, however, your character cannot reabsorb more Quintessence than the number of dots you placed in her *Avatar* Background. Her *Avatar* score serves as a ceiling to the Quintessence points she can soak in through meditation at a Node. For example, if she has an *Avatar* score of three, she cannot absorb more than three points of Quintessence per sitting, no matter how many successes you roll.

The *Avatar* rating is also the limit to the amount of Quintessence that a mage may channel for an Effect. A mage cannot channel more Quintessence than her *Avatar* rating, so mages with weak Avatars are limited to smaller Effects.

Quintessence stored in the Avatar is "personal" and inviolable; it cannot be taken from the mage with Prime magic.

Note that the role of the Avatar may vary with the Storyteller's slant on the game, and as such this Background may be changed to represent other powers....

X Your Avatar is barely capable of magic.
• May rebuild a pool of/ expend one Quintessence.
•• May rebuild a pool of/ expend two Quintessence.
••• May rebuild a pool of/ expend three Quintessence.
•••• May rebuild a pool of/ expend four Quintessence.
••••• May rebuild a pool of/ expend five Quintessence.

Contacts

Sliding the note under the collection plate, Father Shelley moved up the pew and toward the front of the church while the nondescript old woman slipped out. Ever since the disappearance of his most promising student, he'd been working to find some lead, some clue to who might want to kidnap his apprentice or get at him. He still had to perform his duties, but even if he couldn't spend every waking moment looking for the poor girl, he could keep an ear to the street.

Father Shelley knew people, and they knew and trusted him. Although his congregation was small, they were a closely-knit neighborhood. He knew that if anyone saw Sybil, he'd hear about it within the hour.

"Word on the street is..." For a mage with contacts, the word is right in her ear. Contacts simply give your character information. They're not as reliable as allies, but they are well-informed, and what a contact doesn't know, he or she can usually find out. By calling on your contacts, you can usually dig up information about happenings, people or general weirdness in the area, although you may have to shell out a couple bucks or a few favors in the process.

When you choose some contacts, you should, of course, work with your Storyteller to determine the sorts of people your character knows. Contacts are essentially casual acquaintances, usually from your character's own walks of life. Outside their areas of expertise, contacts may have some trouble finding information, but they can usually get in touch with someone who will know what your character needs. Of course, contacts aren't an excuse to short-circuit the adventure; they're hardly all-knowing. Worse still, unreliable contacts might sell the information that *your* mage is looking for something, or tell other people the same things that they told your mage.

When calling on contacts, use a Social Attribute + Background roll (difficulty depending on the information desired). Success usually garners some information, while a failure indicates that your contacts don't know and can't find out. A botch means that your contact lies or sells your character out.

Each dot in *Contacts* represents a major contact, a fully fleshed character who can help you out. The Storyteller should design such a contact. Your character also can call on minor contacts in other locations and for other purposes, but the difficulty of getting information out of such "casual contacts" is usually a little higher, and the mage must first pay up or prove himself.

X No contacts: You have to do all the legwork yourself.
• One contact.
•• Two contacts.
••• Three contacts.
•••• Four contacts.
••••• Five contacts.

Destiny

The strange cylinder gave off a grating, throbbing, pulsing noise just at the low end of audibility. Standing a full eight feet tall, two feet across, and dappled with strange cracks and protrusions, it looked like some haphazardly-carved piece of modern stone art, but Cathrine new that it was much more. As she pushed closer, she could feel the waves of sound emanating, rippling through her body painfully. Nearby, a lone corpse sprawled across the floor, testament to the thing's unusual destructive power.

As her nose bled, ears rang and vision blurred, Cathrine pushed forward to reach the cylinder. Pain rocketed through her body but determination filled her mind: she still had work to do in the Digital Web, and no thrice-cursed stone monolith would stop her! Her fingers glowed with light as energy collected in her virtual gloves, and she reached out to plant her counter-resonator on the thing — lesser souls might've cracked, but she still had a date to keep.

Some mages — or even Sleepers! — stand out heroically, pulling the threads of the Tapestry around them as they charge blindly on to an undeniable destiny. The fate of such a mage is generally known, though in a vague way. A prophecy, a vision or even just a "sense of greatness" follows this sort of mage. Her fellow

mages sense this fate, as does she. Although none of the characters will know the exact nature of her fate, you should work it out behind the scenes with your Storyteller, or have your Storyteller determine it for you secretly. This final fate should remain mysterious — an enigma — within the context of the story.

The knowledge that she will go on to do great things gives your character a stronger sense of purpose and, thus, it increases her ability to exert her will. She knows that she will not die an ignominious death and this knowledge gives her the courage to go on when times get rough. Once per story (not each game session), if your character faces an end that goes against her destiny, you may roll her *Destiny* score versus a difficulty number of 8. Each success you roll allows you to regain one spent Willpower point. You may use these points to help your character avoid a cheap death. Destiny steps in and helps your character when she needs it the most.

However, your Storyteller may decide, at any time, that the danger your character faces meets the criteria of her destiny and disallow you any special saving rolls. Your character's fate, in this case, has come calling and she must survive on her own or fulfill that destiny.

A mage *can* fulfill his destiny, and at such a time, the Background goes away. The fulfillment of the destiny usually culminates in some large change for the character's life, though. Conversely, an otherwise mundane person may suddenly discover a powerful destiny. The course of fate is fickle indeed, and even mages cannot see the future with total certainty.

X You're just a tar-heel like everyone else.
• A minor destiny; roll one die
•• An impressive destiny; roll two dice
••• A crucial destiny; roll three dice
•••• A world-changing destiny; roll four dice
••••• An earth-shattering destiny; roll five dice

Dream

Dakota stood at the edge of the mesa, looking out over a landscape made rich in the light of the setting sun. The wind played in her long hair and kissed cool her sweat-misted brow. She spread her arms to the world, welcoming it, breathing it in. She closed her eyes....

Every one of her senses came alive, and she heard again the syncopated beat of her heart-drum. She let the music fill her and followed its lead into the sky. She flew, in her dreamplace, with her dreamfriends, with Eagle. Across the great waters, she drifted, holding close the image of Maria. Maria, sweet Maria, had a baby inside her — a baby that carried a strange curse. Dakota flew tonight in search of the curse. She saw it lurking there on the horizon. Her dreamcompanions left her, unwilling to get too close to the dark, cancerous entity. She continued on alone, toward the answers she sought.

With the *Dream* Background, your character has the ability to meditate and tap into the wealth of information carried within the universal mind. She must focus on a particular problem while meditating, and the amount of time it takes her to glean the information will vary based on its complexity. This process has its drawbacks. She may not get exactly what she wanted, but instead may find herself possessing an intuitive understanding that she didn't expect. The universal mind knows better than she does what will help her, but that doesn't mean she'll figure out why this particular bit of information applies to her dilemma. Furthermore, she only has access to the information until she sleeps again. Once she sleeps, the knowledge flies out of her mind and she loses access to it.

Your Storyteller may ask you to roll Perception + *Dream* to see how well your character can focus and reach a meditative state. Each character will have her own unique way of bringing forth the dream. It doesn't have to be sitting in a full lotus with incense burning. Some take long walks by the beach or vegetate to rock music. Whatever method your character uses, she must have no interruptions for the amount of time the Storyteller determines necessary. The information your character receives isn't concrete information, but rather an intuitive, guiding sense about something. She can't find a person's address this way, but she can sense that the person probably lives near the river, for example. Roll your character's Perception + *Dream* (difficulty 6) to determine to what extent the information she receives is helpful.

Once per day, after your character has meditated successfully, you can substitute her *Dream* score for an Ability in a dice roll pertaining to the topic of her meditation. This applies whether she has the Ability or not. For example, if she's seeking some insight into her friend's emotions, you can roll Intelligence + *Dream* instead of Intelligence + Alertness, even if your character has no Alertness score. If she does have an Alertness score, you can still substitute, if you choose. However, you cannot add her *Dream* and Alertness scores. You roll either one or the other.

X The collective intuition of the cosmos is a mystery to you.
• You catch hazy bits of information.
•• You gain helpful insight.
••• You can access worthwhile lore.
•••• You glean a wealth of knowledge.
••••• You make amazing leaps with your insight.

Influence

Nicky sat down on the ratty couch and stared at Patricia in amazement. "It's the weirdest freakin' thing," he said. "Yesterday, the cops dropped the charges against me. This morning, the lab called an' offered me my job back. And, this afternoon, this publisher guy asked if I would be interested in writing a book about my... what was that word he used... travails." Nicky watched Patricia look down and try to hide her smile. A light bulb went off over his head. "You had somethin' to do with this, didn't you?"

Patricia shrugged elegantly. "I couldn't let Dedmund destroy you. I pulled a couple strings, that's all. Dedmund's an asshole, a child playing in a grown-up game. As soon as I realized that he was the one who set you up, I just... dropped a word or two to the right ears and... well..." She grinned crookedly and waggled her eyebrows.

As visionaries and leaders, mages have often held some influence over the course of the mortal world. You tailor your character's influences to her background and decide, with the help of your Storyteller, what type of influence she has. This sway you hold may be political, business-related, fame-based or religious in nature. Perhaps your character owns a major corporation, is a successful politician, sings in a popular rock band or has many followers who listen to her speak each week at the local PTA

meeting. Whatever the case, your character can direct certain currents in society to flow the direction she wants. She can use her influence to get things done or to block the activities of others.

You can roll your character's Influence score in conjunction with Social Traits in order to have your character gain special favors. When combined with Mental Traits, it could represent your character's search for information via her connections in the area of her influence. This Background can also help your character acquire new acolytes. By rolling Charisma + *Influence*, you determine her success at swaying others to follow her. Unlike the *Allies* Background, *Influence* just enables your character to get things done; it doesn't supply you with "mooks." Similarly, you might hear a few choice tidbits from a local scene with *Influence*, but for the full range of dirt in the city, you need *Contacts*.

X Nobody pays much attention to you.
• Your peers recognize you.
•• You have many local associates, and you know who to call.
••• You're respected regionally; people seek your opinion.
•••• Your word is gold on a national level.
••••• You are vastly influential on a global scale.

Library

Barbara went straight to the library, as instructed by the note, and found Chin seated on the floor surrounded by books. In amazement, she watched the diminutive old man fuss and cluck over the tome in his lap. He had the look of someone who'd been up all night, further evidenced by the empty pizza box and soda bottle on the desk.

"What are you doing?" Barbara asked.

Chin lifted his round face, shocked out of his concentration. But then, his wrinkles spread and rearranged to produce a broad smile — including that one missing tooth. "Barbara! Come. Come! Look at this. I found it! It took me all night, but I finally found it. You remember that name Mosha mentioned? I looked it up. The man was a Tibetan monk in the late 1800s who supposedly Awakened and turned to the dark side." Chin adored movies. "Well, look at this. He's still alive, and I can prove it."

With this Trait, your character has access to a great wealth of information. This "library" may take the form of books, old scrolls, computer databases or even of friends who have it all in their heads and who are happy to share it with you. Most importantly, your character can access this information whenever she wants and study it at will. The knowledge contained in your character's library can include both mundane and occult elements. Although it may not always prove entirely reliable, more often than not your character can take her time, cross-reference and check her information. Best of all, such a library is often a wealth of information that your particular mage considers important, so it has useful knowledge about magic, the supernatural and other obscure topics that wouldn't be found in a more mundane collection.

Libraries are especially useful in unearthing new lore, Sphere knowledge or specialized information. Use a Mental Attribute + *Library* roll to look up information regarding an arcane or obscure topic. Success helps your character in such an endeavor, possibly justifying the expenditure of experience on such Traits.

Depending on the nature of the "library," your character may choose to keep it somewhere that everyone in her cabal can use it. In such a case, all players involved can pool their *Library* scores and benefit from the increased wealth of information (pending Storyteller approval). However, they may run into duplication of information. Thus, a pooled library is only as effective as the best *Library* rating in the group, plus one for each additional *Library* thrown in.

X You have no particular information resources.
• You've got some New-Age paperbacks.
•• Your library is 90% pulp and 10% substance.
••• You have numerous useful texts.
•••• You have an enviable collection, both occult and mundane.
••••• You can access lore, lost secrets, common wisdom and obscure facts.

Mentor

The concrete room had steel bars and magical barriers. Ashe couldn't get out. She couldn't avoid the smell of sewage that burped up from the drain in the floor. She could only watch as the drain gurgled and began to overflow with dirty, brownish water.

Ashe didn't begin to panic until the water had reached her neck. She couldn't climb the walls. She had no escape. Someone's perverted mind had imagined drowning her in sewage, and the plan was succeeding. Ashe floated to the ceiling and waited for the water to cover her head.

"Ashe..." The call came softly into Ashe's mind, whispering across her consciousness. She knew that voice. It was Nicole! Nicole! Ashe had never loved her mentor as much as in that moment. Surely, Nicole had come to save her. But the filth kept rising and Ashe went under. "Ashe... dive down, grab the bars... hold on, Ashe..." Ashe did as instructed, holding her breath until her lungs ached. "Don't give up... Ashe... don't give up..." With a sudden, rolling rush, the pressure of the water burst open the door and it all flowed out, trying to drag Ashe with it into the grinding teeth of the processor. Ashe held on for dear life, taking grateful gulps of the rancid air.

Only the most naïve Orphan discovers magic without some sort of help, training and instruction. Often, a character's mentor has a more profound influence on her personality, beliefs and knowledge than any other person since her Awakening. If she has no mentor, then she doesn't have the benefit of a teacher. If she has a lousy, abusive or over-protective mentor, then the things she learned could scar her. A mentor can be a mage, a spirit or any other Awakened being. You should work with your Storyteller to give your mentor an identity and personality.

Your character can use her mentor in many ways, though her mentor may also use her in return. The mentor-student relationship can be a complex thing, especially if the mentor requires favors in exchange for the wisdom he imparts. Furthermore, your character's actions reflect on her mentor, just as her mentor's reputation reflects on her. If your character does something to disgrace herself, her mentor may step in with a hard lesson in retribution for the stain to his own reputation.

Mentors are key in teaching characters about new skills, knowledge and magical practices. A mentor could instruct a mage

in some obscure lore or special techniques, offer the advice of experience, loan a magical item or intervene in a nasty situation. Obviously, a mentor is much more active than a library, but using this help requires that the character repay the debt in some fashion.

X No mentor or teacher—how did you learn to do magic?
• Unimportant or distant mentor.
•• Helpful, but eccentric, mentor.
••• Good and notable mentor.
•••• Wise and respected mentor.
••••• Powerful or influential mentor.

Node

The spirit swelled and manifested, bringing with it the stench of decay. Its maw gaped, lined with row upon row of razor teeth. Its eyes gleamed a rancid nuclear green. "You trespass!" it howled, voice pitched to break glass.

Xavier stood his ground and his cabal stood with him. "No!" he shouted back at the creature. "You are the one who trespasses. We claim this Node and will defend it with our lives!"

"Pitiful, tiny creatures, you are," the spirit screeched. "So be it! Today, then, you will lose your lives!" Power surged in the air around the place, the lines of magic almost becoming visible as spirit and man clashed for the forces of reality itself.

One of the most hotly contested prizes in the war between mages is the possession of Nodes. A character with a Node has access to a place of power where she can replenish her Quintessence and gather Tass. Your Node can be located anywhere — in a cellar, a grove, a high-rise, a glade, a crystal cave or an old church — but mages protect them like the treasures they are. Quintessence thieves may attempt to overthrow the current custodians of a Node and take the location for themselves. Your character may have to fight to keep her Node.

You and your fellow players can pool your characters' *Node* scores to increase the value of one particular Node rather than having several small ones scattered around the area. The Node's rating determines how much Tass the place produces and how much "free" Quintessence a character can absorb from it per week. Your character can stockpile Tass, but the magical energy may lose its potency after a short time if not used. The form this Tass takes reflects the nature of the Node. If the Node is in a cemetery, the Tass may take the form of grave moss that your character will have to boil down to remove the Tass. Or, if the Node sits in a cave by the ocean, the Tass may take the form of salt-like deposits that your character will have to gather up and sift out to separate sand and silt.

The Quintessence available from a Node counts for all uses of absorption. Thus, characters who meditate to refresh their *Avatar* rating must draw on the Node and deplete it, and the Node may temporarily run out of power. The exact amount of power that a Node holds is up to the Storyteller. For a game with scarce magic, a Node might only supply one point of Quintessence per week per dot, while a more generous Storyteller might give ten points per week per dot. The higher the rating of the Node, the more energy it holds and the weaker the Gauntlet in its location.

X No access to a Node: Like most mages, you only have what power you can scrape up.

• A minor Node, barely worthy of mention.

•• A small Node, holding a useful trickle of energy.

••• A significant Node, able to power several mages.

•••• A major Node, hotly contested.

••••• A powerful Node, one of the few sites of magic left on Earth.

Resources

"You can't keep living this way, Jamie," Boyde commented. He started to lean on the table, but it wobbled so badly he almost stumbled. "Christ!" Brushing his hands off, he shook his head.

"I've got a job interview," Jamie replied. He, in turn, eyed the diamond in Boyde's ear, the gold tie-tack, the silk tie. "Tomorrow. Down at Bateman's."

"Bateman's? That's good." Boyde stood in the center of the room. "You own a suit?"

Jamie shook his head, "No. I figured I'd just go down to the laundromat, wash my jeans, maybe my blue shirt." His confusion showed on his face as Boyde reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He stared in amazement as the other man put five one-hundred-dollar bills on the table. Never in his life had he even seen one of those.

"Get a suit," Boyde said, sliding the calf's leather back into his pocket.

Even mages must eat. This Trait represents the financial assets and income your character starts out with at character creation. It describes your character's standard of living and helps to determine what kind of property she owns. If your character has no dots in *Resources*, she has the clothes on her back, a few belongings and a small amount of spending cash. She may have to live with someone else and she doesn't have a job. Work with your Storyteller to decide where your character's income and assets come from, what kinds of property she owns and what she will have to do to maintain her standard of living.

Any mage can make a little money with some clever magic, but such feats tend to attract the unwanted notice of other mages, especially the Technocratic Syndicate. For beginners, it's usually easiest and safest just to have a "real" source of income.

X Flat busted: No job, no money, no prospects.

• Small savings, tiny apartment, cheap vehicle, can liquidate $1000, monthly income of $500.

•• Middle class, apartment or condo, sturdy vehicle, can liquidate $8000, monthly income of $1200.

••• Large savings, small house, mid-sized vehicle, can liquidate $50,000, monthly income of $3000.

•••• Well-off, large house, luxury vehicle, can liquidate $500,000, monthly income of $9000.

••••• Rich, mansion, limousine, can liquidate $5,000,000, monthly income of $30,000.

Wonder

Though normally self-reliant, Lee Ann wouldn't pass up a little help when offered. She hadn't counted on running afoul of... critters... at the soup kitchens, so she wasn't totally prepared for the rotting, zombie-like birds that had swooped down to drive away all comers. People were depending on that place, and flighty as some people might call her, Lee Ann did her part to help her community. She just needed a little magical hand, herself.

Digging through her duffel bag while crouching behind a stairwell, Lee Ann wrapped her hands carefully around an aged statue depicting Kali. Some would consider the goddess an ill omen, but Lee Ann knew better — besides, the simple object had a power of its own, if you knew how to tap it. Heaving a deep sigh, she let its ambient energies flood into her, filling her with a sense of enormity, of cyclical beginning and endings. Then, letting the talisman guide her consciousness, she cast out with its power to set the dead back into their natural place....

Wonders are objects like Talismans and Technocratic Devices that have power and that produce magical Effects (usually when wielded by an Awakened being, such as a mage). Although they are rare, a few lucky mages have objects that carry their own power; legend holds that Masters can even manufacture their own. For the most part, only an Awakened being can use a Wonder, although your Storyteller may make exceptions to this rule. Your Storyteller may also limit the number and/ or power of the Wonders that she will allow into the game.

Any item can be a Wonder if it has somehow been imbued with magic. Tree branches, mechanical devices, jewelry, wands, bones, and stones can all suffice as magical items.

When triggered, Wonders produce magical Effects just like mages do. Each Wonder has a special purpose. A Wonder's Effect comes from one of the magical Spheres, and you determine with your Storyteller exactly what occurs each time that your character triggers the item. Sometimes, it may misfire or the Effect may not turn out exactly as your character intended, but for the most part, your character has an idea of what to expect.

When creating a Wonder, you also determine what exactly each of its Effects does. You base these effects on the magical Spheres. You may choose the Sphere that represents the Effect, but the Effect is limited to a Sphere level equal to the level of the Wonder. Note that the level in this Background does not correspond directly to the level of the Wonder possessed. A Wonder is rated by the power of its Spheres, but the level of this Background simply indicates a general categorization of the Wonder's powers.

A Wonder may have an Arete rating that allows the holder to use the Wonder's score when rolling for its Effects, and it may store its own Quintessence. (Some Wonders, called Periapts, are little more than Quintessence batteries.) Others simply have one magical Effect that's always on, or that works automatically when called.

Spirit Wonders, called fetishes, may work differently in story terms, but you purchase them the same way. These objects contain spirits who have, either by force or by choice, entered into the items and who perform a service. Some of these spirits have strong personalities, and they may cause the wielder some frustration and trouble, depending on how the mage treats the spirit. When your character uses up all the Quintessence in a fetish, the spirit departs. Your character cannot refuel a fetish, though your mage might undertake a quest or deal with a spirit to try to keep a fetish empowered.

Many mages use Wonders as foci. Although doing so may not make the magic coincidental, it usually helps the mage to focus. Any Paradox triggered by a Wonder's Effect goes directly to the item itself, possibly destroying it.

As always, the Storyteller has final say on the potencies and potentials of any Wonder.

X You haven't run across any magical items.

• A Wonder with a trivial Effect, or a small stash of Quintessence.

•• A Wonder with a useful Effect, or a reasonable battery of Quintessence.

••• A Wonder with a reasonably handy Effect, or a large supply of Quintessence.

•••• A Wonder with a very useful or commonly used Effect, or a generous helping of Quintessence.

••••• A Wonder with an associated potent Effect, or a legendary power source.

Arete

Many have will, many have vision and many have purpose. Only an Awakened few, though, have true Arete — the intuitive awareness of the universal ebb and flow, the channel for will through which the mage understands and directs the Tapestry. Once Awakened, a mage forever sees the universe through altered eyes. Arete is a measure of that understanding and mystic will. It is through Arete that the mage grasps the Patterns of the Tellurian and bends them in conjunction with his will and belief.

Not all mages have Arete. Sorcerers who practice static paths of wizardry invoke simple effects through their rigorous efforts. Only with Arete, though, can a mage truly reach the full power of dynamic magic. The Avatar stirs and the mage's Arete binds her mundane understanding with her mystic self to allow her to change the universe.

Awakening may come slowly or quickly, but once a mage finally Awakens, she often experiences a sudden flash of insight — the character gains an Arete of one to three dots. Further development of this enlightened state comes only with long effort and introspection. The mage must strive to understand the Tellurian, to delve into her innermost being and to overcome her flaws. Experience is part of the process of developing Arete, but an ephemeral wisdom is more important. By strengthening her resolve, unlocking sublime mysteries and passing through the gates of Seeking, the mage refines and improves her Arete until her magical will radiates like a shining beacon pointing toward Ascension.

Every mage has a personalized view of Arete. Some mages, like most of the Order of Hermes, try to quantify Arete as a base knowledge of mystic principles. More subtle magicians quantify Arete as a sort of harmony, the placid stillness of an internal self. Arete could be seen as the connection of the soul to the cosmos, or as the bond to the very powers of life. In truth, Arete is all these things. It transcends any simple categorization or limitation, for it is the enlightenment that surpasses the human mind.

Arete also serves to measure a mage's raw mystical power. While understanding of the Spheres is necessary to actually cause directed change, the depth to which a mage can study the Spheres and the breadth of her magical power stems from her Arete. A highly enlightened mage can discover more complex universal structures and turn reality on its head with greater force. Through a powerful understanding of herself, the mage reflects great change.

X	Sleeper
•	Unschooled
••	Talented
•••	Novice
••••	Disciplined
•••••	Commanding
••••• •	Aware
••••• ••	Understanding
••••• •••	Wise
••••• ••••	Enlightened
••••• •••••	Transcendent

Game Effects of Arete

• Arete measures pure magical strength. Almost all rolls for magical feats use the mage's Arete as the dice pool.

• Truly great understanding allows a mage to overcome her dependence on props and foci. A mage with a high enough Arete rating — six or more dots — comes to understand that it is his will that moves the universe, not his dependence on a particular form of magic. Once a mage's Arete rating reaches six, he no longer needs to use foci for one of his Spheres. For each additional point of Arete gained, the mage may discard the requirement of foci for two more Spheres. Of course, the mage may choose to continue using foci, and doing so can be helpful. Furthermore, the mage must come to some personal realization of this; the knowledge does not spring unbidden into the mage's mind. (Storytellers may alter this rate to suit their whims, though.)

• A mage's practical understanding of the universe can never exceed her abstract, theoretical level of enlightenment. Thus, no Sphere rating can ever exceed the mage's normal Arete rating.

• A mage's ability to work magic stems from willpower as much as belief and comprehension. Thus, Arete cannot exceed the mage's permanent Willpower rating. If the mage's permanent Willpower rating drops, his higher levels of Arete and Spheres become inaccessible. He retains his mystic understanding, but he cannot exert the will to use it.

Willpower

When the weight of the world seems too much and only the most monumental, heroic effort can possibly triumph against adversity, the true hero draws upon the last shreds of inner resolve to prevail. Even the common man has a point at which his spirit stirs to fight. When a mother fights to save a child, when a soldier makes a final effort to defend his companions, when a magician must overcome the cares of living to invoke real magic, that's when the character summons the reserves of Willpower.

The Willpower Trait measures confidence, drive and resolve. A character with a high Willpower rating is steady and self-assured; one with low Willpower has limited self-control and determination. Willpower normally runs anywhere from one to 10, but it has two ratings: a permanent rating and a temporary pool. When rolling against a character's Willpower, use the permanent rating; when using Willpower to perform feats, spend temporary points from the Willpower pool. Points get crossed off from and restored to the pool, but the permanent rating usually stays constant. The temporary pool can rise until it equals the permanent rating, so a character with a high Willpower rating not only has a stronger will when rolling to resist certain effects, but he also has more reserves of inner strength.

When calling on Willpower, a character makes a determined effort to finish some task or overcome extreme adversity. Such an expenditure usually costs one point from the Willpower pool. Over the course of play, the Willpower pool may be diminished or refreshed. A character who runs out of Willpower is in dire straits indeed. He's tired out, exhausted and unable to muster any more spirit. A character's resolve may return slowly, but he just can't rouse himself to give a damn in the meantime.

Because mages literally wrap reality around their desires through force of enlightened will, they tend to have strong Willpower ratings. Most mages start with a permanent Willpower rating of five or more. Sleepers, by contrast, can range anywhere in the scale of one to 10, though an average of three is usual, and extremes are quite rare.

X	Spineless
•	Weak
••	Timid
•••	Unassertive
••••	Diffident
•••••	Certain
••••• •	Confident
••••• ••	Determined
••••• •••	Controlled
••••• ••••	Iron-willed
••••• •••••	Unshakable

Using Willpower

• By spending a Willpower point, a mage can get an automatic success on an action. He can use only one point per turn this way, though an extended action over several turns could benefit from multiple expenditures. Such a success adds directly to the roll, without counting against any of the dice. Obviously,

such an expenditure also prevents the possibility of a botch. Use of Willpower in this fashion must be declared before the action is actually taken, but the use is then considered reflexive.

• Willpower can be used in resistance against Mind magic, usually against difficulty 6. Successes scored on such a roll subtract from the successes of the Mind Effect. Note that resistance may not be possible or automatic in some cases (at Storyteller discretion). Supernatural entities gain this resistance at no cost, but normal mortals must spend a point of Willpower to exert this defense.

• A point of Willpower is sufficient to banish a hobgoblin or Quiet-induced hallucination for a scene. You must roll Willpower (se p. 201) to do so successfully; otherwise the Willpower point is expended to no avail. If successful, the phenomenon goes away, and the mage asserts command of his senses for a short time. This expenditure also burns out a point of Paradox, if the mage still holds any. Only one point per day may be used in this fashion.

• When faced with an overwhelming urge or compulsion — "You flee in horror from the Umbral monstrosity," or "The wiles of the succubus draw you closer against your better judgment" — you may expend a Willpower point to override the compulsion and act normally. Your mage musters enough self-control to assert himself in the face of a monstrous urge. Should the source continue, though, you may need to spend additional Willpower over successive turns, just to keep control. If you ignore a situation and call for your mage to do something in the face of an overwhelming reaction, the Storyteller may require you to spend a point of Willpower even if you do not specifically ask to do so. Although you [the player] may be rather blasé about the prospect of your mage's confrontation with an Umbral monstrosity, your character is much less certain about the outcome!

• Spending a point of Willpower allows a mage to ignore all penalties from wounds and injury, up to but not including total incapacitation, for one turn. The character struggles to put out a last-ditch effort. This expenditure lets the character perform one action without dice pool penalties, or move at full speed in spite of injuries.

Losing Willpower

Because mages set the force of their will against the weight of reality itself, it's inevitable that the mage will come out worse for wear occasionally. Besides magical compulsion and attacks, people can also be subject to humiliation, exhaustion and torture that sap their will. With enough trauma, anyone can be broken — his mind snapped like a twig under too much pressure.

Loss of permanent Willpower is rare — it takes a concerted effort to strip away the ego and lay bare the mind. Repairing such damage requires time and a great deal of effort, as the subject must overcome the hideous emotional scars. Thus, characters lose permanent Willpower only if the Storyteller judges that they've undergone trials terrible enough to break them in mind and spirit. Such lost Willpower can only be recovered through roleplaying and experience.

As guidelines, characters might lose permanent Willpower when:

• Suffering a terrible mental shock, such as a Mind attack, an emotional upheaval or some other disaster, while at a Willpower pool of one or zero;

• Undergoing prolonged torture, brainwashing, conditioning or some personal hell;

• Failing a Seeking disastrously, getting stuck in a severe Quiet or Paradox Realm for an extended period of time, or losing a powerful magical bond like a familiar.

Regaining Willpower

Over time, confidence returns and mental fortitude rebuilds. A character who's had a chance to rest and regain her strength can refresh her Willpower. Many other events can return Willpower to the character's pool as well, up to the limit of the character's Willpower rating. Raising the Willpower rating permanently comes only with experience.

• At the end of a story (*not* a single session), the characters regain all of their Willpower as long as they manage to achieve some significant goal. The characters don't need to do everything they set out to do, but as long as they held their own and got a few licks in, they regain some measure of confidence. After a nasty failure, the characters might not regain all of their Willpower, although making such a decree is a particularly vicious way to end an already harsh story.

• At the Storyteller's option, a character may regain one Willpower point each time she gets a full night's sleep and starts a new day (or whatever; some of those Virtual Adept hackers keep pretty weird schedules). Refreshed and ready to face the new day, the character gets a small measure of return. This reward shouldn't apply to characters under a great deal of stress, captive in a hostile environment or otherwise under duress.

• A character who manages to pull off a particularly heroic or spectacular stunt may regain a point of Willpower as a result of this success, at the Storyteller's option. The character's phenomenal feat restores a measure of her confidence.

• Through roleplaying your character's Nature, you may enable her to regain one or two points of Willpower. Although the Nature is just a convenient handle to help you get a basic idea of the character, it lies at the core of many of her motives. Therefore, when your character manages to act out her inner drives, she reaffirms her place in the world. This award should be given only if the Storyteller feels that the player has roleplayed the character's process of self-expression and discovery successfully, not just for randomly wandering about and performing trivial tasks that somehow relate to the character's Nature.

• The *Destiny* Background can allow your mage to regain some Willpower, simply by drawing upon the knowledge that she's destined for better things. Once per story, you can roll your character's *Destiny* rating against a difficulty of 8. Each success refreshes one Willpower point in her pool.

QUINTESSENCE

As the archetype of all things, Quintessence forms the Patterns of reality. Prime Force can be channeled into magic, directed in defense, used to fuel potent attacks and turned into new Patterns of creation.

Prime energy is tracked on the 20-box Quintessence/ Paradox wheel. As the mage gains Quintessence, it fills up the boxes clockwise from the starting dot. As the mage spends Quintessence, these points are erased from the wheel. A mage starts with Quintessence points equal to his *Avatar* rating. Further Quintessence is gained from Nodes, Tass or even from the universal pool, if the mage is powerful and knowledgeable enough.

Quintessence has many quirks, but it tends to obey certain rules:

• A mage can never channel more Quintessence in a turn than his *Avatar* rating. Thus, a mage with an *Avatar* of 3 dots can channel only three Quintessence in a turn, from any source. This limit applies to refueling his Pattern, casting Effects, creating new Patterns, working countermagic or striking with a Primal attack.

• Quintessence does make working magic easier. As the mage reinforces his spell with the power of reality, it bends the cosmos more smoothly. Each Tradition has its own views on what, exactly, Quintessence is and why it serves as a power source like this. The upshot is that each point of Quintessence channeled into an Effect lowers the Effect's difficulty by one point, to a maximum net difficulty modifier of three — so you can cancel some penalties and perhaps lower the difficulty by as much as three points.

• Quintessence can be stored in a mage's Pattern or spent directly into an Effect. Drawing Quintessence out of a Node requires a rudimentary knowledge of Prime (one dot); using Tass requires a high degree of proficiency in Prime (three dots); Masters of Prime (five dots) can draw Quintessence from the universal pool itself, with a vulgar Effect. Any drawing of Quintessence tends to be noticeable, however. Winds surge, lights flicker and the mage glows with a palpable aura as the raw power of creation flows through the area.

• Although Quintessence is invisible to those without Prime 1, its effects often manifest in some form, simply because of its raw power. Channeled Quintessence makes things seem more "real" and "solid," and it almost always enhances Resonance to a noticeable level. Beings with the Awareness Talent can usually sense the channeling of Quintessence (difficulty 6 to 10, depending on the nature of the channeling), but they may not realize immediately what it is.

• Any magic that pulls on large amounts of Quintessence — five or more points in a turn, or 10 or more points overall — is automatically vulgar and noticeable. The monumental energies released thus cause pyrotechnic displays, ripples in space-time and auroras of power.

• Quintessence can be stored directly in a mage's Pattern, held by her Avatar. Such "personal Quintessence" cannot be pulled away from the mage or used against her will. This amount

equals the mage's *Avatar* rating. This personal Quintessence can also be refreshed simply through meditation at a Node. The power of the mage's Avatar draws the Node's energy into itself, even if the mage is unfamiliar with Prime magic. A simple Perception + Meditation roll (difficulty 7) refreshes the mage's Quintessence after an hour of meditation at a Node, one point per success, up to the limit of the mage's Avatar rating or the Node's power supply. Any power beyond the mage's personal power (*Avatar* rating) must come by drawing from another source, using Prime magic.

• Under the right circumstances, Quintessence can counter Paradox (see Prime 5) or fight against other mages' magic (see "Countermagic" on p. 154).

Paradox

The bane of magicians, Paradox strikes all mages at some point in their careers. As the mage twists the universe to his whims, the universe bends back and strikes change on the mage in return. As with Quintessence and Resonance, full details on Paradox and systems are handled in Chapter Four.

Paradox tracks on the same wheel as Quintessence, but it proceeds counter-clockwise from the opposite side of the starting dot. Usually, large quantities of Paradox will burn off in startling ways or explode, but it's possible for a mage to gather a significant amount of Paradox and Quintessence at the same time. However, Paradox always wins out. If the mage has too much Paradox, it prevents her from storing further Quintessence, and additional Paradox removes Quintessence as it's gained. The more that a mage screws with reality, the less that he can hold the power of Creation in his hands, until he's paid the price.

• Each time a mage calls on vulgar magic, he garners *at least* one point of Paradox.

• Attempting magic and failing badly (botching) can indicate that a spell has gone awry, which also incurs Paradox.

• Often, Paradox rebounds and twists a mage's Effects in some unexpected fashion. Sometimes, though, Paradox waits, an almost palpable distortion in the mage's Pattern. Such Paradox energy, tracked on the Quintessence/ Paradox wheel, could explode out in a spectacular display any time the mage garners additional Paradox, or it might just stack up. There's no telling when Paradox will behave in a given fashion.

• A mage who holds Paradox energy can bleed it off slowly. For each week of relatively mundane existence — that is, each full week in which the mage does not garner any additional Paradox — one point dissipates as the mage's Pattern "unbends" and settles back into reality. Such is true even if the mage isn't involved in "normal" places and actions, as long as he manages to avoid any additional Paradox. However, once the mage has over 10 points of Paradox, this escape no longer works. The mage's Pattern is so twisted up with Backlash energy that something's got to give sooner or later. A mage who manages to store all the way up to 20 Paradox may enter a permanent Quiet, vanish completely from reality or explode in some spectacular fashion, at the Storyteller's discretion.

• Mages with too much Paradox energy can sometimes pick up permanent Paradox Flaws, manifestations of change that rebound to alter the mage in question permanently. These flaws could be physical, mental or supernatural Effects. A mage might suffer a withered hand, a constant buzzing noise or a luminous glow about his head. Such changes become part and parcel of the mage, and they are as difficult to remove or alter as changing any other fundamental aspect of the mage.

• Mages who hold a large quantity of Paradox tend to draw attention. People, always sensitive to the fact that mages "just aren't right," are even more nervous around beings who hold the pent-up seizures of reality. Although few beings other than mages recognize the feeling of Paradox, most creatures instinctively fear such forces and are wary of a mage with too much Paradox.

Resonance

As a mage creates magical Effects, she invests them with her own wills, desires and drives. Naturally, the results reflect such strong emotions as the mage imprints her own vision of reality over the cosmos. Each mage has a few Resonance Traits, a set of adjectives that describe the sorts of Resonance that the mage normally builds. A mage normally starts with one dot in one Resonance Trait: a Dynamic Trait, an Entropic Trait or a Static Trait. Through further actions, the mage may develop additional Traits of the different sorts or garner additional dots.

During character creation, you need to select the Resonance characteristics for each Trait. Your character's Dynamic Resonance might be Energetic, Violent or Fiery; Entropic Resonance could be Destructive, Languorous or Seething; Static Resonance might manifest as Accurate, Geometric or Smothering. These Traits describe how your character's magic tends to change according to her emotions. Every magical Effect that the mage does is affected in some way by Resonance; the more dots the mage has in a Trait, the stronger its manifestation.

Dynamic Resonance reflects the pure creative force of the universe, the drive to make new and different things, action without thought to consequences and continuous motion and evolution. Such Resonance Traits are fast, moving and mutating, though the Trait itself tends to stay the same for any given mage.

Entropic Resonance reflects the mage's tie to primordial energy, the bubbling morass that melts Creation back down into fluid emptiness and makes room for new birth. Entropic Traits show decay, destruction and death, though not always in

a wholly negative way. Jhor is a special kind of Entropic Resonance, garnered from too much interaction with death energy (see Chapter Four).

Static Resonance shows up in patterns, constants and the solidification of Creation into permanent or semi-permanent forms and repeatable ideas. Such Traits are often intellectual, heavily patterned or highly organized.

X	Negligible Resonance
•	Quirky
••	Odd
•••	Noticeable
••••	Influential
•••••	Overwhelming

• Each dot in a Resonance Trait indicates a certain level of Resonance that appears in the mage's magic. With high levels of Resonance, the mage is likely to have every Effect twisted in a noticeable way to reflect his personal Resonance. A mage with low levels of Resonance might show only subtle changes, and he might not manifest any noticeable Resonance in very small Effects.

• Resonance is traceable to those who know what to look for. A mage can often determine if a particular Resonance fits a certain mage's style. With a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty of 10 minus the Resonance score), a mage can determine the type of Resonance present in an Effect if it's not otherwise immediately noticeable. ("Aha! My old nemesis Dr. Lugan always used Vindictive magic, and this Effect fits his style perfectly.")

• A mage who builds an Effect that works with her Resonance often finds it easier to work such magic. A mage with the Fiery Dynamic Resonance has an easier time with fire magic, a mage with the Static Resonance of Perspicacious is better with insightful Mind magic and so on. This effect translates as a reduction in difficulty (by one) to Effects that play on the mage's specific Resonance, *as long as the player describes a specific way to make the spell use his Resonance Trait*. It's not enough just to say "I have Static Resonance for Thinking so I get a bonus on all Mind Effects." The player must make some part of the Effect reflect the appropriate Resonance deliberately.

• A mage's Resonance usually changes only when she's heavily influenced by strong magical powers. This change can occur during a Seeking, after botching an Effect in a spectacular fashion or when visiting a strange Horizon Realm.

Health

Given that mages are on the run not only from the Technocracy, but often from fearful mortals, magical monsters and each other, magicians have a nasty tendency to get banged up, shot, stabbed, scraped, burned, dropped from a height, folded, spindled and mutilated. The Health Trait tracks the effects of such injury and applies the necessary penalties to a mage who's trying to fight while his body's falling apart.

Basic characters have seven health levels, shown on the character record. Each time the mage takes damage, he loses one or more of these health levels until magic or rest restores it. As the mage becomes more and more wounded, he suffers increasing penalties to movement and actions, reflected by penalties to her dice pools. Should a penalty remove the mage's dice pool completely, she can't even attempt the action in question — she's too badly wounded to try. Even experts have problems when they've got leaky holes in their torsos.

Arete rolls are an exception to die penalties. The power to work enlightened magic is exempt from the injuries of the body. However, a mage who is Incapacitated or otherwise knocked unconscious cannot work magic at all (barring the use of some bizarre Mind Effects).

See Chapter Eight for specifics on damage, but keep in mind:

- Bashing damage, marked with a "/", represents battering and bruising. It heals quickly, and it is usually nonfatal. Mages can often "roll with the punch" and absorb some amount of such damage.
- Lethal damage, marked with an "X", comes from stabs, slices, crushes, avulsions and other nasty and often-fatal attacks, including many forms of magic. Mages, as mortals, aren't terribly resistant to such damage, but they can heal it with magic.
- Aggravated damage, marked with an "*", shows up when a mage suffers supernatural Pattern damage, like a Prime attack or injury from fire or extreme trauma. Such attacks not only tear apart the mage's body, but they are extremely difficult to heal with magic.

Experience

Living is a process of growing and learning. As they seek enlightenment and magical power, mages delve into self-discovery just as much as, if not more than, anyone else. From the revelations of everyday life or magical practice, mages improve themselves and hope to move toward Ascension — or, at least, toward surviving another day. Experience reflects the tangible rewards of such growth.

Although mages can and do learn many things that aren't modeled directly in the game system, some Traits can be developed to new levels of usefulness. The experience system allows you to improve your mage in areas like her Abilities and Spheres. Delving into the mage's personality and learning about her place in the world, in terms not reflected by Traits, is a job solely for you, though.

At the conclusion of each story (or part of a story for long sessions), the Storyteller may award experience points. These points go toward developing better or new capabilities. Players can track these points on their character records and then use them between stories. Of course, experience points are not mandatory; the Storyteller doesn't *have* to award them. On the other hand, who wants to come back to the table if the characters aren't going anywhere or learning from their mistakes?

However, although experience points can be used for many improvements, the Storyteller *always* gets to step in and determine what's appropriate. A player cannot decide that his mage simply gains more Arete just by spending experience; nothing's that simple. Instead, the player may suggest improvements in his character, and the Storyteller determines whether the character truly would have improved in such areas. The Storyteller decides when the character has learned enough, fought and suffered enough to develop. This limit isn't a mandate to keep characters from improving, but rather a requirement that you as a player must make sure that your character acts and works in a manner consistent with the improvements of experience.

In no case should a character's Trait improve by more than one dot in a session (or between sessions, unless there's a particularly long time between games). It takes a lot of work to show real improvement, especially in difficult endeavors like magic.

New Traits

Mages studying to gain new Traits, like a new skill or Sphere, should have an appropriate teacher. In some cases, this teacher could be another player's character; in others, a mentor or library might be appropriate. As always, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of what qualifies for such teachings.

As talented as they are, mages don't pick up new capabilities overnight. Learning a new trick can take some time, both for student and teacher. A student who's interrupted constantly might have to spend Willpower to justify the purchase of a new ability, or he may simply fail to grasp it. Conversely, a character who goes out of his way to try new things in the course of a story may find it easier to develop those nascent skills.

New Abilities are simple to develop as long as the mage gets some practice, often with an instructor or a good set of books. This developmental period takes anywhere from a couple of days to a few months, depending on the Ability. Learning to navigate Windows is probably marginally easier than learning Cantonese if you're an English speaker, after all.

New Spheres, on the other hand, are difficult propositions at best. A mage must undertake quite a bit of study, often with a more advanced member of his own Tradition, in order to unlock Spheres that he hasn't yet learned. A mage might be able to garner some insights from members of other Traditions, but their practices are so far apart that it can be hard to turn such knowledge into tangible lessons. Unlucky mages or loners may have no choice but to study through practice or through old books. In such cases, it may take months or years for the mage to develop the most rudimentary proficiency in a Sphere. As always, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of when a mage can develop a Sphere.

Awarding Experience Points

Experience awards are great incentive for the players, but they are also a balancing act. Too much experience will cause the mages to progress rapidly through any problem, becoming invincible demigods. Too little experience will make sure that the mages never develop; the players will feel hampered by the stagnation of the characters. The Storyteller must balance these extremes to find a happy level of experience that lets the players improve their characters, but keeps them hungering for more.

Experience awards should come at the end of a game session or story. Thus, it's easier to track them and to have an opportunity to gather around and discuss experience expenditures.

End of Each Chapter

A chapter is a part of a story, often told in one session, or even with several chapters to a session. Chapters are natural breaks, so it's good to award a couple of points here.

One Point — Automatic: Each mage learns in spite of herself and gains a little experience just for surviving.

One Point — Learning Curve: For those mages who truly learned something shocking, inspiring or new, award an additional point to reflect the new vistas opening in their minds. The player should explain what the mage has grasped.

One Point — Roleplaying: A player who went above and beyond the call of normal roleplaying to portray a particular role, especially delving into the quirks and hindrances of the character, may gain a bonus point as a reward for enhancing everyone's game experience. The standards for such a reward should get successively higher!

One Point — Heroism: A player whose character bravely and selflessly puts life and enlightenment on the line may come out stronger from the experience. That which does not kill us, is worth extra experience points.

Experience Costs

Trait	Cost
New Ability	3
New Sphere	10
Willpower	new rating
Ability	new rating x2
Attribute	new rating x4
Specialty Sphere	new rating x7
Other Sphere	new rating x8
Arete	new rating x8
Background	new rating x3

End of the Story

A story concludes after several chapters and game sessions. At the close of the story, award a few extra points to those characters that made it all the way from beginning to end, on top of the reward for the last chapter.

One Point — Success: If the characters achieved all or at least some of their goals, they should get a point for advancing their agendas and carrying out their tasks successfully.

One Point — Danger: If the story was particularly harrowing and the characters were forced to stay on their toes constantly, they may learn quicker just by surviving.

One Point — Wisdom: If a player came up with a brilliant plan that saved the day in mid-story, adapted to the circumstances, adjusted for a new and clever use of the characters' capabilities or just plain rocked, give a bonus point to that character for sudden insight.

Of course, the Storyteller can always award more or less points, as dictated by the needs of the chronicle and the group.

Grain
POINT TO

"But how do you do it?" Michael asked, frustrated, as he paced back and forth across the room. "I mean, I can see the effect. But I still don't understand how."

Walter leaned back in his chair and scrutinized his new student, smiling at they young man's need to know. "It is through force of will that I do it. I think in a certain way, move my awareness in a certain way and it happens. Observe." Walter held out his hand and explained in a soft voice as he went. "First I envision my desire — that there is a small lick of flame in my hand. It does not have to be a perfect vision, just enough to focus upon. Once I have done that, I say the proper words, recite the formulae. The rituals focus that will and give form to the vision. I *push* with my will to create the strength; the ritual casts that strength into the form of my vision."

Michael blinked at the small flash — there, in Walter's hand, flickered a small, dancing blue flame. Looking up at Walter's face, Michael furrowed his brow, then looked back at the small fire.

"So what makes it happen? All of that? I mean that the power comes from with in us. Not just from words and formulas, right?" Michael asked, seeming a little confused.

"Yes..." Walter hesitantly replied. "The power comes from within; the effect comes from the will." Walter closed his hand and opened it again, banishing the flame. "But we need ways to let us access it. The words, gestures and symbols are tools to help us achieve the effect desired. They are all important components. Your supermarket cashier does not have the enlightened will and could no more perform this trick than could a dog or, for that matter, a slime mold."

Michael finally sat in his chair. Silence hung in the air for a short while. Finally, Michael returned his gaze to Walter. "Is all that necessary? The envisioning, words, formulas. If the power comes from the will, can't it simply *be*?" Michael slowly extended his arm, opened his hand and held it out, staring at it with concentration. Sweat beaded upon his brow and poured down his face, concentration etched on his features. In the eternity of a moment he grimaces and a small red flame flashed for a moment in his palm. "Like that?" he wearily, yet triumphantly, declared.

Walter closed his eyes and brought his hands up to massage his temples. That same headache that always came with teaching promising students was returning. When he spoke it was in a very tired voice: "Yes, I suppose that is another way to do it."

Chapter Four: The Spheres

Magic defines the existence of mages. But what is it? To some, magic is power; it's the ability to make things happen. To others, it's wisdom, the enlightenment that comes with internal fulfillment. Some practice magic as an external force shaped by procedure and ritual, while others consider it the energy that flows from inside the magician.

Magic is all of these things and more. It's a dynamic force of change, whether that change tears down the old, strengthens the new or creates the wonderful. Through strength of will, belief in practiced forms and an enlightened consciousness that speaks to the Tellurian, mages reweave the Tapestry itself.

The magic used by mages steps past the boundaries of lesser tricks and supernatural phenomena. Many sorcerers and their ilk find themselves constrained to specific ritual formulae and particular repeatable "spells." An Awakened mage has no such limits, instead forming his own approach to magic as tempered by the teachings of history and heritage. Although a mage's power is not infinite, it is infinitely diverse. The styles of each Tradition (and Convention, and Craft...) give a mage tools to push and pull at the fabric of reality. What the mage does with those tools is limited only by the mage's functional knowledge (the Spheres), enlightened awareness of the universe (Arete), particular belief in a style of magic (paradigm) and by the force with which reality changes the mage who brings change too forcefully (Paradox).

There are no "spell lists" or "magic points" to which mages must adhere. A mage's power stems from her own inner awareness and will, and so the mage can work magic limited only by that strength. Potentially, every mage could create nearly any Effect; your own imagination fuels the infinite combinations of Spheres.

It's up to each player and Storyteller to work with the combinations of power that the magic of the Spheres provides. A potent mage can literally reweave the skein of reality to her whims, and an unwise or impulsive magician may wield magic that crushes the very life and resistance from his adversaries and trials (and from the story itself). Telling a story about magic isn't an exercise in showing off the powers of wizardry; it's a group effort that everyone should enjoy. The powers of **Mage** thus bow, ultimately, to the imaginations of Storyteller and player alike, and to the desire to tell an entertaining story.

The Ways of Creation

Nothing defines a mage so readily as his ability to wield the reality-bending power of magic. It is this power to impose his own view of reality onto consensual reality that forever sets the mage apart from the ruck and run of Sleeper society. By concentrating his Awakened will, a mage can alter the nature of reality as easily as the average Sleeper might alter her home's temperature by adjusting the thermostat. Still, the modern mage is very unlikely to transform his enemies into swine, divide the sea or blot out the noonday sun. The time of such extravagant displays of wizardry is long past.

Today's mage depends on subtlety, even more so since recent supernatural events have made the blatant use of magic much harder to perform. The wise willworker cloaks his magical Effects in coincidence and happenstance. The timely arrival of a taxi to whisk the mage away from trouble, the sudden collapse of a street into a sinkhole just before a nondescript black sedan rounds the corner and other similar occurrences are in no way implausible to the Sleepers who may view them. By avoiding alerting Sleepers with vulgar displays of magic, the mage lowers the risk of incurring Paradox substantially. By blending quietly into the world around him, the mage avoids the attention of suspicious mortals, hunters, other supernatural creatures and even the conflicting forces of the Tellurian itself.

A modern mage is not any less effective than his predecessors, however. The power to alter reality is an awesome one, even limited as that power has always been by the need to avoid Paradox. The feats performed by contemporary mages are of no less legendary stature than those achieved by the magi of the Mythic Ages merely because they are done surreptitiously. The fact that modern magicians are successful at all, given their countless enemies and hostile reality, makes their feats even more impressive. In a world overrun with science and technology, the existence of a subtle magic is a potent feat in itself.

Types of Magic

Magic cannot exist without the mundane. As counterpart to that which is common, magic gains definition through its touch of the strange. Such mysterious powers and supernatural phenomena exist outside the everyday world of the common man, the perception of "normal," consensual reality. Using magic, the Awakened impose their desires onto reality, changing the world to match their whims. Yet were there not a rigidly defined static reality, there would be no subject on which to work the magician's will. There can be no Awakening unless someone first slumbers.

Most people accept the limitations of static reality. Feeling that they exert no control over their destiny, these folk take what is handed to them by the cosmos. These, then, are the Sleepers who make up the vast majority of humankind. Of these, a small number realize that reality's laws are not as binding as most believe. They find that it is possible for them to exert certain magical powers within reality's restrictions through elaborate ritual and perseverance. Through ancient practices and rites, they draw out natural power inherent to the Tellurian and shape it in small, stealthy forms. These people can stretch reality's dictates through their castings, but they have no control over that reality itself. They have mastered what is sometimes termed static magic.

It is a deeper understanding of the relationship between himself and the cosmos that distinguishes the Awakened mage from a skilled, but un-Awakened, sorcerer. Mages are those few people who realize that they are not defined by reality, but rather, they define reality. These people are the ones who have Awakened fully to magic's potential and may, through enlightened will and belief in their vision, work changes on reality itself.

Awakened Magic

Put simply, Awakened magic is the ability to reshape reality through force of will. There are *theoretically* no limits to what may be accomplished magically, beyond those limits that exist within the mage himself. Theoretically, a practitioner could make the seas boil, raise mountains and cause a barren desert to erupt with foliage, but in practice, the high cost in Paradox and the major investment in time and effort would almost certainly preclude any such thing. The power of the Awakened mage does not require that any specific rite or ritual be performed, though most mages still use and believe in the efficacy of such trappings. All that is truly required is a combination of sufficient knowledge and determination to forge reality into the mage's desire. With the proper understanding of reality's diverse elements (which are divided by mages into nine Spheres of knowledge) combined with a sufficient strength of will and belief in his own ability to do so, very little lies beyond the willworker's power.

Several schools of though exist concerning the origin of this ability to produce and wield Awakened magic. Some mages maintain that they are merely a conduit for a power greater than themselves. They maintain that, through their Avatars, they connect directly to Prime, the Pure Ones or some other higher power. Through their Avatars' connection, the mages channel the energies of Awakened magic and remake reality.

Others believe that the power of Awakened magic is inherent to all Awakened beings. They contend that each Avatar is composed of a shard of Prime given form by the Pure Ones and anchored to the flesh-and-blood mage. Proponents of this theory believe that all one needs to work Awakened magic is the faith to believe that it exists, the bravery to embrace the divine within oneself and the will necessary to force one's own paradigm onto static reality.

A number of other theories exist, but whichever of these beliefs is the correct one (assuming that there is one single answer) is of little practical consequence. What matters is that the mage may alter reality at will, forever setting him apart from his Sleeper brethren.

Static Magic

Unlike the blatant displays of Awakened magic, static magic or sorcery conforms to the consensual reality of the World of Darkness. This is not to say that static magic in any way corresponds to scientifically accepted dogma, of course.

Still, the collective unconscious of humankind accepts at some level that certain unexplainable phenomena are possible. The proliferation of 1-900 psychic lines and strip-mall soothsayers shows that many Sleepers put their faith in abilities that are best defined as "magic." Even young children's make-believe relates to both the protective rituals and curses of static magic ("Hide under the covers and the monsters can't get you." "Step on a crack, break your mother's back."), instinctively recognizing its powers. History supports the rituals handed down for thousands of years, and in the ancient legends told by grandparents to awed children, a simple magic survives.

The psychics, mediums and sorcerers (called "hedge wizards" in times past) who use static magic must follow very strict rules to achieve very specific results. What they can and cannot do with their abilities conform to clearly delineated paths. While nowhere near as powerful and versatile as the Awakened mages' command of the Spheres, the sorcerers' Paths work without recourse to actually twisting the Tellurian through an Awakened Avatar. Thus, sorcerers avoid the worst of Paradox. Some mages theorize that the powers exhibited by other supernatural beings (like werewolves and vampires) are merely further examples of static magic at work.

The type of ritual used to create the magical Effect doesn't matter as long as it's a ritual that has real power. A psychic's reading of the tarot and a vitki's casting of runes may both give insight on the future, but no sorcerer could simply throw together a random collection of occult mumbo-jumbo and hope to achieve a result. It is the user's belief in his ritual, his consistent use of it and the adherence to the still-viable forms that matters. Similarly, individual rituals must be used to perform each separate magical function. A houngan, for instance, will not use the same spell to bless one individual and to curse another.

There is an upper limit to what may be done using static magic. A hedge wizard may make minor alterations to reality, but he cannot approach the fundamental restructuring possible to the Awakened mage. Even the strongest-willed, most driven sorceress is unable to circumvent this limitation. Only by Awakening may she ever experience such power. Still, sorcery and psychic powers are nothing at which to scoff. Many sorcerers can achieve potent Effects as long as they're careful to conceal their workings from unbelieving eyes. Since they work with rituals that don't rely on recasting the universe in their own image, such sorcerers even avoid the dread bane of Paradox.

Interestingly enough, Awakened mages never use petty sorcery (despite the fact that some Traditions, most notably the Order of Hermes, groom prospective apprentices by schooling them in such magic). The Awakened mage reshapes reality on a fundamental level, while the static magician operates without actually tearing and twisting the Tapestry's threads. Once a mage Awakens, his power flows from his ability to reshape himself and his Avatar to bend the cosmos in turn. Although the Awakened mage can perform some quiet, static Effects that mimic sorcery, his power is far greater, and the consequences are concomitantly severe. Similarly, the hedge magician cannot begin to comprehend, much less wield, the reality-altering magic of the Awakened willworker.

What You Don't Know....

Although sorcery, hedge magic, psychic phenomena and such terms refer to a different, simpler, ritualistic or path-based form of magic in game terms, the typical mage makes no distinction between this and Awakened magic. As noted before, the sorcerer waves his hands and chants in a mystic language; the Awakened mage does the same. Both achieve a magical result. Where's the difference?

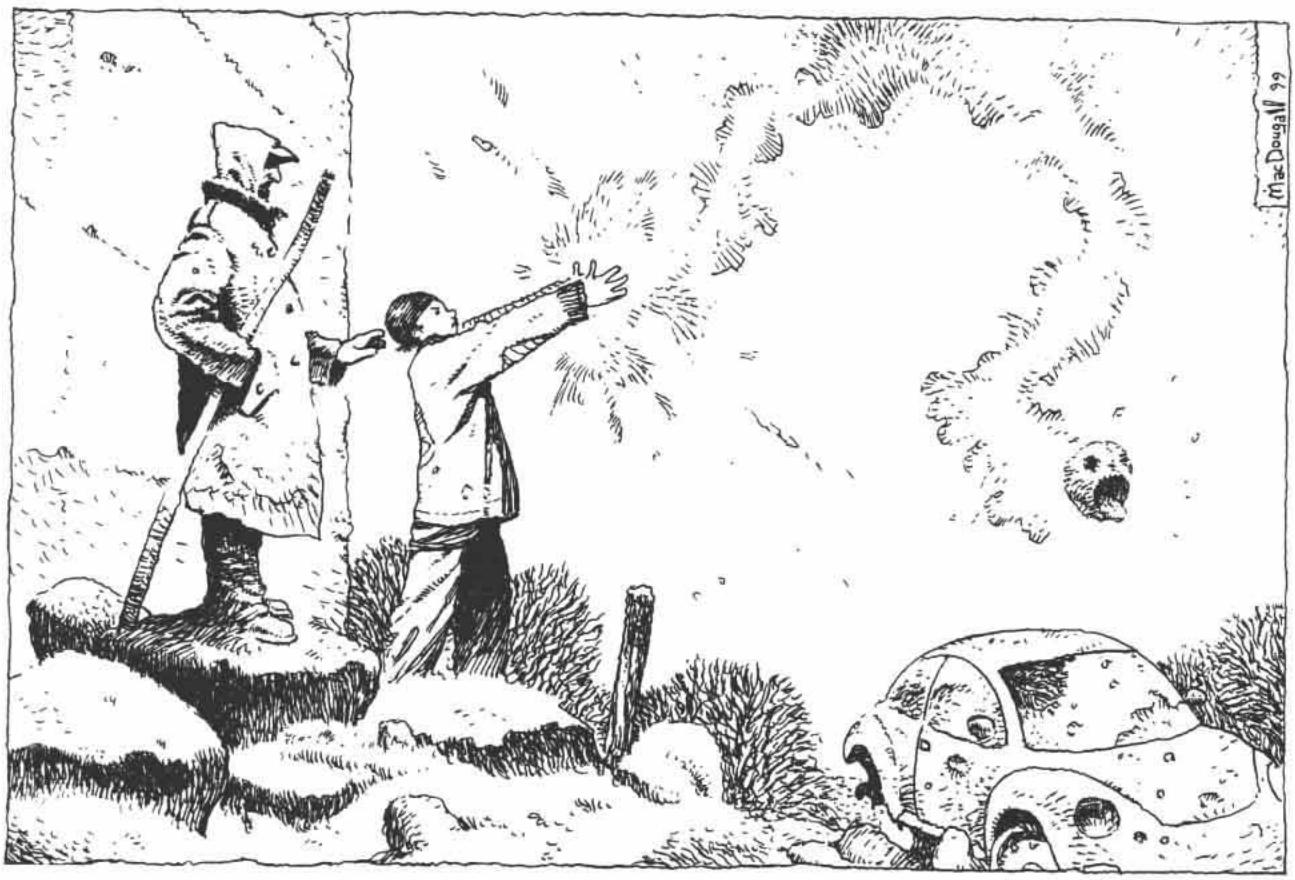
Certainly, there's a distinction between the two groups, and some few mages who study Avatars, Essences and Prime intensely learn to scrutinize this sort of separation. For most, though, magic is magic, be it done by someone who's opened his eyes and Awakened, or someone who does it through rote and practice. Most of the Effects that sorcerers perform would be static Effects for Awakened mages anyway, and in cases where a sorcerer tries to perform a really outlandish feat, it simply fails. Paradox may only strike those with the audacity to twist the Tapestry to their ends, but a sorcerer is not inherently better or worse than an Awakened mage. Ultimately, only his means of magical practice differ.

It's interesting to note that the forms of magic handed down by sorcerers often mimic the rituals used by the Awakened. Indeed, Awakened mages still hold dear their own history and cultures, using the beliefs of their people to form their magic. The magician adheres to the proper forms and speaks the secret words, and magic results — who can tell the difference between Awakened and Sleeper mage? Although the Awakened mage refolds the universe in his image, the sorcerer's quietly inherent powers are just as magical.

In the past, Awakened mages and sorcerers sometimes squabbled over issues of power and dynamism. Although mages and sorcerers share techniques and achieve similar results, the Awakened mage has experienced an enlightenment that the simple sorcerer has not, and he has opened his eyes to a larger world. Conversely, as people set apart from normal humanity by the shared bond of magic, magicians, wizards and visionaries of all stripes have also found common cause to work together at times. Indeed, few mages make the distinction between Awakened magic and sorcery. Few would even know the difference.

The Limits of Awakened Magic

Since the close of the Mythic Ages, the restrictions imposed by material reality have come to hamper the castings of the willworker greatly. It has been said wistfully that the first mages had no fear of Paradox, as no single consensual reality yet existed. Whether such a beatific age ever truly existed is unknown, though certainly such an open and free world of magic is a dream for many mages. In the ages since, the unchecked population growth of humankind conspired with the advent of mass communication to unite the planet, creating a truly global society and, thereby, a global reality too. Whereas



humanity first existed in only isolated pockets whose mercurial belief systems allowed for great displays of magical power, today's worldwide sharing of beliefs in what is and is not possible serve to shackle modern workings of the Art.

Vulgar Magic

Vulgar magic, also known as dynamic magic, occurs as the result of a mage forcing reality to conform to his preconceived expectations. Using dynamic magic, a mage may let lightning fly from his fingertips or transform his enemies into glass. During the time of the Renaissance, such magic was referred to as "vain," an accurate description even today, as only a mage of monumental hubris would dare such Effects except under the greatest duress. Such reckless castings rend the Tapestry of reality and invite the not-so-tender consequences of such changes.

No logical explanation exists for vulgar magic. To Sleepers who may view it, its Effects are patently impossible. Truly amazing results are possible, but only at terrible risk to the mage employing dynamic magic. Static reality abhors vulgar magic and any mage who uses it. The mage who uses such magic *will* pay the price, in Resonance if not in Paradox.

The smart mage uses vulgar magic only when the stakes are life and death. Think of dynamic magic as the tactical nuke of Awakened society. It is dangerous and messy, and it has far-reaching consequences. Those mages who use such power frivolously don't remain a problem for long.

Coincidental Magic

Coincidental magic is the only choice for mages planning on sticking around for any length of time. By couching magical Effects in chance occurrences, the mage operates in plain sight with potential Sleeper witnesses none the wiser. Such castings are referred to as static magic, as they, like the powers of the sorcerer, work within the confines of static reality. If, for example, a mage experiences financial problems (a common problem for magicians who draw the attention of the Syndicate), it might be possible for her to conjure the money she needs from thin air. Of course, there is no way that static reality will accept such an occurrence as natural. However, a much less dangerous and equally expedient solution might be to return that Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes letter that's on the kitchen table... and guess who the Prize Patrol pays a visit to just before the IRS seizes her assets! Static reality, and the Sleepers responsible for it, would find such a turn of events extraordinarily lucky — but in no way magical.

Think of coincidental magic like water flowing downhill; it will flow around obstacles to reach bottom. In much the same way, magic follows the path of least resistance to reach an appropriate resolution if it is not forced to conform to specific shapes and results. The mage shapes a particular desire and empowers it, but he lets the cosmos determine the specific Effect. Confronted with an enemy, a mage might focus his will and hatred, manipulating the flow of Forces around him to await a convenient trigger event like the eruption of a faulty gas pipeline.

Less believable coincidences make magic more difficult, as reality can stretch only so much to accommodate a mage's whims. Also, the more "accidents" that occur, the more their overall probability is strained, which can lead to what's referred to as the "Domino Effect." When an inventive mage uses static magic sparingly, however, she can find a way to perform her Effects coincidentally, and she will find that static reality is much less likely to rebel against these subtle alterations. By shrouding magic in incidents that Sleepers find believable, if lucky, the mage finds that her casting is accepted by humanity's collective unconscious.

Awakening

It is the act of Awakening that opens the doors of perception through which the new mage peers at the magical world. The mage looks at the world with new eyes — eyes no longer clouded by sleep. New truths about the nature of reality are revealed to her, while long-held preconceptions shatter. The newly Awakened mage struggles to make sense of this barrage of new sensations. Those without a strong sense of self and a powerful will sometimes remain overwhelmed by these impressions, unable to decipher or control them. In a world where reality is shaped by perception, who can determine whether an individual is insane or simply seeing a different cosmos?

Awakenings can happen at any time in life. There's no single moment of crisis where every individual goes through a question of magic; the eye-opening may strike in childhood, youth, adulthood or elder age. The majority of mages trace their first moments to the experiences of their early adult life. Awakenings seldom occur in childhood, though it does happen occasionally. Parents satisfy the needs of most children abundantly, leaving them so comfortable with the status quo that they don't have the impetus necessary to Awaken. Awakenings are similarly uncommon among the elderly. Older people, unlike some of the more youthful members of society, have usually discovered something in life on which to focus their attention. Whether it is building a career, raising a family or even drinking themselves numb, they have found some function in life that makes them feel complete and binds them forever to static reality's comforting familiarity in the process. Even those without such sense of purpose have already discovered a comfortable, familiar niche from which they have little reason to explore. Young adulthood, however, is the time in a person's life where he begins searching for the purpose and meaning to his life. In rare instances, this search leads the seeker to Awaken.

Awakenings are typically triggered by traumatic, life-altering events, although there are exceptions. The Awakening often coincides with a need on the mage's part, often a drive to overcome some problem insurmountable through conventional means. When the chips are down and there is nowhere else to turn, the mage rises to the challenge, stirring his fitfully slumbering Avatar to wakefulness and empowering himself. Even if the nascent mage denies this power, her new awareness shapes the universe to her will, sometimes with drastic and unpredictable effects.

Of course, many mages would dearly love to discover a means of reliably Awakening others, but no such method is known. Would-be mentors keep a close watch on people with strong wills and unusual lives, while erudite magicians try to teach their ways to hopeful novices. None are guaranteed this Awakening. Enlightenment strikes where it will.

Once a mage Awakens, there is no going back to sleep. The truth of reality's subjectivity is laid bare, and the neophyte mage has no choice but to struggle forward in an attempt to understand what's happened. Although he may want to return to his old way of life, events conspire to make that course of action impossible. Family and friends both will notice a change in the budding mage. These people may well slumber, but they are far from dead. The mage's newfound Avatar and awareness positively radiate "otherness" to those most familiar with the Sleeper he once was, as the two conspire subtly to alter reality at the mage's subconscious urging. Though he may be able to salvage some of these relationships, Awakening will invariably cost the mage most human contact, as even old friends find it disturbing and dangerous to be associated with him. Even complete strangers tend to give this "weirdo" a wide berth. The caress of magic, even when not readily visible, leaves its distinct mark on the magician. Humans instinctively notice and fear this aura, so a mage must either be careful to hide his magic very well or turn to other mages for companionship.

While daunting, the problems of alienation and uncontrolled power are merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg. He soon comes to realize that there is much more to the world than he ever imagined. Spirits, werewolves, vampires, sorcerers and more become not only things whose existence he must acknowledge but, often, things with which he must talk, fight and, on occasion, ally with. His very existence leads to him being courted by a myriad of Tradition factions, all starved for allies. The Technocracy will want to either assimilate the mage or eliminate him. The responsibilities intrinsic to being one of those on the front lines, protecting an unknowing world from dangerous reality deviants, leaves room for no other options. Everybody wants a piece of the magic, and the novice mage may not even know what it is.

The only option is to change or die. If he's going to survive, a new mage must learn what he is and what he is capable of. Others, a mentor or cabal perhaps, may show the newly Awakened mage the path that he must take, but it's up to him to take the first step. Only by accepting his new state will the mage be able to progress toward enlightenment and Ascension. (More detailed information on Awakening may be found in **Initiates of the Art**.)

Avatar

Within every Awakened mage dwell two distinct spirits or sides: her Avatar and her mortal self. The two parts interact with one another in many ways, developing a complex dynamic that may be akin to that occurring between teacher and student, boon companions or even adversaries. Whatever form this relationship takes, its eventual goal is to bring about the mage's Ascension.

It is the Avatar's function to cajole, coerce or drag the mage kicking and screaming into enlightenment. Mages with more powerful Avatars will be prodded into action more often than their less mystically endowed compatriots. Though few of their fellows

would envy the constant goading these mages must endure from their pushy Avatars, they do, in fact, enjoy an advantage over their colleagues. The constant hounding serves to push such mages to excel. They are more prepared to endure the trials and tests demanded of them during Seekings, and consequently, they often find enlightenment more easily than their more relaxed brethren, becoming wise beyond their years quickly.

Another property of the Avatar is the ability to grant its possessor insight into her past lives. The Avatar is the part of the willworker that is eternal. Within its depths lie the experiences of all of its former earthly incarnations. Some mages learn to access this wellspring of knowledge and apply its teachings to their advantage in the present.

In times past, a large number of Avatars appeared to their mages as distinct, tangible entities. Whether it appeared as an angel or djinn, god or hero, the mage was capable of conversing with the Avatar, coming to blows with it or treating it as material friend or foe. In more modern times, it's become much more rare for an Avatar to manifest itself physically to a mage. In fact, in the aftermath of the Reckoning, such an event has become downright unusual. Nowadays, the Avatar communicates through more subtle means, such as in dreams or flashes of intuition. The time of corporeal materialization is past.

As they do about most issues, mages disagree about whether it is the Avatar that allows one to wield magic or whether it is one's own innate magic that allows one to sense the presence of the Avatar. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Sleeper's higher self must Awaken before she becomes capable of exploiting the full potential of magic.

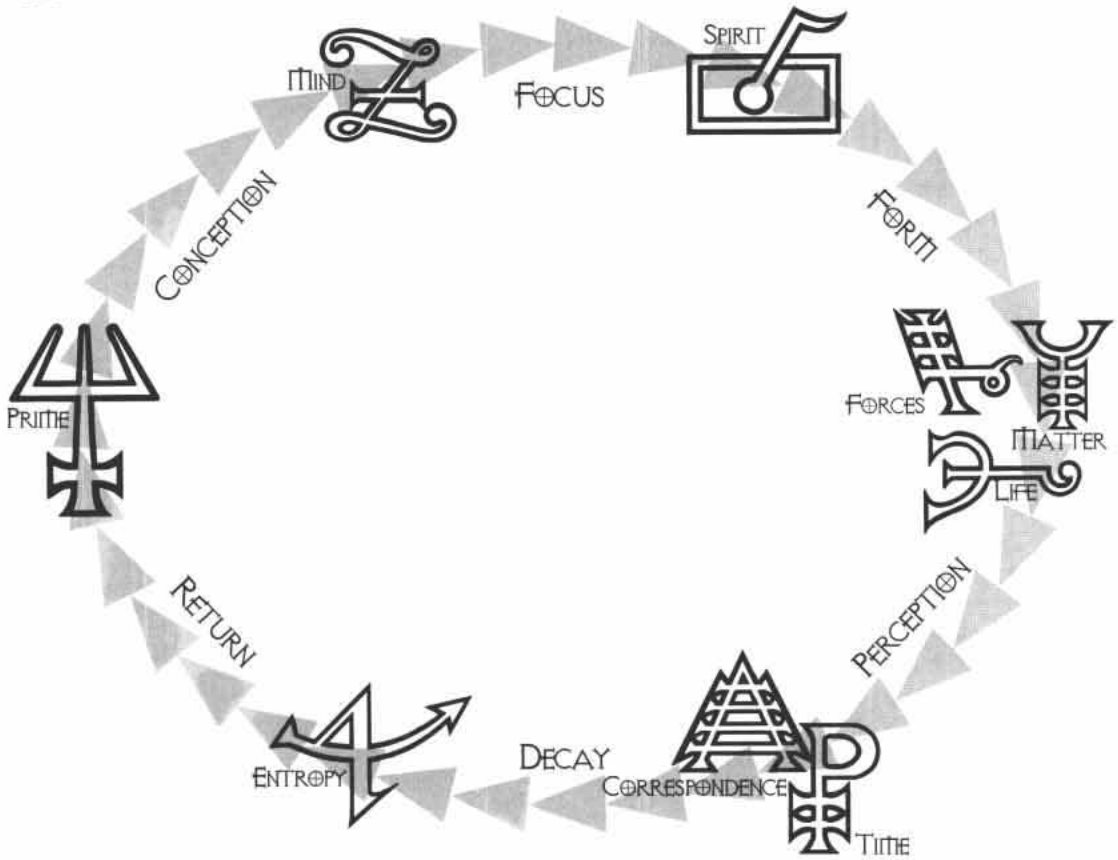
Arete

Arete is a measure of a mage's enlightened will. Some amount of Arete is required to perform any Awakened Magic. A mage's Avatar is a measure of her understanding of the cosmos on an intuitive level. This intuitive awareness may come to a mage slowly or in a sudden burst of insight. Often, a great deal of Arete is acquired during a mages Awakening. Thereafter, progression becomes much more laborious, commonly involving Seekings. A mage with more Arete may plumb the mysteries of the cosmos (be they magical or mundane) with greater ease.

The Nine Spheres

To make his desires a reality, a mage needs more than just willpower. He also needs a profound grasp of the underlying elements of the cosmos. Long ago, the predecessors of today's magical practitioners divided these component elements into nine Spheres of Knowledge to ease the daunting task of studying the nature of reality. A mage facilitates his understanding by focusing on the individual aspect of reality that each Sphere represents, rather than trying to take in and affect reality as a whole. Although each Tradition is biased towards one favored Sphere as a group, any individual mage may study any Sphere.

Despite the vastly different ways in which the various Traditions interpret the Spheres (frequently using completely different sets of symbology and premises), the basic principle remains the same. First, a thing is *conceived*, beginning as an abstract idea of



Prime which finds focus in the Mind and receives substance through the Spirit, leading to a Pattern gleaned from the Spheres of Forces, Life and Matter. This form is then *perceived* through its interaction with Correspondence and Time before succumbing to Entropy so that the whole process might start anew.

The Spheres are:

• **Correspondence:** All points in space are one. Command of this Sphere allows a mage to transcend the constraints of space and distance.

• **Entropy:** Things fall apart. The Wheel turns on its inexorable course, destroying what exists to make way for new growth. This Sphere encompasses both fortune and destruction.

• **Forces:** This Sphere provides its students command over the fundamental forces of the universe. Electromagnetism, fire, gravity, kinetic energy and nuclear power all are within its purview.

• **Life:** The biology of all life forms (from simple viruses to the complexity of the human body) fall under this Sphere's control. Biological functions may be sped up, slowed down or even completely rewritten at the whim of the mage who masters the Sphere.

• **Matter:** This Sphere encompasses the study of material, inorganic patterns. Everything from simple analyses of chemical composition to the transmutation of base metals into gold is possible using the magic of Matter.

• **Mind:** The study of sentience, perhaps even separate from the biological brain, is the goal of this Sphere. It allows the mage to plumb the depths of his own consciousness and unlock the powers within.

• **Prime:** This Sphere covers the study of Quintessence, the raw stuff of Awakened Magic. Mages trained in this Sphere understand and manipulate creation at its most basic, learning to detect, absorb and alter this mysterious Fifth Essence.

• **Spirit:** Knowledge of the Umbra and its inhabitants comes from studying this Sphere. The mage who commands its power may converse with spirits and travel to their realms (albeit with difficulty).

• **Time:** This Sphere promulgates the subjectivity of time. Using it, a mage may manipulate the perception and passage of time for himself and others.

These rather arbitrary divisions of reality are by no means accepted by all. (Some Tradition mages suspect that it was originally posited by the Order of Reason.) Regardless, the division of the nine Spheres remains a useful model by which mages may communicate the components of their Art.

A Tenth Sphere?

Some mages theorize that there exists an undiscovered tenth Sphere in addition to the aforementioned nine. It is believed that this missing Sphere will unite the other nine and illuminate the true path to Ascension. Despite the fact that most mages discount this theory, each Tradition has its own preferred "pet Sphere," which often stands in the way of any inter-Tradition cooperation on the discovery of and outlining of said Sphere. Even the Technocracy has its Unified Field Theory.

A hypothesis that disturbs a number of mages is the idea that the final unification of the Spheres may be the road to

stasis, or even entropy. These willworkers feel that this possibility is to be ignored at the already beleaguered Traditions' peril.

The Paths

Unlike the extraordinarily flexible, Paradox-provoking, Spheres used by Awakened Mages to fuel their magic, sorcerers subscribe to highly predictable, but reality-friendly, Paths. Paths are very appropriate names for the sorcerers' Arts, they are all well defined and able to wind through static reality, never leaving or disrupting it. While they lack the raw power of Awakened magic, sorcerers may use the magic of their Paths without much fear of Paradox as long as they are careful. By operating within the bounds of static reality, sorcerers effectively operate beneath Paradox's radar. While it is outside the scope of this book to outline the Paths of magic, players interested in building such characters are directed to **Sorcerer** for more complete information.

Technomagic

No self-respecting Technocrat appreciates having his work disparaged as "magic," although that's essentially what it is. To an Enlightened Scientist, all he is doing is applying advanced scientific principles to solve the problems at hand. He researches and proves each of these principles methodically, then disperses it to Enlightened and un-Enlightened audiences through scientific journals and the mass media. This method insinuates such "breakthroughs" into the collective unconscious of humanity, thereby rendering them coincidental to static reality. To confuse the results of the scientific method with the superstitious claptrap practiced by the Traditions does the Technocrats' work a disservice.

Technocrats typically refer to their Effects as procedures. A few mavericks from the Void Engineers and the Progenitors refer to their procedures as "spells" or "psionics," but the other Technocrats are accustomed to the odd behavior evinced by agents of these two Conventions. Semantics notwithstanding, it is important to note that while Technocratic operatives may reshape reality at will just as any other mage, such feats are only possible through the use of advanced science. No agent may just furrow his brow and will something to happen. It is only the application of scientific principles appropriate to his paradigm that *allows* something to happen.

All technomagic works through the judicious use of apparatuses. The most common sorts are hypertech gadgets, though cybernetics, drugs, genetic enhancements and advanced training facilitate many procedures. Devices, the Technocracy's equivalent of Talismans, are capable of many potent Effects not yet available to static reality. Unlike other forms of Wonders, Devices may be used by both Awakened agents and un-Enlightened technicians who have received training in advanced scientific theory. Such Devices have a tendency to fail in the hands of the un-Enlightened on occasion, but their utility is still a tremendous advantage over the Traditions.

The Spheres of the Technocracy

Like the Traditions they oppose, Enlightened scientists divide "magic" into nine formal spheres of influence (which are not capitalized in Technocratic jargon). By manipulating these elements, both Technocracy and Tradition mages achieve similar results.

Appropriately enough, it is the through the efforts of the Conventions that the spheres were first codified. To the Technocracy, each of the nine spheres represents a natural law, not some esoteric division of reality. Despite arguments on both sides, there is little fundamental difference between Tradition Spheres and Convention spheres of influence. A rote and a procedure designed to produce the same outcome will be made up of similar, or more likely identical, elements. The only difference lies in the methods the two willworkers use to prepare themselves, each according to his own paradigm.

The only exception to this rule is the Spirit Sphere, the study of which is known to the Conventions as "Dimensional Science." Viewed by the Technocrats as extremely dangerous, Dimensional Science remains little understood by the vast majority of agents. (Iteration X scientists were expressly forbid it, in fact.) Only the Void Engineers practice Dimensional Science on a regular basis, and they are monitored closely by the New World Order for any behavioral deviance resulting from possible contamination.

The Conventions frown on its agents using vulgar Effects. Only under conditions of complete isolation or extreme duress may such techniques be employed. Unveiling new technologies before the Masses are prepared to accept them can lead to both Paradox and discovery, both of which are unacceptable to the Technocratic Union. Similarly, Devices are not to be used where Sleeper witnesses might be encountered. Agents who persist with such behavior may find themselves punished by fines, revocation of equipment, detainment... or reeducation.

Techspatriates

The Technocracy doesn't hold a monopoly on technomagic. The Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts are both former Technocratic Conventions. Each uses procedures almost identical to those performed by its former brethren within the Technocracy, procedures replete with high-tech gadgets and rigorously researched theorems. Apparently, it is easier to take the group out of the Union than it is to take the Union out of the group.

The main difference between the Enlightened scientist and his Tradition counterparts is that he remains completely unaware of his use of magic. To him, what he's performing is science, pure and simple. If someone tried to tell the Technocrat that what he was really performing was technomancy, he would likely become incensed at the absurdity of the notion. He didn't study as long and hard as he has to have his work disparaged as some sort of superstitious hoodoo. The very idea of magic is foreign to his paradigm. The acceptance of such preposterous ideas by the Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts just serves to point out how far they have fallen. Unable to prove their pseudo-scientific claptrap logically, they've turned to calling it "magic." Pity, that.

The Metaphysic of Magic

All around the world, children are indoctrinated in a passive, scientific view of reality. They are taught to use the laws of nature to understand the world around them. They are told that, despite being a part of reality, they may in no way affect the world's natural laws. Often, such children balk at such talk, much like mages do. In their worlds, reality's "truths" change from moment to moment, as quickly as their ideas. They command armies of verdant plastic, build impregnable fortresses of bright Lego's and gain unparalleled speed with the acquisition of new shoes.

Children know something instinctively that their parents and teachers forgot long ago — they are capable of working their will on reality actively, even if it's a reality that consists mostly of action figures and comic books. Sadly, this innocent notion will soon be reasoned and rationalized out of existence, consigned to the occasional wistful daydream. Mages, on the other hand, return to these childhood concepts. To the Awakened, reality is subjective. Rather than building awareness and belief through the passive understanding of the world around them, mages know that belief and conscious desire create the world around them. This premise implies that humanity plays a more active part in the universe than Sleeper doctrine would lead one to believe. People, as intelligent individuals, are the cause, and reality is our effect.

Static Reality

After Awakening, and the corresponding realization that they may mold the world to their will, most neophyte mages ask their teachers (those who possess such mentors to ask, at any rate) why, given the limitless possibilities inherent to reality, they can't drag the moon from the sky for instance? Why can't they boil away the oceans? What's to keep them from transforming the Earth's atmosphere into glass?

The answer to these questions lies in the nature of reality itself. Static reality is a construct derived from the collective belief of humanity. Some apprentice mages misconstrue this idea to mean that every Sleeper is consciously projecting his or her own personal reality, and they wonder why the world isn't a chaotic jumble of overlapping realities vying constantly for dominance. Their mentors explain to these young proteges that, rather than being a hodgepodge of conflicting realities, existence is more like a shared hallucination formed through the agreement of a majority of humanity. As such, existence is sometimes referred to as consensual reality.

Only one reality may be extant at any one time in a given space. Static reality's constancy is backed by the faith of billions of Sleepers, each of whom bear within themselves an un-Awakened Avatar that works subconsciously to reinforce the status quo. Although such unfocused belief has little effect on the nature of reality individually, Sleepers exert a tremendously rigid stabilizing force through their aggregate beliefs. Whenever a mage attempts a magical Effect, she must overcome the combined will of humanity's collective unconscious. Defying this force is a feat of incredible difficulty for even the most puissant of mages.

As a strategy to overcome the strength of static reality, most mages (Tradition and Technocracy alike) attempt to disseminate their ideas into the cultural mainstream. This campaign serves the practical purpose of encouraging others to accept the tenets of their paradigm, in the process making it easier for them to impose their will on the world.

The Technocratic Orders have proved remarkably successful at using this tactic, employing a combination of the mass media, propaganda and psychology over the last 150 years to convince the

Historical Inertia and Cosmological Constants

Two additional forces contribute to static reality's resilience. Both hamper a mage's ability to affect the world around them, and they make her more fantastic castings patently impossible in many cases. These bulwarks of reality are referred to by a number of epithets in mage circles, but they are more properly known as historical inertia and cosmological constants.

Some things have been around for so long that they have both the weight of history and a huge expenditure of belief behind them, validating their existence. The historical inertia this belief generates makes any attempt to change or eliminate these items virtually impossible. For instance, a mage could not eliminate the ability of heavier-than-air vehicles to fly, as they have been part of the Sleeper belief system since the Wright brothers first took their flight. The sheer preponderance of belief in and use of airplanes dooms such a feat to failure. The Technocracy turns historical inertia to its own advantage expertly by rewriting history to give credence to patently false things. By doing so, it makes them true.

Cosmological constants, on the other hand, are things that have always been true and that can never be changed. No mage, no matter how powerful, can rebuild Quintessence into a totally different base of reality or change the gravitational constant of the universe. It also bodes ill to dabble with either the workings of the Metaphysic Trinity or the Curse of Caine. Although no one is sure why, certain fundamentals of the cosmos seem eternal. They seem to date back to the creation of the world itself, serving as the immutable keystones of reality. (What really counts as constant or not is up to the needs of the individual Storyteller.)

Certain mages, typically powerful Masters of the Art, become fed up with the restrictions placed on them by Sleeper belief. With time and effort, some of these mages create their own private Realms beyond the Horizon. In these Realms, theirs is the only consensus, and each of these Realms has its own set of cosmological constants. Despite their great power within such a place, these masters have lost the race to Ascension by denying true reality to dwell within a false one mirroring their selfish desires.

Masses that the technological paradigm is not only effective, but that scientific advancement is synonymous with the betterment of mankind. This occurrence is fairly recent. Prior to the last century, technological devices had a tendency to malfunction on a regular basis, showering their enlightened users with Paradox, despite the best efforts of the predecessors to the Sons of Ether and other like-minded Conventions. Over time, however, people came to believe more and more in the validity of science, and as they did, more "miracles of modern science" became possible under static reality. Soon it was possible for Sleepers to use various scientific contrivances as well as Awakened operators might. The process by which science became the dominant paradigm was a gradual one, but one that was highly effective. And it continues to be so in the present.

The Metaphysic Trinity

Sleepers can only comprehend a small fraction of reality's whole. If one attempts to take in the entire thing at once, it proves too much for the human mind to grasp. Mages, with the aid of their Awakened psyches, are able to understand a portion of reality correspondingly larger than that of Sleepers, but even they are forced to arrange and classify it for ease of study. The three fundamental elements of this categorization are Dynamism, Stasis, and Entropy. These three forces form a mystical model known in more esoteric circles as the Metaphysic Trinity of magic.

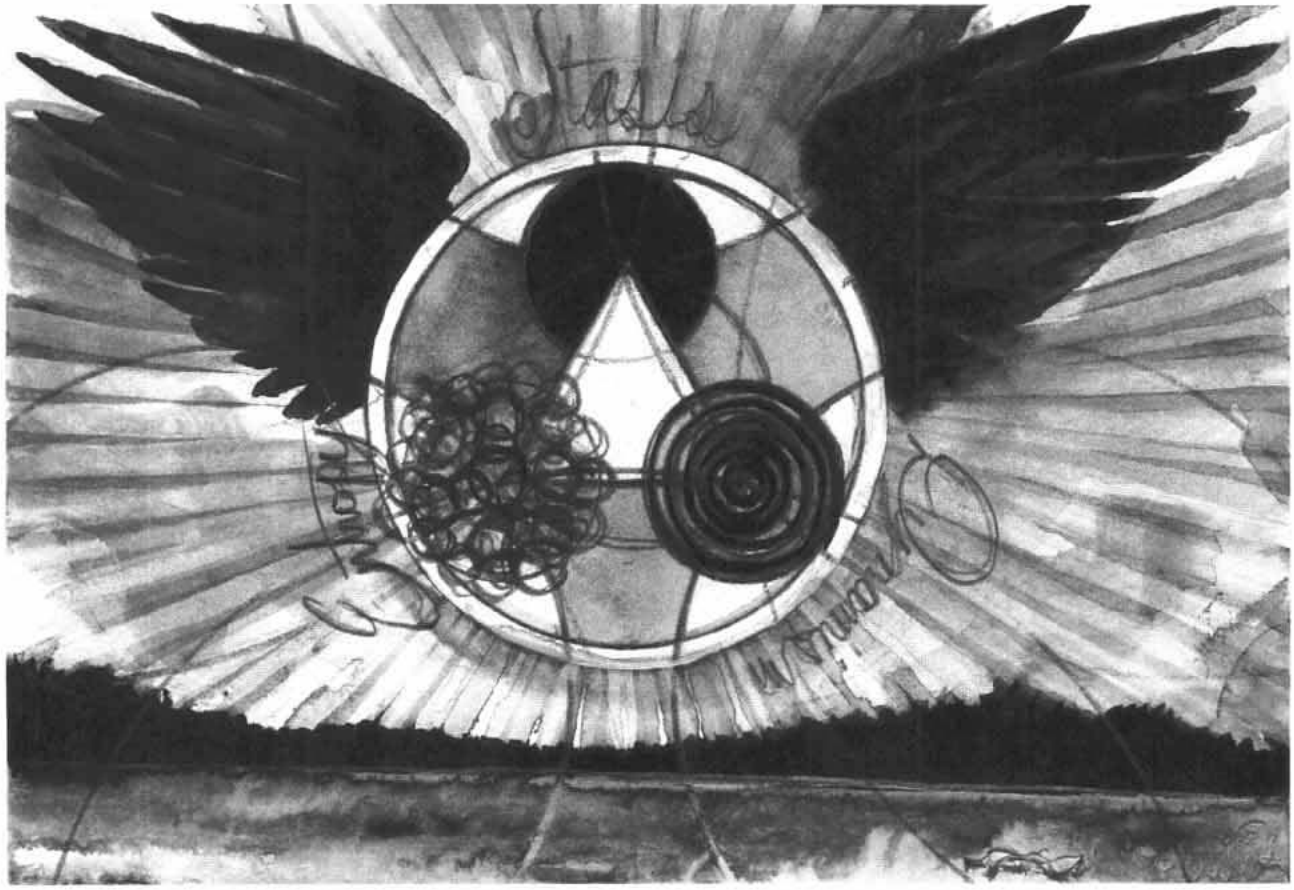
Dynamism

Dynamism represents creation, growth and change within the Metaphysic Trinity. It is both forward motion and the drive to adapt or die. Those who don't understand it view Dynamism as a force of totally random chance, a roiling storm of chaos. While it is an active force for change, it is not invariably random. Many Tradition mages mistakenly believe that the Technocracy is opposed to change. It is such misinformation that led to Technocracy agents being referred to as "static mages." As any agent of the Technocratic Union can tell you, the Technocracy is very much in favor of change, but it must be controlled change. There is a reason that periods of rapid technological advancements are referred to as "revolutions."

Lacking the force of Dynamism, the universe would fall into decay and dissolution. The need to change and adapt is an essential part of life. Such change may seem daunting, even frightening, but it must continue in order for the universe, and all within it, to grow and prosper. No one embodies this drive to change more than the Awakened mage. Through will alone, he alters the world around him. Every time he does so, be it subtly or dramatically, he affects the whole of reality, becoming a greater agent of change than he may realize.

Stasis

Stasis is the element that holds everything together, a sort of universal glue. Without the stability provided by this force, the universe would be an ever-shifting sea of conflicting realities, each overwhelming (and being overwhelmed by) the others. Such a state would preclude even an acknowledgment of the concept of self. Of course, an excess of Stasis has just the opposite effect, serving to calcify reality and make it more resistant to



change. Modern times have seen a gradual increase in this force's sway over reality. In ages past, Stasis was less dominant, and mages had a relatively easier time imposing their will onto reality.

As Stasis exerts a stronger grasp on Creation, reality continues to become ever more fixed and unyielding. Paradoxically, a great many Sleepers view Stasis' effect as a form of "progress" which affords them greater freedom and expanded possibilities. This belief is patently false. With each new "convenience" modern life affords them, Stasis gains a more secure hold over the minds of humanity, robbing them of their own inherent creativity.

Entropy

Entropy is both the alpha and the omega of existence. It is the state from which all things rise and to which all things return eventually, only to rise again. As such, it acts as a balancing force between the antithetical elements of dynamism and stasis, serving to keep the cycle of birth, death and rebirth in motion. Within the bounds of Entropy, Stasis and Dynamism reach a state of equilibrium that undoes both, rendering them unto the oblivion which Entropy ultimately represents. As the Euthanatoi point out, however, this oblivion is not so much an end as it is a new beginning. Entropy gives up what it has devoured to begin the cycle anew.

There appear to be two distinct cultural viewpoints on Entropy. Westerners fear it as a destructive force that leads to death and ruin. Westerners prefer to be able to separate reality's contents into distinct units. A man driving his car is an entirely separate entity, with nothing in common with his vehicle. However, in both animistic cultures and laboratories worldwide, the line distinguishing man and machine becomes blurred. In the East and in the tenets of both tribal shamans and quantum physicists worldwide, no distinction exists between the energy manifestation that forms the matter of the man and the matter that makes up his automobile. Both are merely eddies of energy within the infinite sea of space-time.

Each of these concepts of reality poses a danger when taken to its logical extremes. In the first view, there is the threat of Dynamism becoming fixed into a static matrix. In the second, given its less ossified view, Entropy erupts when borders blur into chaos.

Without Entropy, items that had outlived their usefulness would continue to exist in perpetuity. As it is, the items evanesce to rejoin the cycle anew. There is, however, a growing number of mages within the Traditions that suspect Entropy of transcending its prescribed limits, worrying at things not yet ready to rejoin the cycle. Whether or not this theory proves true remains to be seen, but few outside their own Tradition seem willing to accept the Euthanatos convictions to the contrary as unequivocally reliable.

Quintessence

Literally translating as the "fifth essence," Quintessence is the fundamental unit of all magic. All energy, matter, spirit and life, literally all things in the universe, are formed from Quintessence at the most basic level. This Prime Energy is neither material nor ephemeral and can never actually be grasped or sundered.

While it is accepted by mages universally that reality is formed of Quintessence, not even they can say with any degree of certainty exactly what it is. Most see it as an ever-changing pool of raw potential from which all things in the universe arise and return. This basic "bio-energy" often gathers at incidents of strong emotion and becomes colored by them thereafter. Mages were quick to grasp that their own Avatars were natural conduits of Quintessence and were, as a result, the easiest means by which to access this Prime force.

As each new thing comes into existence, it draws Quintessence from the endless pool. Similarly, when an old thing fades away, its Quintessence reenters the pool, where it may find use again. It is an understanding of this Great Cycle that is central to the beliefs of the Euthanatoi. Some of the death-mages (and a number of Nephandi) believe that if reality were ever to attain a state of pure entropy, the artificial frameworks imposed on it by humanity would cease to exist, revealing the unadulterated glory of raw Quintessence. Such talk does little to win them friends outside their own Tradition.

Tass

Tass is the concrete, physical expression of Quintessence. These bits of pure Prime can often be used to fuel a mage's magical undertakings. However, as it has already been mentioned, Quintessence is indivisible. This begs the question, "How then can raw Quintessence be captured in a base material form?" In the past, the Traditions' Masters might have spent hours haranguing their less experienced comrades with their own philosophical take on this conundrum. But, since recent events have placed the Masters' wisdom beyond the reach of younger mages, a simple illustration must suffice. If one is accustomed to thinking of the raw Quintessence as a pool, then think of Tass as Quintessence temporarily frozen like ice, floating on the surface of this larger sea. In time, this Tass will "melt," eventually flowing back into the infinite pool of Quintessence that first spawned it. Until it does however, Tass may be used by mages to lend power to their magic and to fuel their mystical Talismans.

Tass infuses the bodies of magical creatures — werewolves, faeries and the like — and it may be harvested from them. Needless to say, such creatures are less than happy to sacrifice themselves for a mage's convenience. More than a few mages have paid the ultimate price for such presumption.

It also collects in certain Nodes where energies gather in physical objects. Tass is sometimes affected by the form in which it manifests, unlike the pure Quintessence from which it springs. Quintessence stored in the waters of a holy spring may lend itself to healing, while that stored in the mushrooms of a faerie ring may cause the magic powered by them to have unpredictable side effects. A mage should be aware of this Resonance and use this resource accordingly.

For all intents and purposes, Tass is a finite resource. As a mage uses up the Tass that exists within a particular place or object, it disappears, returning to the pool of Quintessence from which it arose originally. Magical objects spent of the Tass that powered them are effectively useless until they are recharged at a Node or through another influx of Tass.

The Tapestry

The Tapestry is a metaphorical model used by mages to illustrate the workings of reality. Its fabric may be seen as a complex weave of physical, spiritual and intellectual elements.

All things that exist have their own unique pattern, formed from threads of Quintessence into energy, matter and life. These individual patterns are all just parts of the greater whole of the Tapestry. They interact with each other, together forming the things we perceive to be real.

Although very few mages can perceive individual patterns, everyone can view their interaction. For instance, each raindrop that falls is an example of the interaction of the patterns of water and gravity. The foundation of reality is magic, its forms a result of interwoven threads of Quintessence. Despite scientists' talk of molecular bonds and holy men's talk of the divine, it is Quintessence that furnishes the life energy that suffuses the Tapestry. Lacking that bio-energy, the threads would unravel. Most mages agree that the Tapestry embodies three distinct types of pattern-energy. These energy types are body, spirit and mind.

Body

The material world is the domain of the body. It is the realm of experience shared by Sleeper and Awakened mage. Tradition mages define the material realm and the wispy spirit-stuff immediately adjacent to it as the Tellurian (see Chapter One). The majority of willworkers contend that the raw "threads" of Quintessence which makes up the spirit realms coalesce into basic, easily comprehensible patterns that make up the physical Realms (of which there are many, not just the one experienced by Sleepers). Each of these material Realms, and the Near Umbral Realms surrounding them, are part of the Tellurian.

Spirit

Spirit is quite possibly the most basic component of magical reality. Wherever the raw stuff of Quintessence resolves itself into "threads," it becomes spirit. This substratum of reality is much too ephemeral for Sleepers to perceive and comprehend, at least consciously. Those conversant in the Spirit Sphere refer to this level of reality as the Umbra, or the Shadow. As the Umbra is the highest level of reality mortal man can experience, willworkers contend that it is, therefore, the "truest" form of reality that we can grasp. The material world, they argue, is merely an imperfect reflection of its spirit counterpart.

Mind

Of the three parts that make up the greater whole of the Tapestry, the least understood is that of the mind. Some mages argue that consciousness is not quantifiable, and that it may be a manifestation of raw Quintessence. Others believe that sentience formed as a reaction to the existence of the Tapestry. However, that very Tapestry cannot exist without minds to will it into being. This seeming paradox is a riddle equal to any Zen koan.

Belief...

Belief is central to all magic. Most mages realize theoretically that the limitations they ascribe to body, spirit and mind are untrue. They only exist because it is believed that they do. Mages impose their own boundaries on themselves. For years, static reality held that an unbreakable barrier prevented planes from flying faster than the speed of sound. Then, on October 14, 1947, pilot Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier in a Bell X-1 rocket plane. Once Yeager had broken the sound barrier, other pilots soon succeeded in matching and then surpassing his mark. Captain Yeager himself set a second record on December 12, 1953 when he flew two and a half times the speed of sound. Now there are commercial airplanes that fly faster than sound routinely. Chuck Yeager's belief and talent overcame a principle of static reality, thereby changing the world.

Willworkers accept that people's personal beliefs serve to mold their actions in many ways. Cases of hysterical blindness and psychosomatic illness are both examples of this concept. The power of belief goes much deeper, however. Belief often *becomes* reality. If a person truly believes in a specific concept, he is not likely to question that belief.

The majority of Sleepers cling to deeply ingrained beliefs as a source of comfort in the face of the unknown. Many times, even beliefs that prove harmful will become precious in their familiarity. If enough people come to believe in something, it will become part of static reality's established paradigm.

Consensual reality suffuses all human beings, Awakened and Sleeper alike. Beliefs structure this static reality, but static reality structures beliefs, also. Every participant in this vicious cycle affects all the others and, in the end, themselves as well. Mages, though, are able to ignore, or even fracture, static reality's paradigm outright.

Despite long-standing arguments to the contrary, most mages agree that a person's belief forms not only her particular paradigm but that of the larger Tapestry of consensual reality.

...and Paradigm

More than a mere style, paradigm is the defined essence of the mage's beliefs, and it has been described by some as the language through which the mage communicates his Art. The only things any mage absolutely needs to practice magic are the will to enforce his desire on reality, the knowledge of the appropriate Spheres and the paradigm through which to focus that desire and make it real.

Before any magical Effect can happen, it must first jibe with the casting mage's paradigm. A Verbena witch cannot just want her enemy to be struck down with ill fortune. She must cause this to happen in a way that is appropriate to her paradigm. Perhaps she performs a blood sacrifice and invokes the goddess Hecate to curse her foe. Because it is both within her knowledge of Entropy *and* appropriate to her paradigm, chances are the effects of the hex will come to pass. The same Verbena would be unable to transform a rampaging werewolf into a garden gnome because such an absurd belief is completely alien to her paradigm, regardless of Spheres.

One of the problems that has always frustrated attempts to foster cooperation between mages is that magical concepts are hard to translate between conflicting paradigms. In the past, Tradition mages have suggested that an artificial paradigm encompassing all the Traditions be established, but the idea has been met with a combination of angry words and howls of derisive laughter each time. Given that each mage's paradigm is tied so closely to his beliefs, it seems unlikely that such a "mystical Esperanto" would become any more popular than its linguistic counterpart.

Talismans, Devices, Fetishes, Familiars and Companions

Talismans are inanimate objects designed to produce specific magical Effects. During its creation, powerful magic is placed within the object to be powered by Quintessence also stored within the item. Some common items so enchanted are staves, rings, weapons and computers. Talismans require a great deal of time, knowledge, effort and artistic ability be expended on their manufacture. Each is unique and often quite powerful, a rare and wonderful treasure seldom seen in modern times. Mages of prodigious skill produce these Talismans to evoke a certain Effect when needed or to allow less talented mages to use magic that is currently beyond their ability to wield. In most cases, Talismans work properly only in the hands of the Awakened. Anyone else trying to use a Talisman wand, for instance, would be merely waving a twig around.

Devices are the Technocratic equivalent of the Tradition Talismans. These Devices are much more common than their mystical counterparts. Each of these scanners, vehicles and BFGs (Big Fucking Guns) "operates" thanks to technomagic theory, at a significantly higher technical level than its mundane equivalent. Although they always require special training to operate, Devices have a much higher success rate with Sleeper operators, since the technology jibes with consensual expectations.

Fetishes are objects employed by mages knowledgeable in spirit magic. Unlike Talismans, fetishes derive their power from spirits that are bound to them and forced to perform some limited service. Most have but one power, though certain exceptional ones may have two or even three. As fetishes are, in fact, spirits bound in matter for a period of indentured servitude, they often exhibit odd quirks if not outright resentment and hostility. Many willworkers believe them to be more trouble than they're worth.

Similar in some ways to fetishes, familiars are also spirit beings embodied in matter. In this case, however, the two parties make a bargain that benefits both mage and spirit. The mage gains access to the familiar's knowledge and supernatural abilities (including an impressive talent for nullifying Paradox), while offering the familiar companionship and Quintessence in return. With the recent strengthening of the Gauntlet, spirits who find it more difficult to interact with the material world are often more amenable to entering into familiar bonds with worthy mages. A familiar is not subservient to his mage, and he may look upon the mage as his own familiar! A familiar may have any form, ranging from mundane animals (such as the stereotypical black cat still popular among the Verbena) to much more unusual specimens (such as the golems produced by the Sons of Ether). Having an over-exotic familiar, however, is a recipe for trouble. The force of Unbelief is too strong for such patently fantastic creatures to survive on this side of the Horizon, and they sicken and die quickly when exposed to it. Conventional familiars, on the other

hand, are quite loyal and likely to remain allied to their mages for a very long time if they are treated properly.

Never wanting to be outdone, the Technocrats have their own companions. More rare among the Union than familiars are within the Traditions, companions are seeing a return to vogue among younger Technocrats. Although created via the scientific methods of hypertech or biotech, there is little to differentiate these beings from their counterparts among the Traditions. They too must be supplied with Primal Energy (Quintessence), be it from personal contact or the occasional Erg Cola, and the attention they crave. Most operatives prefer forms of life that readily jibe with static reality, intelligent house pets are common. Still, more unusual companions run the gamut from Artificial Intelligence programs to gray-skinned, hairless aliens with huge eyes. Technocrats pining for companionship should be aware, however, that the Union is much less forgiving of incidents of reality deviance and security breaches by such creatures. The agent is held accountable for anything perpetrated by his companion.

Creating Magical Effects

Within the bounds of the Spheres, there's an infinite variety in magical practice. Of course, the mage is limited to her practical knowledge of the Spheres and the constraints of reality around her. Still, any limit can be surpassed with enough time and knowledge. As a result, each Effect is unique. Although a given rote or procedure may be handed down as a tried-and-true technique, the mage's paradigm, Resonance and knowledge of the Spheres all shape how even the simplest Effects take form.

When you craft a magical Effect, you just follow a few simple steps. You can build the Effect to do just what you want, as broadly or as narrowly as you desire. You're not limited by any static list of powers. Instead, your mage uses her learning to make up her own magical feats on the spot. Your imagination and the constraints of what your mage knows how to do are the only limits here.

A mage literally alters reality to her whims when she creates a magical Effect. Doing so could create something new, destroy something, change the environment or perform any number of strange results. However, reality itself doesn't take lightly to being hauled around and slapped into shape. Large-scale, vulgar or long-lasting changes are much harder to do than simple, brief Effects, especially Effects that blend in. A mage can therefore change nearly any fundamental aspect of the world around her, but it may take too much time, effort or magical knowledge. Worse still, the consequences of hubris (of trying to make a change that's too large or too quick) can be deadly. More than one mage has been engulfed in her own spells gone awry.

Here, we'll describe exactly what you go through in each step. Of course, you won't necessarily use every modifier and every foible. The Storyteller chooses which modifiers to apply, or even whether to "wing it" and let the story determine the Effect without recourse to the rules. Once you've built a few Effects, you'll find the system easy to use.

Step One: What Do You Want to Do and How?

If you didn't have a plan in mind, you wouldn't be using magic. However, there are usually several ways to accomplish a given feat. Figure out what you want to do in general terms, and then look at the ways to accomplish it with magic.

Desired Result

Obviously, you must determine what it is you want to do, exactly. You might be trying to electrocute an opponent or heal a wound. Figure out a way to make events turn according to your whims. Remember, with the right Spheres and paradigm, you can do just about anything. You need only determine how you want to accomplish your aims — by using a Pattern, altering an existing phenomenon, toying with Prime energy, whatever.

Effect Description

Once you know what you're trying to accomplish, figure out how you want it to happen. Narrow it down to a particular Effect, or even something like "I want to make events twist to electrocute this guy." The Storyteller can determine whether your Effect is defined well enough for the story. Determine your desired angle, whether it's firing a bolt of lightning or tearing a hole in the Gauntlet. A lot of this decision involves roleplaying, as you decide how your mage approaches problems. The time and resources available to your mage affect this approach as well. Your magical feats will depend on paradigm, too, so this decision is a great way to distinguish your mage's beliefs and way of shaping Effects.

Your desired Effect also establishes a base difficulty. Is your Effect readily visible, or is it a subtle shift of events? Is it blatantly vulgar or quietly coincidental? Small, static Effects are a lot easier to cast than large, vulgar ones, but sometimes you just have to bust out the whup-ass and lay out some smackdown. Circumstances, opposition and the use of the right tools can all affect the outcome, too. If the Effect is just too large for you to pull it off in a quick-and-dirty casting, you'll need to add helpers or work out an extended ritual.

Paradigmatic Effect

Your paradigm should always influence your magical Effects. Rarely does a mage simply wave a hand to wreak great change. Instead, the mage relies on the tools that she's learned to use. Check out the various Traditions and their beliefs. Each one has an approach to magic that shapes the caster's Effects. Work this individuality into your Effects to generate a more colorful, engrossing story. After all, it's much more potent to describe how your character focuses his chi energy or uploads a viral neural rewrite, than to simply state that you're blasting the enemy with Forces or examining something with Mind magic.

Sometimes, a mage can use techniques from outside her own paradigm, which happens most often when multiple mages

work together or cross-trained Orphan mages share techniques. This cooperation is uncommon, though, since most mages are conditioned to think of their way as "the right way" of doing magic. Establish how your character's "right way" of doing magic flavors her Effects. Then, decide whether you call upon the Goddess with a sacrifice of your blood, or use murmured chants to invoke heavenly powers, or... you get the idea.

Casting Time

A spell may take as little or as much time as the mage requires to cast it. Elaborate preparations may modify the difficulty, although some forms of magic (like Hermetic high magic or spirit-channeling) might demand extra time. In this case, there is no modifier unless the mage takes time and effort above and beyond the usual requirements. Remember, your paradigm may demand that you can only perform certain Effects with a great expenditure of time and effort, so you may have no choice. Conversely, even if you can do a quick Effect, you can choose to spend more time in order to make it more formidable.

Step Two: Do You Know How to Do It?

Although a mage can theoretically rewrite reality, he must have the right knowledge to make it practical. Once you've decided on an Effect, you need to work out whether your mage can actually make it happen!

The Spheres

The mystic Spheres reflect a mage's understanding of reality's elements. The more he knows about a given thing, the higher his Sphere rating will be. Provided he knows what he's doing, a mage can do anything his Sphere rating and paradigm allows him to do.

The parameters of what the Spheres can and cannot do are covered later in this chapter.

Mundane Knowledge

Some really complicated feats — like creating a functioning computer from scratch — may require some mundane knowledge in addition to the magical know-how. If you want your Spheres to duplicate the functions of accepted devices like cars, computers and airplanes, then you need to have an idea of how those things work normally. In other words, just knowing how to manipulate Matter doesn't let you make a plane that can fly or a laptop that runs commercial software.

Generally, your Abilities like Computer and Firearms determine how much you know about such technical subjects. The Storyteller determines how much knowledge your mage needs in order to perform specific feats. This job does not necessarily require hard rules. Rather, take a look at some of the Abilities and use them as guidelines for the sorts of knowledge that a mage may require to make complex objects, creatures or Effects.

You can also use your Abilities to improve your character's magical feats. Though some magic won't necessarily require special knowledge, there are times when the right Abilities can make it easier or better. If your mage is healing someone, a little Medicine Ability may help, after all. When you decide to use an Ability thus, you may manage to lower the difficulty of your mage's Effects. Just ask your Storyteller.

Step Three: Did You Succeed?

Now that you've figured out what you're doing and how you're doing it, it's time to make the attempt. Whether it succeeds or fails, your magical working will probably do *something*.

The Arete Roll

Your mage's Arete, or measure of enlightenment, determines her raw ability to weave the stuff of magic. All you need to do once you've figured out how to perform an Effect is roll your character's Arete. In so doing, your mage tugs at the Tapestry with her magic, will and ritual. You needn't use your mage's entire Arete for the roll, but you're more likely to succeed if you do. Then again, the more dice you roll, the more chances you have to score a nasty botch. There's no sense in dropping a huge Effect when a small one will do, and it's usually not as risky, either. Too many mages get caught up in the power to change, instead of the wisdom to change only what's necessary.

Difficulty

Magic is tough, and it gets harder the more a mage tries to push or pull. If your mystic performs a small feat, it'll probably be easy to cast, but large-scale, fantastic Effects become very difficult very quickly. When the weight of disbelief from surrounding un-Awakened people fights against a mage's manipulation of the Tapestry, the resulting Backlash can be downright deadly. That's not to say that your mage can't pull off some mighty feats, just that you'd better stack the odds in her favor first!

In the modern age, of course, magic is rare and precious. Feats that would have been simple even a decade ago are tricky now, and the legendary magic of ages long gone are locked away in the past. In these days of disbelief, there aren't dragons or crystal caves any more. Mages are often limited to the hard knocks of their Traditional tricks.

- Coincidental magic's base difficulty is the highest Sphere used in the Effect +3. If your mage makes a wound look like "just a flesh wound," using Life 2, then the difficulty is 5.
- Vulgar magic without a Sleeper witness has a base difficulty of the highest Sphere used in the Effect +4. If your mage uses Life 2 to cause a wound to close with the pass of her hand, the difficulty is 6.
- Vulgar magic with a Sleeper witness has a base difficulty of the highest Sphere used in the Effect +5. If your mage heals her own wound instantly while normal people watch, the difficulty is 7.
- Inherent magic typically functions according to its own rules. If a vampire mesmerizes a person or a werewolf changes shapes, then it uses its own systems, described in a separate rule section. For simplicity's sake, assume that these powers either function automatically with an appropriate expenditure of Tass, or that they require a simple roll of difficulty 6 using an appropriate Attribute + Ability combination. Use Manipula-

tion + Subterfuge to mesmerize someone or Dexterity + Athletics to move with incredible speed, for instance.

However, be warned that any use of vulgar magic rebounds on the mage. Changing the universe in a blatant fashion causes Paradox; see the quick-reference casting page for details. Most vulgar Effects will generate *at least* one point of Paradox, and anything generating five or more points at once risks a really nasty Backlash. Generally, a vulgar Effect generates one point of Paradox per level of the highest Sphere used, plus one more if there are unbelieving Sleeper witnesses, and that's if it *succeeds*.

Modifiers

Given the difficulty of working magical feats, it's sensible to get as many bonuses as you can. Smart mages do magic on their own terms and turf, getting helpers, time and ritual on their side. If your mage uses all the right tools and takes enough time, you can get several modifiers to help make the Effect a little easier.

The casting charts later in this chapter list several possible difficulty modifiers. You should take only three different modifiers in order to keep things from getting too complex. Of course, the Storyteller decides what modifiers you take, so don't expect to stack on too many bonuses without any penalties unless you really take pains to put your mage in an advantageous situation!

No matter how many modifiers you apply, your Effect difficulty can't be shifted more than three points in either direction. You can only stack up so much good or bad karma, after all.

Using Willpower

Since magic is, by nature, an effort of will, the Willpower Trait comes in handy when casting it. Using Willpower requires temporary Willpower points, not permanent ones.

By spending a point of Willpower, you can get one automatic success on your mage's magic roll. A tremendous effort of will forces the magic to take form. You must do so *before* you make the Arete roll, however. You can't decide to concentrate on a spell after it's already failed.

Once, it was possible to shield against Paradox Backlashes through sheer force of will, but doing so is no longer possible. Once magic gets out of control, it takes its own form, and Paradox carries it off.

Using Quintessence

As the building block of creation, Quintessence fuels all manner of Patterns and magic. This rare and precious energy forms all things, so it is highly useful in the construction of magic. Channeling Quintessence aids in the creation of new "reality" from the raw stuff of Creation. In some cases, Quintessence *must* be used to build new Patterns.

Up to your mage's Arete in Quintessence may be used in a given Effect roll, modifying the difficulty by one per point. This modifier works like any other, but it lasts as long as the willworker continues to use Quintessence. Again, you must spend Quintessence before you make the Arete roll for the Effect, channeling the power to strengthen the spell as your mage casts it. For example, if your mage casts a normal Effect with no modifiers, you can spend enough Quintessence to lower the difficulty by 3 (assuming an appropriate level of *Avatar* Background). If you suffer from penalty modifiers, you can spend Quintessence to cancel those modifiers and reduce the difficulty, up to the limit of your mage's *Avatar* rating or a final difficulty modifier of –3.

Remember, though, that a mage can never use more Quintessence in an Effect roll than the character's *Avatar* Background rating. A mage with a weak Avatar simply cannot channel Quintessence effectively, or at all if the character has no *Avatar* Background dots. (See the *Avatar* Background in Chapter Three.)

A mage can use whatever personal Quintessence he has to aid an Effect, subject to the limits of the Avatar. Using outside Quintessence — Tass, Nodes, etc. — this way requires an additional use of Prime 3 to channel the power. Once such a channeling Effect is cast, it needs no additional attention for its duration, though it may still be subject to the rules for concentration difficulties with running minor Effects.

Necessary Successes

The number of successes required for an Effect varies with its scope. Larger and more complex Effects naturally require a greater level of success than simple, brief spells. The quick-reference charts give an idea of the amount of success required to actually pull off an Effect completely.

- Simple, personal Effects *usually* require only a single success, though of course they work better if you score more. A marginal (single) success grants you a partial or weak version of your desired magic, while complete success (three or more successes on the roll) means that the magic works just as you wanted. This scope applies to minor sensory alterations, divinations, self healing and so on, but not to gross mental, physical or spiritual changes like shapeshifting or altering your soul. Powerful magic still generates a threshold, requiring a great number of successes before you pull off anything productive at all.
- Effects that go outside the bounds of your mage's Pattern to touch something or someone else require at least two successes. Unwilling targets can usually dodge or resist such Effects as well, and you may need additional successes to get around that resistance, too. Your threshold may be higher if you try to perform a particularly tough trick, as usual.
- World-altering Effects, even if they only play with your mage's little corner of reality, can require anywhere from a few successes to 30 or more. Time for the high ritual magic! The Storyteller determines the final difficulty for such a powerful Effect. Some guidelines are listed with various rotes and on the reference tables.

Thresholds and Pushing Difficulty

Some circumstances push your magical difficulty above a 9. As always, such Effects require a threshold for success (see "Thresholds" in the rules chapter). These Effects are so demanding, or cast under such deleterious circumstances, that you need to score multiple successes to accomplish anything at all. The threshold thus counts against your successes. If you have a threshold of one, then you lose the first success from your roll. If the threshold cancels out *all* of your successes and you have 1s left on the dice, then you botch (although it's not a botch if the successes beat the threshold, even if they're cancelled by 1s

rolled). The moral? When you decide to perform a particularly potent or large-scale Effect, get as much help as you can!

Success, Effect and Interruptions

Most Effects are pretty straightforward — either you succeed or you do not. Examples include hurling a ball of flame, determining the truth with a mind scan or dilating time. Such all-or-nothing magical Effects demand that a certain amount of successes be rolled before the spell takes effect. Simple actions are easy; more complicated ones take time and effort (i.e., extended rolls) to complete. The Degree of Success table, on the magical reference chart, handles these cases.

Other spells are cast with an immediate intent in mind — to cause or heal damage, to sense some property or element, to influence somebody's mind or change some object's shape. The amount of damage, benefit or influence you exert depends on how well you roll. The better you roll, the more effect the magic has. The same goes for duration; the better you roll, the longer the Effect lasts. See the Damage and Duration table in these situations.

If an all-or-nothing action (i.e., igniting a gas main) also does damage or lasts for a while, use the Damage and Duration table to find out just how much it inflicted or how long it lasts. Split up your successes among damage and duration to determine the potency of your Effect.

Many Effects also have a possibility of scoring some success, or of happening partially. In such cases, check the Degree of Success table, and compare it to the required successes for the Effect. The Effect may be completed at once, or it may happen only partially. If your mage is shapeshifting but you don't score enough successes to complete the Effect, then you'll only go part way and you'll need to finish the spell with an additional Effect. If you feel like keeping some bookwork, you can even cause extended Effects to slowly take shape while the mage casts them, and if the Effect ultimately fails or botches, the magic collapses horribly, undoing the Effect and wreaking whatever havoc Paradox brings.

Rituals and Extended Magic Rolls

A mage can accomplish most *minor* feats with little difficulty (one to five successes). However, many Effects are so complicated or powerful that the caster must take extra time to succeed. In story terms, she has to work some magical ritual; in game terms, you must make an extended roll, gathering enough successes to finish the job.

Effects that require extended rolls include summonings, complex creations, weather-witchery, strong curses, Correspondence searches, Node-drainings, Horizon Realm creations and other powerful acts of will. The Storyteller may decree that one roll may take game-time hours instead of turns, depending on the magic involved.

A mage's paradigm may also dictate that some magic can be performed only with specific rituals and actions (foci). In such a case, you must take the appropriate game time to complete the Effect, since your mage doesn't know how to do it any other way. This requirement doesn't necessarily make it an extended Effect — you could take a few turns to wield a focus in a fashion necessary to cast a spell, but only make one Effect roll. You could certainly use it to justify extending a ritual over several turns.

Extended rolls follow the normal rules found in the rules chapter. Keeping the magic going can be tough, though, so apply the following modifiers as well:

- The bigger the Effect, the nastier the potential Backlash. Each roll after the first adds one more Paradox point to a Backlash's total, on top of anything gained for the botch. This Paradox does not apply if the ritual succeeds or fails without botching.
- If you fail a roll — that is, you get no successes that turn — you may still continue rolling, at a difficulty penalty of one per failed cumulative roll, until the ritual is completed or the magic is somehow disrupted. If this modifier generates a threshold, the threshold applies to the final roll. You could wind up in a sticky situation, with the increased difficulty and threshold making it nearly impossible for you to score enough further successes to complete the ritual. Note that the cumulative difficulty modifier from extended rituals won't exceed the usual limit of three, but all of the bonuses for a well-planned ritual could be lost and a total difficulty modifier of three could be applied if several failures come up during the casting.
- If the roll botches, you may spend a turn (or whatever unit of time the ritual rolls take) and a Willpower point to avoid screwing up the whole affair. By spending the Willpower, you make your mage keep the magic going — barely — but you lose one previously rolled success in the process as well as the Willpower point. From there, you must increase the difficulty by one, as if you had failed the roll.

A second botch destroys the Effect utterly and brings Paradox crashing down on the caster.

- If the ritual is disrupted by an outside force — like an attack or a distraction — you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or botch the whole Effect.

As always, it's best to get as many good modifiers as possible on the mage's side. Most rituals are performed in a sanctum, with loyal help. Again, modifiers cannot reduce the difficulty by more than three points.

Important note: Your mage can take extra time and care with an Effect without making it extended. If you make multiple rolls to complete an Effect, then your mage stacks up magical energy until it's at the desired level. If you declare that your mage is spending a lot of extra time and precision just to perform a singe Effect — or even on each step of an extended task — then the activity may take more than a turn or even an hour to complete. However, the roll gets a difficulty modifier bonus of one.

The Storyteller may decide that mages cannot perform extended rituals that are *too* long. After all, allowing a neophyte mage to accumulate 30 or 50 successes on a ritual may cause Effects that get out of hand. A mage who tracks down and kills opponents in such fashion may quickly get caught in return and dealt with, or the Storyteller may simply rule that it's impossible for a mage to concentrate that much magical power at once. A good general guideline is to limit a mage's total ritual successes to the product of the mage's Willpower and Arete. The mages can thus handle only so much power at once. If you do use this limitation, don't include successes gained from acolytes and assistants in this limit; a mage with a big enough following can perform spectacular feats.

Note also that, unless the mage relies on special magic to keep going long beyond human endurance, he probably won't be able to keep a ritual going more than a couple of hours without a lot of practice and work. This restriction alone can limit the extended feats possible with magic.

Automatic Successes

An Adept can do simple things with little trouble. If she wants to perform some Effect that requires only one or two successes, she may do it without a roll, provided her Arete is at least one point above the necessary difficulty. Coincidental first-rank Effects would require an Arete of at least five, second-rank Effects need six, and so forth. Such "instant magic" would not last long — a turn or two — but it may work long enough to get the job done.

To speed play, a Storyteller may just decide to allow her players to succeed automatically with simple spells that they've perfected and used repeatedly, as long as they're low-key. A mage could consistently "just happen" to have a business card in his pocket, but certainly wouldn't be able to run down the street flaying enemies with magic without a roll.

Remember, even an automatic success follows the dictates of paradigm. An Adept must still perform the appropriate rituals to take advantage of a simplified feat, even if no roll is required.

The Dotting Effect

Wise mages who wish to avoid the nasty consequences of Paradox will attempt to disguise their magic in coincidental Effects. As the number of wild "coincidences" rise, however, they become harder to pull off. As an optional rule, a Storyteller can impose an additional difficulty penalty of one to coincidental magic difficulty rolls for every two such Effects over the first in one scene.

The effects of this penalty are cumulative. After five coincidental magic Effects, the difficulty for such magic increases by two. Storytellers should only count those Effects that cause massive change, such as pipes bursting, tires going flat and ammo dumps exploding. Coincidences that no one sees — sensory magic, Attribute increases, objects disappearing into pockets — should not increase the difficulty at all.

Step Four: What Happened?

The magic's done, the dice are rolled and the Effect is running wild. The time comes now to figure out the results of your power... or your pride.

Range, Area, Damage and Duration

Generally, your Effect's scale was already computed in the number of required successes. Now, you'll need to split those successes up, to make sure that the Effect hit all the targets you wanted and reached as far as necessary.

• Under normal circumstances, a mage's Arts can affect anything within her normal sensory range — be it touch, taste, sight, smell or hearing. For subjects on the edges of that range — far away, under cover or obscured by smoke, fog or other obstructions — add one to the magic roll's difficulty. Correspondence magic can dramatically expand the mystic's sensory range. A mage with less than three dots in that Sphere, however, must cast long-distance Effects at difficulty penalty of one due to her inexperience with such extended perceptions. The Correspondence Sphere must be used if an Effect is supposed to bypass a solid object in between the mage and her target. When augmenting an Effect's range with Correspondence, the Correspondence range is a threshold — the successes required for range are counted off from the Effect successes. Furthermore, a mage cannot exercise any Sphere at a level exceeding her knowledge of Correspondence. Even a Master of various Patterns can perform only limited long-range manipulations with low levels of Correspondence. A long-range, powerful, multi-person, long-lasting Effect is pretty damn difficult these days.

Note that Spirit Effects must often work against the Gauntlet, and the strength of this barrier varies from place to place. Use the Spirit Gauntlet chart when some Effect must pierce it. With Time, a mystic can look across different time spans. Use the Time Lines chart to figure out how far in the future or past a Time Effect can see.

• As a quick-and-dirty rule, figure that the spell can affect one subject within easy reach per success, unless it includes some large area by its very nature. (Such Effects include explosions, TV broadcasts and Effects created over a user-linked network.) For individual results on multiple targets with one Effect, each Pattern affected after the first requires an additional success as a threshold. If your mage tries to hit two people with a spell instead of one, remove one extra success from the total roll. Thus, striking multiple people with one Effect means that the magic has less power and is more likely to fail.

• You figure the damage or resultant effect of a spell by checking the Damage and Duration table. Though once it was possible to kill with a single strike, doing so is much more difficult with modern magic. Generally, each success left over from the Effect causes two levels of damage, healing, point-transfer or whatever. Therefore, if your mage casts a damaging Effect and scores two successes (after thresholds and other subtractions), the Effect scores up to four levels of damage. This limit works the same way for damage, healing and channeling Quintessence. You can "pull" your Effect to be less powerful, but only if you specify the limit of your Effect before casting!

Some Spheres alter damage by their nature. Forces Effects add one level of damage when used to attack, Mind Effects always score only bashing damage and Entropy itself does no damage until the fourth rank (though indirect attacks, like collapsing walls and crumbling floors, may still cause incidental damage). When performing a direct damage attack, use the Damage and Duration table. You don't need to check with the table unless you are trying to perform a particularly spectacular attack.

• Like damage, an Effect's duration is based on the chart results. This requirement usually applies only for Effects that could last a while, such as sensory magic, Mind Effects, shapeshifting and transmutations. Damage is usually immediate, while created, summoned or conjured items are often permanent. The duration is treated as a threshold; making an Effect last more than one scene therefore subtracts from the Effect's total power.

Most magic fades or needs to be replenished over time. Truly permanent results are possible, but the Storyteller may

require twice the usual successes to make them so. Some Effects are just too wrenching to be made permanent. The Tellurian itself rejects these sudden attempts at altering reality permanently, with historical inertial unraveling the magical weavings (often with resultant Paradox).

Combining damage with duration — that is, inflicting damage over a period of time — can be done *at Storyteller's option*. If you add a threshold of one success to an Effect, its damage can spread over a full scene. This extension does not cause the damage to multiply over the time period. It only delays or slows the damage, causing it to accumulate over time. Thus, you get a slow-acting poison, a delayed bomb or the like.

• Any physical attack that attacks a Pattern with another Pattern — a lightning bolt, magic bullet, mutant virus, etc. — might be able to be soaked by the target. Vulgar acts of pure magic, which attack a Pattern on a purely mystical level — transformations, **Rip the Man-Body**, **Flames of Purification**, etc. — cannot be soaked, nor can mental attacks. Since mages are mortal, soaking most physical attacks is limited to armor or the use of additional defensive magic.

Most magical attacks cause lethal damage; weak or battering attacks may inflict only bashing damage. Attacks that affect the victim's Pattern directly score aggravated damage.

Dodging and Resistance

A target who is aware of an incoming magical attack may choose to dodge it (if the attack is material) or resist it (if it involves the Mind). The first requires a Dexterity + Dodge roll; the second, a Willpower roll. The difficulty of either avoidance is 6, just like a normal dodge or soak roll. Like any other dodge, each success the defender rolls to avoid an attack subtracts one from the aggressor's magic successes.

• Direct attacks — lightning bolts, falling buildings, blasts of energy, bullets, hails of stones and such — can be dodged like any other physical assault, so long as the victim knows that the attack is coming. An opponent may not necessarily know what to expect, though, and shooting someone in the back makes the point moot. A victim can detect an incoming magical assault with a reflexive Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8). If the victim doesn't know what's coming, dodging out of the way may not apply; jumping to one side doesn't help if a building is collapsing on top of you. Ray guns, hurled lightning and the like may require a roll to hit (Perception + Occult, Dexterity + Firearms, whatever the Storyteller feels is appropriate) and can be dodged, but extra successes do add to damage as with any other attack — as long as the successes aren't removed by the opponent's dodge. Direct Pattern rips usually can't be dodged and don't require an attack roll, but thus only score the damage from the Effect rating itself.

• Mental attacks such as commands, possessions, mind-crushes, telepathic bonds and brainwashing can be countered by a Willpower roll if the defender is aware of what's going on. This facet often makes Mind magic a slow and subtle art. Note, however, that most Sleepers won't know what's going on. Also, a Sleeper must expend a point of Willpower to gain such a roll, so Sleeper minds can be worn down.

Countermagic

Essentially, countermagic is a roll used for undoing magical Effects. Mages refer to countermagic as a means to block incoming Effects with similar Spheres, anti-magic for shielding against magic with Quintessence and unweaving to destroy an existing Effect. The methods of casting such counters are similar, though some are a bit more difficult than others.

In brief, countermagic typically requires an Arete roll (difficulty 8). The particulars depend on whether the mage is trying to counter an Effect directly as it's cast, or undo a completed Effect. See the Permutations section for details.

Failure

When you roll less successes than needed to execute your mage's Effect, or if the mage is restrained or incapacitated before she can finish it, the magic fails. Failure is simple: The spell has little or no effect. Depending on what your character wanted to do, this failure might create a partial success (see the Degree of Success table) or no result at all. Remember, even if your Effect fails, you still garner any appropriate Paradox.

Botching

If you botch the roll (roll any 1s without scoring any successes, even successes that were canceled or used up), your mage blows the spell and gains Paradox.

• If the Effect was coincidental, your mage gets one Paradox point for every dot in the highest Sphere she was using. If, for example, she was trying to cast a Life 4, Prime 2 Effect, she would gain four points of Paradox.

• If the Effect was vulgar without Sleeper witnesses, she gains one point for every dot in the highest Sphere, plus one. The aforementioned mage would now earn five Paradox points.

• If the Effect was vulgar with witnesses, she gets two per dot in the highest Sphere used, plus two points. The unfortunate from the first two examples now gets a total of 10 Paradox.

Remember, a Sleeper (or other being) only counts as a witness if he's watching the Effect in question directly, and if he doesn't believe in the magic or have a supernatural nature. In a way, thinking humans are the universe's method of looking at and understanding itself. Their belief helps to shape what can and can't be done. A normal man on the street counts as a witness against most Tradition magic. An educated, but un-Awakened, scientist might count as a witness against Technocratic procedures (since his training tells him that those feats of science are "impossible"). Vampires, ghosts and similar creatures don't count as witnesses, nor do acolytes or other humans who believe in the truth of the mage's powers. Again, cameras and the like don't count. The observers must actually watch the Effect in action for their belief to impact on it. Of course, an Effect that's taped on film may wind up in any number of places, and getting your cover blown is generally a Bad Thing.

Paradox

The full rules of Paradox and its effects take up their own section later in this chapter (pp. 194-197). The step-by-step process of a Paradox Backlash can be summed up like this:

• When a mystic gains Paradox points, list them on the Quintessence/ Paradox wheel at the bottom of the character sheet. The Storyteller may roll for a Backlash, or the Paradox might just stack up to haunt you.

• When the Storyteller checks for a Backlash, he rolls the offending mage's Paradox total as a dice pool. This total uses all of the mage's Paradox — any points that were on the wheel, and any that were just added.

• The Storyteller rolls the Paradox pool against difficulty 6; for each success, the Backlash expels one Paradox point. The more points this Backlash expends, the worse the effects will be:

— Small Flaws usually manifest when five or fewer points are spent. At greater levels of Paradox, either major Flaws may appear, or other results may occur.

— Physical damage dependent on the severity of the Backlash burns its way through the mystic. Really large Backlashes may spread their damage outward from the caster, dividing the damage between everyone within a few yards.

— Paradox spirits may show up at any level. The bigger the Backlash, the meaner the spirit.

— If more than 10 points go off at once, a Paradox Realm may manifest, punishing the mage and possibly others in the area.

— Quiets work best when a Storyteller prepares for them in advance. After the journey's completion, the Storyteller simply tells the player how many points of Paradox were lost through the trials. An episode of Quiet makes an excellent chapter for one or two players, between other game sessions.

— Sendings and hobgoblins may show up as a result of Paradox. Such manifestations do not occur as a result of the Paradox *per se*, but they come in response to the violent counter-twisting of reality.

Permutations

There are quite a few ways to use magic, and many of them can have some pretty strange results. Check out these rules for some ideas on the limits or side effects of magic. Of course, these permutations might complicate your game, so use only as much as you want in order to tell a good story.

Sensory Magic

The first rank of any Sphere allows a mage to detect whatever elements that Sphere covers. These Effects expand the mystic's perceptions for the spell's duration. If the phenomenon could be sensed intuitively, it may simply require a Perception + Awareness roll. If it could not have been seen or felt "on a hunch," the mage must seek it actively with magic. Such perceptions are usually coincidental, unless the mage goes out of his way to elaborate on sensing something that no Sleeper could see.

Extending Perceptions

By assigning successes to additional targets, a mage may let someone else share her magical perceptions. Doing so usually shifts a coincidental Effect into the "vulgar with witnesses"

arena if the person gifted with this extended perception is a Sleeper, and it suffers the appropriate difficulty modifier. Awakened mages can share a magical sense without revealing their powers to others, though.

Technically, a mage can extend her senses to anyone within sensory range. Each person after the first requires an additional success, as always. Extended perceptions normally last one turn unless additional successes are allocated to duration.

Detecting Magic

With a successful reflexive Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6), a character can feel magic in use within her immediate vicinity. Really powerful Effects (10 or more successes) might lower the difficulty as low as 4, while unusually subtle ones (where the mage spends successes to wipe out magical traces) could raise it as high as 10.

The Prime 1 Effect **Sense Quintessence** can detect the remaining resonance of magical acts after they occur. A feat is generally detectable for an amount of time equal to the duration table, for every two successes scored on the finished Effect. Thus, a simple one-success Effect leaves a whiff of magic for a turn, but a huge 10-success spell may leave traces of magic for months. The longer it's been since the spell casting, the harder it will be to detect the change.

Acting in Concert

In some cases, a group of mystics may wish to work together to accomplish a greater end. Large spells may include summonings, searches, elaborate rituals, Realm-creation and spirit-bindings. Such collaborations work best on extended rituals. Smaller Effects are harder to coordinate and rarely worth the effort.

First of all, each mage involved must have at least one dot in each of the Spheres of the Effect. Someone who knows nothing about Matter Arts is no help to a mage who does. The collaborators must also be able to communicate freely during the casting, through telepathic bonds, speech or signals. Setting this communication up may take a turn or longer per caster.

Secondly, all of the mages must have some way of communicating paradigmatically. A Virtual Adept Master of Forces can't help a Hermetic mage's Forces Effect if the two can't agree on a common way to work the magic. This cooperation often requires a little bit of blended techniques, some haggling over magical forms and a whole lot of metaphysical arguing.

- Each mage involved with the necessary Sphere ratings to perform the Effect gets to participate in full, with the player rolling the whole dice pool and adding all of the successes scored to the Effect.
- If less knowledgeable mages assist a more powerful one (or group), each helper adds one success to the main caster's efforts.
- Un-Awakened acolytes may assist their compatriots as well. The main casting group adds one success for every five participants in this ritual. Coordinating such large gatherings may take hours per roll, and such rituals should be played out for maximum effect (which is also a good opportunity to use those Social Traits). Acolytes who believe enough to help in this fashion obviously do not count as "witnesses" in the vulgar sense. If over 100 people were involved, some vulgar Effects might even be considered coincidental, *if* no other witnesses were around to contradict them.

If the main casting group botches (*nobody* scores any successes on dice rolls), the Effect generates the normal Paradox for *every* participating mage. (Don't count the automatic successes from less-skilled mages or acolytes when determining whether the Effect is a botch here.) Sleepers and acolytes participating in the ritual do not gain Paradox, but they may suffer some psychic or mystical trauma from the failed attempt. In particularly nasty cases, the Paradox may all take the form of a tremendous Backlash that affects everyone present indiscriminately.

Countermagic

Countermagic is the act of using magic to weaken or undo another spell. When a mage realizes that he's about to be hit by someone else's magic, he can try to use his magical knowledge to stop it or bulwark against the Effect. With luck, it may dilute the Effect to a more manageable hazard or negate it entirely.

Using countermagic does count as a mage's magical action; since a mage can only perform one magical action in a turn, countermagic is a defensive tactic. Still, if the enemy is about to get that fireball off and fry you, it may be better to stop it and live to try a different attack. A mage can abort a magical (or mundane) action to perform countermagic. The previously started job is scrapped (considered a failure) and the mage whips out the countermagic instead. If the mage has already done his action for the turn, of course, he's stuck with the results.

Some entities have natural countermagic. The special Devices and Talismans that grant such defense are reflexive, activating automatically to absorb the brunt of magical attacks. Other supernatural creatures can sometimes counter magic as well, though rarely with the efficiency of a learned mage.

Countermagic takes an Arete roll with a difficulty of 8. Each success blocks out one of the enemy's successes, assuming that you have the right Spheres. You must have at least rudimentary (one dot) knowledge of all the Spheres being used in the subject's Effect, and the mage must be aware of it. It's impossible to counter an Effect that you don't know is coming, and it's difficult to affect one that you don't understand. Assuming that you *do* have the right Spheres and that you succeed in the countering, you manage to nullify the Effect's successes and it fizzles out like a normal failure. Even if you only nullify it partially, you can mitigate some of its results. If you have at least one dot of Prime and you manage to score more successes than the opponent, you can even turn the spell back if you counter it in the same turn. Each success that you score on the countermagic over the enemy's spell successes counts as one success directed back at the caster!

Should you have enough knowledge of the Spheres used in an attack, you can decide to make a directly opposing Effect. Moderation of this tactic is up to the Storyteller. The advantage is that you might be able to counter a conjunctional Effect with a good knowledge of just one or two Spheres. If your mage is a master of Mind but knows nothing of Correspondence, he may still shield against a long-range mental attack. This technique relies on your description of an Effect that opposes the enemy's Effect, and it is more of a roleplaying mechanic.

This tactic is also useful in countering the powers of other supernatural creatures. If you want to break the hypnotic gaze of a vampire, for instance, you'll use Mind magic to defend yourself.

If you don't have the Spheres to understand an enemy's spell, you can try to defend yourself with Prime. You can channel Quintessence to strengthen reality, and thereby make it harder for the enemy to work magic. Make the countermagic roll as usual. Each success allows you to spend one point of Quintessence (up to your Avatar limit, of course). Each point spent then raises the difficulty of the enemy's Effect by one point, without the usual limit of three. The enemy can, of course, spend Willpower and Quintessence to try to undercut this defense. Such an attack is sometimes called anti-magic, since it nullifies the use of any sort of magic.

Lastly, you can unweave free-standing Effects, ones that have been rendered permanent or given a duration. By scoring up a number of successes on the countermagic roll equal to the original caster's successes, you manage to unravel the Effect completely. You still need the basic understanding of the Spheres involved (so that you know how to unwork it) and at least Prime-sensing capability (so that you can see the Effect). Such unweaving weakens and eventually totally destroys an Effect though, or can shorten its duration to the point where it fails. Unweaving works best against wards, illusions and other static but temporary creations. A spell that has been granted permanency is often best just reversed, while a spell that takes an instant Effect and then lets nature run its course (like the wound left by striking someone with an attack) is already over and done with, and the results can't be unwove.

Abilities and Magic

Since magic comes from a mage's formative beliefs and practices, the mage's learning affects the magic's outcome. A mage who's firmly convinced that a specific ritual like Tarot-reading or dancing is necessary for magic had better learn how to do those things well. Conversely, using magic can make otherwise mundane tasks much easier.

As with all modifiers to magic, Abilities should be used to help the story and flow of the casting, not as an excuse for another set of modifiers. Ability modifiers cannot change the difficulty by more than three points, as usual.

Abilities Enhancing Magic

If a mage uses an Ability appropriate to her Sphere — perhaps as a focus, or as a process of using a focus — she can cast her Effects more reliably. Having the right Ability might also help the mage to target the Effect better or to have a better idea of what to do to get good results, as well. Just about any Ability can have some impact on magic, though of course the exact combinations will vary with the mage's paradigm.

If a mage takes a full turn (sometimes more) to exercise the appropriate Ability just before casting her Effect, you can make an Ability roll (with the appropriate Attribute) at the same difficulty and threshold rating as the magic. Each success beyond the threshold then lowers the threshold and difficulty of the subsequent magic roll by one point, up to a modifier of three at best.

Sometimes, an Effect may require a specific Ability. It's nigh impossible to make a working computer without the right knowledge, and influencing someone's emotions may rely on the proper subterfuges first. It's up to the Storyteller to determine when a magical Effect requires an Ability roll first, and whether the Ability roll is mandatory or just makes the magic a little harder if failed. A mage might be able to fix a car with Matter magic, without knowing too much Technology, although it would be difficult. However, trying to fix a nuclear reactor the same way would be a bad idea....

Magic Enhancing Abilities

Just as Abilities can make magic easier, a little judicious magic can certainly make the use of Abilities much simpler. Just the right amount of magic can let you jump a little bit higher, move a little bit faster, see a little bit more... you get the idea.

Using magic to enhance an Ability usually works on little coincidental nudges and insights, so it's easy to do. The magic roll proceeds as normal, but for each success garnered on the result, the subsequent Ability use gets a difficulty modifier of one, up to a limit of three. Adding some successes to area or duration could let the mage share this bonus, or maintain it for a short time.

Magic used to enhance an Ability must be done right before the use of the Ability, or else it needs to be running and maintained while the Ability's used. It's possible to take multiple actions and use one for magic before performing the feat, but doing so is inefficient unless the mage is *really* pressed for time. After all, if you are using magic to aid the Ability, you're probably not trying to take any other negative modifiers.

Multiple Effects

A mage can cast only one Effect per turn, even if she has used various powers to speed herself up (reality is already "preoccupied" when it's in a different time frame). If you want to do multiple things at once, you'll have to have your mage build an Effect that performs several simultaneous feats.

Simultaneous Effects

Although a mage can *cast* only one Effect at a time, he can keep various Effects running. The difficulty of doing so often varies with the Effect's type.

A simple Effect that just modifies the mage or surroundings for a time requires only a tiny flow of the mage's attention and magical effort. Keeping the Effect moving is a constant push from the Avatar and the will, but it's a small one, since the Effect is generally somewhat self-sustaining or static. Such Effects include things like body-enhancement, sensory improvements or even small changes to Patterns that are designed to last for only a short time. Such simple Effects cost you a difficulty penalty of one for every two full Effects in use, whenever your mage tries to cast a new Effect.

More complex Effects like mind-reading, juggling huge Forces or manipulating Life Patterns all require the mage's concentration. These Effects require constant update and manipulation, so the mage must divert a substantial amount of Awakened will to them. Your mage may not be able to concentrate enough to perform other

Effects while doing something this delicate, at the Storyteller's discretion. If the Storyteller lets you concentrate on multiple Effects (or if your character has specific Merits or magical Effects that let him maintain multiple areas of concentration), you'll still take a difficulty penalty of one for every two Effects that your mage has running. That's for simple and complex Effects both.

Instant Effects rewrite Patterns or alter reality and then are *done*; they require no further maintenance. If you change a material into a different sort permanently, or you create something from nothing and give it Prime energy to make it fully real and permanent, then it's part of the Tapestry. Such manifestations no longer require concentration.

Rotes and Fast-Casting

Most of the Traditions teach sets of common Effects, called rotes. These rotes allow a mage to perform a technique that's tried-and-true over the course of several years or centuries. A rote has already been built with the Tradition's trappings and foci in mind, and it relies upon well-understood principles of the Tradition's Sphere knowledge. In brief, it's a spell formula.

Just about any Effect could be cast by rote: anything that's been well-used, tinkered, thought about and used again can eventually pass into common mage use as a rote. Rotes are traded among mages of the same Tradition for favors or information; a good rote can give the mage a slightly easier time casting an Effect, or perhaps open the mage to some idea of Sphere use that he hadn't thought of before.

When a mage builds an Effect on the fly without using a rote, it's called fast-casting; it's a little bit rougher, and gets a +1 penalty to difficulty. Thus, many mages spend a lot of time honing a few favored Effects, to turn them into well-known rotes. What qualifies as a rote is ultimately up to the Storyteller; however, it can be assumed that any of the base Effects listed for the Spheres (following) can be found in rote form for any of the Traditions.

The Nine Spheres

Centuries ago, the Tradition and Convention mages settled on the nine Spheres as a way of describing the elements of the universe. Each Sphere covers a wide area of understanding and control. Even though mages describe magic in terms of their own paradigms, the Spheres form a consistent basis from which to work. Together, the Spheres encompass all (or nearly all) of the facets of the Tellurian.

Many mages posit the existence of an additional Sphere or Spheres. Each Tradition has its pet theory as to a "10th Sphere," and the Technocratic Union seeks a Grand Unification Theory. Still, despite years of study, no one group has been able to find an over-Sphere or a missing element to fill this mythical role. Like some posited Northwest Passage, the "10th Sphere" draws students but never reveals itself.

Correspondence

Specialties: Conjuration, Distortion, Scrying, Teleportation, Warding

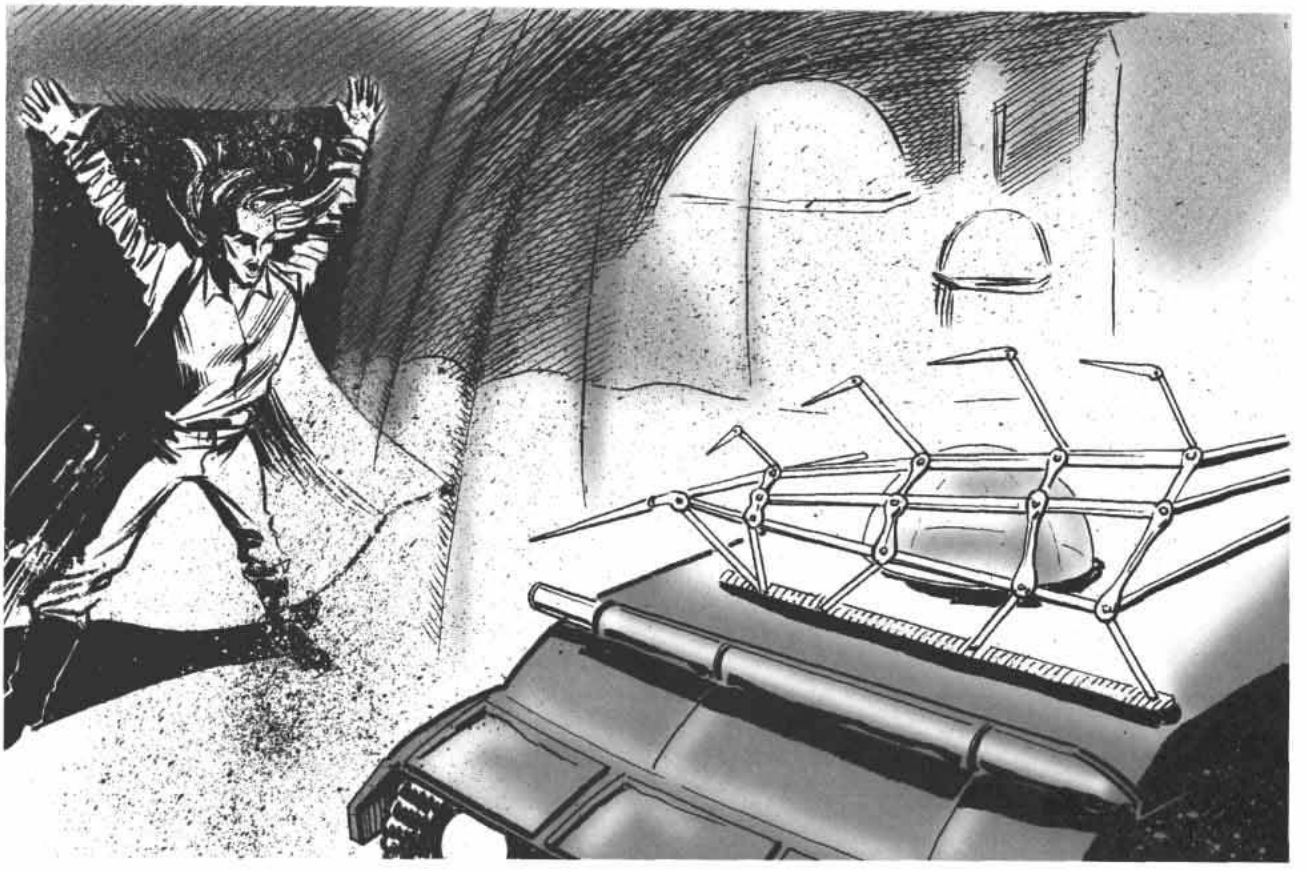
Space, interrelationships and sympathetic links all become clear through the study of Correspondence. By bending space or bypassing it entirely, a mage can travel rapidly, fly or teleport from place to place. Divining locations allows the mage to see far-away places or direct magic over distances. With a link between a person and an object, Effects may be targeted through connecting rituals.

Distance forms no barrier to a master of Correspondence. Indeed, distance and even space do not exist to the student of this Sphere. Through the unifying Correspondence Point, mages realize that all things occupy the same space — or no space at all. Virtual Adepts, the most dedicated modern students of Correspondence, theorize that all things coexist in a single All-Space or Correspondence Point, and that bypassing space is simply a matter of realizing this unity. Mathematically, space is just an illusion, a convenient construct of the mind. Objects, people and places don't really take up space, according to such theories. Instead, everything is just a Pattern, and space simply describes the relations of different Patterns to one another.

Mystically inclined mages see Correspondence through the theories of contagion and sympathy. Any two things that have touched share a little trace of that connection, which can be called on through Correspondence. Objects or places that are similar in Pattern can be manipulated through that similitude. Any sort of connection opens the door to the manipulation of Patterns. It's always easier to work with the familiar than the strange, after all.

In and of itself, Correspondence understanding is highly abstract. A mage skilled in Correspondence can measure space, find connections between objects and move Patterns around. Combined with the other Spheres, Corresponding becomes a formidable tool indeed. Proper use of Correspondence lets a mage bypass the limits of his own senses, extending his magic and actions to distant places or objects as long as he can form some connection. Correspondence visualization lets a mage see far-away places, people or things, and perhaps even touch them, go to them or drag them to himself. This door swings both ways, though. Just as a mage forges a connection, that connection can be traced back to the mage.

See the quick reference chart for distances on p. 209 for the sorts of links formed with Correspondence. The more disparate a set of objects, or the greater the perceived distance crossed, the more difficult the Correspondence Effect. Such distances can be combined in conjunction with other Effects. Doing so makes the Effect more difficult to cast but capable of extending to great ranges, possibly even beyond the mage's senses and to places of which he is not aware. Normally, a mage can extend



his magic only to areas of his immediate senses, but Correspondence ranges bypass this limitation. The Correspondence Sphere lets the mage perform Effects beyond his line of sight, outside his hearing and otherwise in places beyond his normal reach.

Despite its capacity to bend space and distance, Correspondence functions only on whole Patterns unless combined with the various Pattern Spheres. That is, it's impossible to just teleport away someone's heart with Correspondence alone. In essence, Correspondence does not affect Patterns directly; such manipulations must be done with other magic. Correspondence simply lets those Patterns be affected, whole and complete, in changes of space or distance. If the mage wants to use Pattern Spheres to affect something with Correspondence, she's limited by the Correspondence level (if it's lower than the Pattern Sphere). Thus, a mage can teleport something with just Correspondence, but if she wants to change its Pattern at a distance, her skill with Correspondence is as important as her skill with the other Sphere.

Advanced students of Correspondence seem befuddled or distracted, as if they're not paying attention to their surroundings. In truth, they are constantly aware of their immediate areas to a degree that others can hardly comprehend. In spite of their apparent distraction, these mages exercise absolute precision of motion, a result of their intimate understanding of distances.

• Intimate Spatial Perceptions

Basic understanding of Correspondence allows a mage to develop precise and intuitive judgments of distance or area. A simple Effect enhances the mage's awareness of space to determine exact directions and distances. The mage can cast spells to "feel out" the contours of space around her, using mystical senses to determine the placement of other Patterns even beyond the normal senses. With the proper Effects, a mage can also detect warps in space or the presence of gates, sinks, wormholes and other instabilities or tears in the very fabric of perceived distance.

Combined with various Pattern Spheres, the mage can determine exact sizes and distances to creatures, objects or forces. With more ephemeral Spheres, the mage could develop a rough idea of the locations of nearby thinking beings, the area of power in a Node or the direction and distance to a peculiarity or strange coincidence.

•• Sense Space
Touch Space

With scrying magic and projection, the mage can cast out her senses to various places beyond her physical form. The mage could touch and feel something physically at a distance or use magic to see a vista at a far-away location. The mage chooses one target and performs an appropriate Effect to scry there. Sensing a distant area forges a sort of connection between the mage and the location — a warp of Correspondence as the mage brings her Pattern in contact with the place — that can be detected with simple Correspondence awareness. This connection also extends the mage's perceptions to allow him to use his magic at such places. Conversely, the mage can make wards that bar scrying, or defend the Patterns that she perceives from conjuration or transportation, by strengthening the hold of space and hedging out such distant perceptions.

Combining Correspondence sensing and touching with Pattern Spheres lets the mage affect small Patterns at a distance. The mage could reach out and touch a stone from a far distance, then use Matter with Correspondence to pull it into his hand, conjuring it from across a field. Similarly, the mage could deposit an animal some distance away with a touch and a conjunctional use of Correspondence and Life. As with all uses of Pattern Spheres with Correspondence, the mage is limited to his lesser understanding in the possible Effects. In conjunction with other Spheres, long-range Correspondence allows the mage to seek someone out in order to establish mental contact or read thoughts, project probability manipulation at a far distance, search for powerful sources of Quintessence to manipulate or even look into distant spirit worlds.

••• Pierce Space
Seal Gate
Co-locality Perception

Tearing the very fabric of space itself, the mage can open a brief gateway to other places and step through. While the mage could only cast her senses out to distant locations previously, she can now actually travel via teleportation. The mage needs only sense the destination — or even haphazardly cast out to a random place, although doing so is extremely dangerous — then perform an appropriate Effect to change her Pattern's location. Drawing together connections in various Patterns — or severing them — is also possible, and it causes the Patterns affected to build a stronger or weaker bond that can be exploited later through Correspondence.

By strengthening the bonds of space instead of warping them, a mage can seal gateways and block the passage of Correspondence Effects. The mage can actually bar an area from passage, be it mundane or through Correspondence. Such an Effect prevents transportation in an area, and it can be cast over Patterns other than the mage herself.

Finally, moderate comprehension of Correspondence allows a mage to split his perceptions over several locations at once. Although the mage can open a door to only a single place, or manipulate individual Patterns without major effort, she can use her scrying to view multiple places simultaneously. The mage could experience the show in any form appropriate to her paradigm. She might see a set of ghostly superimposed images around her as she spies on multiple locations, or perhaps she has a series of small simultaneous images for different places.

With Pattern Spheres, the mage can use Correspondence to teleport Patterns or move objects from a distance. The mage reaches out and bypasses space to touch the object from range. Searching through multiple locations at once lets the mage perform very acute investigations, especially when using other Spheres to look for specific results.

•••• Rend Space
Co-locate Self

Adepts of Correspondence can not only tear through the Tapestry to create warps or rents in space, they can force such distortions to remain instead of just sliding their own Patterns along brief slips of distance. The mage can create a free-standing wormhole or gate that transports anyone to another place, or he can bend space to remove something from the bounds of the normal Tapestry entirely. Space isn't necessarily mutable at this level, but various points can be connected or Patterns can be placed in new locations or even outside the concept of "space" altogether. Combined with specific wards, the gates through space can be made selective so that only certain types of Patterns may pass through.

By causing her own Pattern to manifest in several perceived spaces, the mage can appear to exist in multiple places at once. Judicious use of other Spheres can let the mage think separately in these places (with Mind magic) or even act differently in each (with Life magic).

Pattern magic used by an Adept of Correspondence can not only teleport or move objects, but establish gates that bar or warp certain Patterns. A particular Pattern can even be thrust into its own bubble of non-space, closeted away from the universe. In such a bubble the mage can scry safely or put away an object where it can't be found or manipulated.

••••• Mutate Localities
Co-location

Mastery of Correspondence allows a mage not only to pull spaces together or hold them apart, but to bend, twist and flex space itself like taffy. The mage can stretch distances, alter volumes and spin around the very concepts of arcs or angles. A three-foot-long rod might be made to span an apparent 10 feet, or a gun could be folded so that its bullet comes out the apparently curving barrel heading toward the shooter, since the bullet travels along curved space and thus follows a straight line through a curved barrel.

Just as an Adept of Correspondence can stack her perceptions or presence to see and interact with multiple locations, the Master can pull entire chunks of space together so that they can interact freely. Instead of gates through which things pass to travel, the whole areas become superimposed on one another. Objects and creatures can exist in two places simultaneously, because the places are now a single location. Items could be made to overlap without damage; in effect, more than one thing *can* occupy a single space at one time.

Correspondence Masters can use other Spheres to cause Patterns to interact bizarrely in overlapped space, to allow themselves to appear in multiple places with independent bodies and thoughts, to cause an object's spatial warping to also reflect in its physical characteristics or to shield areas from intrusion.

Correspondence Effects

• **Sense Connection** — Powerful uses of Correspondence pull places together or wrap space around like taffy. The proper rituals allow the mage to sense such distortions. This Effect is handy in determining if there's a gate nearby, whether someone is scrying or whether an object is being manipulated remotely. The mage can also determine if a Pattern has a specific connection to another Pattern. Obviously, this knowledge is extremely useful in sympathetic magic, or in determining what would be a good item to use

or place to work a specific Effect. Note that a mage can't necessarily tell what something is connected *to*. The Effect merely indicates the presence or absence of an unusual Correspondence.

• **Landscape of the Mind** — One of the most basic Correspondence exercises, this Effect opens the mage's awareness to her surroundings without recourse to normal senses. With concentration and ritual, the mage can "feel" or perceive a great area of space, although extreme areas are both difficult to encompass magically (requiring many successes) and difficult to process mentally (generally requiring the aid of Mind magic for anything beyond a city block in area).

• **Whereami?** — Absolute sense of space gives the mage a perfect determination of her relative location. Combined with Spirit, the mage can even intuit location within spirit worlds, and thus find her place almost anywhere in the Tellurian. Mind magic lets the mage determine the validity of her senses and establish whether she's hallucinating or dreaming. Naturally, wards can alter or block such perceptions, and Paradox or Quiet might confuse the issue. In most cases, this Effect simply lets the mage get a rough idea of where she is relative to some axis of her normal, familiar world, so that she can get home or find her way. This Effect gets its name from the Virtual Adepts, who tend to use computer-aided maps and positioning to determine location.

•• **Apportation** — Although the rudiments of Correspondence are insufficient to actually teleport safely over long distances, a mage can affect some small Patterns. A quick Effect causes an object or creature to transport to or from the mage. The mage must also use the appropriate Pattern Sphere, typically Life or Matter. Apportation can't affect any Pattern more complex than the mage's Correspondence knowledge. That is, even a Master of Life or Matter can transport only very simple Patterns with this limited understanding of Correspondence (plants and very simple animals for Life, basic homogenous substances for Matter).

•• **Correspondence Sensing** — The ancient arts of scrying take many forms. The mage might use a tiny camera, a reflecting bowl, a magic mirror or any number of means. The end results are the same: The mage draws a connection between her senses and the desired location. The mage can use her normal senses there, and thus she can watch events unfold, listen in on a conversation or perform similar feats. With Time or Spirit magic, the mage can even look into other worlds or ages, although such Effects are substantially more difficult and prone to interference or unusual results.

Correspondence Sensing can follow the traces picked up with a more basic **Sense Connection**, allowing the mage not only to determine if something's a gate or if someone's scrying on an area, but to trace back to the location at the other end. This Effect lets the mage determine where a gate goes before passing through, or find out where a spy is lurking and look back. Spirit magic is also required if such a connection crosses the Gauntlet or into certain protected Realms.

Once the mage knows how to sense an area, she can defend against such senses, performing countermagic against other spies by using her Correspondence knowledge — her own knowledge of scrying techniques — to block the perceptions of the spy.

•• **Ward** — Just as a mage can sense distant locations, the mage can also defend against such perceptions. A ward prevents sensory intrusion from most varieties of supernatural perception. The mage simply creates a bar against the connections of space that would form with **Correspondence Sensing**. Such an Effect pits its successes against the successes of any scrying attempt, so a well-built ward can keep out even determined spies while a hasty one just makes scrying a little blurry. The ward's successes subtract from any scrying attempt's successes, but the spy's work of battering down the ward is noticeable unless the spy is also careful enough to rebuild the ward while worming through it.

With the proper conjunctional Spheres, a ward can be set with specific conditions or blockades. A ward with the right Mind magic might let through certain viewers or certain people in a particular state of mind, or who know the right password. Time magic can key a ward so that it's penetrable to viewers in a specific range of time. Matter or Life magic allows wards to be woven directly over such Patterns, and it makes scrying on the objects themselves difficult.

Once the mage can actually pierce or strengthen space (Correspondence 3), a ward can be built as a ban, an actual barrier to passage. The ban might appear as a force field or a set of glowing runes, or it might have no visible manifestation. The Spheres used in the creation of the ban determine what it keeps out. A Matter ban could be keyed to resist intrusion by bullets, iron or radioactive material; a Forces ban might block certain energies; a Life ban can keep out specific creatures or types of creatures; a Spirit ban naturally protects against demons and spirit entities. The ban strengthens space against the creature, combined with the power of the appropriate Pattern Sphere, to hedge it out, though anything *not* keyed to the ban passes through normally. Thus, a ban against spirits would still let a spirit's spells and thrown weapons through, so be careful! Bans must usually be cast over an area, and unless the mage spends a lot of time adding to the duration and conjunctional Effects, they aren't likely to last for too long.

••• **Chain** — "As above, so below." Like objects often bear similar Resonance, and changing one can change the other. With Correspondence magic, a mage can strengthen or weaken the ties between objects or places. Such a chain makes for a powerful tool in building magical links, or a good way to defend against Correspondence senses and attacks. A simple **Chain** Effect lets the mage change the attachment between two Patterns as expressed on the Correspondence Ranges chart on p. 209.

••• **The Seven-League Stride** — Legend has it that the Order of Hermes made magical boots that would take the wearer exactly seven leagues with each stride. Though such boots are an artifact of the past, this Effect mirrors their capabilities. A competent mage can step from place to place nearly instantaneously. Depending on the exact sort of magic used, the mage might seem to blur past in an instant, or just vanish and reappear somewhere else. Regardless, the mage effectively teleports to any place he desires, although near and better-known locations are easier to reach, of course.

Just as a mage can teleport himself through judicious use of Correspondence, objects or creatures can be moved with the right Effect. Simple **Apportation** can affect only simple Patterns, but as the mage's Correspondence knowledge improves, she can affect similarly more complex Patterns. Simple living things or composite objects can be moved with variations on the **Seven-League Stride**. Adepts and Masters of Correspon-

dence can even use their greater rituals to bring along other people or to transport large or unusual substances.

Combined with **Correspondence Sensing**, the mage can travel to just about any place that can be scried — which is a good thing if the mage doesn't want to land in a hostile environment by accident. With **Sense Connection**, the mage could detect a scrying adversary, trace that connection and then teleport to the spy.

••• **Filter All-Space** — Spreading senses across the Tellurian, a mage can search for specific objects or creatures as she extends her senses. The early Correspondence power of **Correspondence Sensing** may allow for scrying of specific areas or Patterns, but this more advanced technique lets the mage look in many places at once! The mage senses everything going on in all the places scried, which may call for the judicious use of Mind magic.

A mage who isn't looking for anything in particular could simply split perception across multiple locations and draw in a welter of sensory input. Conversely, a proper filter, especially with the right Pattern knowledge, lets a mage sift through many places to find an exact and particular target. The mage can then eliminate scenes from the multiplied vista until homed in on the right spot.

•••• **Bubble of Reality** — By removing a Pattern from interaction with "space," a Correspondence Adept can cause an object to exist in its own sort of pocket dimension. Actually, the subject exists beyond the bounds of space, but the distinction doesn't matter much. What's important is that normal space and reality can't interact with the target. However, the mage can still make Correspondence connections between normal space and the "bubbled" subject, so that it's possible to see back out to the world or to scry on the object even as it's cocooned away. Normally, the object exists in its own non-space and the mage establishes a link at need. If the mage wants to keep a link going, cause the bubble's apparent linkage to move or encompass a large area, he must generate a sufficiently large Effect.

•••• **Hermes Portal** — Free-standing gates or doorways to other places are staples of magical travel. The Order of Hermes claims to have pioneered a specific version that creates a permanent Gate through the Tapestry and then includes a ban (see **Ward**) to prevent the passage of anything but sentient, willing creatures. Such a Gate makes for quick and accessible transit between any two places desired, and the mage can make it usable by others easily.

Usually, a properly banned Gate seems like a darkened window; **Correspondence Sensing** allows the mage to trace and view the other end, or the Gate might not ban light and therefore would appear to be a panorama of the destination. Without a ban, anything on the other side of the Gate can pass through freely, which can cause all sorts of complications — the Wu Lung reportedly use an Effect called *tsuiho* that blasts an enemy with the fires of Heaven (Gated in from the sun). Either sort of Gate is a vulgar Effect, although a banned Gate is usually worth the additional work due to its greater safety. Of course, putting the bans on the Gate requires knowledge of the appropriate Spheres (usually Life, Mind and Matter).

Portals can also open into multiple and varied locations. Such a portal might be keyed to a specific thought or password (with Mind), to a sequence of places (passing through them with Time), or to different places according to the subject (with Matter or Life). A particularly defensive portal could cause anyone without the right password to be deposited in one place while all of their material possessions wind up somewhere else. Such portals are staples of travel between heavily guarded Nodes and Chantries, as the magical defenses let mages discriminate easily between who can use such portals and where they'll go.

•••• **Polyappearance** — Instead of disappearing from one place and reappearing in another, an Adept of Correspondence can choose to simply stack himself in multiple places simultaneously. The mage seems to inhabit all of the spaces at once. Onlookers in the various places see the mage react to the surroundings of all the locations. Thus, the mage could react to things that aren't there in one place but are present in another. The mage takes in the sensations of every place at once.

Just because the mage exists in multiple places doesn't mean that he can cause those multiple objects to interact, though. The mage might grab or use something in one place, but it won't have any effect on the other places that the mage exists, unless additional Correspondence magic teleports or co-locates the subject. The mage also suffers the consequences of everything in all the locations. If a mage is in an open area and a small room at the same time, the walls of the small room block the mage's sight entirely (since there's still really only one mage, just experiencing multiple spaces). Getting attacked by multiple people is a bad idea....

On the other hand, polyappearance can be advantageous. Akashic Brothers multiply their positions to strike from multiple angles at once, while Hermetic mages hold conferences with multiple groups simultaneously.

If the mage actually wants to process information from multiple locations, a Mind Effect is invaluable. With Life and Prime, the mage can also make additional bodies, and then use Mind to split her attentions between them, though only one body at a time can actually do magic (in effect, the mage's attention focuses only on one actual body at a time).

••••• **Co-location** — With this bizarre magic, a mage may stack multiple locations and allow them to interact freely. No damage occurs to objects that superimpose themselves on one another during co-location, yet they are solid to one another. Once separated, they will not superimpose again. Stacking entire areas (instead of just objects) is possible, but highly vulgar, difficult and usually only done by desperate or crazed mages.

••••• **Spatial Mutations** — With true Mastery of Correspondence, the mage can alter distance and direction as desired. Though the mage can't really "create space" *per se*, she can easily cause a perceived distance to change without affecting the relative outside world. She can bend space around to make strange shapes that don't hinder objects or creatures inside. To those on the inside, the space seems normal while the outside appears distorted. She can cause things to appear shrunken, grown or distorted, though such magic does not actually affect the subjects directly — it just makes them appear different relative to the rest of the world.

Since the mage can change distances or directions, she can cause an object to become very small relative to herself, but it would still have the same mass and strength. She could make something larger but it would not become any more resilient. In effect, the material properties of various Patterns don't change, just their appearance in three-space.

Entropy

Specialties: Chaos, Dissolution, Fate, Fortune, Order

Luck, fate, chance and chaos are the prime components of the study of Entropy. From this Sphere comes the study of order and randomness, and thus, the study of totally random creation and destruction. All things dissolve eventually into haphazard components, and similarly events form from disjointed, unconnected patterns. Whether in thermodynamic theory or metaphysical metaphor, Entropy describes the simple fact that all things break down, but that new states come from disorder.

For mages interested in coincidence and chance, Entropy affords great possibilities. Mages can sense the flow of probability itself. Determinism and chaos are equal partners to the student. The mage can spot chance on the move, recognizing points where probability quirks in odd directions. With enough mastery, the mage can even influence probability to cause changes and accidents to happen according to her desires. The mage may not be able to specify the exact outcome, but she can at least cause fair or foul fortune to fall as she wishes.

In practical physical terms, Entropy also relates an understanding of the breakdown of systems. Although the mage can't affect Patterns directly until he achieves a great mastery of the Sphere, the final steps on the Entropic path allow the mage to literally tear apart Creation by encouraging the natural — or unnatural — spread of chaos. Matter crumbles. Forces fade. Creatures die. This is the lesson of Entropy: Everything falls apart.

Mages who study Entropy often choose the path of either order or chaos. Students of order look into patterns, into the ways that events flow from one to the next and into the means by which new things build on the old. Students of chaos study the dissolution of patterns, the destruction of matter and the random elements that infect happenstance and probability. Either sort of mage has an intuitive understanding of the forces that build and destroy.

By itself, Entropy cannot be used to attack Life Patterns directly until the fourth level (that is, only an Adept or better can inflict damage directly with the Entropy Sphere). However, indirect Entropy — bad luck, collapsing buildings and just rotten strings of happenstance — can inflict damage normally.

Unsurprisingly, Entropic masters often have a great deal of Entropy Resonance. Such individuals have a nigh-tangible aura that gives an impression of being in exactly the right place and important — or of being completely out of place. Such mages seem to show up in just the right places at the right (or wrong) times. Sensitives and mages with high Awareness note that Entropy mages have a sort of dark, primordial air that belies a swirling, entropic core.

• Sense Fate and Fortune

The rudimentary ability to sense entropy allows a mage to discern the current of destiny. The mage can look into the waves of probability, see places where chance has been altered or nudged, notice nexuses of unlikely events and sense the weaknesses of objects. The mage can determine if something has a particularly lucky characteristic and see if something is on the verge of breaking. Though these senses are far from perfect, they do make the mage a mean gambler and a give him insight into a little bit of luck.

Combined with various Pattern Spheres, the mage can look for weaknesses in a Pattern or see where it will fracture naturally. The mage can also determine if a particular object or creature is lucky. Correspondence with Entropy lets the mage find a place where an unusual event may happen, and Time could let the mage isolate exactly when a manifestation of destiny will appear.

•• Control Probability

After determining the threads of the Tapestry and how they pull on one another, the mage can tug subtly at Fate's loom. Although this ability doesn't necessarily change Patterns directly, it does let the mage alter probability just enough to influence the direction in which the Tapestry unfolds. The Disciple can grab the gross threads of probability where they collect and alter them to suit his whims. Though fine manipulation is still out of reach, the mage can exert a level of control that allows him to determine the outcome of simple events.

By spotting random occurrences, the mage can distinguish predetermined or set patterns from totally chaotic ones. In any pattern where chance and chaos plays a part, the mage can make minor alterations, forcing the randomness to play out as he wishes. Thus, the mage can pull out a good poker hand from a shuffled deck of cards, influence a dice roll subtly or pull out the one odd sock in the sock drawer. The more complex or the more patterned the event, the harder it is to affect, so the mage is best off dealing with fairly simple and subtle changes. The mage doesn't lay a hand on the Patterns around him directly. Instead, he influences the chance of specific things happening.

In conjunction with Pattern Spheres, the mage can sometimes determine how multiple objects, creatures or forces will interact with one another, and which ones will meet. With ephemeral Spheres, the mage can sense patterns in seemingly random fluctuations of the Gauntlet, notice who's likely to come up with a particular idea first or influence an event to happen at a specific time.

••• Affect Predictable Patterns

The more predictable a Pattern, the more easily a mage can determine how it functions — and how it breaks. Finally able to touch other Patterns with Entropic control directly, the mage can cause chaos in static Patterns, or arrest the onset of decay. Of course, the natural course of things always wins out in the end. It's impossible to dodge Fate and erase chance completely. However, the mage can exercise a great deal of control over random events, forcing them to delay, making them happen much sooner than they would and causing a Pattern to undergo its natural end sooner or later than usual.

At this level of skill, the mage can affect only set, predictable Patterns such as Matter and Forces. Life Pat-

terns, with their constant ebb and flow, are too difficult for the mage to hamper directly.

Since the mage can alter set Patterns, he can cause machines and systems to break down or prevent such damage. He can cause a device to fail, to suffer a quirky malfunction or to continue working long after it should've given out. Such blessings and curses do eventually wear off (and the entropy often "catches up" in the end), but they can be a boon in the interim.

With Pattern Spheres, the mage can not only affect a Pattern with Entropy directly, but he can control how it will react with other Patterns. Thus, the mage could make a computer that won't break down for years or get overloaded by an electrical surge.

•••• Affect Life

Living Patterns grow, change and adapt. Because of their constant motion, such Patterns are unpredictable, and they are difficult to read or affect with Entropy. However, the Adept of Entropy has reached a level where he can finally sort out such massively complex developments and make a good guess at influencing the growth and change of life. The Adept learns how things grow, mature, change, adapt and die, how they decay, how they feed into the cycle of life and death. By changing the natural course of multiple points in the life cycle, the Adept can guide it subtly in new directions, whereas simpler changes would merely be corrected.

A mage can use Entropy magic of this level to influence Life Patterns and their successive lineages, bestowing long life, good luck and health, or a quick demise and a blighted family line. Although the Life Pattern is not directly touched, the events around it all quietly bent to force it into directions and circumstances of the mage's choice.

With the Pattern Spheres, the mage can exert direct effects on living beings, causing them to decay or to recover from injury or illness rapidly. Good fortune may result in the healing of diseases, while a curse could cause the subject to suffer complications.

••••• Affect Thought

Just as more physical Patterns are subject to change, so too are the vagaries of thought, space and time itself. The Master of Entropy learns to impact the very changes of universal concepts.

At this level the mage can influence the interaction of many other Spheres of magic. Though the mage might not have extensive knowledge of the other Spheres, she can let random chance take its course to bring elements together or apart as desired, to tear down old concepts or structures and replace them.

Over time, ideas change, new beliefs take hold; places fall away from public use or grow in prominence; even time itself goes through long patches of unassuming emptiness followed by periods of extreme change. The Master can see and affect all of these events. Ideas can be changed, evolved, brought to prominence or discarded. Large strings of coincidence can be moved into a single nexus in time or pushed away to leave a period of absolute normalcy. The mage can cause a place nearby to change in importance and nature to people, taking on certain qualities.

This intellectual entropy creates a true "meme," an idea so strong and pervasive that it creates change through its very existence. By spreading that idea, the Master can make others change their views and alter their perception of reality. The Master does not grossly recast Patterns into new forms. Rather, he opens the floodgates of possibility and, like a gardener, guides and prunes events to grow into a desirable direction.

Naturally, such sublime control of Entropy can be combined with the many Spheres for a multitude of Effects. The mage might always be in the right place at the right time. He can not only change someone's mind, but he can wipe away any previous thoughts, consigning them to the oblivion of Lethe. He can hasten the evolution of living things or the maturity of ideas, or delay them to a later time.

Entropy Effects

• **Locate Disorder and Weakness** — By using Entropy senses, the mage can locate areas of chaos, disorder and decay. A simple sensory Effect determines roughly where an object may break, where an occurrence may happen randomly or how a sequence of events may fall out. With more successes, the mage gets more detailed and accurate information.

By concentrating on an organizational structure, the mage can find the most disorganized and chaotic point. Doing so can be useful in determining areas that may be difficult to understand, or places where a few more little changes may go unnoticed.

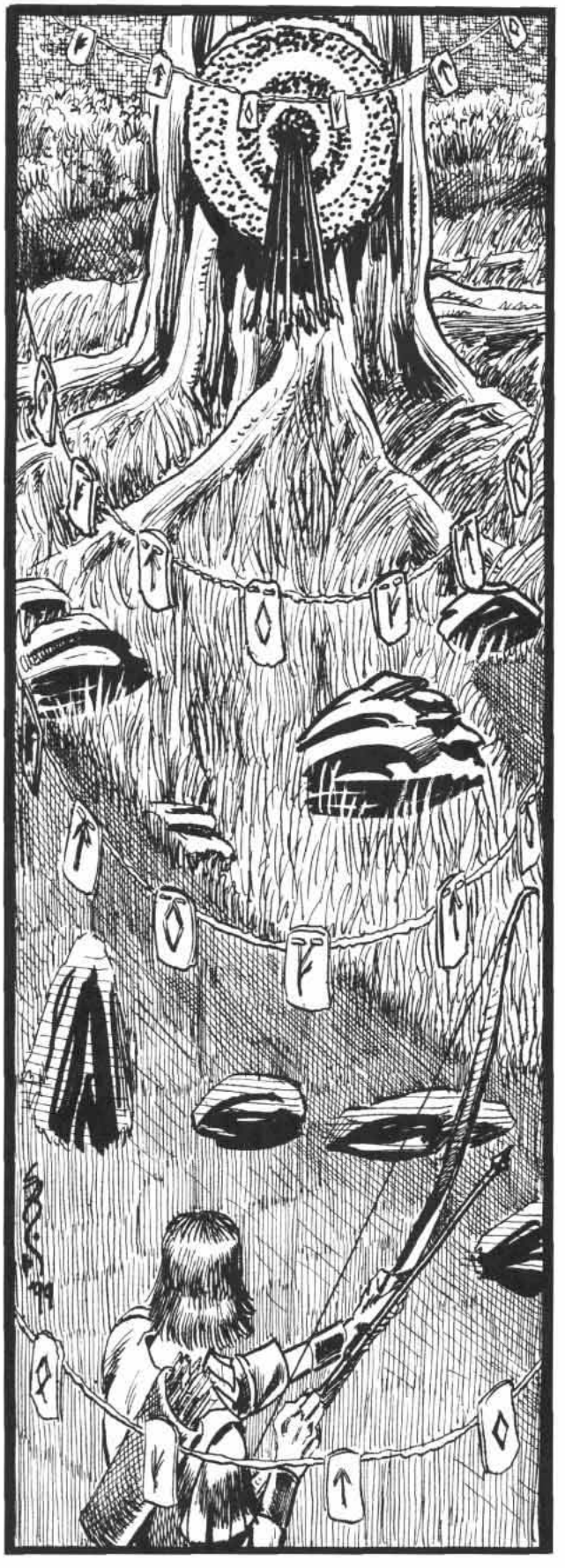
Focusing on a Pattern, the mage can sense the weakest areas and make a devastating attack in those places. Applying the magical senses lets the mage use his Entropy magic to augment his damage roll (see "Magic Enhancing Abilities," p. 155).

• **Ring of Truth** — For those who believe in such things, destiny has a way of coming to the fore. Prophets speak the words of destiny, and events come to pass; people make simple statements that turn out to hold profound truths. Attention to destiny (or just to the patterns that indicate when someone is most likely to lie or to be right about something) can tell a mage whether someone's words hold accuracy.

The **Ring of Truth** relies on some tie to destiny to determine veracity. Although this powerful Effect can help a mage determine if someone is lying or if the individual's words are somehow important, it has limits. The mage can only analyze something that has meaning to her — a question that has no relevance to the mage or the subject cannot be analyzed. That is, the mage cannot simply query a random person on the street, or even a cabal-mate, about sundry details of the Technocracy and expect an objective assessment of truth if the questions are without connection or context to the subject. Furthermore, the Effect is not infallible, and it often leaves the mage with cryptic hunches or incomplete answers. Fate is fickle. "Reply hazy. Try again later."

•• **Beginner's Luck** — There is a statistical possibility that any random attempt to do anything will actually succeed. You can get a hole-in-one the first time you pick up a golf club or hit the bull's eye at a rifle range on the first try. The trouble is doing it the second time, as the chance gets exceedingly improbable. One lucky shot is in the realm of possibility, but five holes-in-one from a rank amateur is beyond belief.

Most mages agree that skill and practice will beat blind luck any day. When faced with any feat that she has never attempted



before (or at least succeeded in), however, a mystic may use the Effect to call on the force of beginner's luck and do the impossible.

For each success with this Effect, the Storyteller may add one success to any non-magical Skill roll that a mage's player has two dice or less to attempt, in addition to any successes that the mage makes on her own. The "automatic successes" from this Effect last until they are used in some spectacular success, at which point the magic expends itself.

Each future attempt to use this same magic for the same feat adds one to the difficulty, reflecting diminishing returns. Mages who wish to continue to make spectacular successes should learn additional levels of the Skill in question. No one stays a beginner for long.

•• **Games of Luck** — By controlling localized probability, the mage can influence the outcome of nearly any game of chance. He can tell which horse will come in, who'll get the winning poker hand and how the dice will fall. As with all Effects of this sort, the mage's successes get increasingly improbable as they continue. At low levels of success, the mage might influence the events but not completely get the desired result. At high levels, the mage can exert a fine (but not exact or total) control over the outcome of such random games. Although it may seem that a mage could make large quantities of cash this way, chance has a way of catching up. Besides, the bookies probably won't let your Virtual Adept run the numbers on his laptop while he's playing poker!

••• **Like Clockwork** — Patterns that rely on precision can be improved and shielded with this simple Effect. By insulating a Pattern against the forces of Entropy, a device can be not only protected from decay and rust, but made to run perfectly for years, never failing and never allowing errors to creep in. Obviously, time catches up with all things so this Effect can't be made permanent. However, it can stretch the life and accuracy of all sorts of machines if it's maintained regularly (especially clocks, computers and other such precision devices). The Technocracy uses this Effect extensively, simply through regular maintenance of its machinery. Tradition mages might work small charms and blessings into a device to give it similar benefits. This Effect's successes establish a duration and size for the subject, keeping it shielded from running down naturally. The successes also defend against Entropy attacks levied against the object in question: An Entropy attack deducts from this Effect's protective successes first before hampering the object's functionality.

••• **Slay Machine** — Just as Entropy can protect a delicate Pattern from failure or decay, so too can chaos induce just such occurrences. By accelerating the process of inaccuracy and failure, the student of Entropy can render a modern technological device a heap of rubble — or at least cause it to fail badly enough that its compounded errors make it worthless.

The number of successes scored on the Effect determines how much chaos the mage manages to inject into a given system. For complex machines, the mage can cause gears to break, belts to snap, axles to bend and rods to slip. Electronic components suffer surges or failures. Computers and calculators get random errors and crashes along with computational problems. Simple material Patterns disperse in an accelerated rate of decay: Water evaporates, steel rusts, wood rots and copper

corrodes. Use the table on page 208 for guidelines on how badly the target is damaged. A couple of successes would be sufficient to interrupt a personal computer, but 10 or more successes would be necessary to crumble a large engine to broken pieces.

•••• **Blight of Aging** — Infusing a Life Pattern with excess Entropy can have all manner of negative effects, primarily by accelerating the process of decrepitude. The caster doesn't necessarily specify any sort of particular physical problem. Rather, the mage simply curses the creature, afflicting the being with a rapid aging and disease. Though Life Patterns are normally self-correcting, the right combination of Entropic factors can drive a Pattern haywire, eventually causing it to fall apart and destroy itself. Rapid aging, cancer, system failure and multiple infections can all result.

A significantly strong curse can reduce the creature to a decaying corpse in a matter of days. More subtle curses may cause the victim to suffer a relapse of an old wound, the onset of a nasty disease or a slow slide into a coma. The mage doesn't choose the result. Instead, she simply levies the curse and watches as the individual suffers the results (like in Steven King's *Thinner*). Medical attention might slow the onset of such a curse, but normal science can do nothing to prevent the deterioration. Victims wither and die slowly, or they just suffer some sort of debilitating disfigurement, and only an enlightened magician or scientist can find a way to battle the curse (with sufficient command of countermagic).

Life-destroying curses are a common (if powerful) staple of most magical styles, but they are usually relegated to the status of dire and dangerous magic. Dabbling in such magic is a quick path to Jhor.

•••• **Midwife's Blessing** — Remember all those stories about fairy godmothers and blessed children? Such blessings are possible with the right command of Entropy. The mage's blessing doesn't ensure specific qualities, but it does help to ensure that the child will grow with health and strength. The usual Verbena form of the Effect is a laying of hands on the belly of the mother-to-be, with the blessing, "Grow tall, straight of limb and well favored." Hermetic mages have been known to enchant for specific qualities in their children, instilling specific forms of *vis* (Quintessence) with Resonance designed to protect against negative qualities. Progenitors are more straightforward, deliberately engineering genetic qualities to remove negative traits and disease susceptibility.

Obviously, ensuring that a child is completely bereft of mischance is too difficult to perform, but a well-cast ritual can at least prevent birth defects or fatal diseases. Protecting a child all through childhood would require an extremely strong ritual (as noted on the Damage and Duration table). The mage also can't specify any specific gifts for the child; all she can do is ensure that harm or misfortune just won't come the child's way.

••••• **Binding Oath** — The most powerful Fate magicians can call destiny itself to witness the oaths and pacts that they oversee. The skein of Fate takes chart of the subject and marks him. Such an oath brings the weight of fortune to bear on any who break it. Even without any additional compulsions or bindings, the oath has power due to the simple weight of destiny hanging over the subject.

A Binding Oath doesn't necessarily lay actual prohibitions on the subject. The individual retains his free will. However, should he *choose* to break the oath willingly, he reaps the full weight of consequence. Fate's tapestry bends to ensure that disaster befalls the oathbreaker, and he's clearly marked to any who can sense the weight of destiny.

Laying a binding oath is a difficult task, since it must be made to last long enough to have any meaning — typical oaths last for a cycle of the moon, a year and a day, even an age or an eternity. Placing a prohibition on an unwilling subject is even more difficult, especially if the victim is already marked for a great destiny. Thus, such oaths are usually saved for situations of the greatest weight and consequence, like ceremonial initiation into the mysteries of a Tradition or the foundation of a new Chantry.

••••• **Mutate Ephemera** — The vagaries of chance can take effect even on time, space and thought, and Masters of Entropy can pull on these threads as well. Most often, this Effect is used in conjunction with constructs of thought and mind. Without even using the Mind Sphere, the Master can cause someone's mind to wander with a glance, lead her down a new chain of thought with a few well-placed words or change her mind about something with a simple warning. The Master of Entropy can also reweave destiny to take note of someone or to ensure that a particular place or time will be a conjunction of great import. As with other manifestations of Entropy, the magician is not guaranteed of the final outcome, but he can make certain that *something* comes to pass, for good or for ill as he determines.

A simple bending of ephemeral chance can cause someone to change his mind about a whim or thought, or it might lead him to a new conclusion. Actually shifting someone's weight of destiny or placing a powerful curse or blessing, making a cryptic prophetic pronouncement or designating an area as a center of unusual happenstance is much more difficult. Placing a bond of fate over an area or for a large span of time requires that the mage address the difficulty of that distance or duration.

FORCES

Specialties: Motion, Primal Elements (Fire, Lightning, Radiance, Cold, etc.), Physics, Technology, Weather

In the physical universe, science postulates the existence of two disparate states: matter and energy. Hermetic theory purports different levels of energetic states, from fire to frost. Primal religions cast natural and elemental forces into powerful, sometimes divine, roles. Through Forces, the universe manifests impersonal energies. Those energies follow rules, though, and the mage with command of Forces can command the elements, be it through quantum mechanics, electronic devices, mystical dances or chants to the patrons of primal archetypes.

Natural forces manifest through energetic Patterns, constructs of Quintessence in motion. Every force has its own unique properties, but they all share the common root of Prime

swirling through a Pattern. By manipulating that Pattern, the mage can turn forces into other forces, negate various forces, increase or decrease their power or even create and banish energy from nothingness. Every magical style has a different means of addressing these forces. Science considers certain forces to be the absence of others, while mystical Traditions usually consider negative and positive forces — heat and cold, light and dark, motion and stillness — to be opposite but independent entities. Regardless, the understanding of Forces lets the mage manipulate all of them equally.

For the mage who indulges in flashy displays and destructive power, Forces presents mastery of the most vibrant magical power. Thunder waits in the hand of the mage of Forces, and flame dances at his command. Naturally, such pyrotechnic displays are often vulgar, but the world is surrounded by forces constantly, and the mage can manipulate them as easily as he can create his own. Apprentices and Disciples can see attacks coming with Forces and defend themselves against all manner of strikes, while Masters can summon up legendary storms, hails of fire and walls of darkness. The unleashed power of agitated Quintessence lets Force Patterns unleash themselves in forms more blatantly destructive than any other Sphere. By itself, study of Forces is not a particularly broad area of influence. Combined with the other Elemental Spheres, Forces allow the mage to master the entirety of the material world. With the ephemeral Spheres, the mage can influence the very concepts of Forces, their release and transmission and their spiritual energies. This Sphere is not subtle, and its effects can be both long-ranging and devastating.

Mages who study Forces tend to carry with them an aura of sheer energetic power: a barely felt wave of heat, an electrical flash to the eyes, the clinging of passing shadows. Like Forces Effects themselves, such manifestations are often more noticeable than the results of other Spheres. The precise sort of manifestation often depends upon the wizard's specialty. A magician who toys with kinetic motion may almost look like he hovers off the ground whilst a mage of darkness is constantly enshrouded in shade. Since they are both noticeable and Paradox-prone, other mages respect and fear such wizards. Forces are blatant and destructive, but most mages are not known for using Forces subtly or to many and varied Effects.

• Perceive Forces

A mage must first understand what he wishes to control, and the apprentice of Forces learns to sense different Force Patterns, read their intensity and learn of the distinctions between different variants of Forces. The mage can sense positive and negative Forces, watch them interact, see where they emanate and where they go. He can determine the intensity of a light source as easily as he can determine the presence of radio waves or radiation.

Combined with other Elemental (Pattern) Spheres, Forces senses let the mage see how other Patterns interact with or create Forces. With ephemeral Spheres, the mage can see the Quintessence that flows to form forces, examine the spiritual archetypes of Forces, determine the origin of various forces and figure out where they're going.

•• Control Minor Forces

Energy can always be diverted, and the Disciple who understands Forces can influence its direction and intensity. The mage can affect various Patterns easily, altering their direction, changing their qualities and controlling their dispersion. The mage cannot yet create forces from nothingness or change forces into different states, but he can manipulate how the forces interact with the rest of the world.

By diverting a force, the mage can cause kinetic energy to change direction, thus changing an object's course. He can make fires dance according to specific images and spread to (or avoid) certain areas. He can lengthen shadows or bend light so that images reach different destinations. He can even reroute the passage of electricity or cause radiation to avoid him. The mage can thus render himself or someone else invisible, cause sound to manifest somewhere other than its origin, and otherwise protect an area from interaction with forces.

A mage can affect only individual Patterns of force at this level, and only on a scale that he can encompass himself. Thus, the mage could render a single individual invisible, but he couldn't cause an entire building to vanish. He could make a flame flicker with a particular image, but he couldn't control the course of a forest fire. Simply directing a force away is much easier than actually taking total control of the force and directing it with precision, but as long as the mage can reasonably influence the minor force, he can take total control of its direction and focus with enough effort.

Combining control of minor forces with other Pattern Spheres, the mage can give a certain item properties that repel or attract forces, make an object or pathway more susceptible to forces or shield part of an individual from interaction with a specific force. With the ephemeral Spheres, the mage can freeze a force in place while allowing it to continue to expend its energy, cause a force to affect a location far distant from its actual position or redirect spiritual energies.

••• Transmute Minor Forces

Finally able to grasp and twist the Patterns of forces, a skilled mage can convert forces into other types, shift their intensity radically or even create force from nothing (and banish it to oblivion as well). Although he is still able to affect only individual small Patterns of force, the mage can cause the elements to dance at his whim. He can impart motion into an object, make a fire that burns cold or cause shadows to explode into bursts of light. Mages can use this power to fly, hurl lightning, pulse out electronics and perform similarly dramatic feats. The mage cannot create force from nothing without the use of Quintessence, but he can turn minor forces to his own advantage.

In conjunction with Pattern magic, the mage can convert a force into an object or even a creature, or disperse a material into raw energy. He can easily weave telekinetic controls around a creature or object, and he can cause his attacks to pass through objects or creatures harmlessly on their way to the target. Similarly, with the ephemeral Spheres he can transmute a pure idea into a construct of force, lay waste to a distant

location or set up a special attack that waits until an appropriate time or event comes to pass.

•••• Control Major Forces

The Adept of Forces can spread his knowledge to encompass entire groups of force and Patterns that exceed his own scale. With enough effort, he can redirect massive energies, bring disaster crashing down across a great area or shield entire groups of people from outside elements. Anything that is possible with control over minor forces is possible on a large scale now, with the mage able to focus great energy into a single point or disperse massive powers across a wide area. The Adept still cannot transmute large scale forces except a little bit at a time, but he can at least divert major forces to gain time necessary to affect them later. Such massive Effects are usually vulgar, but sometimes there's no choice and you just have to rely on the big guns.

In combination with the other Spheres, Adept understanding of Forces lets the mage do many of the things that he could do with lesser forces on a much broader scale. He can insulate a whole building or area of forest from fire and electricity, divert light into a series of rooms, banish all sound from a huge cavern or render a Chantry invisible to normal sight. He can defend against the storms of power that sweep through the spirit world and redirect massive forces to other places and times.

••••• Transmute Major Forces

The Master of Forces is not to be trifled with. Through exertion and will, he can create power on an incredible scale, creating Effects that include storms of fire, massive charges of electricity, shadows that blot out entire city blocks and typhoons even in the midst of a calm day. The mage can disperse such forces as well, dousing a forest fire or bathing an entire area in light at night by transmuting darkness to illumination. Although conjuring or banishing forces from nothingness still requires Quintessence, the mage can easily turn any existing force to his own ends with his knowledge of forces alone. Incredibly Paradoxical, such Master strokes can unleash force on a tremendous scale, capable of laying waste to entire cities. Mystical sorcerers command the hand of nature, ride the winds and rip light and darkness alike from the moment of inspiration. Technocrats bring forces to heel with containment fields, magnetic bottles and the power of the atom.

When a Master of forces combines his power with other Effects, the carnage is unlimited. A Master can create an Effect in a distant place or one that hangs and explodes outward at a later time. He can create the forces from nothingness with Prime energy and set up strokes that befall only specific victims or unfortunates. These mages are the terror of their enemies, for their mighty forces can destroy whole cabals. Few Masters of Forces survive to an old age.

Forces Effects

• **Darksight** — In the absence of visible light, the mage can shift his perceptions up or down the spectrum of electromagnetic radiation. This allows him to view infrared or ultraviolet light, radio waves, X-rays, etc. He won't be able to discern colors, but he may read other interesting perceptions from the various spectra — X-rays would allow him to see an object's underlying structure, and he could see in the dark using infrared.

Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether tend to use special visual lenses, filter programs or goggles for this Effect, and they look through scientific spectra. Mystical magicians use this power to see by heat or sound, often mimicking natural creatures that can do the same.

• **Quantify Energy** — By invoking this Effect, a mage can sense the type and amount of energy at work around her. She can easily translate her perceptions into accurate measurement units such as volts, amps and teslas. Note that this quantification includes kinetic energy, which allows a mage to determine an object's speed in relation to her if she knows the object's mass.

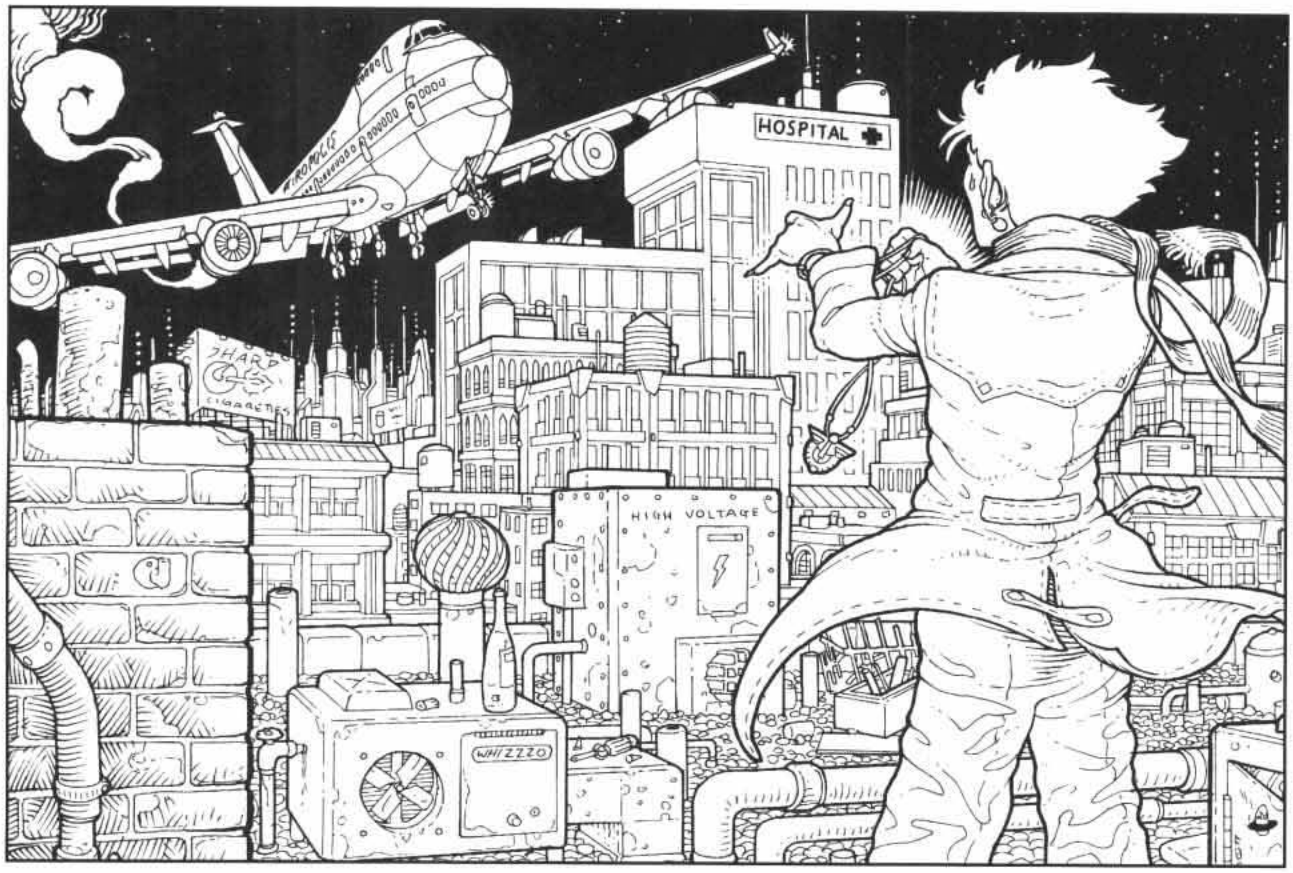
Just because a mage can sense and quantify energy doesn't necessarily let her make sense of it. A mage could note the presence of radio waves, but he might not be able to translate and hear them immediately.

•• **Electrical Chaos** — Virtual Adepts in need of a quick diversion often sabotage Technocratic equipment with a sudden electrical pulse. Akashic Brothers and Hermetic mages sometimes concentrate electricity around themselves or their weapons and use it to shock the enemy. Either way, the mage simply diverts the flow of electricity, causing it to concentrate in one area or discharge in another. Such an Effect is a damaging attack, striking against a living opponent or a device susceptible to electrical damage.

•• **Energy Shield** — By bulwarking against certain forces, it's possible to not only defend against many attacks, but also to create a variety of interesting exceptions to "natural law." Bending away light makes a mage invisible, but it also means that she can't see. She must rely on other senses or use Correspondence to sense other locations. Pushing away sound renders the mage completely silent; the mage could also concentrate sound into an area, drawing in sound from around her and keeping it from being heard elsewhere. It's a simple matter to protect against electrical or fire attacks, too. Altering the direction of incoming kinetic energy allows the mage to stop or deflect bullets. By deflecting gravity, the mage can make himself essentially weightless, able to float or levitate, even controlling direction by allowing forces from certain directions to interact with her. Such a shield could also be helpful in repelling radiation or other esoteric sorts of rays.

Note that most mages only maintain a shield against one or two types of forces at a time. It's nearly impossible to make a shield that hedges out all incoming forces.

••• **Friction Curse** — Turning a subject's motion into heat energy, the mage not only renders the subject unable to move, but causes the victim to heat up until he bursts into flame! This Effect essentially turns the subject's movement into damage, so faster objects are more susceptible. A modified version can cause the subject's own breathing action to create cold, freezing the subject in place and encasing him in a block of ice. Partial successes negate some motion and impart some heat; multiple successes can transform motion into damage. Better still, since the target can't move, he is hard-pressed to dodge the ensuing eruption of fire or cold.



••• **Telekinesis** — At low levels of skill, a mage can perform rudimentary telekinesis by altering the directions of motive forces on an object. With the ability to transmute forces, though, the mage can easily turn body heat, a shout, even ambient light into a push that controls or moves an object. (With Prime magic the mage could create telekinetic force from nothing.) It's easier to manipulate smaller objects, of course, and fine control is quite difficult. The mage must also have a constant source of force. If no outside force influences the subject, there's nothing to transform into kinetic control. On the other hand, since people generate all manner of forces, it's usually a simple matter to hinder an enemy's movements.

Some mages focus telekinesis by using dolls or representations of the subject, while others just use transformative runes or phrases to direct the motion. In many cases, mages find it easier to telekinetically manipulate the subject if they can act out the motion, but that action isn't always necessary.

•••• **Embracing the Earth Mother** — The Earth Mother sleeps only fitfully, and the Dreamspeakers can cause Her to stir in Her slumber with their drums and calls. The weight of Gaia's attention draws around the target, focusing gravity about him. Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether perform similar feats technologically, by concentrating and redirecting gravitons. Euthanatos sometimes freeze their targets in place with the "weight of terror."

Successes scored on such a result focus the force of gravity around the target, making the victim seem to weigh more. A good guideline is that each success beyond the initial casting requirements increases gravity around the subject by one g (Earth gravity), so with four extra successes a subject would feel five g's (normal gravity plus four). Thus, a 75 kilo man would feel as if he were a whopping 375 kilograms! (That's about a 165 pound man to an 825 pound man, for all you English weight system users.) The character can probably stand in g forces up to his strength rating. Beyond that, he's reduced to hugging the ground, and if the forces exceed twice his Strength rating, he starts taking damage from his own body weight — excess levels of gravity score damage on the damage chart normally.

Hermetic mages are known to concentrate surrounding forces like fires and electricity into their opponents as well, diverting massive power to strike their enemies.

•••• **Storm Watch** — By redirecting wind forces and heat patterns, the mage can bring rapid change to the weather. Verbena and Dreamspeakers in particular perform such rituals with dances, sympathetic magic or paeans. The mage can banish wind, bring up or disperse clouds and cause the surroundings to become hotter or colder.

With two successes, the mage could perhaps stir up a light breeze or cool off a hot day, while with 10 successes, the mage could generate a heat wave or bring in rapidly moving clouds over a small area.

••••• **Inferno** — By sucking all the light and sound out of an area and transforming it into heat, the mage can cause a small area (like a person or building) to suddenly burst into all-consuming flames. If the mage spends several turns gathering the Effect, the subject may notice an odd darkening and silence, almost as if doom itself hovers over him. Once released, the

Effect raises the subject's temperature rapidly, causing it to explode or melt. Naturally, this Effect is vulgar as all hell, but it still scores damage normally. Plus, it's aggravated to boot.

••••• **Tempest in a Teapot** — The stormwives of the Verbena use this magic to harness the pull of the moon and the flow of the tides and brew a tempest, using a small copper kettle inscribed with runes and a length of cord as their foci. Multiple witches may act in concert, dancing around a larger cauldron. The Verbena of England claim that the storm that wrecked the Spanish Armada was their doing. Existing storms may be called and controlled with Forces 4, but with this level, the witch weaves the tempest out of the energy of the moon herself.

Life

Specialties: Cloning, Creation, Disease, Evolution, Healing, Improvement, Shapeshifting, Wounding

Those material things that move, grow and change come under the purview of the Sphere of Life. While other Patterns remain stagnant, or are self-contained flows of Quintessential energy, life Patterns are different. They connect to the Tellurian, drawing Quintessence as they live and grow and returning it to the flow with their own contributions and excretions. Only in death does this process cease, the Pattern stultifying to base matter. It is this connection to the cosmos that makes life unique, and it is from this ever-changing flow that life adapts and draws its infinite complexity.

The power over life is a great one, the power to create and influence all creatures. Mages who study Life learn to heal and alter animals and later themselves and others. As the mage's knowledge grows, he learns to affect more complex Patterns. Eventually, the mage can change shapes, restore youth and health, heal injury. Conversely, he can strike down foes, rend apart the living and spread disease in his wake.

Among the Traditions, study of life is a respected discipline. Life mages are the healers, the nurturers and the defenders who bring health and the joy of living with them. Even potent necromancers and the undead cannot stand against the ever-renewing power of life. With the strength drawn of life, the mage can be whole and effectively immortal.

Life magic holds sway over any creature or cell that still moves with the ebb and tide of living breath. Even cells in plucked fruits or severed parts may still be governed by life while there is yet the spark within them. Once the subject finally dies — its Quintessence still and its connection to the universe inert — it returns to Matter.

Masters of Life are without blemish or imperfection, carefully healing away the foibles and flaws of their own bodies. Strong and radiant, they seem to glow with the unending bounty of generous life. The appearance of such a mage reflects her desires and moods, and she eats or drinks, breathes, ages or changes according to her will.

Note that when a mage alters or heals a Pattern, she does so to the limit of her capabilities. If a mage pulls off a Life Effect, she cannot recast the same Effect for more successes until the Pattern has undergone some natural change (that is, a change of scene). Thus, the mage can transform herself and then change differently or change back, but if she heals an injury or causes a wound in a given scene, she cannot use that power on the same subject again — she's done all that she can to the Pattern at that time.

If a mage affects a Pattern and changes it away from its true nature — that is, increasing or decreasing Attributes or adding new characteristics that are not natural to the creature — then the subject suffers the phenomenon of Pattern leakage (or bleeding). Over time (once per day, sometimes more often) the creature suffers injury as its Life Pattern fights the changes, generally taking one health level of lethal damage for each gross change. A mage skilled in Prime can use Quintessence to offset this injury, but when he runs out of Quintessence (or if the victim is not a mage), the problem will set in again. The only way to overcome this Pattern bleeding is to alter the Pattern permanently or to remove the changes.

• Sense Life

The most basic principles of Life magic involve the study of living Patterns and their motions. The mage starts by learning to feel the flow of life energy. From that point, the mage can sense injury or sickness, and he can feel the potency of vibrant health. Given experience, the mage can easily learn to sense nearby living creatures, to determine their nature, health, sex and age, and to sense any tears or imperfections in her own Pattern.

With the other Pattern Spheres, Life senses allow a mage to tell not only if there are people nearby, but what they wear or carry and whether the forces and objects around them cause injury. Entropy with Life tells whether they will suffer from disease or mischance and what form it will take. Time and Correspondence magic lets the mage sense the living Patterns of far-away individuals or people in the past or future. With Prime, the mage can actually see the stream of Quintessence that bonds all living things to the cosmos.

•• Alter Simple Patterns
Heal Self

A mage's manipulation of living Patterns begins with the most rudimentary ones, and with the ones most familiar to her. The budding Life mage learns to affect sessile Patterns and ones that make up very simple creatures. She also learns to recognize her own innate Pattern's form, to help it in the process of restoring itself.

A novice of Life magic can heal herself, restoring her Pattern to its original form and closing wounds or removing alterations. She cannot actually transform herself into new forms or change her Pattern from its original base nature yet, but she can at least defend herself if others do so. She can determine if her Pattern has been affected in some way, sensing disease or imbalance long before any symptoms manifest.

With control over simple Life Patterns, the mage can also influence rudimentary life forms like bacteria and plants. Any

plant, invertebrate, algae or fungus is within her purview, and the mage can harm or change them as she desires, perhaps shaping them to grow in certain ways or striking offending creatures dead. The mage can't totally transform them yet. Such Patterns must retain their original nature, but they can be coaxed into moving, growing and changing in certain ways.

In conjunction with other Pattern Spheres, the mage can imbue herself or a living being with resistance to certain objects or forces, or she can cause such other Patterns to influence the growth and development of simple creatures. She can set up Effects to heal herself upon the receipt of injury (with Time magic) or use Correspondence to sense and alter life anywhere in the world.

••• Alter Self
Transform
Simple Patterns

By the time the mage reaches a significant understanding of Life, she unlocks the keys to transformation: the means to turn a life Pattern away from its original nature and into something different. She can change her own Pattern in startling ways, and she can exert mastery over simple living things. To more complex creatures, she can exert change, causing the entity to grow or change as she desires.

By working with her own Pattern, the mage can take on new qualities or change old ones, perhaps giving herself unusual features. She can grow claws or suspend briefly her need to breathe. She must remain fundamentally human, but she can stretch the limits of her own capabilities and surpass her normal limits of mortal flesh.

With total mastery of simple Patterns, the mage can transform them into new shapes, turning a crawfish into a cedar tree (albeit a very, very small one) or reweaving a simple bacterium into a deadly killer. Her understanding is sufficient to create and destroy such Patterns utterly, and to cause them to grow, change or die as she sees fit.

By using simple Pattern-transformation in conjunction with other Spheres, the mage can create simple living things out of nothingness, or turn nonliving matter or forces into living creatures, although such creations have no minds of their own unless the mage uses the Mind Sphere. She can also alter creatures across a distance or push or pull such beings into other places, even the spirit worlds, with the proper Spheres. She can cause a change that will not affect a creature for some time, such as causing an apple tree to suddenly blossom in the

middle of winter some years later, or she can render plants and simple animals safe from disease and injury.

•••• Alter Complex Patterns Transform Self

The Patterns of all living things are accessible to the Adept of Life. The mage can not only rewrite her own Pattern as she desires, but she can shift and change the Patterns of nearly any other creature, including sentient beings. She can heal with a touch, gift someone with great strength, cause wounds or make a being manifest robust youth and vitality.

With self-transformation, the mage can reshape her Pattern in any form that she desires. She can take on new characteristics, become an entirely different creature of the same rough size and mass and even bolster her natural capabilities beyond human levels. However, such gross manipulations often lead to difficulties. It may take some time to get used to a new animal form, and the form itself may not have the capacity to store the mage's human knowledge and intellect. Animal forms often come with instincts as well, and the mage risks losing her identity over time. The Pattern itself usually has a tendency to grow back into its natural shape, too, so a mage who alters her own Pattern too radically may suffer injury as her Pattern fights against the confining magic.

By altering complex Patterns, a mage can heal people or animals and perform small manipulations to them. She cannot yet create duplicates of them or totally change their true nature, but she can guarantee health or instill weakness or injury.

In conjunction with other Pattern magic, the Adept of Life can assume various supernatural properties: becoming a fire-breathing dragon or eating metal, for instance. She can make wounds that will not heal or set transformations that will revert at a set time, or even stretch out to heal or harm people that she cannot see.

••••• Transform Complex Patterns Perfect Metamorphosis

All living things become as putty under the sculpting hands of a Master of Life. Her command of life is flawless, bringing her into perfect harmony with the flow of life energy. She can change all life at her whims, and she can heal or harm as needed and desired.

The mage can rework a creature into any form as long as the mass and size remain similar, thus turning a man into a tree or raising up a small dog into a human child. Such transformations are difficult, of course, but spectacular. The mage could reduce a group of enemies into large, flopping fish, for instance. She can also smooth out Pattern defects and deformities completely, and she can mutate the Pattern into any sort of natural or unnatural change.

With her total control of her personal Pattern, the mage can immunize herself from the rigors of age, disease, hunger or injury. She can regenerate nearly any damage, although direct Pattern damage may take time and effort. Better still, she can surpass many of the usual limits of Pattern transformation. She no longer needs to worry about the problems of losing her identity to animal instinct, for example. She can even cause her own Life Pattern to grow or shrink as needed, allowing her to change her size.

Most phenomenally, a Master of Life can combine her powers with other Spheres to create complex living creatures from Quintessence or from other Patterns. She can make clones of existing beings, make mythic monsters or let her creative whims take her as far as her resources allow. She can gift such creations with their own minds and spirits by use of the appropriate Spheres, or leave them empty, perhaps as homes for a disembodied spirit. She can even create a new body and move her consciousness into it, or reincarnate into a successive body that will be born in the future. With access to Prime and Correspondence, the mage can open her awareness to the entire vast glory of life and touch any living thing.

Life Effects

• **Life Scan** — A simple attachment to a computer can search for the bio-fields of nearby living creatures, allowing a Virtual Adept to determine the locations and conditions of such targets. Although such scans require additional work (and Correspondence) to reach over a great distance, they can be helpful in targeting friends or enemies, since the Virtual Adept can recognize individual Patterns that have been detected and logged previously. Most Virtual Adepts also include special filter programs to cut out undesired life-forms from the scan, like microscopic organisms or simple vermin (aside from Technocrats).

Many other Traditions can perform a similar Effect with an appropriate scrying tool. A Verbena might use a mirror that shows images of nearby creatures, while a Euthanatos sniffs for the distinctive scents of various creatures.

• **Prayer of Healing Revelation** — The Celestial Chorus studies Life magic to detect illness and injury. These Disciples learn to identify flaws that indicate various diseases, injuries, poisons and parasitic infestations in a life form's Pattern. The mystic must usually make a Perception roll when scanning the Pattern. The more successes scored on the Effect, the more specific the information she receives. One success might reveal poison, two might reveal that the poison is affecting the respiratory process, and three successes might determine the poison to be arsenic.

•• **Alter Simple Creature** — By grasping a Life Pattern and molding it metaphysically, the mage learns to heal or change it as desired. Euthanatos use a version of this called "Little Good Death" to learn how to tear simple Patterns, bringing death to plants or small creatures as a stepping-stone to greater skill. Verbena use this skill to mold their trees and pets into pleasing and healthy forms, and to cure disease or injury in such. Healing or injuring a creature uses the damage chart on p. 209. Causing a change to the Pattern relies on the Storyteller's judgement of the power of the feat and severity of the change.

•• **Heal Self** — Each Tradition has a time-tested means for self-healing; mages get into too many scrapes not to! Verbena renew themselves with a draught of pure water or a charm of good fortune. Hermetic mages restore the form of the physical body by words that mold flesh. The Akashic Brotherhood uses "Ho Tien Chi," or the "Breath of the Day After Birth," to bring in healing energies and vitality, as taught through Do. Celestial Choristers lay on hands while Technocrats use simple slap-on medical patches, amp drugs and regenerative devices. The

Effect is simple: The caster simply heals damage as specified on the Damage and Duration table (p. 209).

••• **Better Body** — Mages who rely heavily on Life Effects use this power to alter themselves. A mage can take on various forms to her advantage: Claws, gills, increased Physical Attributes or Appearance, body armor and more. The only limits are imagination and what the mage believes that he can do within his paradigm. Successes scored indicate the limits of the change: One success would be good for an extra dot on one Attribute, for instance. Additional successes can maintain the Effect or generate larger changes.

If a mage changes a Pattern beyond normal limits — increasing Attributes to legendary levels (six or more), adding totally inhuman features, fortifying to soak against aggravated wounds, etc. — the subject gains permanent Paradox as long as the changes remain. Usually Paradox is a problem only for mages, but other victims can suffer as well, especially when Paradox erupts near them. Such gross changes always cause Pattern bleeding as well.

Simply altering a Pattern within its normal range of forms — swapping two Physical Attributes, for instance, or changing eye color — is a much simpler and less danger-prone use of this Effect.

••• **Rip the Man-Body** — With this Effect, a Euthanatos can rend the Patterns of complex life forms. As the mage lacks detailed knowledge of such complex Patterns, she cannot unravel the Patterns quickly. Damage is inflicted using the table on p. 209. This damage often manifests as lesions and internal hemorrhaging.

•••• **Mutate Form** — The mage can alter the form of any living creature, changing its appearance and function much like the Better Body Effect. Disguises and beneficial alterations are popular among Tradition mages in varying degrees — Verbena sometimes give their pets unusual capabilities, Euthanatos might change the appearance of their confederates and Hermetics would just deform people with whom they became irate.

The mage can also transform himself, taking on animal form, changing shape and generally screwing with the basic nature of his Pattern. In this case, the mage can actually turn his Life Pattern's true nature into that of another creature: he can become a true cat, for instance, and thus avoid the problem of Pattern bleeding due to internal conflict. On the downside, the mage fundamentally *is* whatever form he assumes. He must spend a point of Willpower each day to retain knowledge of his former self, his intellect and human instincts; he may also need time to adapt to his new form (as adjudicated by the Storyteller — two experience points is a good measure). Certain Mind magic can help the mage to get around some of these problems, which is fortunate, because if the mage runs out of Willpower in his animal form, he completely loses his identity and believes himself to be a normal animal of that sort.

The successes rolled determine the scale of change possible with this Effect. As with any gross physiological change, there is a risk of Pattern bleeding if the true nature of the Pattern isn't altered.

•••• **Physiological Emotion Control** — Many Virtual Adepts view human beings as biological computers. By inducing certain reactions within the physical body, the Adepts can "reprogram" a person's behavior. Emotions like anger or fear can be induced by causing the body to release adrenaline, while endorphin stimulation can bring on intense pleasure. Even depression has biological causes. This "tyranny" of the physical body over the mind is one of the reasons that the Virtual Adepts wish to attain a virtual reality state, where that body is left behind and the mind is no longer a slave to the body's desires.

Any Adept of Life can induce emotions in a subject by causing the person's body to release or stifle the correct hormones. More successes on the Effect roll make the emotion more severe.

••••• **Animal Form** — Although the mythical(?) Circe's transformation of men into pigs is perhaps one of the better-known examples of this power, Verbena and Hermetics still have a history of changing offenders into various sorts of animals. The subject must retain a similar general size, although the mage can induce the Pattern metamorphosis to cause the victim to shrink into a mouse or grow into an oak tree with enough work. The subject's consciousness remains, but it will eventually fade into the new form, as with **Mutate Form**.

Animals can also be changed into humans with this power — although they retain their animal instincts, they may slowly become more human. Whether an "uplifted" animal could Awaken is unknown.

••••• **Perfect Metamorphosis** — Overcoming the problems of imperfect Pattern-transformation, the mage can create a Pattern that carries the physical nature of a beast yet holds as well his own persona and mind. The mage can take on the shape of any creature that he desires, of any size. She can shift or revert, cure her own Pattern of undesired changes and maintain a perfect state of health in any living form as she desires.

Matter

Specialties: Complex Patterns, Conjuration, Shaping, Transmutations

All non-living Patterns that coalesce into form fall into the Sphere of Matter. Along with Forces and Life, this Sphere completes the cycle of Pattern Spheres that influence things of the material world. Given the incredible utility and variety of objects all across the Tellurian, this Sphere is highly versatile and useful, and it's often underestimated due to its perceived "base" nature.

Matter Patterns are objects whose flow of Prime has coalesced into a simple, static form. The Quintessence in Forces is still active and energetic, and Life Patterns flow with the universe in a process of give-and-take. Matter, by contrast, is inert. However, manipulating Matter is usually a much simpler affair than manipulating other Patterns.

Magicians who study Matter can create objects (with base elements or Prime energy), transform them and change their properties. Matter can also be made to behave in unusual fashions, flouting scientific law and even, in some cases, the bounds of

common sense. At the very advanced levels of study, Masters can blur the lines between matter and energy, creating Matter Patterns that throw off Forces (radiation) or bear a resemblance to Life.

Masters of Matter gift everything they own with vibrancy and solidity. Their clothing and possessions are often exceptional, with special qualities and great durability. Indeed, many take pleasure in bringing artistic forms or changes to materials that they own. Anything can be shaped or created with Mastery of Matter, but true art expresses more than base material.

• Matter Perceptions

The most basic understanding of Matter gives a mage a clear insight into the nature of material objects. By scrutinizing a Pattern, the mage can tell not only how massive something is and what it's made of, but whether it's a composite, whether it's damaged in any way, how it might interact with other objects and what could be hidden inside.

Combining Matter and Entropy lets the magician sense weak points and identify the best means by which to break them; Forces tells what energy to bring to bear against objects. With Life magic, the mage can determine the presence and composition of inert matter in living Patterns, like piercings and implants. The use of more ephemeral Spheres lends itself to scrying at range or determining whether a given object is actually a form of Tass.

•• Basic Transmutation

The mage may transmute one substance into another, without changing its shape, temperature or basic state (solid, liquid, gas). The object simply takes on a new composition, at the mage's whim. Complex creations are more difficult or in some cases impossible; usually, mages are limited to creating or transmuting homogenous substances — a block of wood into a brick of stone, for instance, but not into an alloy of gold and osmium. Naturally, the sorts of possible transmutations depend heavily on paradigm. A Hermetic mage might turn lead into gold alchemically, a Chorister could duplicate the miracle of turning water into wine but a Technocrat is more likely to convert simple elements like hydrogen to helium.

Only simple and inert forms of Matter can be transformed at this level. The mage cannot make radioactive elements. Doing so requires Mastery, as such Patterns shed their essence in the form of Forces. Matter Patterns also tend to have a rigid shape, and this shape cannot be changed with this base understanding. Of course, if the mage turns a rock into butter, he can sculpt or melt it easily. Rare materials are also hard to create. Metaphysically, such matter is a precious substance, not easily found or made, which reflects in the difficulty of magical duplication.

Basic transmutation combines with other Pattern Spheres to let the mage create solid matter from forces or even from living beings. (Of course, anyone can turn a Life Pattern into a Matter Pattern — just kill it). The mage can also conjure a basic object out of Prime energy. With the right understanding of Forces, the mage can impart enough energy to change an item's state while transforming it. He can use Correspondence to pull or push items around and even to reach into them and remove parts. The mage can give a spirit a physical representation or create an object according to a mental image with Quintessence.

••• Alter Form

Although Matter Patterns are resilient, they are not inviolable, and a mage with enough experience can reshape matter as he desires. This level of skill lets the mage sculpt the object mystically, changing its form or even compressing or expanding certain elements of its material properties. The mage can increase the object's density or disperse it into gas, or he can just make it take on a different silhouette. Broken materials can be rejoined and matter made whole once more, or the mage can pull things apart, separate them into components or make mixtures of matter.

With the Pattern Spheres, the mage can easily draw energy out of a Matter Pattern or make it mesh with a living creature. More ephemeral Spheres let the object change in response to thought or even cause it to shift randomly into a useful (or harmful) shape.

•••• Complex Transformation

By tearing out the detailed elements of combined Matter Patterns, an Adept of Matter can rebuild complex Patterns that rely on rare and complex material or on multiple independent pieces with different bases. Assuming that he has the appropriate mundane knowledge, the mage can easily make objects with moving parts or do the opposite in order to turn valuable equipment into useless lumps. Whereas a less experienced mage is limited to making simple items or Patterns of a homogenous sort, an Adept can create alloys, combinations of multiple types of matter and other fine details. Both the level of detail and the complexity of the final object determine the difficulty of the Effect.

With Forces or Life magic, the mage can transform creatures or energies directly into complex objects. He can turn a canary into a golden clockwork songbird or a lightning bolt into a silver stylization. Life magic lets the mage blend living and unliving matter, making silk, fresh food and the like. Prime energy can be used to conjure complex matter from nothing — more than one Euthanatos has pulled a gun seemingly out of nowhere.

••••• Alter Properties

The highest Matter Arts allow a mage to rebuild individual segments of a Matter Pattern at will. Instead of making base matter or objects of combined materials, the Master can devise entirely new Matter, setting its physical properties as desired. He can transmute normal Matter so that it has a different boiling point, specific gravity or transparency. He can also create an object with a mass, density and viscosity determined at whim independent of any sort of normal physical laws. The Patterns of Matter can be made to interact with other Matter in unique ways, so the Patterns may be explosive, acidic or even immaterial to one another.

With Mastery of Matter, the mage is not limited to the so-called "laws" of the material world. His creations can have whatever strengths and physical characteristics he desires. Matter Patterns can even be made that transform spontaneously, changing state or characteristics or throwing off Forces (radiation).

With the other Spheres, a Master of Matter can build invincible armor out of Prime energy, make devices that heal or harm living creatures outside of all normal expectations and develop complex, rare and lethal substances.

Matter Effects

• **Analyze Substance** — Any number of simple enchantments can be used to determine material properties. The mage could pick out gold from iron pyrite and tell exactly what a chair's made of and how much weight it can hold. Mages do so in many and varied ways. Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts use their favorite tricorder-style sensing devices, Hermetics often compare to known samples and look for disparities, Ecstatics just "go with the flow" and pick whatever feels right.

• **Fragments of Dream** — Dreamspeakers view all manner of fragments of the Earth Mother's dreams. By tapping such dreams, they can expand their perception of Matter. The mage extends her senses beyond physical reality into Pattern. She no longer sees matter in the same way: instead of a brick wall, for instance, she sees its Pattern in her mind's eye.

This Effect allows the mage to perceive things that would be unseen in physical reality. She could sense the contents of a room beyond a wall, or detect objects or structures that might otherwise be hidden, such as a false bottom of a suitcase. Really dense or complex Patterns may be more difficult to penetrate.

•• **Melt and Reform** — The mage turns an otherwise inviolable object into a similar but much more accommodating item. The mage could grab a stone wall and briefly render the stone into clay, easily shaping it with his hands until the Effect ends, or he could turn a statue to butter and let it melt before changing it back. This Effect makes an excellent way to get out of traps, although it may take some work to be explained as coincidental.

•• **Straw into Gold** — Just like Rumpelstiltskin, the mage can weave base matter into a valuable substance. It remains a homogenous material, but it takes on qualities desired by the mage. Vulgar willworkers may literally turn tears into diamonds and straw into gold. More subtle magicians could improve the quality of an existing object, or "accidentally discover" that an object is more valuable than it first appeared. In this fashion, a mage can turn cheap beer into a decent stout, make generic brands seem of higher quality and cause an ordinary item to actually be made of something valuable.

••• **Destroy Structures** — The mage uses her knowledge of Matter Patterns to break down structures by shredding their Patterns. The Effect resembles **Sculpture**, but the mage simply breaks down a Pattern as quickly as possible. The mage can destroy nearly any simple object. He can tear up concrete, steel and cloth with equal ease. However, advanced compounds might be too difficult for the mage to unravel (and require a higher level of skill). Note that the material is not reduced to nothingness; it is simply scattered and torn apart.

The mage can also turn an object into some other sort of inert substance and go from there. Doing so can be useful if a mage is dealing with matter that won't be destroyed just by dispersing it, like poison gas or acid.

••• **Sculpture** — By changing the shape of a chunk of Matter, the mage can easily sculpt a substance without bothering to transform it like **Melt and Reform**. The mage just grabs the Pattern mystically — whether by pantomiming the sculpture, chanting its name of power or whatever — and yanks it

around into the desired shape. The object responds and takes on the appropriate form.

Sculpture may require multiple successes for very large or complex objects.

•••• **Alloy** — By grabbing two Patterns and compressing them together, the mage makes an alloy out of solid objects. He can shove a chunk of wood into the middle of a piece of plastic or blend two types of metal into a composite. Such an alloy still retains the properties of its individual components, but it might have its own characteristics if it's mixed finely enough. That is, a chunk of wood stuck in a wall of plastic would still burn, but if the wood were diffused throughout the plastic, the wall might have a pleasing wooden texture while remaining fire retardant (although it could well give off poisonous smoke when it *did* catch fire).

•••• **Transformers** — Complex and radical changes in composition let a mage with the appropriate knowledge alter the function of various devices. A mage could turn his wristwatch into a dart-firing weapon or cause his stereo system to also house a telephone. There's almost no limit to what can be done, although the mage must have the knowledge necessary to build and use the device. Such devices are just reorganizations of existing Matter, so they must still conform to the general laws of the consensus. That is, the mage could cause his wristwatch to also have a dart-firing mechanism (since someone could conceivably build such a device normally), but it wouldn't be able to also serve as a teleporter.

••••• **Alter Weight** — By manipulating the properties of an object's elemental mass, a mage can change it into a unique element that has a weight dissociated from its size. A tiny object can be given the mass of a car, or a car could be made light enough to be picked up (great gas mileage, hell in strong winds). Objects that are heavy for their size — superdense materials — tend to be stronger and more durable than the balsa-like constructions of hyperlight material. The level of success scored indicates how much the object can be tweaked in terms of density. With a couple of successes, the mage might succeed in changing its mass by 25%, while 10 successes could alter it by a factor of several times.

••••• **Matter Association** — A Master of Matter can change how certain Matter Patterns interact with other Patterns. If he decides to make a Pattern unable to interact with others of a specific type, he may well get a material that's insubstantial to certain substances. Bullets could fire through body armor and a coroner's tools could pass through dead flesh. The Master can also make the matter take on the properties of some other sort of matter or entirely new properties, so a piece of matter could be made superconductive, incredibly strong and somewhat ductile, despite originally being a crumpled-up ball of duct tape. Such massive transformations are, of course, generally vulgar and reserved for occasions where the mage needs a permanent special object. The successes scored determine how much the mage can alter the nature of the object. With a few successes, he might tweak the weight and interactive properties a bit, while many successes would allow the mage to reverse fundamental properties, make an inert substance radioactive or vice-versa. He could also swap around characteristics from multiple types of matter.

Mind

Specialties: Astral Travel, Communication, Illusions, Mind-Shielding, Self-Empowerment

The enlightened will shapes reality, so it should come as no surprise that the power of the Mind is, indeed, an esoteric yet highly studied tool of mages. Such study leads to the investigation of thought, the existence of perfect forms, the idea of intelligence and inquiry divorced from mere physical form. The mage who studies Mind delves into all of these subjects and dives to the very root of cognition, the formation of ideas and the power of unfettered will.

By opening the mind and transcending the limits of the body, the mage surpasses any paltry human limitations. His thoughts are pure, and his sensation of comprehension is perfect. The Mind magician can use thought to communicate, control and wipe away the inaccuracies and errors of human misjudgment for the peaceful serenity of total concentration. All thought is open to the mage: from the refined sensibilities of human philosophy to the feral instincts of animals. Any thinking process can be comprehended and manipulated with sufficient skill.

Although Mind magic is not a particularly flashy art, it is a respected one. Unlocking the mysteries of the Mind requires great discipline and study. Furthermore, its subtle uses are many. Mind arts can perform any number of tasks invisibly, since such arts rarely manifest physically. The Mind mage can sense the intent of others, alter their emotions and control their thoughts. He can set his consciousness free to roam invisibly and explore such esoterica as the foundations of linguistic understanding or conceptualization as well.

Mind Masters usually have a concentrated, placid air about them — as if they are in a constant state of meditation. From time to time, they let slip small hints like reading peoples' reactions, guessing the answers to questions intuitively, even forming intricately constructed chains of logic on a moment's notice. Physically, they are rarely imposing. However, their clear communicative skills and depth of intellect are readily apparent.

Unlike the orderly Pattern Spheres, Mind magic tends to be a bit more "fuzzy" in its capabilities. An initiate can often perform tasks similar to what a more experience mage could do, but not as well or with as much precision or variety. However, Mind constructs do seem to take on specific "thought objects." In some cases, a Mind magician can influence a particular concept just like a Pattern Sphere might be used to manipulate a material object. Because Mind attacks do not cause direct physical harm, all damage inflicted with Mind magic is bashing damage.

• Sense Thoughts and Emotions
Empower Self

Although Mind magic is not really an elemental Sphere, mental constructs do seem to fall into ephemeral categories. A trained mage becomes sensitive to moods and thoughts around herself, and she learns to recognize the base impulses of other minds while taking control of her own.

With a simple look, a mage can get a gut feeling or empathic hunch, determining someone's emotional state or telling whether a particular object has a powerful emotional Resonance attached to it. The mage can't read specifics, like whether an emotion is strongly directed at someone in particular or the intricacies of a plan in someone's mind. However, she can tell if someone is giving off positive or negative emotions and determine if an object, place or piece of Tass has "good vibes" or "bad vibes." She can even read basic, strong emotional contexts attached to such objects, so that she can pick out a knife used for a murder from a group of otherwise identical knives.

Since the Initiate also learns to control and order her own thoughts, she can perform a number of prodigious, but usually coincidental, mental feats. With preparation, she can make a rudimentary defense against mental intrusion. She can also render her aura obscured and unable to be sensed. Furthermore, her discipline allows her to use any number of simple Effects to improve her computational skills, memory and concentration.

•• Read Surface Thoughts
Mental Impulse

As a mage moves beyond the organization of her own thoughts, she learns to reach out to other minds. The mage can read not only surface thoughts, but she can sense memories associated with objects and scan for specific emotions. Her own thoughts are ordered and disciplined enough to defend against most outside intrusion and to mislead those who attempt to plumb her mind.

Surface thoughts flit across the consciousness of people in garbled, half-formed images that can be easily picked up by the mage. Indeed, different people have different thinking processes and "flavors" of thought that the mage can understand. The mage cannot yet invade a mind and tear out its secrets, but much can be learned just from the casual thoughts of others.

The mage can also associate thoughts with specific items, determining particular forms of Resonance that a material or place might have and drawing out strong memories attached to it. At this level of skill, such impressions are still vague, but the mage can often sense general events and ideas with a strong content of emotions.

If the mage forges a communication with another open mind, she can send emotional impressions. Subjects may get a sudden sense of the mage's emotions, or she may leave the source unspecified, leaving the subject wondering whence a certain impulse came. Subconscious suggestions can lead a subject to perform actions without even knowing or questioning why, although the mage's projections are limited in their strength and strong-willed minds may shake these suggestions off.

With her strong mental control, the mage can not only shield her mind from intrusion, but she can build false fronts, disguises and surface ruses. Mental intruders may not recognize the mage's true skills and powers, or may find her mind completely empty. She can even alter the appearance of her aura, so that onlookers note a different emotional state than would normally be visible. Her discipline allows her to sense most attackers who enter her mind without great skill, and she retains a level of control over her mental processes at nearly all times, even when sleeping or splitting her concentration.

••• Mental Link
Dreamwalk

The mage's powerful mind cuts through interference and irrelevance to form a strong link to other thoughts. She can indulge in telepathic communication, experience someone else's senses, control her own dreams and pierce the veil of understanding to read the true meaning behind a concept, symbol or idea.

It's a simple matter for a skilled mage to set up direct mental communication. She can read ideas directly from the subject's mind, without even the need for language, and send her own thoughts thus. Such communication can make for a silent and perfect exchange of ideas, or it can be used to project illusions, false thoughts and psychic assaults. The mage can also read through the subconscious impulses of the victim, gaining insight to the subject's drives and experiences. Memory is laid bare to the mage's scrutiny, colored as the subject saw it.

Language is, at its heart, just a symbolic way of communicating concepts. At this level, the mage can cut through the symbol to the root concept. Doing so allows the mage to understand nearly any written, spoken or symbolic language that has some human basis. The mage can make her words understood to those who hear her and understand nearly any language. She can translate writings with ease and understand symbols automatically without any cultural context. Things that are outside of the mage's conceptual experience or that are magically defended might still remain mysterious, though.

Regulation of mental power even in the mage's subconscious mind allows the mage to control her thoughts during sleep and dreams, to contact other dream minds and to enter mysterious Dream Realms. She can influence the dreamscapes there, but the strangeness or spirits that reside in some dreams can affect her as well. The mage could enter dreams telepathically while she remains awake, although splitting her consciousness thus is usually more trouble than it's worth. More usefully, the mage's control over her dreams means that unless her psyche is somehow trapped, she can always fall asleep or awaken as desired, immediately.

•••• Control Conscious Mind
Astral Projection

By the time a mage is an Adept of Mind, her thoughts are so potent that not only can she project them, she can override the processes of other thoughts. She can send her consciousness out to experience distant places or to control minds directly.

At this level of power, the mage can invade a victim's mind and lay it bare, dragging out secrets, taking direct control of the victim's thoughts or even thrashing the victim's psyche into a catatonic state. She can alter memories, erase experiences, implant suggestions or even make the victim perform any number of unpleasant and potentially harmful tasks. Unless the victim also uses Mind magic or some sort of mental defense, his only resistance is Willpower — and any mind can be eroded, given time.

A mage who wishes to extend her powers can also defend others with her mental strength. She can shield people from mental invasion just like she shields her own mind, or she may conceal or alter the auras of others for a time.

From the subconscious Realms, the mage can also extend her perceptions to Realms of pure thought. The mage passes beyond dreams and into the Astral Umbra. There she can flit for a brief period in a plane composed of pure thought, perhaps in search of lost ideas or new concepts. Such travel is dangerous, and the Adept cannot divorce mind and body completely, so the duration of such trips is perforce limited.

••••• Control Subconscious
Untether
Forge Psyche

The penultimate Mind magic has manifold powers. The mage essentially learns to divorce conscious thought from any other constraints. Base emotions and impulses can be separated from intellect, and intellect from body. The mage can create or destroy thought at will.

With control over the subconscious, a mage can rewrite a subject's personality and beliefs totally. The victim is irrevocably changed as the mage inserts whatever base-level motives he desires. Such a victim can be turned into an automaton, or given a totally new Nature, in addition to altering memories or controlling actions. The mage can also rework a subject's psyche, improving or destroying mental capabilities as desired.

Extended work allows the mage to divorce her mind from her body completely. She can move her thoughts to take possession of another shell or simply roam the realms of astral space as disembodied thought. Although she must return to the body eventually — during life, the body, mind and soul must remain united — she can make extended forays into the realms of pure imagination. With luck, she may even be able to move her consciousness into other spirit realms, able to travel freely as a disembodied mind, free of the restrictions of physical form.

Since the Master of Mind can separate thought from form, it's possible to actually *create* consciousness with this knowledge. Although anyone can think of something new, the Master makes a truly unique mind — a thinking entity (process?) formed whole without a body or shell. The parameters and personality of this immaterial mind are totally defined by the Master's whims.

In combination with the Pattern Spheres, sublime Mastery over Mind lets the mage create true, new, real consciousness and place it in a body, creature or machine. Mages can make computers that think, animals with human intelligence or even completely new people.

Mind Effects

• **Mind Empowerment** — The mage's mental discipline, even at this rudimentary level, lets her accomplish prodigious feats easily. She can focus on multiple tasks at once, improve her thinking capabilities and focus her concentration. The mage can reach out to feel others' emotions, defend herself (rudimentarily) from such intrusion or enhance her mental capabilities.

The mind-shielding of an Initiate is crude but effective: The mage's successes on the Effect counter direct Mind assaults. Very subtle or skilled assailants may be able to bypass this protection, and the mage's mental defenses at this level of skill are obvious to anyone who cares to probe the magician's psyche. This Effect can at least keep out some unwanted guests though.

Empowering mental processes allows the mage to function like a calculator or computer. He can work through information rapidly and with little or no error, and he can collate facts and logical data. The successes scored either cut down the time necessary to process information accurately, or allow the mage to multi-task and concentrate on multiple avenues of thought at once. Although the mage still moves, responds and acts at his normal rate, he can engage in battle while simultaneously thinking about several problems and deciding what sort of tie to wear for formal dinner later that evening. The mage can even improve her Mental Attributes temporarily and artificially, although surpassing human limitations or supercharging her mind for too long can risk Pattern bleeding (see p. 168).

With emotional sensitivity, the mage can "see" auras as multicolored halos that reflect the emotions of a person or object, or even feel some level of the subject's emotion. Strong emotions practically scream out at the mage, and they may even be traumatic if the mage does not defend herself with mental shielding. A knowledgeable mage can also detect some types of supernatural activity or creatures by watching an aura. She can even tell as a subject goes through mood shifts. Watching reactions to others lets the mage tell friend from foe, and the mage can also determine when a subject is lying, with careful study and a handful of successes on the die roll. The mage can also determine when an area has strong emotions associated with it, or sense the presence of Resonance in a given form of Tass or at a Node.

• **No-Mind** — A simple examination for nearby mental Patterns allows the mage to detect other thinking beings in the area, and to determine their positions, individual genders and types. The mage senses the closest minds first in a pattern that radiates outward, but he can screen out known types deliberately. The Akashic Brotherhood performs this Effect through the "No-Mind" technique, emptying their own thoughts to clear away their minds and make them more sensitive to others, but the other Traditions have similar mind-sensing Effects as well.

•• **Empathic Projection** — Emotions carry great weight. By focusing her emotions and casting her attention to a subject, the mage can send a sudden impulse or feeling. The target can be made to experience the mage's own feelings, or the mage can strike an emotion into the subject. The successes scored indicate the intensity of feeling. With two or three successes, the subject just has a slight sudden urge or quaint moment of

queasiness, while five or six successes would cause a sudden blast of emotion to scream into the forefront of the target's mind.

Obviously, a sudden influx of emotion can startle a person or cause her to act strangely for a moment (or longer, if the mage places a duration on the Effect). The target may suddenly laugh inexplicably, drop something or flee the area in panic. Stronger-willed targets are harder to affect. The target can spend a point of Willpower to resist the urges, as with any sudden impulse. If the subject has reason to suspect the mage's intrusion, a Willpower roll can be used to resist, so an extended ritual may be required to affect a wary subject. In some cases, a sudden blast of pure, heart-stopping emotion can paralyze or shock a subject (inflicting standard bashing damage).

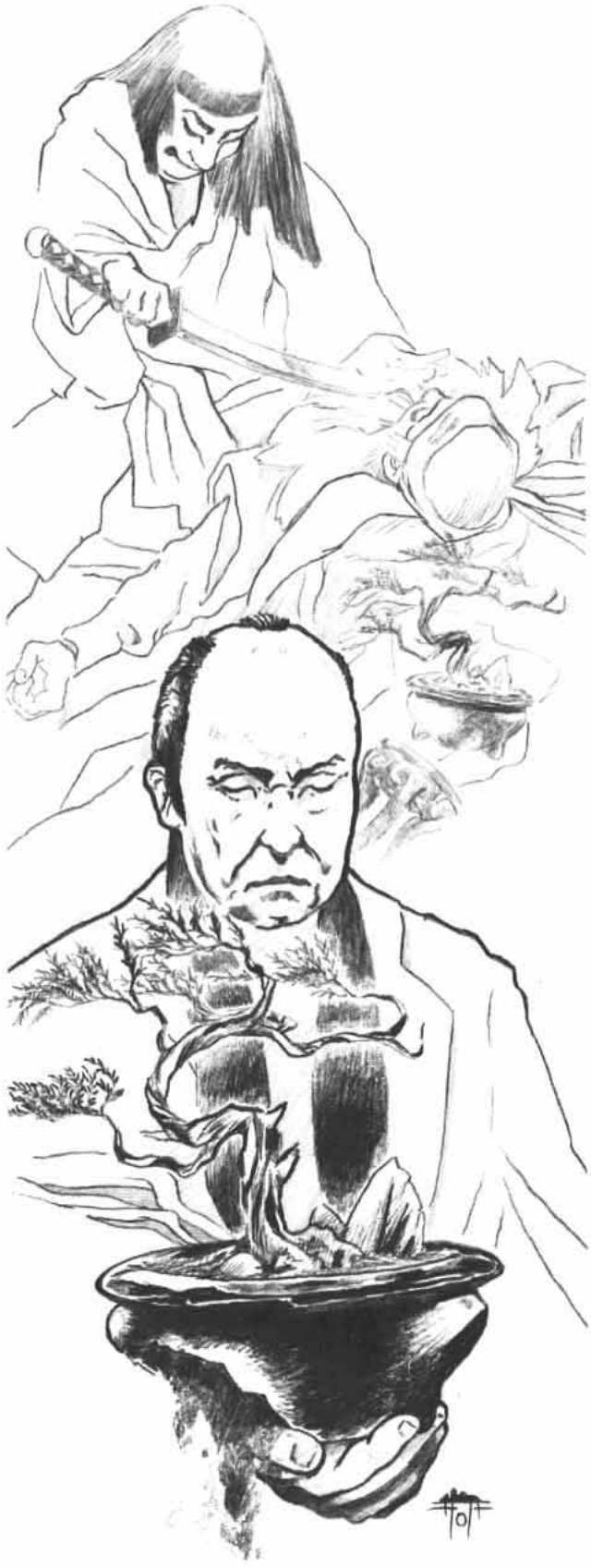
The mage cannot send actual pictures or words through this method, but a sudden feeling of danger or need can often be a useful missive when in trouble. Of course, other Mind magicians in the area may well sense the panicked empathic projection.

•• **Psychic Impression** — The mage leaves a Mind imprint on a given place or object, thus imbuing it with a particular emotion. Most often, this impression is some Resonance Trait of the mage, but the mage may imbue the target with a strong emotional Resonance under circumstances of great stress. The object carries the Resonance for as long as the Effect lasts. If the object is used in conjunction with an Effect, its Resonance may assist or hinder the Effect (see p. 208). Thus, the mage can cause an item to feel his own hate, elation, curiosity, joy or rage. A bullet used in hate would carry greater mystical weight, as would a bandage infused with compassion or a bottle of wine infused with camaraderie.

When a mage places Resonance in an area, that place gains a certain "emotional weight." A house could be made to seem creepy, a nightclub might have a dance floor that brings out anger or lust, a church could be peaceful. Such an Effect can be felt by anyone who enters the area, though generally only those with Awareness will recognize it as supernatural. Normal people will just find the place relaxing, agitating or whatever.

••• **Probe Thoughts** — It is nearly impossible to keep secrets from a skilled and determined disciple of Mind magic. The mage can simply bore into the target's mind, rooting around at will for surface impressions, or dig into memories, sensory information or even the subconscious. The target may suddenly experience strange thoughts and emotions as the mage brings them to the fore, or the mage can expend additional effort to slip in quietly and dig through the target's mind unnoticed.

With a successful probe, the mage can dig into memory (as the subject remembers it), experience any or all of the target's senses (perhaps in conjunction with her own senses, by using a multitasking Effect) or determine the victim's subconscious drives and desires. A quick surface scan may go unnoticed, but deeper probes often alert the subject that something's amiss. The successes scored indicate how deeply the mage can probe. Two or three successes give fleeting impressions of surface thoughts, while five or more open up buried memories and painful secrets. If the mage wants to sneak around unnoticed, his player must score additional successes exceeding the subject's Wits. A suspicious subject can resist the initial intrusion with



Willpower, as always, and a Mind mage can often build a mental shield or even a layer of fake thoughts to block the intruder. In the latter case, the intruder must best the target's Mind Effect in order to break down the mind shield or notice and bypass the fake layer of thought.

••• **Telepathy** — Direct mind-to-mind communication is possible with this power of Mind magic. The mage can send words, pictures or concepts directly to the subject, and he can read the surface thoughts of the target in return. With enough successes, the mage can connect to remote subjects, unfamiliar ones or multiple subjects (with additional successes needed for each). Thus, the mage can easily link minds with a member of her cabal or try to set up a telepathic network between multiple people, at the cost of a great deal of effort.

Since the mage setting up a telepathic link works on the basis of pure concepts, she can communicate through images or ideas instead of simple words. Language is no barrier to the trained mage. By contrast, those without Mind experience still tend to think in terms of language, and the mage may have to cut through the babble of words to get at the underlying concepts.

By sending images or sensory information, a telepath can also cause the subject to experience hallucinations. The complexity of the illusion determines the required successes, and a wary target may try to resist with a Willpower roll. With few successes, the illusion may seem unconvincing, incomplete or phantasmal. Illusions created with high levels of success — usually five or more — are indistinguishable from any real sensory input. Even if the target knows that something's an illusion, his body may well react reflexively when his senses warn him! Better still, the mage can simply send a knife of disturbing psychic Resonance straight into the victim's brain, inflicting bashing damage.

Untrained subjects, especially those with low Willpower, have a tendency to generate a distracting amount of psychic volume. The mage might well decide to lend a little organization to the target (by extending a mind shield) just to keep less skilled members of the link from distracting the group. Keeping a mental link up is certainly a distraction of *some* level, and the mage may suffer additional penalties to dice pools above and beyond the penalties for maintaining an Effect if there's a substantial amount of psychic "chatter."

•••• **Manipulate Memory** — Altering memories is delicate work that requires incredible finesse. An Adept of Mind can not only probe and delve into the subject's memory, but he can alter such memories, implant false history, wipe areas blank, give the subject special knowledge or even leave the victim a tabula rasa. Such work is not to be taken lightly; the mage must invade the subject as per **Possession**, and then accumulate successes to alter memories. Unless the mage also takes some precautions like immobilizing the victim or performing this Effect in the subject's sleep, the target is likely to notice the sudden gaps and changes in memory. Although the subject can't remember what's changed, the process is a terrifying one to someone who's not expecting it. Thus, it behooves the mage to work with the utmost subtlety, unless he plans to simply rip apart the victim's memory and leave it at that. Acting this way is a good way to pick up nasty Entropic Resonance like Destructive and Obliviating.

When the mage alters memory, he can make the memories as realistic or artificial as he likes. The subject might be left with only vague recollections, cartoon-like images that can't possibly be real or crystal-clear images of a life he never lived. A subject wiped of all memory does not necessarily lose his Talents, Skills and Advantages, but he certainly doesn't know what he can and can't do. Subjects who have special knowledge implanted can call on rudimentary Knowledges, although until they've become accustomed to their new database of information (by spending experience), they will be able to access only the basic Knowledge (one dot). Still, memory-alteration is a great way to de-empower enemies without killing them, or to implant important knowledge into someone's head quickly.

•••• **Possession** — One of the more fearsome Effects possible for Adepts of Mind, **Possession** allows a mage to exert direct control over the subject's thoughts. If the mage succeeds in besting the subject's Willpower, he can control the target's actions directly, either taking over the subject completely or just influencing specific, desired parts of the mind.

When the mage takes total possession of a target, the victim's thoughts become overlaid with the mage's. The mage needs only think the appropriate actions, and the victim performs them naturally, often oblivious to the invading mage. The mage can direct the subject's body easily (to the subject's normal limits, of course) and dig through memories or surface thoughts as with **Probe Thoughts**. The subject will even remember all of his thoughts as his own; his entire mind is subsumed by the mage's power.

Should the mage decide to exert control over a simple part of the target, she can command the subject's motive processes jerkily, seize emotional responses, direct the target's thoughts or perform any combination of such. Unless the mage seizes the target's thoughts, the victim will be aware that someone is controlling him.

Establishing partial control, of course, is much easier than totally suppressing a victim's personality. Simply making a subject jerk an arm or start crying uncontrollably would only require two or three successes. Actually overpowering someone's mind requires the caster to at least best the target's Willpower rating. Even if the mage only exerts partial control, the target is likely to remember the incident unless the mage also uses additional magic to control or erase the target's memories.

•••• **Astral Projection** — The Astral Realms are reaches of pure thought. Because of their ephemeral nature, it's often difficult to navigate or survive in them. Adepts of Mind can make short jaunts into astral space; Masters can separate the mind from the body to make extended journeys. In such realms, the mage experiences pure thought constructs, meets beings of thought and passes with incredible speed through the highest reaches of the spirit world. Successes scored on such an Effect determine how long the mage can remain outside of his body, and how deeply he can penetrate into the Astral Umbra.

Unlike Spirit magic, which allows the mage to enter the spirit world physically, **Astral Projection** releases the mage's consciousness as a free-floating thought. The mage can be detected with Mind senses, but he is otherwise invisible and intangible. Since the mage has no body, he must rely on magical

senses to detect or influence his surroundings. He can still use other Mind Effects, of course, and he could take control of a subject thus if necessary. Without recourse to ritual and magical foci, the mage may have difficulty with successive magic, but at least such magic is coincidental in the Umbra.

If the mage draws his consciousness down to Earth (or just never heads for the Astral Umbra), he can zip about the material world as a formless and massless entity traveling at the speed of thought. The expenditure of a point of Willpower enables the mage to manifest for a single turn as a ghostly, hazy and idealized image, but he cannot interact with the world physically without using magic.

Astral entities can interact with other astral beings and similar thought-constructs only. Since the physical body means nothing, the mage uses Wits instead of Dexterity, Manipulation instead of Strength and Intelligence instead of Stamina. Ghosts, spirits and other astral forms can do combat with the mage. Such attacks injure the psyche of the mage and sap his will, draining Willpower points instead of health levels. If a combatant runs out of Willpower, he is disrupted. A spirit or mummy would simply dissipate into the Umbra, while a mage finds that his silver cord, the tether between body and mind, snaps.

A mage lost in the Umbra, fades away into the Epiphamies (realms of pure thought). A Master can avoid this fate for a time, but his will erodes slowly, and the individual vanishes into the mists of the Umbra, never to be seen again. Mages have reported meeting once-human astral beings that seemed quite capable of surviving as pure minds, but such an existence is beyond the capabilities of even a Master. The only recourse for a mage lost in the Astral Umbra is to reconnect to a physical body using Possession — be it his own, or someone else's.

Note that a mage who projects his awareness astrally has no sense of his physical body unless he uses other Effects (like Correspondence) to maintain a sensory link to his body. Thus, the mage is well-advised to keep his physical form hidden and protected.

••••• **Create Mind** — The penultimate mastery of Mind allows the mage to create an entirely new consciousness. The mage can determine the personality, intellect and foibles of the consciousness. If left unattended, such minds tend to drift into the Astral Umbra, where they float away, dissipate or go insane. With a proper housing (like a newly created body, a computer or a section of Umbral space), the mind can stay and perhaps even achieve a level of independent sentience. Unless built as little more than instinct, such minds do tend to grow beyond the initial parameters of the creator.

Virtual Adepts use this Effect to create machine intelligences, computers that can think and take on human roles. Such machines can be dangerous — many become unstable or resent their servitor roles — but they are also the most effective forms of computers available.

Of course, if a created mind is not also given a soul (with Spirit magic), then it has no existence beyond its own memory. Should such a persona "die," it will never reincarnate and it is gone forever. If a mage uses sufficient magic to create a new mind, body and soul, then perhaps it would be possible to create true life... but the Master capable of such a feat has not walked Earth for decades, if not centuries.

Prime

Specialties: Artifice, Channeling, Creation, Destruction, Perceptions, Resonant Effects

Above and beyond the Pattern Spheres sits the Sphere of Prime, the study of raw creation and the energy that fuels the Tellurian. Prime is the study of Quintessence, literally the "Fifth Essence." To every Tradition this is a sacred or valued power, for with Prime the mage can tap into and manipulate the keystones of cosmic forms. Quintessence is also known as ether or Odyllic Force, the underlying nature of the fabric of reality, the First Essence or Prime. Through Prime magic, the mage directs the flow of universal energies to create, destroy and reshape as she sees fit. While the other Spheres influence the actual stuff of creation, Prime controls the power from which they all spring.

According to the united theories of the Traditions and Technocracy alike, Prime energy fuels everything. It is everywhere, flowing through living Patterns, swirling in Forces and coalescing into Matter only to be released again. The cycle of Prime energy never ends. This cycle is the cycle of magic itself.

From Prime energy, a mage can create the base materials of the Pattern Spheres, or he can reduce such objects to the sublime constructs of Spirit and Mind. He can convert Quintessence into magical force and draw out the natural power inherent in places or object. He can cast enchantments of permanent power over things, nullify the workings of other mages and use the power of Prime to combat the rebounding force of Paradox itself at the greatest levels of mastery. Such mastery does not come lightly, but it is the foundation of the most powerful and permanent workings in *any* Tradition and *any* Sphere.

Masters of Prime energy carry in themselves a reflection of that power. Although even mortals can feel the eeriness of mages, Prime Masters surpass that level of energy. They almost glow with radiance, be it divine or profane. The magical power at the hands of a Prime Master lends the mage a definite palpable aura of otherworldliness.

• Etheric Senses Effuse Personal Quintessence

An Initiate of Prime studies learns to sense and see Quintessential energy, be it stored in Tass, welling up from a Node, traveling across a powerful line, swirling through a natural Pattern or shining during a Juncture of power. His Prime senses allow him to detect the use of magic, to determine when a coincidence was the result of a magical Effect and to see the flow of magic energy as it is shaped and cast forth. Although such perceptions are not necessarily sufficient to determine the exact Effect, they do alert the mage to the bending of the Tapestry.

Just as each Tradition has its own view of Prime, each mage has a different sort of Prime sense. Some mages recognize Prime as a brilliant white or blackness, a color that surpasses natural vibrancy. Others hear it as a sort of music or melody. A few ascribe to Prime a different sense entirely, a sort of comprehension that cannot be translated into the natural senses. Regardless of whether it is a pure, crystal matrix or a swirling darkness of the original Void, it represents *power*.

By sensing the strongest currents of Odyllic Force, a mage may align himself so that they flow into his own Pattern, charging his Avatar. Without the first rank of Prime, the mage cannot store free Quintessence within his own Pattern beyond the amount he receives from his Avatar. Mages without Prime magic cannot gain Quintessence ratings above their *Avatar* rating. The mage can't necessarily use this power to gain additional Quintessence from meditation, but if someone tries to empower the mage with additional Quintessence, the mage must have at least this rudimentary understanding of Prime to be able to hold the excess energy.

In conjunction with the other Spheres, the mage can see Prime energy in various Patterns or recognize specific sorts of Resonance and their strength. The mage can also determine if an area has a strong Prime wellspring (like a Node) or when a Juncture that creates Prime energy might occur.

•• Weave Odyllic Force
Fuel Pattern
Enchant Patterns
Summon Prime Weapon
Activate Quintessential Matter & Forces

By reaching out and touching Prime energy metaphysically, the mage can create tiny diversions in the energy that fuels the Tapestry. She can twist the power of Quintessence, storing it in an object or turning it to use in specific cases. She can also use this power to cast other magic into stronger forms.

The patterns of physical matter and forces may be enchanted, creating magic swords that may damage spirits or etherically charged lasers to burn vampires. Moreover, Odyllic Force itself may be spun into a blow that hammers at Patterns, allowing a mage to launch bolts of pure Quintessential energy or to form a glowing weapon of mystic power.

Base matter and energy that are already infused with Quintessence, the inert but magical forms of Tass, may also be activated, structuring its essence so as to compose potions or temporary Charms.

In conjunction with various Spheres, the mage can create materials, forces or creations from the ether. The mage can also spin dreams, nightmares and quasi-real phantasms with Mind magic, or generate new constructs of Spirit energy.

Whenever a mage creates a Pattern "from nothing," she uses this power of Prime to divert a small amount of the Tapestry's energy into that new Pattern. Thus, all Effects that create Matter, Forces or Life out of nothingness rely on the mage also using Prime 2.

••• Channel Quintessence
Sublimate Quintessential Matter & Forces
Activate Quintessential Life
Enchant Life

Normally, a mage cannot pull Quintessence directly from the Tellurian itself. Although the flow is immense and constant, it is also tied intimately to the shape of the Tapestry. However, in some special places (Nodes) and times (Junctures), excess Quintessence bubbles up through the Tapestry, there to be taken by a mage with command of Prime. Even though the mage cannot steal the Quintessence directly from a Pattern, he can take advantage of the rare opportunities where Quintessence arises unconnected to any Pattern.

As the Ahl-i-Batin explain, Quintessence is either free or fixed and it's like water in a desert land — just as common and just as precious. Nodes are like wells and oases, with mage Chantries the caravansaries that are built around them. Periapts are gourds to hold the water, while Junctures are the rare rainy days. There is enough water in the air and sand to let a palm tree grow, if you give it time, just as there is enough free Quintessence around you to spin into the Patterns of the elements or life. The remaining Quintessence, like water, is fixed, giving life to palm trees and camels and women and men, and you can no more drink that Quintessence than you can drink the air or the sand. Yet a mage is a fortunate man, for he has a righteous djinn in the form of his Avatar, pouring cool sweet water when he asks and carrying it as a slave would hold a precious gourd as they travel from oasis to oasis, asking hospitality. But only an unrighteous man or a desperate one would slay his camel for the water it holds.

This poetic analogy holds true. At this level of understanding, a mage skilled in Prime gains the ability to pour water from gourd to gourd or drink blood from his camel. That is to say, free Quintessence may be transferred from Periapt to Periapt, or from a Periapt to a mage's Avatar or back. The mage can pull Quintessence out of inert Tass for personal use, as well.

At this level, inert Tass may be sublimated and forged into permanent Artifacts and Talismans, as the mage forged it into Charms at the previous level, and living Tass may now be

Magic is Green

Hermetic mages commonly use the following color scheme for perception of the magic of each Sphere:

Correspondence: Purple	Life: Red	Prime: White
Entropy: Indigo	Matter: Brown	Spirit: Gold
Forces: Orange	Mind: Blue	Time: Green

However, please note that not all mages — and not even all Hermetic mages — perceive magic with this color scheme, or even perceive it in terms of color at all. This construct is simply a way of looking at things as taught by a majority of the Tradition. Spontaneously Awakened mages, and members of sub-Traditions, have different ways of viewing the world.

activated so as to become a living Charm. Chimerical and ephemeric Tass, such as the substance of dreams and the ectoplasm of ghosts, follows the same rule as physical matter — sentient chimera and living ephemera are treated the same as living beings, while inert dreamstuff and ectoplasm follows the rule of Tass created of base matter and energy.

As he enchanted swords and flames before, the mage of this level now gains the ability to enchant living beings, such that hands and claws can now inflict damage directly upon Patterns. In conjunction with other Spheres, the mage can create items of power or fuel them with energy. The mage can not only create items from nothing, he can steal away a small measure of Quintessence from Patterns as they decay. Such energy returns quickly to the flow, and it is more directed than harnessed, but it can offer a small measure of additional power to the mage's workings.

•••• Expel Base Energy from Matter & Forces
Sublimate Quintessential Life
Permanently Enchant Matter & Forces
Suffuse Matter & Forces
Create Soulgem
Tap Wellspring

As Disciples of Prime learned to divert and ripple the flow of ether through the Patterns of existence, Adepts discover how to return the Quintessence to the Tellurian, at least from settled and unconnected Patterns (Matter and Forces). Doing so has the direct and deadly effect of erasing them from mental, physical and spiritual existence. This energy returns immediately to the Tapestry as the object vanishes forever, but with proper use of other Prime magic, the mage can sometimes divert a small measure of the released power into his other Effects.

Adepts also learn how to sublimate the Quintessential patterns of living Tass so as to create Artifacts and Talismans, as well as those nonliving wonders meant to be grafted to living creatures, such as cybernetic arms or jeweled slippers that never come off until the wearer is dead. The mage also learns how to take the nonliving Patterns of existence which are not suffused with free Quintessence and infuse them with Quintessential energy from his Avatar, creating Tass, or sublimating that Tass into a Periapt resonating with the power of his own Avatar. Such a Periapt is called a Soulgem.

At places with strong Resonance, the Adepts of Prime also possess the wondrous ability to reach deep into the earth and tap a wellspring of free Quintessence. This act is the metaphysical equivalent of opening a fire hydrant on a hot day — it will soon be shut off, but is very refreshing while it lasts. Doing so may also recharge the Quintessence of Periapts in a controlled Effect.

In conjunction with other Spheres, the mage can enchant objects with selective qualities, enhance magical powers and place them into items permanently or disperse all manner of Patterns back into the Ether.

••••• Expel Base Energy from Life
Alter Quintessential Flow
Nullify Paradox
Permanently Enchant Life
Suffuse Life
Create Soulflower
Create Node
Fountains of Paradise

Masters of Prime can blast living beings out of existence — body, mind and spirit — shutting off the flow of Quintessence to their Patterns like cutting off light to an image on a screen. The Celestial Chorus calls this act "erasing a name from the Book of Life." Fortunately, doing so does not affect the Book of History or the Book of Destiny (although Masters of Time and Entropy can do both these deeds).

More kindly, Masters of Prime may also increase the flow of Prime through a being, refreshing the Quintessence of Avatars instantly. Masters of the Chorus in particular learn how to atone for their sins against reality, channeling Quintessence to nullify Paradox as part of "Penance." Pope Honorius, also a Master of Time, used this Effect to create the fabled "Perpetual Indulgences of Pope Honorius," which forgave not only one's present sins but a measure of one's future sins as well. Dreamspeakers are known to charge special crystals with Prime energy designed specifically to attract and nullify Paradox, while Hermetic mages form elaborate wards and counter-sigils to reinforce their spells with Prime energy.

Masters also know how to enchant any living being or spirit permanently, able to grant them blessings as do the fae and the spirits of the Umbra. Living things may also be suffused with Quintessence to create living Tass, and the Master may also suffuse a living thing with the Quintessence of his own Avatar to create a Soulflower, a living Periapt (though it needn't be an actual flower).

The Masters may now also reach into the earth and tap a wellspring of free Quintessence anywhere, not just at spots with strong Resonance, creating pure uncolored magic in an Effect the Ahl-i-Batin call "The Fountains of Paradise." Even more wondrous, where Resonance is strong, Masters of Prime can harness the power of the ley lines and dragon paths to create a new Node, or consecrate a certain cycle of the seasons as a Juncture, though these are mighty rituals that are not lightly attempted.

It is theorized that the Oracles of Prime may create a Node or a Juncture wherever they please.

Prime Effects

• **Consecration** — A mage may allow the ether to suffuse his aura, so that his unique pattern of psychic Resonance bleeds over and into an object and forges an etheric bond between the two. This phenomenon occurs naturally, and Sleepers even make it happen subconsciously, but the magic of Prime can perform quickly what is usually an extended process. Such consecrated objects are useful in that, as they are considered part of a person's Pattern, they will thus transform, translate or otherwise change along with the subject to

whom they belong. There is also some risk to this Effect, for such intimately connected items can be a great danger if they fall into the hands of an enemy. Likewise, a person or a place may be aurally marked in this manner, the subject linked to the place or person, and the person or place linked to them in turn.

Naturally, such sympathetic magic causes an object to carry some of the mage's Resonance Traits, and it may seem to have a "personality" of its own, reflecting the owner. An object so suffused typically counts more closely as a connection to the mage on the Correspondence Ranges chart.

With Prime 2, it's possible to form such a bond with a living creature. Although this bond doesn't help the mage to sense the creature's thoughts or moods without Mind magic, it is used in the formation of familiar bonds (for familiars with living forms) and sometimes as a sort of "lifeline" to valued friends or loved ones. The mage can always use his Prime senses to track back the link, as long as it exists.

• **Heart's Blood** — An initiate of Prime can easily sense the flow of Quintessence through his own body — his life energy. This energy flows from the Tellurian, through the Life Pattern and back out to rejoin the cosmos. Each point corresponds to a health level, the last three on beyond Incapacitated and their loss resulting in death.

In desperate times, mages skilled in Prime — typically the Celestial Chorus and the Verbena — can push themselves beyond their limits and "give 'til it hurts," taking the additional health levels as points of Quintessence above and beyond what is stored in their Avatars. Such damage may only be healed by time and bed rest, not magic, so most mages will usually only risk the Bruised health level. Mages of the Chorus, however, have burned themselves out in acts of martyrdom to perform one last holy miracle, while Verbena with low Avatar ratings often use their Bruised health level as a power reservoir, considering the sacrifice of heart's blood more holy than the spiritual energy used by most mages.

• **Watch the Weaving** — This Effect is not so much a spell as an additional degree of sensitivity. When any magical Effect is attempted within the vicinity of a disciple of Prime, he may roll Perception + Awareness to detect the weaving of the etheric threads. Once the mage has noticed the subtle tint of magic — or if the mage is just naturally suspicious — he can use this Effect to actually see or sense the magical weavings. Most mages perceive these weavings as patterns of light and color in the air, although perceptions vary according to the nature of the mage, the Tradition of the spellworker and the Effect in question. However he perceives magic, the mage may watch the weaving and attempt to identify the patterns and thereby discern the magic's intent, as well possible affiliations of the caster.

Mages of the Order of Hermes use a standardized system of mathematics, colors and seals as notation to record the forms of unknown magic. They may then take these notes to Masters of the Order who then decode the basic form and intent of a particular weaving. The mage may then allow the patterns of familiar rotes — or unknown spells that bear the seal of a friend or ally — to pass by unopposed, as the mage knows they are of friendly intent.

This forewarning also allows the mage to attempt countermagic if he understands all the Spheres involved. Other

mages, who do not have etheric senses, can recognize only magic that involves them directly in some way or of which they will feel the immediate effect. For example, if a Nephandus attempts to conjure a demon, most mages cannot attempt to counter this spell (even with knowledge of Spirit) since the spell is not affecting them directly. However, a priest of the Celestial Chorus could use Prime to sense the stirrings in the ether at the Nephandus' words — and possibly even recognize the demon's sigil as it appeared in the air. Assuming the mage also understands the Sphere of Spirit, he could counter the magic invocation the moment it began.

Continuous magic, particularly wards and curses, may also be detected by use of this Effect, although it often requires some knowledge of the appropriate Spheres involved in order to comprehend their nature fully.

•• **Body of Light** — At this level of Prime, the mage may use his control over the ether to weave what is known as a Body of Light. A Body of Light is a purely etheric construct that typically takes the form of a person's idealized self, but it may take any form the mage devises. There is no mental or emotional content to such a creation. It is merely a useful empty shell typically used to house the astral form of a mage using Mind to travel. Without one, the psyche is essentially naked for its journeys through the Astral.

The Body of Light, however, is more than just a work of vanity. The form serves as armor, as well as a physical form for travel within the Middle and Lower Realms of the Umbra. Astral travelers who wish to perform shapeshifting or other feats in places where they do not have a spiritual body — like Dream Realms — must use a body of light. Also, without such a body, an astral traveler is invisible to those in the physical world, even to those who can sense spirits or magic (Spirit 1, Prime 1). While those sensitive to mental emanations (Mind 1) will be able to sense the mage's presence, he will not be able to communicate without further use of Mind magic.

The Body of Light is also commonly used in conjunctional Effects with the Pattern Spheres to allow a mage to materialize his idealized form as an illusion of light, as living flesh or even as a golem of living stone, while his true body and spirit lie protected elsewhere.

The technique of crafting the Body of Light is also used to create things of ether which are then transmuted to physical substance via the Pattern magic. It may also translate things of the base elements into pure ether which may then be used as adjuncts to a Body of Light.

•• **Enchant Weapon** — A mage now learns to reweave the underlying Quintessence so as to clarify and intensify existing forms, enchanting objects and creatures. Weapons treated in this manner — while doing no more damage than their mundane counterparts — strike directly to the Patterns of their targets, inflicting aggravated wounds.

The etheric form may also be made different from the physical, so that a dirty denim jacket may have the underlying structure of a Kevlar vest, or a broken talismanic dagger may still have a whole blade with regards to magical structure. Such structures are still what they appear to physical reality — the denim jacket would not stop bullets, nor could the nonexistent dagger cut butter — but to etheric, spiritual and astral reality, they are quite real. The jacket could stop spirit darts while the dagger could stab wraiths, or even perform whatever magical or ritual functions it did before.

Note that a mage cannot yet imbue Life with static seething Prime energy at this level, so he cannot cause his own Pattern to tear into other Patterns — but a clever mage could easily wear enchanted gloves for combat. Enchanting a Pattern in this fashion typically requires energizing it with a point of Quintessence (the enchantment lasts for the duration scored, but is almost never permanent without a greater supply of Quintessence).

•• **Holy Stroke** — Even initiates of Prime can defend themselves by using pure, charged Prime energy. When a material object is not handy for brief enchantments, or when the mage simply needs to get the job done with a demonstration of pure, nonconjunctional power, this Effect is appropriate. The mage fires coruscating energy at the opponent, or creates an ephemeral, glowing weapon of Prime energy. Such a construct requires Quintessential fuel (typically one point per use), but it inflicts aggravated damage using the mage's Prime skills. Depending on the attack, the mage might fire it off as a bolt, or simply slash with a glowing sword of holy energy. Such attacks are particularly effective against supernatural opponents. On the downside, the mage must score enough successes to not only inflict damage, but to maintain the Effect and to affect the targets desired (striking an opponent with a blast of Prime counts as one target; creating a Prime hand weapon only counts as one target regardless of how many people it's used to strike, which is why swords of light are more common than holy bolts in massive battles).

••• **Bond of Blood** — Transferring Quintessence between Patterns is a staple of potent magicians. The mage can take Quintessence from Tass or from a Node. If offered freely, the mage can even accept Quintessence from another individual, or gift a person with his own Quintessence. The mage can store energy in a Periapt or store it in another object. With a powerful enough Effect, the mage can even strike out against another mage and drain away that magician's extra Quintessence, although energy stored in the Avatar is inviolate.

This Effect gets its name from the Verbena, who use blood as a conduit for Quintessence. The Verbena in question smears an object with her blood or shares blood with a person in order to share her Quintessence. Hermetic mages use a similar rite by passing around a golden chalice and drinking from the cup or anointing a subject with it.

Although other supernatural creatures often carry their own power, taking Quintessence from them is a chancy matter at best. Most have a form of power that does not translate well into universal energy, and it is often bound up in their own inherent natures (that is, their Avatars). In the rare case where a mage is offered that power in some sort of conduit — vampire blood, for instance, or a shifter ritual that allows the trade of spirit energy — he can harvest Quintessence from the source. However it is usually inefficient and loaded with Resonance.

As a variant, a mage can sometimes channel a small trickle of Quintessence from a Pattern that's destroyed. An object that's burned normally releases its Quintessence back to the

Tapestry, but the mage can coax some of that Quintessence into taking a slightly longer route and funneling through another Effect. Such an Effect must be used conjunctionally with whatever magic it's powering, but allows the mage to draw a single point of Quintessence from the process of breaking or sacrificing things, like pouring out an offering of wine or burning several sticks of valuable incense.

••• **Enchant Life** — Because of their ever-flowing and changing Quintessential currents, Life Patterns are more difficult to affect with Prime power than simple Matter or Forces. With this feat, the mage energizes the Life Pattern and gives it greater solidity, anchoring it in reality. This Effect makes the creature seem more "real," and it often provides a sudden flush of energy or emotion.

Furthermore, the living being can inflict aggravated (Pattern) damage with its own natural weapons. Akashic Brothers thus affected can score incredible damage with their bare hands, or shapeshifting Verbena can use claws to incredibly dangerous effect. As always, such an enchantment typically requires the expenditure of a rare and valuable point of Quintessence.

••• **Lambs to the Slaughter** — Sacrifice is a highly controversial magical procedure, painted black in the eyes of most of society — and no few mages — by images of Nephandi gaily slaughtering virgins, goats, children, passersby and whatever comes to hand.

Sacrifice, however, is used, approved and even praised by all Traditions in one form or another. The most common — and most holy — form is self-sacrifice, as done with **Heart's Blood**. **Heart's Blood** may be combined with a living bond (see **Consecration**) to sacrifice one's own life energy to power another's magic. The magic comes from a willing sacrifice, and this sacrifice lends the magic additional power, the psychic Resonance of the primal energy in harmony with the magical working. Thus, a woman who gives of her own life energy to save the man she loves will have the power of that Quintessence affected by the Resonance of her love (and the total sacrifice of her life may not even be necessary, depending on the magic).

In many other magic spells, the mage sacrifices some sort of material object: breaking an item, burning it, burying it or otherwise destroying an object of value. In the case of Tass, this act releases its excess Prime energy; to a mage with Prime magic, it allows the mage the opportunity to channel away a small measure of Quintessence as the item is destroyed (typically one point). Such Quintessence returns quickly to the flow, as soon as the object is broken, and so it must be used immediately.

The trouble with most Nephandic rituals — and the reason most Nephandi gain no additional power from their sacrifices — is that the victims are unwilling. Every point of Quintessence pulled out of the blood of an unwilling victim generates an equal and opposite measure of psychic Resonance absolutely opposed to the murderer and everything he or she stands for. This Resonance cancels out any benefit there might be from blood on the altar (apart from pleasing one's Dark Masters).

However, a willing sacrifice — such as a Celestial Chorus priest who martyrs herself to save her flock, a Verbena acolyte willingly burnt in the Wicker Man to end a famine or a Nephandic groupie who really and truly believes that the best thing she can do with her life is spill it on the ground for the greater glory of the Dark Masters — gives a great deal of power to a ritual. This sort of devotion can't be mentally compelled or blackmailed, but it can be carefully taught. There are certain Nephandi who raise children as "innocent lambs," treating them well and telling them: "The Dark Masters are your friends. The Dark Masters are better than Barney. There's nothing more wonderful than to be sacrificed to the Dark Masters — but we won't do that yet. We'll save it for a special occasion. All praise the Dark Masters."

Verbena, Hermetics, Euthanatoi and particularly traditional members of the Chorus engage in similar practices, but with domestic animals — particularly lambs, goats, chickens and calves. They raise them with a great deal of special care and special treatment, then use them as the centerpiece (and main course) of seasonal rituals and feasts. As vampires know, the amount of life energy in such a creature is not as great as it is in a human, but there are also less moral qualms about killing a chicken or lamb.

Many people find the concept sacrifice of distasteful, but it is included here both as a story element and as an important part of both ancient and modern magical and religious belief. However, a Storyteller is free to disallow sacrifice as a source of magical power if it is a story element she does not want to deal with, if it's inappropriate to particular magical ceremony or if the proper rites and rituals have not been observed by the player's character. A Verbena might gain between two and five points of Quintessence from an appropriately raised and humanely slaughtered lamb as part of a May Day feast. Then again, the lamb may not be that innocent or willing, and any possible bonus might be spoiled by negative Resonance. It is a matter of Storyteller opinion and judgment whether any particular sacrifice holds power beyond the beliefs of the person performing the ritual.

•••• **Create Talismans and Artifacts** — Although it's technically possible to create some forms of minor magical items with lesser Prime power, most potent objects require at least an Adept's knowledge of Prime. The mage essentially concentrates Prime energy and reweaves it into the desired Effects (using other Spheres known, or guided by special grimoires and mentors), imbuing the object with a magical Pattern in addition to its own natural qualities. The item gains certain powers, perhaps even taking on elements of the mage's Resonance and personality.

A mage can also use this power to create a Soulgem, a special Periapt that concentrates Quintessence with her own Resonance. Such an item is tied intimately to the mage's Avatar, and it can be used by only the mage herself.

•••• **Flames of Purification** — Mages of the Celestial Chorus are not destructive by nature. Still, they have been known to wield the power of Prime to cleanse reality of abominations. By fanning her focus over a chosen object, a Chorister can invoke this Effect and cause the object to burst into mystical flames. This fire sheds no heat, yet it devours quickly the target.

The mage releases the object's Quintessence back into the ephemera of the Tapestry. The item suffers aggravated damage, and its Pattern evaporates into nothingness if it's destroyed completely. Only inanimate objects or forces can be dispersed with this power. With the **Bond of Blood** variant, the mage can

even channel a tiny amount of this Quintessential destruction into a separate Effect.

•••• **Wellspring** — When a mage finds a place of strong Resonance that matches her own power, she can reaffirm her place in the Tapestry and draw strength from the matching emotions. The mage simply "opens up" to the power carried by those emotions, and refreshes her Quintessence naturally. It's like a sudden shot of energy that comes straight into the mage's innermost drives.

What constitutes acceptably strong and appropriate Resonance is, of course, up to the Storyteller. A mage generally needs to use an Effect of this sort at a place where the Resonance is powerful enough that it's felt even by normal people. Even if the location isn't a Node, the mage can draw a small amount of Quintessence from it (generally one point for every three successes scored on the Effect, up to a limit of the mage's Avatar rating). Once the mage has filled up her reservoir of Resonance (drawn out Quintessence equal to her Resonance Trait rating), she's "used up" the metaphysical power in the place, and she will have to come back later for more.

••••• **Fount of Paradise** — The famed Akashic fount allows the mage to reseat his Pattern with respect to the Tellurian, refreshing his Quintessence anywhere and any time. Akashic Brothers also use this Effect through meditation, while Choristers pray for holy inspiration. The mage simply uses this Effect and each success translates into a point of Quintessence restored to his Avatar.

••••• **Paradox Ward** — Although only Archmages of Prime would know for sure, mages surmise that the nature of Paradox runs counter to the smoothing effects of Prime. This Effect draws upon that theory, negating the worst results of Paradox with a charge of Quintessence. The mage invests some symbol of his workings with Quintessence, showing that he puts utmost effort and care into his magic. Then, instead of rebounding or twisting in unusual and unexpected ways, the magic takes form exactly as desired, powered by the Quintessence. Each point of Quintessence channeled with such a rote (up to the successes scored) nullifies one point of Paradox. With a little duration, the mage can set this Effect up in advance right before casting a more powerful Effect, or he can add this extra care and power to another Effect conjunctionally as he weaves it.

••••• **Master's Enchantment** — This catch-all describes the greatest enchantments known to Masters of Prime — the enchantment of a living being, place or time with the power of Prime. Enchanting a living creature enables the mage to create a Relic, a magical being or blessing on a person. Enchanting an area, often by bending ley lines or channeling natural energies, creates a Node. By consecrating a specific time with adherence to rituals and patterns, the mage can create Junctures where regular surges of Quintessence spring forth.

Naturally, such superlative enchantments represent the pinnacle of the Master's craft. Few mages even attempt such vulgar feats any more, and the number of mages who could complete such a task — or even know that it's possible — dwindles every day.

A mage who creates a Node or Juncture essentially makes a temporary ripple in the Tapestry, where a specific space (with Correspondence) or time (with Time magic) surges with Prime energy. The mage must meet the full requirements of the area and the duration, and such a task qualifies at least as an outlandish feat (requiring 10 or more successes in addition to the duration and area). Creating a new Node permanently is a job for an entire circle of Masters, and it can backfire and blow all of the mages into oblivion. As rare as they are, Nodes are easier to find than create.

Spirit

Specialties: Gauntlet Manipulation, Naturalism, Necromancy, Possession, Spirit Dealings, Umbral Travel

Defining the ephemera between Quintessential and material, Spirit marks the creation of such stuff as reflects the world beyond simple human perception. Spirit is a homogenous whole, a sort of conceptual energy given a special form that can mirror or mimic the more mundane Patterns of elements. However, Spirit is much more. It is also the results of emotion, hope and thought — the intangible end product of the Mind's musing and shaping. The mage skilled in Spirit can touch the wall that separates potential from material and reach through to see entire realms formed of maybes, might-haves and never-weres.

Both spirit entities and spiritual landscapes form of a spiritual energy that hovers somewhere between Prime and physical Pattern. Ephemera or plasm, this intangible substance makes up the otherworlds, the far Deep Umbra, the Shard Realms and the myriad other places where mages explore magic in its purest states. Such spirits are responsive to impulses and materials, and so the entities of spirit often reflect human drives, belief systems, even gods or concepts — or is it the other way around? Regardless, most people remain blind to the spirit plane, while mages can reach out to interact with the half-felt dreams of the world itself.

The Umbra — the spirit reaches — is separated from the physical world by an invisible and intangible Gauntlet, a mystic barrier that keeps the dead or the spirits of nature from crossing into and affecting the living world. Other worlds are sometimes isolated from the Umbra by their own Gauntlets, and other times coexist with Spirit. Powerful mages can pierce this Gauntlet to reach different areas of the Umbra, but such a task is not without hazards. Journeying to the lands of the dead or to the far reaches of other dimensions is possible, but it is difficult in the extreme. Worse still, the Gauntlet itself, once merely a barrier through which mages had to exert their magic to cross, is now actually metaphysically dangerous. To traverse the spirit world risks injury, insanity and worse.

There are countless strange creatures and entities in the spirit worlds, many of which follow bizarre rules that bear no resemblance to the laws of Earth. A mage who would traffic in

Spirit would do well to learn such rules, to discover the byways of the Umbra and to traffic in the currency of spirits — chiminage, or the bonds of mutual service. Near the Earth, the Mirror Umbra reflects physical reality as colored by Resonance. Deeper in the spirit worlds are the Dream Realms, Epiphamies, Astral space, Horizon Realms (other worlds in their own dimensions) and eventually the Deep Umbra — the great void beyond the stars. It's no wonder that many Spirit mages choose to stay on Earth and simply summon or converse with the spirits that happen to be there! In the Umbra, one can find any Heaven or Hell of mankind's creation... and perhaps be trapped there.

Technological students of Spirit magic instead study Dimensional Science, the ways to reach alternate worlds that coexist with this one. Though their means are different, their ends are the same. To such Technocrats, spirits are alien entities or otherdimensional manifestations.

Masters of Spirit have an otherworldly sense, a tendency to murmur to the air, focus on things that aren't there and hold to unusual taboos. They often indulge in unusual behaviors and sometimes talk to spiritual allies or enemies that nobody else can see. Technocratic Masters of Dimensional Science often carry specialized trappings to see (and defend against) the spirit world's intrusions. They range from distant psychic sensitives to powerfully rational mathematicians and physicists.

• Spirit Senses

Initiates in the ways of Spirit can sense the Mirror Umbra, the reflection of the material world into spirit energy. The initiate can see anima and ghosts, hear natural spirits and sense places where the Gauntlet between worlds thins or thickens. The mage can determine when an object has a powerful spirit component, like a mystic fetish. The mage's Resonance pulls her most closely to objects, spirits and places of similar Resonance, but the mage can open to any spirit perception with effort.

Combined with other Spheres, the mage can sense objects that have connections to the spirit world or that have been somehow translocated there. The mage can also either combine her vision of animas with an awareness of emotions and auras, or detect the places most favorable for converse with specific types of spirits or where spirits might gather for energy.

•• Touch Spirit

For a brief moment, the mage can reach out to touch the spirit world. The mage can manipulate spiritual objects and interact with spirit entities, even pushing them around, conversing with or attacking them. The mage can affect the spirit world while remaining physical, extending his natural reach, voice and form across into the next realm.

By casting his control over the Gauntlet directly, the mage can also manipulate the strength of the wall between worlds. This difficult task can make it easier for a spirit to manifest, or the mage could protect an area from ghosts and possessions. Powerful spirit wards can keep out travelers who walk the spirit realms. Adequate preparation can also make it easier for the mage to reach into the spirit realms, if only for a time.

Combined with the Pattern Spheres, the mage can make items that can affect the spirit worlds, or give another creature a brief sense of spirit or ability to touch the mirror realms. The mage could also cause an area of the spirit world to suffer chaotic storms of spirit energy or use Correspondence to extend his sight to the many and varied Realms of Spirit.

••• Pierce Gauntlet

Although it's dangerous to do so, a skilled mage can pierce the Gauntlet between worlds, stepping into the spirit world or back out to the material. The process of stepping sideways, as it's called, often relies on powerful rituals, and it works best at places of natural power. Even then, survival is not guaranteed — the Gauntlet is a dangerous barrier to mages.

A mage can translate himself across the Gauntlet, becoming pure ephemera (spirit matter). Bringing possessions takes more work and increases the difficulty of the trip. In either case, the mage risks injury. Mages with strong Avatars are especially susceptible to the storm winds that ride the barrier between worlds.

While in the spirit worlds, the mage obeys the laws of those places and interacts with them normally. The mage can deal directly with spirits, but he can also exert his magic directly against them. Once in the spirit world, the mage can travel to other spirit destinations, often by taking pathways known to Traditional lore. The mage might forge out into various near Realms or other worlds, but he cannot pass the Horizon — yet.

As the mage can alter the spirit world directly, he can also stir a spirit to wakefulness or lure it into slumber. Most objects and places have associated spirits, but the powerful Gauntlet and lack of connection to the mortal world causes those spirits to sleep, uninterested in goings-on around them. The mage can stir those that hover on the edge of wakefulness, or briefly cause some to return to sleep. Most spirits are too weak, too far deteriorated and too unconscious to be so roused, but many places or items that hover on the edge of importance or that have strong Resonance have lightly sleeping spirits that can be roused. Similarly, powerful objects or fetishes have spirits that the mage can put to sleep temporarily, perhaps to avoid their wrath or to reach something that they guard.

With the Pattern Spheres, the mage can create ephemeral representations of material objects or forces, essentially duplicating the Pattern Spheres in the spirit worlds. With Mind magic, the mage can determine Resonance and roles of various spirits encountered, while Correspondence can ease the rigors of travel in the spirit realms. Prime magic lets the mage determine the boundaries between places of power and feel the flow of natural wellsprings of spirit energy.

•••• Rend and Repair Gauntlet
Bind Spirits

While lesser mages are limited to slipping themselves through the Gauntlet, a powerful mage can tear the Gauntlet asunder and create a gate between the spirit and material worlds. Spirits and other people can travel through this gate, but they risk the perils inherent in such a journey. The mage can also reinforce the Gauntlet against such breaches and repair or close tears that he or others create.

The mage's command over spiritual matter allows him to place powerful bindings and summonings over spirits. The diffi-

culty of such a feat varies with the spirit in question; extremely potent spirits are still beyond the mage's powers. Still, many minor spirits can be useful allies, and can perform a variety of feats. The mage can even bind the spirit to an object to create a fetish, or form a sort of symbiotic link with a spirit. Doing so is similar to possession, but the mage remains somewhat able to direct his actions and call on the spirit's powers. Dealing with the spirit world in a cavalier manner can garner a mage many enemies, of course, so Adepts must be judicious in their use of power.

A mage with this level of power can bring other people or objects into the Umbra or out of it easily. With other magic, the mage can empower free-standing gates or doorways that leave one section of the material world to enter a different area in the spirit world. The mage can also create time differentials between spirit and material, or he can take control of a spirit directly and influence its actions and role.

••••• Forge Ephemera
Outward Journeys

The most advanced understanding of Spirit allows the mage to shape ephemera as he desires. The mage can alter, destroy or create spirit material, force it to obey his whims or gift it with new powers. He can sense and affect the spirits of living beings and the dead alike, and journey to the farthest reaches of the spirit worlds, defended by his own mastery.

A simple spell enables the Master to heal spirits and restore their Power, which is a potent way to garner spirit allies. The mage can also reshape spirits as he desires, although particularly powerful spirits can take a long time to change, and most spirits will object to such treatment.

Shaping spirit energy into desired forms lets the mage create new Realms, though such undertakings are massive and require a great deal of Quintessence. The mage can create places in the Umbra where he can shape the spirit world to his liking and even build new Horizon Realms, but most Masters consider this feat extraordinarily difficult.

Because the Master can sense and interact with the living soul, the mage can now actually see the Avatar of a living being. The Avatars of Sleepers are little more than dim motes of magical energy, but mages often have powerful and active Avatars — and they may take interest in those who watch them! Most horrifyingly, the Spirit Master can perform the Gilgul rite, the vulgar magic that tears the victim's very Avatar asunder and removes forever his magical power. This last spirit ritual is one of the most guarded and feared powers, used only in extremis and as a punishment for the most hideous of crimes in magical society.

Guarded by complete control over the spirit world, the Master can forage at last past the Horizon and beyond to the Deep Umbra. He can explore the Far Realms and go where he pleases, such as other worlds, the many creations of human imagination and the dimensions far removed from his own.

Spirit Effects

• **Detect Possession** — A Chorister uses exorcism rites while a Verbena tests the subject's blood, but whatever the ritual, it's a simple way to determine whether another spirit rides within a material shell. The mage simply uses his spirit perceptions to sense the offending spirit's presence in a person (or object, in the case of a fetish). The mage may not be able to do anything about it, but it's useful to tell if someone's actions are her own. Of course, determining the exact nature of the spirit may require the use of the Cosmology Knowledge or Mind magic.

• **Spirit Sight** — It's usually a simple matter to shift one's sight into the spirit world. The mage can see what exists on the other side of the Gauntlet, although he may not be able to affect it directly. Thus, a mage might notice that an area has a very nasty or vibrant spirit reflection, indicative of some sort of problem or boon. The landscape of the nearby spirit world usually reflects the physical world of that area, but often with significant changes based on powerful events and items in the place. The mage can also see spirits as they go about their business, and some might even take notice in return.

With enough successes, the mage can translate multiple senses into the spirit world, allowing him to hear or feel spirits as well as seeing them. Usually, the mage can only sense one area at a time (spirit or material), unless he splits his senses and concentration with additional Life and Mind magic. The difficulty generally depends on the thickness of the Gauntlet.

•• **Call Spirit** — A sort of "Hey!" shouted randomly into the Umbra, this Effect lets the mage translate his voice into spiritual terms on the other side of the Gauntlet. The successes scored determine how pervasive and compelling the mage's call is. Powerful spirits rarely show up to such a call — they have better things to do, and they are usually too far out in the spirit world, anyway — but lesser spirits often flock to such. Spirits seem to *love* messing around with the material world. The mage can't really exert any control unless he has more powerful spirit magic, but he can attract attention.

If the mage uses **Spirit Sight**, he can call for specific spirits or even hold a conversation with something (or someone) on the Other Side.

•• **The Spirit's Caress** — A mage can reach across the Gauntlet briefly to touch a spirit on the other side. The mage could strike a spirit or just interact with it while remaining otherwise physical. This Effect is a perfect means of conflict if the spirit has no way to manifest in the material world to return the insult. Of course, the Effect just allows the mage to affect the spirit; it doesn't guarantee the results of any of his physical actions (the mage might pierce the Gauntlet and reach across, only to miss the spirit with a punch).

Combined with the Prime Effect **Bond of Blood**, the mage can share Quintessence with the spirit, or ask it to give up Power in exchange (treat them as interchangeable resources). This tactic doesn't work as well with ghosts although some wraiths have their own means of granting power to a mage, as the ancestor-spirits of the Wu Lung can attest. Note that Quintessence drawn from a spirit takes on the spirit's nature as its Resonance, so it's best to deal with a spirit that does the sorts of things that the mage wants to do!

••• **Awaken the Inanimate** — By talking and crooning over a physical object, a Dreamspeaker or Akashic Brother may Awaken its spirit and rouse it into awareness. A Verbena might

spread blood in a pattern over the object while a Hermetic mage would sprinkle it with dark dust and carve a seal onto its surface.

Objects, once their spirits are awake and aware, can be particularly useful. Their personalities tend to be very protective of those who have treated them well and ill-disposed toward those who have treated them badly. The object could not really do much on its own, but it might cause small coincidences that work for or against the mage. For example, if a Euthanatos were to rouse the spirit of his gun, it might misfire in the hands of an enemy. Likewise, an aware Chantry house might take a very dim view of burglars, especially if they broke in — doors might slam, lights could go out (or on), and the alarm system the burglars disarmed might short out and go off anyway.

Rousing an object typically requires plenty of ritual successes — five or so for a gun, 20 or more for a house. This is slow, but often coincidental unless the mage wants an especially vulgar manifestation. The older and more psychically-charged the object is, the more powerful its spirit and the harder it will be to rouse. The newer and less important the item, the less powerful and less intelligent its spirit and the easier it is to rouse. A new knife from the knife shop, never used, would have less personality and intelligence than a cockroach, but could be made aware with a minimal amount of magic. Over years or decades, the objects would start to absorb some of its owner's personality. The knife an old shaman forged in boyhood would have a strong and active spirit (thought it might not be a fetish *per se*). As always, an object with strong Resonance similar to the mage's is more likely to awaken to his call.

An object with an awakened spirit exists in multiple worlds at once. A person can use an awakened knife in the physical world to injure spirits in the Near Umbra, or he may cut the silver cords that connect astral travelers to their bodies.

In the modern age, many objects resist awakening completely. The dullness of mundanity infects them and prevents them from taking on their own personalities. Even if a mage manages to awaken an object, there's no guarantee that it will be helpful, or that it will know anything of value.

••• Stepping Sideways — Mages can push through the Gauntlet and into the Near Umbra. Once in the Umbra, the mage walks and interacts with the place just like always, but as a being of ephemera instead of as a material entity. The mage is always noticeable to those who know what to look for. Living beings stand out in the Umbra, especially if they visit the deadlands.

Traveling through the Gauntlet is usually done as an extended ritual — the mage makes a real or symbolic journey and eventually passes into the spirit world. The difficulty of such a journey varies with the thickness of the Gauntlet. Should the mage botch, he may well become stuck. In such a case, only another mage able to reach into the Gauntlet can pull him out or push him through.

Crossing the Gauntlet is a very dangerous journey. The storm winds of the Reckoning lash the very Avatars of those mages who dare to cross into the Mirror Worlds. When a mage crosses into the Umbra, roll the mage's permanent Paradox + Arete (difficulty 6). Each success indicates one level of aggravated damage as the storm winds flay the mage's enlightened spirit! In some particularly nasty

cases, mages have even had their Avatars flayed apart by the storm winds, getting haplessly dumped back in the material world with less power and sometimes horribly Gilguled. Such punishments rely on the Storyteller's cruelty.

•••• **Affix Gauntlet** — By hardening the Gauntlet in an area, the mage can cause any number of effects. He can trap a spirit into a place or object, create a ward that ejects a spirit from a space, or tightly control an environment and protect it against spirit entry. Successes scored on such an Effect generally raise the Gauntlet, but they could have other consequences.

By warding an area, the mage can prevent spirits from entering or leaving a space. Successes generate an area and a duration for such a ward. This ward exists in both the material and physical world — any construct of ephemera cannot pass through unless it can defeat the potency of the ward.

An interlocking pattern of Spirit energy can trap a spirit in place, or force it out of an area. The mage's player must score more successes than the victim in a contested roll — typically the mage's Effect versus the subject's ability to travel in spirit form (be it through Spirit magic, a spirit's powers or whatever). If the mage succeeds, he can banish a spirit from a place or person (with exorcism) or lock it in place so that it can't escape. Such powers are a staple Chorus and Order of Hermes' means for dealing with demons and other evil spirit manifestations.

Trapping a spirit in an object creates a fetish. A willing spirit can empower an object deliberately; an unwilling spirit must have its will broken by the mage's Effect. If the mage succeeds, the Effect creates a temporary fetish. With a willing spirit, the fetish lasts as long as the deal allows; for an unwilling spirit, the mage must use successes to generate a duration for the spirit trap.

Lastly, the mage can place a spirit in possession of a body temporarily. Most often this is done by wrapping shards of the Gauntlet around the mage, holding the spirit in place so that the mage can tap its power, but the mage could also cause a spirit to possess an unwilling victim. In the former case, the mage must best the spirit's will (if it resists), but can then draw on the spirit's special Charms and powers; in the latter case, the mage must overcome the victim's will, and then can inject the spirit into the victim for the determined duration.

•••• **Breach the Gauntlet** — Like the earlier power of **Stepping Sideways**, this capability lets the mage cross into the spirit world — but he does so by tearing open a hole in the Gauntlet (or, perhaps, bringing spirit and material worlds completely together again). For the duration of the Effect, any being that's not specifically warded can travel the gate, entering or leaving the spirit world.

A breach of the Gauntlet is generally quite vulgar, but it can be the only way to get allies or Sleepers without Spirit skill into the Umbra. Some spirits also crave entry into the material world, but they do not have the power to cross over on their own.

Naturally, this Effect is very difficult; the difficulty varies with the strength of the Gauntlet, and the successes required are usually high (five or more plus duration and area affected). Note that passengers through the gate do take storm damage from the Umbra just as per the **Stepping Sideways** rote! (Sleepers, ironically, therefore enter the Umbra with the least risk.)

••••• **Break the Dreamshell** — The Dreamshell is the Dreamspeaker term for the Horizon. To enter the Deep Umbra, a mystic must break through this Dreamshell, just as she must break through the Gauntlet when stepping sideways.

Ten successes or more are required to pierce the Earth Mother's Dreamshell. Other Realms might have weaker or stronger Horizons. If the mage uses an Anchorhead (a special Domain set amid the Dreamshell), the passage becomes easier and requires only five successes.

Fortunately, the Dreamshell is not overrun with flaying spirit energies, and crossing it does not carry the same inherent dangers as **Stepping Sideways**.

••••• **Deep Umbra Travel** — Surviving the utterly barren spiritual environment of the Deep Umbra requires a membrane of spirit magic. This spiritual essence creates a sort of bubble around the mage, protecting him from the ravages of the Deep Umbra. The traveler must reach and enter another Near Umbra before the duration rolled for the field elapses, or he will die a cold death in the Void.

Deep Umbral travel is a dangerous affair. Most distances are great but highly subjective. Mages often experience hallucinations or visions in the Deep Umbra, and they can encounter strange entities that make their homes there. Such creatures are rarely friendly to humanity.

A few bold mages actually build giant ships that travel the various dimensions, not only skirting space but piercing into the primordial Void itself. The Void Engineers are foremost among such, of course, but Sons of Ether also build great and fanciful Etherjammers to carry them to distant places. In the Deep Umbra, they look for other worlds, spirit realms beyond any known place, and clues to the formation of the Tellurian.

Time

Specialties: Alternate Timelines, Divination, Temporal Manipulation, Travel

Time, as the philosophers say, is the magic that all men know. The relentless tick of the clock leads down a road to an uncertain future, immutable, undeniable, equally profound to all humanity. Although time may vary with the observer — long moments of passion and profundity, stark seconds of terror or loss, relativity and the spin of quantum mechanics — it's an undeniable part of existence.

For mages who delve into the mystical study of Time, of course, matters aren't so cut and dried. Science and magic both agree that the flow of time varies with the observer, that time itself is hardly the constant that it initially seems. Indeed, some students of esoterica question whether time's linear flow is not simply another artifact of consensus, a happenstance result of random

creation that's no more constant than a changeable wind. Even those who accept Time's forward march (more or less) still discover that the eddies, currents and branching paths of time are far more manifold and mutable than most people would ever guess.

Mages studying Time magic agree that the world is full of unexpected whorls and vortices of temporal disturbance. Time contracts around some places and dilates at others, though the regimentation of scientific time means that such phenomena are not as common as they once were. In unusual circumstances, time may loop back on itself, make jumps and rifts to past or future, or diverge in multiple streams. A trained mage can sense all such variations, although these phenomena are hardly predictable or safe.

Time mages often start with a basic sensitivity to the flow of time and move to comprehend their own subjective sense of it. From there, the mage learns to manipulate her personal perceptions of time, and later to extend that manipulation to others. Truly skilled mages can even warp, halt or accelerate time and step into past or future.

Obviously, a strong understanding of metaphysical Time is useful in conjunctional Effects, much like Correspondence. While control of space grants a greater range and sensitivity to Effects, Time magic allows the mage to "hang" Effects until some future time, dilate their duration or change their rates of manifestation.

Curiously, once a mage manipulates time in a subjective fashion, it's progressively harder to rework the manipulation. If a mage stretches out a particular few seconds, for instance, she may gain time to perform responsive actions at her convenience, but further time-manipulating magic must contend with the fact that she's already warped her perception of that time. Thus, once a mage has twisted a particular bit of time, she must overcome the momentum of her own Effects to change it further. More importantly, once the mage is working with distorted time, her magical energies are already tied up in the feat. (Therefore, the mage can't take six actions in one turn and use all of them for magic.)

Masters of Time most often carry a strong sense of *déjà vu* with them. People around the mage find time itself "fuzzed out," as if the past, present and future blend to a single point. The mage may well manifest sudden, unconscious shifts in time, causing a flower to bloom or a book to gather dust.

• Time Sense

As might be expected, a mage's first initiation into the mysteries of Time is an awareness of time's flow. The mage learns to discern subjective time, to keep an accurate track of her own temporal position, to notice anomalies and alterations in time and to track Effects through their temporal "wake," the disturbance that all things leave in the flow of time.

Most Time magic leaves some sort of disturbance that's noticeable to a mage who knows what to look for. Although an Initiate can't really do anything about it, the mage can at least tell when Time magic are at work, and may well get the heck out of there! Natural phenomena sometimes cause odd Time distortions, too, and these are apparent to a trained mage. Actually messing around with time instabilities is a dangerous process, and more than one mage has been catapulted into far-distant times, alternate histories or bizarre temporal loops. The Initiate can easily such dangers and keep away spot, and he may even be able to determine how the phenomenon in question works.

Although it's impractical to *always* have a concrete sense of Time, an Initiate can often tell when someone's scrying on her through time, and she can develop a powerfully accurate count of time's passage.

Combined with the other Spheres, the basics of Time magic let the mage determine whether a particular Pattern has been affected unnaturally by Time and how it has been changed as a result. Furthermore, they give the mage better accuracy in using pre-existing time distortions in conjunction with other magic.

•• Time Sight

Although both past and future are hypothetically nothing but possibilities, it's possible to scry through time itself to look at the probabilities that tie most closely to the direction of the magician's own timeline. The mage can cast her perceptions into past or future and gather information from other times. The process is not always accurate; the future is mutable and some say that the past, too, changes as people's memories and beliefs of it change. The closer the mage looks to her current present time, the more accurate the vision. Distant times and places may be inaccurate, fuzzy and difficult to comprehend. Some places and times are even protected against such scrying by powerful wards or by natural phenomena that bend the course of time itself.

Simple pre- and retro-cognitive Effects just allow the mage to look into the past or future at her current location. The mage can watch time as if viewing it directly, pausing to skip to different points or glossing over some areas to speed on to others. She can extend her Time senses to such vistas and tell whether there are other temporal distortions at the times that she watches.

Mages can build walls of warding with this power, creating a great deal of "temporal static" to blow out Time senses in the same way that Correspondence can be used to repel distant scrying.

In conjunction with other Spheres, Time senses let the mage examine Patterns of the past and future, determine the course of fate and even read the thoughts of people in different eras.

••• Time Manipulation

By extending personalized perceptions over an area of time, the mage can alter the apparent flow of time at a site. Theories vary over whether this is a true manipulation of the time-stream or just an extension of subjective time properties, but the fact is that such manipulations can create some very unusual — and powerful — Effects.

By dilating or contracting time, the mage can alter the rate at which things happen in comparison to the "normal world." A flow of water could be made to trickle like molasses, a bullet could be slowed to visible speeds or a running man could seem to whiz by with incredible velocity. The subjective time of the target isn't changed: the running man feels himself moving as if at normal speed, while the world around him seems to be moving very slowly; the bullet appears to onlookers to move slowly, but it hits

with as much force as ever. Most mages agree that such Effects simply wrap the subject in a bit of slow or fast time, although a few hardcases insist that it's a matter of altering relative universal time-flows or something equally esoteric. In general, the specifics don't matter, since the end results are quite fantastic.

A mage wrapped in dilated or contracted time can easily cocoon himself in a protective layer that insulates himself from the outside world, effectively freezing himself in time, or accelerate to the point of performing numerous physical tasks in a few seconds. Different mages all have different ways of approaching this undertaking, of course, but it's still a potent power.

With a bit of finesse, a mage can rewind or loop time as well. Doing so is very difficult, however, and it tends to draw down a lot of Paradox. Once time is bent in this fashion, it gets exponentially more difficult to warp it further, and such distortions are easily noticed by other Time magicians (and sometimes by astute sleepers!) as well as causing all sorts of interference that makes time sensitivity in the area go haywire. In short, the mage might be able to rewind a few seconds of time and reconstruct an event differently, but Paradox and destiny tend to conspire to make such undertakings profoundly difficult. Such redirections often result in unforeseen problems later.

•••• Time Deterministi

Instead of stretching or compressing time, the Adept of Time magic can literally stop time in its tracks or drop something into a loop that only releases at a specified time. Magic can be made to wait in place, as can other Patterns. The mage can cast suspension over a target so that it is literally unaffected by the passage of time or build specially keyed Effects that hold off until certain events come to pass. The mage can even freeze a target outside the time-stream, leaving it trapped and unaffected by the outside world while it experiences nothing more than the blink of an eye.

Such powerful magic are often vulgar, but they can generate very potent Effects in conjunction with other Spheres. A mage who is temporarily "paused" in time can't be affected by anything else in the normal time-stream, while a dangerous subject or out-of-control experiment can be easily frozen until resources can be assembled to deal with it. Indeed, by joining control over time with a dash of Correspondence, a victim can be trapped completely outside the space-time continuum — warded into a pocket that dissipates only with the cessation of the magic or the intervention of powerful outside forces. Many creatures and entities too powerful for mages to confront directly are said to be trapped in such a fashion.

A time-halting Effect combined with a Pattern Sphere can generate a keyed pause: something that doesn't happen until a specific person, creature or item comes into the right position. With Entropy, a bit of Time magic can create an Effect that does not happen until a certain crux of destiny or improbability comes to pass. A princess can be put to sleep until her predestined true love arrives or a dying subject can be placed into cryogenic suspension while doctors search for a cure for his condition. Entire family lines or places of power can have magical Effects granted that wait until they're signaled for activation, though use and the rigors of Paradox slowly erode such Effects until they're gone.

••••• Time Travel
Time Immunity

The pages of history are open to the true Master, who can not only immunize places and people from the ravages of history, but who can thrust objects and even individuals through time and connect points through the time-stream. The mage's reach is limited only by her perceptions and by the constraints of her own magic and its concomitant Paradox.

By immunizing herself to the effects of time, the mage can essentially evade the passage of time in the rest of the world. To her, the world is a frozen plateau, one in which she may move about freely without ever interacting with her surroundings. The mage would wander about and perhaps pull other objects or people into her pocket of immunity just long enough to use them, then continue on her way. To the outsider, such events would seem to happen instantaneously and without any apparent impetus as the mage accomplishes several things between seconds.

With an anchor point in the present, the mage can send herself or other people or things into the near future or past temporarily. Without an anchor, the mage can send someone into other parts of time permanently. Either type of travel is fraught with peril. The future is uncertain, and the mage risks becoming lost in the mists of possibility, while the past is protected by the weight of peoples' memory and their belief in its set forms. Paradox lashes out against mages who push too hard against the walls of time, and it has a nasty habit of undoing the mage's works or shunting her into an alternate timeline — or even outside the bounds of reality altogether.

Naturally, Masters of Time tread with great caution. *Things* wait in the time-stream, perhaps more incomprehensible than even the spirits that guard the distant reaches of the universe. Mages who meddle too much with Time have a disturbing tendency to disappear, sometimes replaced by beings that masquerade in their place, other times arriving with full knowledge of a horrific fate that awaits them in some unavoidable time. Travelers can be pulled out of the time-stream by other Master-level Time magic in eras where they did not plan to go. And there are barriers in Time itself, places where even mages can't see or dive, where nobody knows what happens to the magician foolish enough to beat his fists against the universe's laws.

In conjunction with other Effects, a Master of Time can fire a spell off into the past or future, although its results may not be immediately apparent or may well catapult the mage into an alternate time. The mage could even send another person or object into a different time and pull it back to his present anchor point later. The mage can also use his Time magic to immunize other Patterns, causing them to exist independent of the clock that ticks for the rest of the world.

Time Effects

• **Perfect Time** — Although Mind magic can provide an accurate internal count and chronometer, only Time magic can sense and correct for distortions in subjective time. From

Virtual Adept self-adjusting computer clocks to Akashic internalizations and Verbena biorhythms, the mage learns techniques to feel the flow of time with incredible accuracy and to automatically adjust for jumps and skips in the time stream. If the mage is flattened with unusual Time Effects from adversaries or strange Umbral spaces, she at least has a chance to adjust and adapt. Better still, the mage can keep absolute track of her own Effects and timing, easily judging subjective time as necessary to put a precise duration or spin on any action.

• **Time Sense** — Powerful events recur in the supernatural world, unseen to normal mortals but visible to mages. Such events range from tiny slips of *déjà vu* to the phenomenal shifting and phasing castles, caverns and complexes that seem to exist outside of time and appear on regular cycles — or with no pattern at all. Keeping up a running sensitivity to such phenomena is trying, but a mage who suspects the presence of something unusual can feel the ripples caused by such disturbances. These disturbances include the sorts of wakes left by other Time magic, as from time travelers and distortions of the time continuum. Potent spirits sometimes hold courts and there are gates that open only on certain cycles... the mage can sense any and all such phenomena with a modicum of concentration. Indeed, the mage may well presage such events before they occur, or feel the rippling residue left by such happenings.

•• **Divinations** — Scrying-bowls, speaking mirrors, uncontrolled cryptic pronouncements or songs, and visionary trances are staples of magical divination, and they are keys to understanding the past and future. Although both ends of the spectrum are clouded by possibility, Time magic can at least draw back the curtain for a moment to snatch glimpses of what might become or might have been. The vision seen or described may be hazy or indeterminate; the further from the present, the more clouded the vision.

Successes rolled on such an Effect are split up to determine both the duration to which the mage can look into past or future, and the accuracy of the divination. Such visions are almost never totally accurate, but they can sometimes paint a useful picture. Beware the mage who sees visions of disaster, though... that way lies insanity.

•• **Time Wards** — Any sort of mucking about with time "muddies the waters," so to speak, and although a novice mage can't perform fine manipulations with time, she can at least lay about with random Time Effects to make the surrounding timestream disturbed and impenetrable to Time perceptions. Other mages trying to look into the past or future get only a blur of possible visions and confused images, and Time Effects tend to run into the rippling temporal currents and get dispersed into the rapids. With enough force and work, the mage can completely block off an area from time sight and render it totally opaque to temporal scrying.

Unless the mage uses other Spheres in conjunction, an Effect of this sort just blocks out a small area of time in her own location. The exact duration warded is determined by the duration chart, although the mage can determine how far the ward extends to past and future by splitting up the duration. Successes rolled are also used to generate the ward's strength; a

persistent or powerful mage can break through Time static with enough will. In other respects, these wards are similar to the more familiar wards built with Correspondence (p. 159).

••• Distort Time — By generating a field of slow or fast time, the mage causes localized distortions that let people or objects move and react to the world at different rates than normal. A bubble of fast time would contain a person who could move two or three times faster than normal, for instance, while slow time could enfold a hurled weapon and cause it to seem to float through the air in a leisurely fashion. The subject still experiences an undistorted sense of subjective time, so the fast man would feel as if he's moving at normal speed while the world around him is slow, and the hurled weapon would retain its deadly momentum but could be easily grabbed by the handle.

Every two successes scored causes the bubble to accelerate or decelerate time by one factor. Thus, two successes would allow a mage to double her physical speed, taking two actions in a single turn.

••• Time Warp — By pulling time back into a loop, the mage causes a small area to suffer a local "rewind" of time. The mage herself remains immunized against this Effect due to her command of Time magic (otherwise he wouldn't know that he'd done anything and the looping would be almost pointless). From there, the mage can change her actions and responses to a given situation, already knowing how it would turn out otherwise. By combining Life and Mind with the Effect, the mage can actually rewind herself physically and undo the effects of physical trauma, while still retaining her memory of the events that never happened.

In game terms, the mage causes one or more turns to rewind and get redone in her area. Successes spent on the area determine how large a location is affected — the mage might just unwind damage done to herself, or might rewind a whole area to undo a massive catastrophe. Additional successes spent on individuals can insulate them from the Effect just like the caster, so that they remember what's about to happen again and can act appropriately. Anyone who's not insulated just redoes whatever they were doing before, although they might change in response to someone else's differing actions. That is, a Man in Black firing his gun still fires it (and scores the same result as before) unless, say, one of the rewound mages decides to body-check the MiB instead of diving for cover.

Rewinding time is not only exceedingly difficult, it's very vulgar. If the mage rewinds time over a specific thread (say, one particular turn), then any attempt to affect that spot of time again must overcome the successes scored on the initial rewind — time is already so bent out of shape that further manipulations must be even more powerful. Time scrying and the like also fight a similar barrier. Time's distortions make it hard to read the area — which, incidentally, means that although the mage knows what *may* happen when she rewinds time, she still can't predict how her changed actions will change the replaced timeline. Rewound time tends to stack up Paradox due to the inherent trickiness of the feat. Every turn of rewound time causes Paradox for the Effect, so rewinding three turns would cause triple the normal Paradox for the spell!

Naturally, this spell is so difficult and specific that very few mages use it at all. Some paradigms just don't accommodate the idea of "rewinding time" while others facilitate it, but all mages agree that such stunts are left to young hotheads who haven't yet learned the dangers of such vulgar magic. (Your Storyteller will probably hate it if you overuse this Effect, too, which is another sure way to get lots of problems.)

•••• Contingent Effect — By placing a hold on a magical Effect, the mage turns it into a contingency: a spell that doesn't go off until some specified condition comes to pass. Doing so requires the use of other Spheres. If the spell only functions when a specific individual arrives in the area, for instance, then Life magic is necessary to discriminate the subject's Pattern. The mage can either make the magic hold off until a certain amount of time elapses (anything within the Damage and Duration table, based on successes rolled) or set further conditions with other Spheres. The mage also has the choice of simply letting the Effect dissipate once it reaches its time limit without any activating conditions.

Hanging an Effect on a Pattern does place a certain amount of magical "weight" there, and such an Effect is noticeable to most magical senses. Doing so does, therefore, count as a maintained Effect (p. 155), although the mage doesn't actually need to concentrate on it.

Note that, if the mage casts a contingent Time Effect, she won't know if the subsequent Effect hung with it is successful until the contingency goes off, unless she also takes the time to use other magic to examine the Effect itself!

•••• Programmed Event — The mage stops time in a localized field and sets a time when it shall resume. Say she lifts a cup from a table and drops it. By freezing time around the cup for one scene, she causes the cup to hang in midair until the scene ends. At that time, the cup falls and breaks. When events in physical reality are frozen for extended periods, Paradox forces usually erode the magic and free the events from stopped time prematurely. Also, if someone were to grab the cup, static reality would reassert itself and the magical field would disperse.

It's possible to generate stasis over a fairly large area, but it's both difficult and dangerous. Anything more than a yard or two of area causes a significant temporal disturbance, noticeable by mages nearby (say, in the same city). The Backlash from such a tremendous casting can be painful as well. The larger the area, the more quickly outside time erodes the stasis, so such fields tend to collapse rapidly.

••••• Sidestep Time — Instead of halting time in a small area, the mage simply steps laterally to the current of time, effectively removing herself from the evolution of the world. While in this state, the mage can move about freely, insulated by a tiny field of time-adjustment but otherwise moving so rapidly that the world is standing still by comparison. The mage can interact with things that she can touch — she still generates enough force to move along the ground, and she can pick up items and move them — but anything that's not included in her field is stuck with the rest of the world. Thus, the mage can pluck a knife out of the air and shove it into an opponent, but the enemy won't bleed or suffer injury (from the mage's viewpoint, anyway) until the Effect ends. Taking other people along for the ride is possible, but it requires the mage to extend her Effect to include them. Note that,

while in a sidestepped state, the mage's magical powers are tied up in maintaining the field, so it's impossible to do additional magic *with the mage's intervention* while outside time. Thus, "mundane" devices still function, but anything that would require the mage to actually call upon her Arete is impossible.

••••• **Time Travel** — Physics aside, the mage simply vanishes from one point in the time-stream and reappears sometime else. Although scientists would argue that a mage doing so would wind up in the void of space (the Earth having moved far from its position in the time jumped), the mage's Pattern obeys metaphysical laws, so the mage reappears in the same place from which she left. The successes scored indicate how far the mage can travel through time, and how many people she can bring along, if desired.

Traveling through time generates a significant temporal disturbance, and many time travelers find that there are already groups of other mages waiting to find out what's going on when they arrive.

If the mage leaves an "anchor point" in her present, she can pull back on that thread and return to the time that she left. Otherwise, the trip is one-way. Likewise, the mage can try to send a subject into the future, but he may discover that the individual has taken steps in that later future to find the mage and deal him!

Trips to the future tend to be fairly easy, but unpredictable. The mage simply scries an appropriate time, or even jumps blind, and reappears in some future point. Past travel is much, much more difficult and dangerous, primarily because the weight of memory causes reality to assert itself against the mage directly. Past travelers tend to vanish into the time-stream, destroyed by Paradox or other forces, and never seem to make significant changes to the timeline (not that anyone would remember, though). Some mages maintain that a sort of "time police" group prevents other mages from traveling too far through time, or from manipulating the time stream overtly.

It's rumored that Archmages have a more effective form of time travel, even permitting them to alter the past in a limited fashion, but who would know?

Paradox

"PHENOMENAL COSMIC POWER!... itty-bitty living space."

— the Genie, from Disney's *Aladdin*.

Perhaps the single thing that any mage can be said to fear most is Paradox. The very idea, be it is called scourge, Backlash, distortion or any other name, is enough to frighten even some of the most insane Marauders. The force of Paradox itself will cause any mage to think twice before he tosses a fireball down the street. Paradox is perhaps most terrifying because it's unpredictable, it's dangerous, and lies waiting for a mage to make a single misstep.

For storytelling purposes, it's important to understand what Paradox is, as well as what it is not. Paradox is not a sentient force. It is not malicious, and it is not benevolent. It doesn't favor certain individuals, and it isn't out to get others. It simply exists. Paradox's results could be described as analogous to the human immune system: It fights off anything that seeks to disturb the equilibrium of the system it protects.

Paradox occurs in any case when a mage makes enough of an impact on reality to "disturb the waters," so to speak. The disturbance can be a badly failed attempt to alter reality coincidentally or the use of any vulgar magic. In fact, vulgar magic *always* incurs Paradox. However, it's important to note that Paradox only seems to afflict Awakened mages. The fact that the mage changes the universe through force of will, rather than through some inherent power, seems to draw down powers that lash at the mage in return.

Basically, a mage changes reality in ways that no other force can do. Awakened magic grabs hold of the Tapestry and shoves it into a completely different direction. Even when some supernatural creatures uses a power that *looks* the same as a magical Effect, the *means* is completely different. The mage undergoes a process of self-exploration and transformation in order to alter the universe in turn, and that process means that the mage is subject to the unleashed forces of change. The *harder* the mage pushes — the bigger the change — the more Paradox rebounds.

Paradox Accumulation

Mages can get Paradox energy in varying quantities, depending on how much magic they do. The attempted Effect determines the amount of Paradox that a mage garners. In older days, the energy often accumulated, and tended to snap at unforeseen times and create disturbing problems that lasted for some time. Since the advent of the signs of the Reckoning, such is no longer the case. Now, Paradox rips through the mage almost immediately after it is accumulated. When Paradox energies *do* accumulate, the effects that release later tend to be more permanent than in previous times.

In game terms, the following are values for Paradox accumulation, with a successful Effect:

- A successful coincidental Effect doesn't normally garner Paradox.
- A vulgar Effect without witnesses generates one point of Paradox per level of the highest Sphere used.
- A vulgar Effect with witnesses generates one point of Paradox per level of the highest Sphere used, plus one.

The following are the amounts of paradox accumulated when botching. All botches cause a backfire, unless the Storyteller feels really *mean* and wants the mage to store up hideous amounts of Paradox for some evil purpose.

- A coincidental botch gives Paradox equal to the highest sphere level of the spell.
- A vulgar Effect without witnesses that is botched generates one point of Paradox per level of the highest Sphere, plus one.
- A vulgar Effect with witnesses that is botched gives *two* points of Paradox per level of the highest Sphere, plus two.

The effects of Paradox occur within a turn or two of the accumulation. The specific effect depends on the amount of Paradox involved.

Staving Off Disaster

A mage often finds it necessary to hold Paradox off for a few moments, to ensure that he completes some vital task. By expending a point of temporary Willpower, a mage can delay all Paradox effects (including any damage or Backlash) until the end of a given scene. Doing so makes the Paradox energy hang above the mage's head like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Any additional Paradox gained before the end of the scene is postponed as well, at no additional cost. The downside of this tactic is that all of the Paradox is added together at the end of the scene to make one large Backlash effect, rather than a few small ones.

Backlash Fortis

Paradox Backlash usually strikes out in some sort of change or injury to the mage. For simplicity, it's easy just to let Paradox fall into certain roles, but remember that Paradox is just as unpredictable as the mages who garner it. Storytellers should always be willing to get creative in the tortures that they inflict.

Note that stored Paradox cannot be bled off or released in smaller amounts, even with Willpower expenditure. Once freed, the accumulated energy is always released in full. Be vulgar at your own risk. Only time and caution allow a mage to smooth out the distortions of Paradox.

The following chart explains some common Backlash effects of Paradox according to the total number of points expended. Storytellers, be sure to throw it out in favor of your own cruel devices.

Paradox Flaws

Usually, when a mage burns off a small amount of Paradox, he gets a splitting headache and some sort of nagging problem. The weirdness that strikes in response to twisted magic is a Paradox Flaw, a sort of taint that afflicts the mage and his surroundings in response to his magical tampering. It is, as the name suggests, the attempted Effect actually working on the mage itself due to the magical energies he misused so grossly.

Paradox Flaws show up for most releases of Paradox energy, often in proportion to the severity of the Paradox involved. However, there's no predicting Paradox, and the Storyteller should use Paradox Flaws to make life *interesting* for mages, especially those who seem overly prone to too much Paradox energy.

All Flaws listed here come at the Storyteller's discretion, and they depend on the Effect attempted. Since Paradox responds to the mage's bending of reality, it takes a form appropriate to the initial magic. Thus, Paradox does tend to cause strangeness, but it also does so depending on what the mage was doing (or trying to do), what sort of Resonance the mage has and what sort of mood the Storyteller's in. Purple flaming elementals, walking on ceilings for a week, or turning a 50-foot tall neon sign bright red for a night are extreme and unlikely examples. Instead, Paradox might be more likely to detonate a mage's car's gas tank, have him experience vertigo as if he were walking on a ceiling, or cause a short circuit in a large electronic device that causes it to stun or injure the mage in question.

Further, Paradox Flaws are not likely to cause collateral damage. The forces that turn against the mage are usually quite localized around the mage in question. The mage's friends are generally safe unless they are in the direct path of the effect in question.

Paradox can be the Storyteller's ultimate tool for teaching common sense. It also guides and directs the chronicle's flavor. Paradox Effects that are silly or random tend to make for a lighter chronicle, while more lingering or dangerous Effects will make mages more careful and paranoid.

Particularly kind Storytellers or advanced chronicles may allow you to choose your own Paradox Flaws for your mage, but this leeway is recommended only for groups with a real sense of proportion.

Trivial Flaws: A trivial Paradox Flaw could be barely noticeable or slightly inconvenient. It probably lasts only a short time. The mage's watch might start running backward at high speed for a few turns, or his hair could stand on end for a minute. Mystical mages get struck with echoes from legend: Flowers might wilt or a swarm of insects could briefly gather near the mage.

Paradox Accumulated	Effect
Up to five points:	Roll the amount of Paradox as levels of bashing damage (difficulty 6). This damage can be soaked. The mage probably gains a minor Paradox Flaw of some sort, but it's mostly a short-term nuisance.
Six to 10 points:	Roll the amount of Paradox earned as bashing damage. The mage suffers one negative side effect, generally adding between one and three to the difficulty of all actions for a number of turns equal to the Paradox accumulated. This damage can be soaked.
11 to 15 points:	Roll [Paradox – 10] dice of *lethal* damage, which cannot be soaked (as usual, unless you use cinematic soak rules). Plus, the mage suffers a negative Paradox Flaw that averages four to six points in difficulty penalties, risks scoring another couple of levels of damage or just hits the mage with something *bizarre*.
16 to 20 points:	The mage suffers [Paradox – 10] dice of lethal damage. If he survives it, he still suffers anincapacitating side effect.
21 or more:	Kiss your ass goodbye! Take [Paradox – 20] *aggravated damage*, which is unsoakable. The negative effect gained can be a permanent effect if the Storyteller can find one that is appropriate. The mage probably gets permanent Paradox points from this Backlash as well. The mage may attract the attentions of a Paradox spirit or be catapulted into a Paradox Realm. Achieving this level of Paradox is a sure way to be shunted into the tender, loving graces of your Storyteller's most malicious nightmares.

Minor Flaws: A minor flaw is inconvenient and troublesome, and it may stick around for a while, but it's not likely to be dangerous. These Flaws might include such things as the mage's feet sticking to the ground for a turn, an article of clothing falling to ash or an uncontrollable sneezing attack. Such Effects typically grant a difficulty penalty of one to certain actions that might be hindered, and they could be noticeably odd to others.

Moderate Flaws: A "moderate" Flaw is a relative term, since these Flaws do hamper the mage significantly, tend to last for a while and can be dangerous. Moderate Flaws might include such problems as suddenly exuding waves of heat or cold, suffering from strange shifts to the senses or losing the ability to speak coherently. These Effects usually cause the mage to suffer difficulty increases on a variety of tasks.

Severe Flaws: Severe Paradox Flaws should give even the most rash mages pause. The mage could discover that his facial features have vanished (yet left him his senses), or perhaps all cloth items that come within five feet of him start writhing uncontrollably. These Flaws can be somewhat harmful, even to others, and they're definitely strange, noticeable and problematic. Such Flaws usually cause the mage to suffer a difficulty penalty of two or three on most tasks for as long as they last, which can be up to several days.

Drastic Flaws: The nastiest forms of backfires cause major changes, injuries and even permanent problems. The mage might have his skin suddenly turn to wood and start sprouting, he could find everyone over the age of 40 irresistibly attracted to him or he could accidentally and uncontrollably fire off magical attacks at his friends and allies. A minor Flaw might show up as a permanent problem, rendering the mage's eyes a new color, wiping away a memory, removing an Ability or Attribute point or causing similar mayhem. If out of control, these Flaws can wreak havoc on the mage and on the people around him. Some things may become downright impossible for the mage to accomplish, depending on the nature of the Flaw.

Paradox Spirits

Paradox spirits act as agents of Paradox. They embody the Consensus' desire to keep reality normal and uninterrupted. They most often show up when the mage has accumulated Paradox from a particularly vulgar breach of reality. These spirits themselves manifest only rarely. Instead, they wait in a Paradox sub-Realm, and use their powers to affect the mage who has attracted their attention.

Paradox spirits themselves are unlike any other spirits in the Tellurian. They are not affected by Spirit magic in the standard fashion. No Spirit magic below level 5 can affect a Paradox spirit, other than Effects that cause damage. Higher-level spirit Effects do require twice the normal number of successes to affect the spirit.

A spirit's power depends on the actions of the mage who attracted it. It's up to the Storyteller to assign the spirit's statistics. Paradox spirits could attack the mage, harass him, drag him off to a strange Realm or just cause Paradox Flaw-like Effects. Again, the spirit's motivations depend on the story, but

the bigger the Backlash and the nastier the Resonance involved, the more likely the spirit is to be a really mean one.

Paradox Realms

Beyond the Gauntlet, into the Horizon, there are a near-infinite number of Realms. Several of these realms are connected to natural forces on Earth. Not surprisingly, there are several realms connected to Paradox forces. The location of these realms in the cosmology of the Tellurian is unsure. All that is known is that these realms are home to the forces of Paradox, and to Paradox spirits.

The closest of these Realms to Earth is the Paradox sub-Realm. Much like the Penumbra, it lies just beyond the Earth, a mirror Realm where spirits that interact with the world walk. Unlike the Penumbra, it cannot be reached by stepping sideways. In fact, no one has been able to reach this Realm without extreme ritual and work. Normal Spirit magic does not seem to grant access to this Realm.

The residents of the Paradox sub-Realm are Paradox spirits. They wander there until they are attracted by a strong flux of Paradox energies, and they seek out the mage that caused this disturbance. Even when they have attached themselves to a mage, the spirits operate mostly from within this Realm, only occasionally materializing to wreak havoc.

Mages almost never see the paradox sub-Realm. Instead, they are more likely to be sucked into one of the deeper Paradox Realms. These Realms are created for especially errant magicians, who just don't pay attention when Paradox hits them. The Realms are prisons for these individuals, much like a personal hell. Rescuing compatriots from these Realms are great story lines that usually require equally great quests. For mages who aren't fortunate enough to have friends who will seek them out in these Realms, the spirits will usually release the victim after a few days or months, depending on the severity of Paradox that he has called down. They have been known to keep people longer, however. Reality doesn't always allow parole or time off for good behavior.

Paradox Realms tailored to mages tend to feature the Spheres that the mage invoked, and often trap and confuse the mage in a tiny Realm that's dominated by a few such features. A Realm might have a fatal environment, but more often, it just seems to behave like a puzzle to trap the mage.

Resonance

If Paradox is the backlash of the universe twisting to change the mage as the mage changes reality, then Resonance is the constant subtle current that surrounds the mage as an agent of change. As has been stated many times, magic stems from desire — the mage's desire to reshape the world to his whims. Although magic allows the mage to bend the world in that fashion, it also means that his desires affect the world constantly, always changing things just a little bit and influencing the outcome of the mage's Effects.

All mages have some form of common Resonance. The most neophyte mages usually only manifest a little Resonance — a single point in a single type of Resonance — but as the mage becomes more powerful, does more magic and delves into deeper passions, Resonance becomes more pronounced. Eventually, Resonance not only overcomes all of the mage's workings, but it affects her normal life. As a mage becomes more potent, her mystical will affects the world around her more strongly. Eventually her Resonance cloaks her in an aura of power that is noticeable and almost tangible. Humans often notice something odd, unusual or potent about mages; for the mage with high Resonance, this feeling is much more pronounced.

When a mage works his Effects, his Resonance causes the Effect to reflect his intent and emotion. The personal, unique nature of each mage causes each form of Resonance to be special, though. Mages who are experienced in sensing Prime threads — or who just have good supernatural instincts — can often tell a mage's specific form of Resonance. They can even recognize who built an Effect or tell a little about the individual. Conversely, mages may try to dampen their own Resonance to make their Effects more subtle.

Resonance tends to flavor Effects in proportion to the Effects' own intensity — a large, flashy vulgar Effect will have more Resonance than a subtle, coincidental Effect. This Resonance manifests in the Effect itself, causing it to look or feel strange according to the mage's Resonance Traits. It may also cause the Effect to generate a subtly eerie feeling that causes mages to take note, animals to become uneasy and humans to get a creepy feeling.

Of course, the amount to which a Storyteller injects Resonance into the game is up to the feel of the story itself. Some Storytellers may feel more comfortable ignoring the more severe effects of Resonance. Others may find the suggested rules here helpful in interjecting Resonance effects into the game and making magic and its consequences more clearly noticeable.

Resonance Affecting Magic

When a mage creates an Effect, the mage's Resonance characteristics often show how the mage's emotions get involved in her magic. It's not as if the Resonance actually changes the Effect; rather, the Resonance is an indicator of how the mage's Effects always manifest. The Resonance is a natural way to describe the mage's particular style of magic. An angry, violent mage tends to create very fiery and dynamic Effects, while a particular and studious mage will do magic that's systematic and precise.

The simplest way to let Resonance affect magic is just to take the mage's highest Resonance Trait and find some way to influence the Effect accordingly. That sort of emotion comes through in all of the mage's Effects. The more powerful the Resonance, the more it impacts the Effects and causes them to take strange properties — weird lights or sounds, strange ways of manifesting, bizarre hallucinations, spectacular appearance or any other number of odd changes. A mage with a single dot

of Dynamic Resonance, for instance, may have Effects that are a little whimsical or that sometimes do chaotic and unpredictable things, while five dots of Dynamic Resonance would add whirling, spinning alterations, bizarre manifestations and strange, completely unplanned changes to the magical results.

If you want to go all-out in your game, you can try to put a Resonant spin on an Effect for *each* of the mage's Traits. Thus a mage with some Dynamic Resonance and some Static Resonance will get some competing dynamics in his Effects. With competing Static and Dynamic Resonance, a mage might get an Effect that has strange lights and sounds, yet makes them in repeating patterns or systematic fashions.

Of course, Resonance needs not affect a mage's Effects all the time. It can be quite cumbersome to come up with an alteration for every magical Effect that every mage does! Instead, it may be easier to come up with a few "signature signs" for each mage. Look at the Resonance Traits that the mage has, and come up with a couple of key ways in which the mage might color her magic. For instance, if your mage has the Entropic Resonance Trait of Dissonant, you might decide that a harsh musical chord often accompanies the mage's vulgar Effects.

How Resonance Traits affect magic can be left in the hands of the Storyteller or the players, depending on the nature of the game. Some Storytellers may prefer to influence the magic in ways that the mage can't predict, while others may want to let the players express their mages' personalities through the use of Resonance.

Resonance and the Mage's Life

Of course, Resonance doesn't just affect the mage's magical powers. A potent mage has an almost tangible aura, a mystical *something* that sets him apart from mortals. His power radiates from his incredible enlightenment, his mastery of the Spheres and the changes that his will causes to the world around him.

Naturally, normal humans aren't exactly comfortable with this weirdness.

Most newly Awakened mages have a sense of the world being a little more strange and different than they ever believed. Their own alienation reflects in a disconnection from the world that mortals know and feel instinctively as the "normal" world.

Since a mage's Resonance manifests in his actions, voice, mannerisms and magic, people can sometimes tell that the mage is more than human. In normal social situations, the mage may suffer a penalty in reactions with humans — one point of difficulty for each dot in the highest Resonance Trait. This penalty can be overcome with appropriate Mind magic, or if the mage's Resonance wouldn't necessarily discomfit the human in question (at the Storyteller's discretion). Acolytes and free-thinkers often deal with "weird" people as a matter of course.

Detecting a mage's Resonance isn't really a subject for dice rolls, though you might use a Perception + Awareness roll to determine if someone has Resonance. In general, Resonance is a descriptive effect for mages. Including subtle hints at the mage's Resonance is a good way to add some description to the character and an indication of the mage's strangeness or areas of magical study.

Quiet

When reality itself bows to the subjective whims of a mage, it's all too possible to become lost in one's own vision of the world. In circumstances where severe Mind attacks or nasty Paradox Backlashes strike against a mage's psyche, the character may well find himself tumbling into a world of madness and harsh delusions.

Insanity in a mage is truly terrifying. With the power to bend reality to his whims, the mage can turn the world around him into a nightmare reflecting his own inner turmoil. It's no wonder the Marauders are so feared. They see a world far different than the one in which everyone else lives, and they impose that skewed perspective on static reality.

Quiet causes the mage to experience hallucinations, distortions of reality and even total internal mindscapes. Anything from sensory overload to badly botched Mind magic to Paradox overload to violent psychic attack to extreme age can lead to Quiet. It's an unpredictable, but always-feared, fate for mages. Worse still, mages in Quiet can even spawn bizarre hallucinatory creations from their own twisted psyches, and these hobgoblins can sometimes manifest and take on lives of their own.

Quiet most often affects a mage in accordance to his Paradox and Resonance. The more Paradox a mage has, the stronger his Quiets become and the more profoundly they affect his senses. High Resonance determines the sorts of Quiets that impact the mage.

Running a Quiet can take a lot of work, since the Storyteller must have a good handle on the character's paradigm and psyche, and other characters may find themselves at a loss to deal with their mentally crippled companion. On the other hand, mages can come back from these so-called "twilights" with new inspiration or handicaps. Visions and revelations of many sorts are quite common as a result of Quiet. Such a story can present a wonderful complication for an ongoing chronicle, as the mages are forced to deal with questions of what's real and how to separate perception from reality.

Entering Quiet

A mage can enter Quiet when an overwhelming event rocks her psyche and causes her to retreat into one of her forms of Resonance. In some cases, a mage might slowly slip into a form of Quiet over time, but such cases are more rare. However, there's no easy dice roll for such a system. Instead, the Storyteller must determine when and how Quiet strikes. Advance preparation is usually best for such episodes, so that the Quiet can be worked into the story and so that the Storyteller can figure out in advance how the mage might be able to overcome the problem.

Forms of Quiet

Quiet manifests in many shapes. The most common sort of Quiet is sheer madness, stemming from an excess of dynamism. As architects of change, mages can find themselves stricken with sheer, mind-bending randomness. However, other sorts of Quiet are possible, based on the sort of Resonance that the mage attracts. Each form has its own sorts of problems and complications. Neophyte mages may not know how to recognize or combat these various forms of Quiet, which can lead to adventures as the mages try to figure out what's affecting their companions and how to cure them.

Madness

Dynamic madness comes to mages who are too overwhelmed with raw, random change and chaos. This sort of Quiet leads to hallucinations, sensory deprivation and eventually, the formation of hobgoblins and mindscapes. The mage becomes trapped in a rapidly changing world created in his own mind, unable to determine the real from the imagined. Marauders are thought to exist within a permanent state of madness, unable to connect with any sort of objective world.

A mage who enters Quiet with an excess of Dynamic Resonance will probably suffer Madness. The effects of Madness are fairly random, but they can get quite drastic if the mage is overwhelmed with too much Paradox or just with a nasty strike. As always, the mage's particular form of Resonance may color the events inspired by Madness, which could serve as a possible way to separate fiction from reality.

Clarity

For mages who embody Stasis and move away from Dynamism, the threat of Clarity lurks. A mage under the influence of Clarity doesn't seem to suffer delusions or episodes like a mage afflicted with Madness. Instead, the mage blots out those parts of the world that don't fit with his vision. He becomes transfixed on a particular goal or idea and pursues it to the unhealthy exclusion of other activities. He becomes convinced of a single way of doing things and becomes unable to deal with new situations or compromises. Eventually, a mage overcome with Clarity becomes a mindless drone, subservient to some higher pattern of Stasis perceived only in his crazed yet orderly mind.

Quiet Chart

Paradox Pool	Madness	Clarity	Jhor
1-3	Minor hallucinations	Minor fixations	Subtle attraction to death
4-6	Common delusions and mood swings	Notable behavior patterns	Pallor and morbidity
7-10	Wild hallucinations and sensory overload	Total obsession and inability to deal with change	Amoral behavior
11+	Mindscape	Complete drone	Sociopathic killer

Naturally, Clarity most often shows up in highly static mages with Pattern Avatars — like Technocrats. Some Traditionalists theorize that high-ranking members of the Technocracy are so afflicted with Clarity that they are literally unable to compromise on the fate of the world.

Jhor

The Underworld carries its own potent Resonance, the energy of death itself. Mages who dabble too much in such studies can be afflicted with Jhor, the Resonance of death energy. Normally, souls discharge that energy in the cycle of death, but such an accumulation is unhealthy and unbalancing in the living. Mages who work with Primordial energy, who dabble in necromancy and death, often accumulate Jhor.

A mage infested with Jhor tends to fall into a Quiet episode that builds on this accumulation of death energy. The mage assumes a pallid visage and an obsession with death. The mage's normal moral inhibitions fall away in favor of a desire to associate with and understand death energy. In actuality, the mage becomes fixated on the return to primordialism, but the living mind and body cannot handle this reunification. As a result, the mage slides into a study of necromancy and draws away from other living beings, becoming gaunt and sociopathic, eventually degenerating into little more than a magical killer.

Tradition mages who enter the Underworld, who spent too much time studying the deadlands or who associate too much with death tend to develop Jhor. The Euthanatos in particular have learned to recognize this particular malady due to their long association with the deadlands, and they can often help mages in the early stages to achieve a better level of balance.

Coping with Quiet

Since Quiet causes all manner of nasty, mind-warping effects, most mages will fight to keep some semblance of normalcy — if they're fortunate enough to realize that they're afflicted. A mage can try to determine what elements of Quiet are unreal or unnatural and attempt to resist them, but he may not always succeed. If your mage is afflicted with some form of Quiet, you can spend a point of Willpower and roll your mage's Perception + Awareness in a contested roll against the appropriate Resonance Trait (difficulty 7 for both rolls). Thus, you roll against your mage's Static Resonance if suffering from Clarity, against Dynamic Resonance for Madness and against Entropic Resonance for Jhor. Obviously, since Resonance Traits aren't usually too high, you'll often succeed on such a roll, but not always....

If you manage to succeed on a disbelief roll, your mage manages to exert his will through the Quiet episode. For the rest of the scene he pushes away hallucinations, overcomes his inability to make decisions or his attraction to death. The mage also manages to discharge a point of Paradox in the process, potentially lowering the severity of the Quiet episode. Eventually the mage might overcome the Quiet completely, or he might run out of spiritual fortitude and have to wait it out.

If you fail a disbelief roll, your mage expends his Willpower but is unable to overcome his episode of Quiet. Suffer.

If you *botch* a disbelief roll, you suffer from hobgoblins.

Hobgoblins

When a mage enters a particularly nasty episode of Quiet, his delusions may manifest on the world around him. Such manifested creatures and objects are known as hobgoblins, and they tend to follow the mage around and cause all sorts of Quiet-ridden problems until the episode passes.

A hobgoblin could manifest in any number of forms — as a small creature, an actual object, a sensory effect or the like. The difference is that a hobgoblin seems, for all intents and purposes, to be totally real, and it can affect and be perceived by other people, not just the mage! Such manifestations are adept at causing all manner of trouble, especially when they can interfere with the mage's friends, or just set the local scenery on fire. Worse still, the mage might well know that they're brought on by the Quiet, but he can't always tell what's a hobgoblin and what's a normal part of reality.

Hobgoblins usually stick around for one day per level of the mage's Arete, although they may last longer in particularly nasty Quiets. They can be destroyed or "killed," but the ramifications could be troublesome (to say the least) if the mage madly attacks hallucinations that aren't there or destroys something that's actually someone's pet or property. While the hobgoblins exist, they typically reveal the mage's dark secrets and desires, cause trouble and raise questions of conflicts within the mage's mind.

Hobgoblins most commonly appear for Madness episodes, but disembodied voices or machine emanations may occur for Clarity, or vicious demonic creatures may appear in cases of Jhor.

Mindscapes

In particularly severe episodes of Quiet, a mage can become caught up in a reality so heavily shifted that the real world can't be distinguished. As some primal part of the mage's mind struggles to come to grips with reality, the mage enters a world completely enclosed in his own mind, fighting through a mindscape to search for an exit from the Quiet. Symbolism, psychological conflict and magical wisdom spin together in a surreal landscape that exists only in the mage's mind. By resolving these conflicts, the mage hopes to work through his inner difficulty to reach some sort of balance.

A mage who enters a mindscape is functionally catatonic. Totally engrossed within his own mind, he cannot interact with the real world without extreme effort. Instead, he traverses the symbolic landscape. In there, he grapples with the rules of the dream-world while his body remains in a near-coma. Such journeys may seem to take mere minutes or entire years mentally. In the physical world, the mage usually remains in slumber for a day for each point of Paradox held. By making a Wits + Enigmas roll (difficulty 4), you can speed the mage's ability to pass the trials of the mindscape, but it's often better to actually roleplay the travails of the mage and run a game where the mage must fight his way past his inner demons. While in the midst of the mental journey, the mage can try to communicate with the outside world through normal means, but you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) with a minimum of three successes. Otherwise, the mage manages nothing more than to mumble or squirm in her sleep. And, of course, the mage can only attempt to do so if he suspects that he's in a mindscape. A mage thrust into a surreal scenario involuntarily may not realize that he's trapped in his own mind.

An outside mage can enter a mindscape through the use of proper Mind 3 magic, generally with a trance, a psionic link, a special astral-travel spell or similar Effect. Inside the mindscape, the visitor experiences everything that the suffering mage sees, and he is fully (mentally) vulnerable to the effects of the delusions. Indeed, an entire cabal could enter a mindscape to try to rescue a friend, but doing so is risky.

An individual who is killed or incapacitated in a mindscape remains in a coma, perhaps for months or years. Mages can also suffer from psychological problems or trauma from mindscapes; to those inside the mindscape, the experience seems utterly real. Mages have been known to emerge from mindscapes with psychosomatic injuries or new mental problems. On the other hand, mages can also discover and overcome some of their internal conflicts and problems. Working through a mindscape is much like a Seeking in this respect.

A mage who manages to overcome a mindscape does, fortunately, discharge his Paradox in the process.

Magical Styles

Paradigms, training, history, Resonance and mundane experience all shape the styles with which a magician does magic. Nothing is as simple as saying, "I use my Spheres to make an Effect." Rather, magic is a careful and refined process, one in which the mage empowers the foundations of her own beliefs. From that conviction — the belief not necessarily in magic itself, but in the *way to do magic* — stems the power that lets the mage change the world, but *only in that particular way*. Game mechanics are just a means to simulate a mage's ability to alter the Tapestry, not an automatic definition of how mages interact with the cosmos.

Since your mage can perform tasks only by using techniques and objects that she believes have power, you must choose and define your mages' foci and paradigms carefully. Your mage will have these elements for a long time. Most mages learn their particular mentor's views or unearth their own styles, then stick with those doctrines for the remainder of their lives. Only a few mages manage to learn the styles of their cohorts or rivals, and fewer still become strong enough to exert magic by their force of will alone. Thus, it's incumbent upon you to determine how your mage sees the world and shapes it with her own individual style.

Foci and styles may seem like a pain, but they're a necessity for mages. Can you cook a TV dinner without a microwave,

stove or flame? Probably not. Can you travel 500 miles on foot in a day? Again, almost certainly not. With the right tools, you can do such things. Similarly, your mage can't necessarily perform any of the spectacular feats attributed to magic without the right tools to make it all come together. The mere fact that the rules say that your character can do magic without foci doesn't mean that your character knows she can!

A mage's style determines everything from what she thinks she can do with magic, to how she does it, to whether its results can be coincidental. If a Verbena waves a hand and causes an injury to heal, it's a vulgar Effect, but that might be the only way that the Verbena knows how to do it; conversely, a Son of Ether might use a bizarre healing device that seems coincidental. Same Effect, different styles; same result, different focus and mechanic.

Style Influences

People hang on to individual convictions formed through the hard knocks of life — tenets that are so central to their beings that they're lived as principles and taken to the grave. Such ideas spring from the ways that we survive: the things that help to shelter us, improve our lot in life and make the world bearable or brilliant. For some people, these core ideals are so strong that they touch on spirituality, altered consciousness or pure, unadulterated inspiration. These devout passions (the rituals, emotions and faith) are the foundations of magical styles. The belief in these sacred forms gives them power and makes them magical.

Magic stems from the elements of the mundane that draw connection to the universal. If gods are simply cosmic elements given familiar masks, then foci and paradigms are just incomprehensible powers attributed to finite keys. Such items and rituals may have power of their own, but mages go beyond intrinsic properties. Instead, mages create their own forms of magic and give new powers to old forms through their personal understanding. Science and superstition have power, but mages have the capacity to *create* power.

At first, mages draw their inspiration from their own cultures. The habits and traditions with which a mage was raised determine how she sees the magical world, what she believes has power and how she works her Effects. With time and effort, the mage may overcome these blinders, realizing that there is no One Truth, but rather that everyone has his own truths. From there, the mage may well abandon the shackles of her foci and her heritage... or she may not. Pride and the conviction that one's way is the only right way are powerful chains.

While you work up your mystic's background, you should also determine her personal style. Depending on where and how the character was raised, you'll find different magical inspirations. Even two mages of the same Tradition with the same mentor will have uniquely individual styles. The conditioning of life itself is more powerful than any abbreviated few months of magical training. Determine your mage's individual version of the truth and why she has faith in the elements of magic that she uses.

Foci

In simple terms, a focus is a concentration aid. Foci are thus the items, rituals and practices that mages use to tap their magical power. A focus may be a totally mundane object or ritual, with no power of its own, but because the mage believes not only in the focus' power but in her ability to use it, the focus opens the door to magic. A novice mage can sense the power of magic just out of her reach. Through a style and a set of foci, that mage learns a way to channel that power. With time and experience, these foci become second nature to the mage, their power so carefully carried and understood that the mage considers the foci extensions of her own will. At length, the mage may come to understand that ultimately the foci were simply a way to express magic, but that the magic comes from within herself.

Each Tradition lists a series of different sorts of foci that are commonly used. A Tradition mage can use any of these foci for the appropriate tasks. It's all a matter of figuring out how the focus would stylistically fit with the magic. If one focus doesn't seem appropriate for your ritual, pick another one! Of course, some foci have better resonance, some mages are better with some foci, and some foci might also be Wonders with powers of their own. And, of course, there's power in uniqueness. If a focus is one of a kind, tied to the mage in some special way, it has more power.

Standard, Personal and Unique Foci

Since every mage has a unique style, every mage also has a unique set of foci. For some, it's enough just to bring together a few necessary tools. Others rely on personalized items or even specially crafted and totally individualized foci. A more specialized the focus gains more power, but it also limits the mage more.

A standard focus is just a normal ritual or object that the mage uses to do magic. If your mage uses magic circles, candles, martial arts or concentration, sex, techno-toys, whatever, then any sample of such things will do. The mage simply needs a representative object or action to act as a focus. These sorts of foci are generally representative of the Tradition as a whole (See the sorts of foci listed for each Tradition in Chapter Two for examples.)

Personal foci are the specific tools with which a mage studies the keystones of her Spheres. When you build your mage character, decide on a specialty focus for each of her Spheres. That particular tool is one with which the mage is very skilled. In all castings where the mage uses the specialty focus, you get a one-point break on the difficulty, making the spell easier to cast. Your mage can still do the magic in other ways, she's just better in this one special form of casting. Therefore, your mage can rely on all the normal, standard foci for all of her Spheres, but her training gives an edge when she uses the sorts of tools that she knows best.

Lastly, unique foci are literally unique items — handcrafted or personally invented devices or individualized, used-only-once-ever rituals. Such items have a great deal of power for the mage because they are tied to her so intimately. Obviously, a

unique focus works best for the mage who made it. Only the mage who actually invented the focus can reap its benefits. Like a personal focus, the unique focus gives a difficulty modifier of one in addition to other modifiers. If your mage uses magical candles as a personal focus for Mind magic, and she handcrafts a candle specifically for the purpose, the use of that candle gets the bonuses for both its unique status and for being a specialty focus.

However, a unique focus is irreplaceable. If a mage's unique focus for a Sphere is lost, broken or destroyed, the mage may have difficulty coming up with a replacement. Often, a mage needs a specific unique focus to work certain types of magic. If you have chosen a unique focus for your mage and that focus is lost, destroyed or used up, then the mage must perform all magic in that Sphere as if attempting to surpass a focus. You can't have a benefit without a commensurate downside, after all. This penalty can only be overcome if your mage manages to make or acquire a new focus, or if your mage achieves sufficient enlightenment to abandon foci for that Sphere.

Surpassing Foci

Mages may sometimes be placed in dire straits where they may not have time or means to complete their rituals with all their foci. When the mage really needs to get the magic going but just doesn't have the tools, she relies on sheer guts, determination and force of will.

If your mage is caught without a focus, she can still attempt a magical Effect that would normally require a focus. She grits her teeth, summons up every ounce of magic that she knows and tries to make *something* happen. You need only spend a Willpower point in lieu of using the focus, and the mage can try to make it happen!

Of course, when a mage draws on magical energy by the seat of her pants and without the aid of her familiar tools, it's much harder to direct the power and much easier to screw things up. Attempting to surpass foci imposes a difficulty penalty of three to the magical feat roll. Eventually the mage may achieve enough enlightenment to overcome the foci totally, but her belief in her own need makes it more difficult for her to do magic unaided in the meantime.

Note that, because of their utter dependence on physical props and material tools, Technocrats and Technomancers can't do this trick at all! A Virtual Adept, Son of Ether or Technocratic mage must always use the tools of his trade, at least until he develops the enlightenment to overcome his need for foci completely.

Abandoning Foci

With great effort and enlightenment, mages can eventually escape the limits of their tools. A mage who's broadened her horizons to understand other forms of magic eventually realizes that the magic comes from her own will and dedication. From there, the mage may eventually find the wherewithal to put aside the tools and *become* the magic.

Although mages need foci during their early stages of training, they can overcome this need eventually. In game terms, you can abandon the foci necessary for *two* of the Spheres that your mage knows once your mage reaches Arete 6. For those two Spheres, the mage can cast spells without the use of foci at all. Every additional point of Arete opens up two more Spheres to use without foci, until at Arete 10, the mage doesn't need any foci at all. If your mage performs Effects using multiple Spheres, she must still use foci for any Spheres that require them, but in those chosen few where she's achieved a real breakthrough in understanding, the power comes solely from within.

Of course, using the same familiar tools is still helpful. You get a bonus difficulty modifier of one if your character uses unnecessary foci. This bonus applies only if you're creating an Effect that relies solely on Spheres that no longer require foci, but your character uses them anyway. If the Effect is a conjunctional Effect that still requires foci for any of the Spheres, you can't claim this bonus.

Even Orphans and Hollow Ones have their foci; they just tend to have a broader range of props and the ability to learn from and incorporate styles. Orphans and Hollow Ones thus get the opportunity to use the standard foci from just about any Tradition that they can study. Conversely, though, they pay for this broad range of skill by taking more effort to develop the Spheres. If you're trying to find multiple ways to do things, it'll take more study.

Note that, for some games, your Storyteller may want to let Traditionalists abandon their foci earlier, or ignore foci altogether. Use what works for you— just have a fun, balanced game.

Sample Foci

The following is a list of possible foci. This list should not limit the type of foci characters use.

Art: The mage creates a piece of art (chalk drawing, pencil sketch, sculpture, computer graphic, etc.) that focuses her will and intent. The magician usually creates an image of the Effect she wishes to produce.

Blood: The essential life fluid holds a lot of power. It's often used in rituals evoking Prime and Life magic, although it's certainly not limited to these uses. The blood of the undead — vampires — holds within it the spark of magically stolen life, and is even more potent. However, it carries a cursed Resonance.

Books: Books communicate various insights to new generations. The Order of Hermes has an extensive library of spells, Iteration X employs technical manuals without number, and the Akashic Brotherhood keeps a written record of scrolls of history.

Bones: The bones of animals, fish, humans or just about anything else can focus one's will. Bones are often carved into wands or become part of a sacrifice.

Cauldrons/Chalices: The traditional cauldron is large, black and practically immobile. Many Verbena use a cauldron to whip up various concoctions. Sons of Ether mix new metal alloys or chemical solutions in modern versions. Cups, bowls or chalices often hold precious liquids or allow mages to share some form of communion.

Circles: By drawing on a floor, wall or table with chalk, ash or blood, the mage can create wards of protection and summoning circles. Different Arts and styles require different types of circles. Depending on its complexity, the circle can take hours or even days to create.

Computers: The computer may be an advanced portable or an old IBM clone with faulty wiring. While simple Effects may take no more than a couple of seconds, major ones might take minutes or even hours of programming time.

Crystals: Crystals gained popularity in the last decade with the Sleepers, due mostly to their effectiveness as a concentration aid. Crystals are also thought to have resonant properties that vary with their type, color and cut. The type of crystal usually defines which Art may be performed, but this choice is up to the player.

Dancing: The type of dance depends solely on the character. Dances usually take a minute or two for completion, and they may require an Ability roll or two.

Devices: The common Technomantic focus, a scientific device of the Technocracy or Tradition Technomancer. Sons of Ether often design their own devices, which rarely work for anyone other than themselves ("You just don't understand the theory!").

Do: Akashic Brothers use this martial art and lifestyle almost exclusively to access their magic. This meditative focusing of the will can take time, and it will certainly draw attention to the mage.

Drugs: Chemicals that induce alternative states of consciousness cloud "normal" reality, allowing for new insights into the inner workings of the universe. The Cult of Ecstasy tops the list of users, but the Progenitors have many pharmaceuticals, and certain Dreamspeakers, Orphans and Crafts use drugs as a matter of course or spiritualism. Drugs have certain inherent drawbacks, including cost, legality, addiction and hangovers.

Elements: Common in spirit-guided, sympathetic and scientific magic, elemental materials — earth, fire, air, water, incense, glass, metal, wood, electricity, mud, ash, etc. — channel powers that a mystic wants to use. These offerings may be placed on an altar, burned, shaped, consumed, observed or otherwise used to tap into some greater force. Many sorcerers feel that such elements have innate powers of their own.

Ether Goggles: This is a classic example of an Etherite focus (who else would wear them?). These goggles are heavy, cumbersome and filled with a weird gas. Ether goggles represent only one of the numerous devices that the Sons of Ether employ.

Feather: Like bones or blood, a feather from any bird or mythical beast holds the life-force of that animal and can be used to help produce magical Effects. Representative of flight and the spirit, it is often used as a focus for Spirit magic.

Fire: A small flame or a burning house may be necessary for a mage to perform her magic. Fire is an essential power of both destruction and renewal.

Formula: No Technomancer would be complete without mathematical equations or physics models to support her theo-

ries or design specifications. Some mages also use ritualistic formulae in near-forgotten languages.

Herbs: Many mages use the inherent properties of certain plants to invoke their magic. These herbs can be sprinkled, eaten or mixed into a potion. Progenitors often use chemical extracts from rare plants while Verbena know a plethora of unique chemical and spiritual powers of herbs.

Holy Symbol: Faith is a very important power. The mage who believes in a higher being can focus his belief through some symbol of that divinity. Such an object usually counts as a unique focus.

Incense: The inhalation of burning incense may help a magician concentrate on the way he wants reality to be and to ignore the way it is.

Language: Words have power; indeed, they may be magical in and of themselves. Mind mages argue that they almost certainly are. Nearly every culture has a sacred language for religious activities or other mystical experiences. The members of the Celestial Chorus use prayer to enforce their will, while Dreamspeakers and Nephandi speak extinct languages with similar results.

A special magical language, called Enochian, communicates directly with the elements and spirits. Very few outside the Order of Hermes still know this language, but those who use it can perform tremendous magical Effects. Specific intonations create different feats. Mispronunciations can be fatal! This language is effective as a primitive form of communication.

Music: Whether the magician must listen to a specific song or perform the music is up to the player. Reproductions of the music through various media — DVD, compact disc, tape, vinyl, 8-track — are acceptable. If the mage must create the music, it might be a specific song, certain guitar lick or even a mystical note. In any case, the willworker must have the instrument or playback device in order for the focus to be of any use.

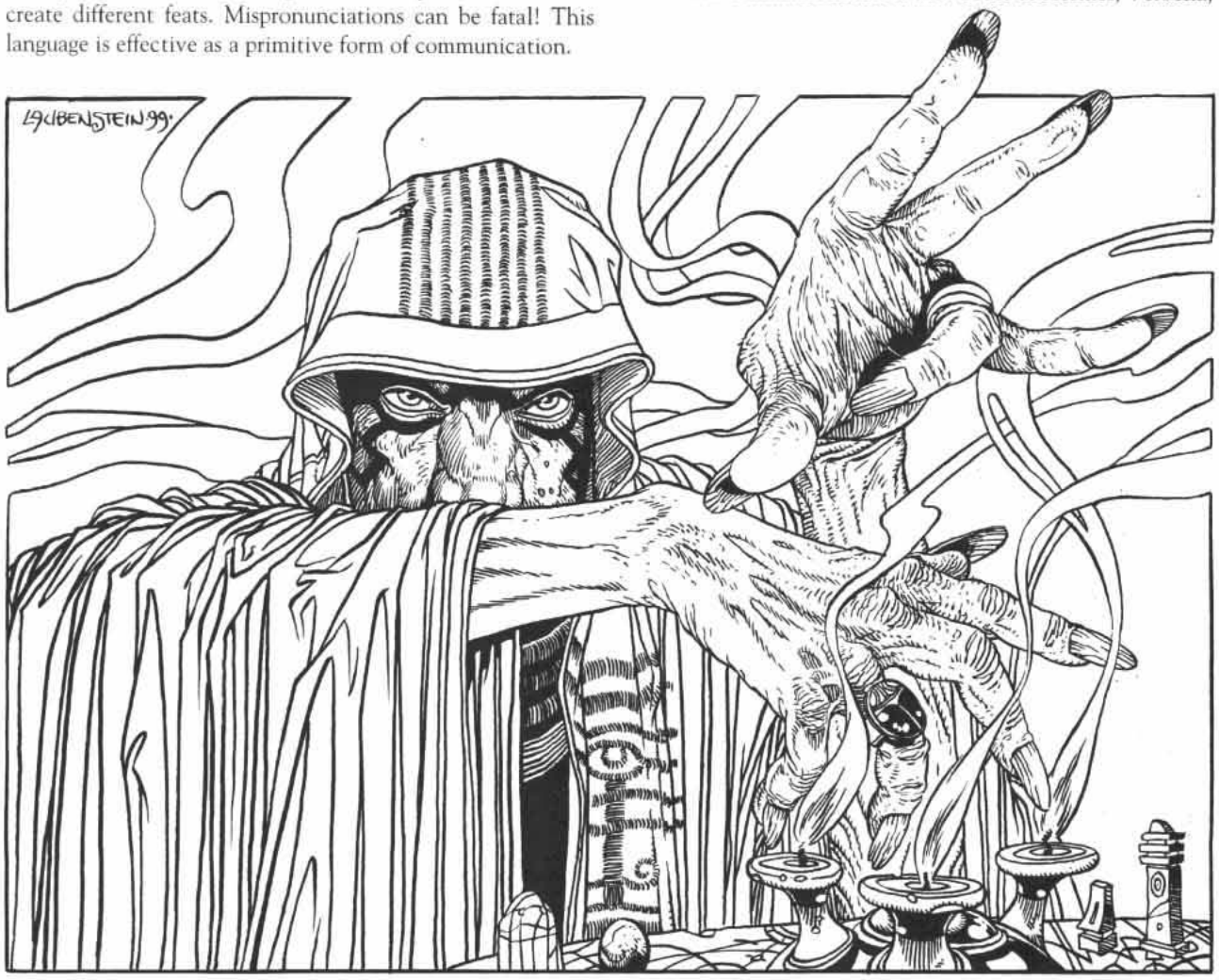
Network: The communication Internet is necessary for various Virtual Adept and Technocrat Effects. A network lets the mage perform Effects remotely, often serving as a Correspondence focus.

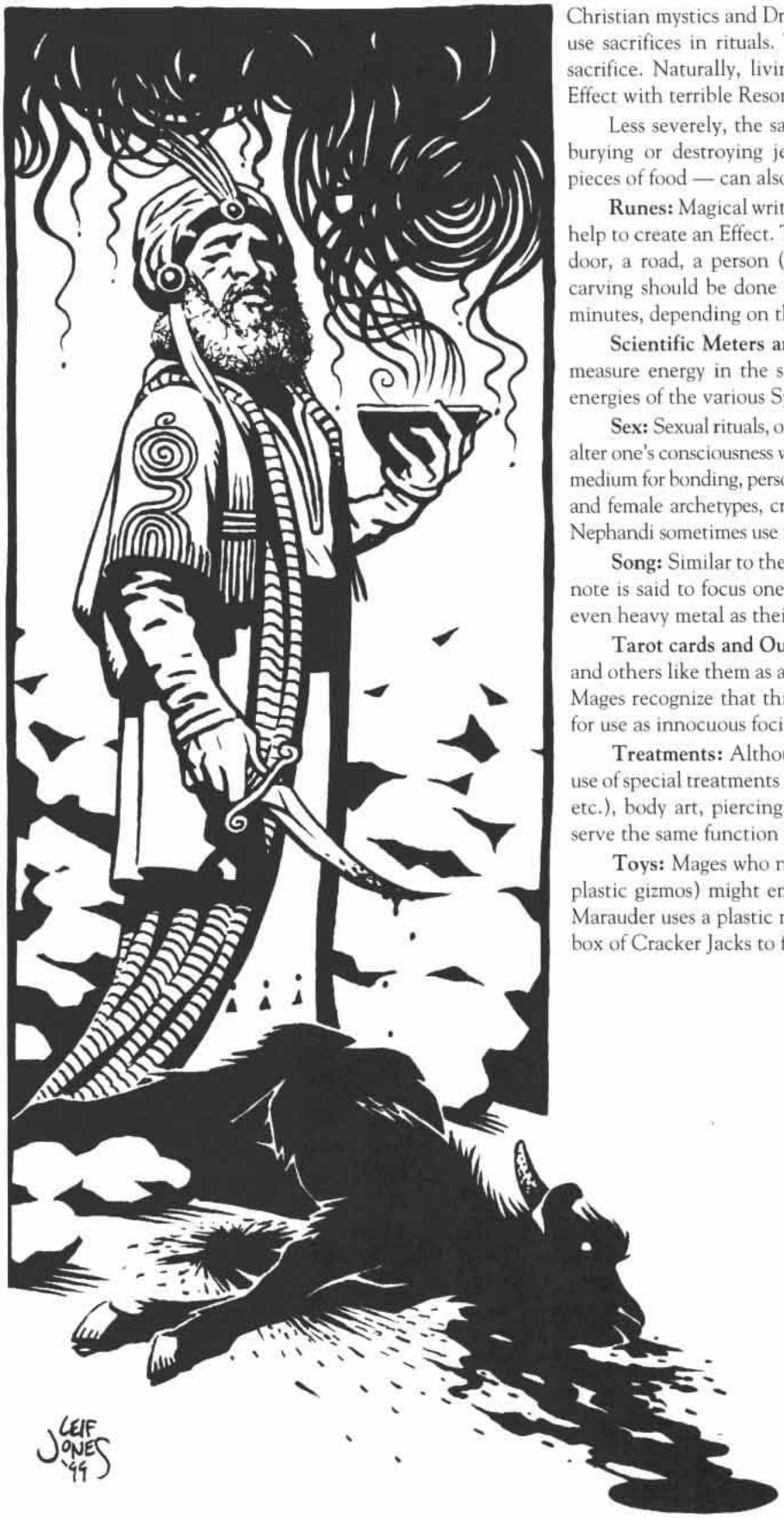
Ordeal: A mage may inflict terrible pain upon his body to focus his magical ability. Many Dreamspeakers perform painful ordeals to gain knowledge of the future or access to the spirit world. Nephandi often use this practice on other people.

Pure Water: Many mages drink, bathe in or sprinkle pure or blessed water as a focus.

Purification: Many mages of various Traditions find complete body purification necessary for certain Spheres, usually Spirit or Life.

Ritual Sacrifice: Nephandi, more than any other group, perform this act. It usually involves a long ceremony ending in an animal or human sacrifice. The Order of Hermes, Verbena,





Christian mystics and Dreamspeakers have all been known to use sacrifices in rituals. The mage himself may even be the sacrifice. Naturally, living sacrifices risk tainting the entire Effect with terrible Resonance of pain and death.

Less severely, the sacrifice of items of value — burning, burying or destroying jewelry, prized possessions or choice pieces of food — can also serve as a call to a higher power.

Runes: Magical writing carved into or near the target may help to create an Effect. These symbols could be engraved in a door, a road, a person (ouch!) or just about anything. The carving should be done by hand, and it can take seconds or minutes, depending on the complexity.

Scientific Meters and Probes: These hand-held devices measure energy in the surrounding area. They can scan the energies of the various Spheres.

Sex: Sexual rituals, or just the very act itself, can heighten or alter one's consciousness when done right. Sex itself is a powerful medium for bonding, personal interaction, the expression of male and female archetypes, creation and life. On the dark side, the Nephandi sometimes use this focus with repulsive results.

Song: Similar to the music focus, a voice held at a specific note is said to focus one's will. Modern sorcerers use rap and even heavy metal as their foci.

Tarot cards and Ouija boards: Sleepers view these items and others like them as amusing diversions and nothing more. Mages recognize that this misconception makes them perfect for use as innocuous foci.

Treatments: Although the Technocracy makes common use of special treatments (implants, chemical baths, injections, etc.), body art, piercing, ritual baths and other preparations serve the same function in other styles.

Toys: Mages who never grew up (or who just enjoy neat plastic gizmos) might employ toys as their foci. At least one Marauder uses a plastic magnifying glass from the bottom of a box of Cracker Jacks to focus a wide-angle laser.

Sample Resonance Traits

Your character's Resonance Traits can be just about any descriptive adjectives that describe some appropriate characteristic. Don't just be limited to these — make up your own!

Dynamic traits describe things in motion, change, new ideas and action. Try traits like *Quick*, *Flashy*, *Unique*, *Creative*, *Spinning*, *Whirling*, *Frantic*, *Frenzied*, *Intriguing*, *Liberating* or *Novel*.

Entropic Resonance covers destruction, death, decay, renewal and primordial energy. Use things like *Seething*, *Bubbling*, *Destructive*, *Corrupting*, *Withering*, *Disintegrating*, *Chaotic*, *Subtle*, *Primal* or *Ravaging*.

Static Resonance ties into principles of definition and construction. Good ones include *Single-Minded*, *Focused*, *Intense*, *Patterned*, *Tiered*, *Enfolding*, *Encompassing*, *Defined*, *Programmed* or *Illuminating*.

Vehicles: Common Technocracy foci include special planes, trains and automobiles. Such vehicles can also be powerful weapons.

Wands: The standard of a bygone era, a wand can be made of wood or metal. Certain wands may be unique items passed down from the Dark Ages or earlier....

Weapon: As extensions of personal power, weapons of all kinds have become common magical items and foci. The Akashic Brotherhood uses martial arts weapons like katana or shuriken; Euthanatos often use knives or whips; Verbena and the Nephandi make use of athame and other ritual daggers. The Technocracy uses all types of weaponry consistently, and some Iterators have built-in weapons. These foci may be unique or not, depending on the individual mage.

Creating Magical Effects

What Do You Want to Do, and How?

- What Effect are you attempting to do and how?
- What is your character doing, within his or her paradigm, to make it happen?
- How does your Effect appear?
- How long does it take?

Do You Know How to Do It?

- Does your mage have the appropriate Sphere knowledge?
- Does your mage need any mundane Abilities to help?
- Does your mage's paradigm support the form of the Effect?

Did You Succeed?

- Roll your character's Arete versus the appropriate difficulty:

  Coincidental: Highest Sphere +3

  Vulgar without Witnesses: Highest Sphere +4

  Vulgar with Witnesses: Highest Sphere +5
- Add or subtract any modifiers, up to +/ -3
- Spend Quintessence and/ or Willpower, if desired
- Check the number of your successes
- Check thresholds and remove successes
- Repeat for extended Effects

What Happened?

- How much effect did your magic have?
- Did the target resist your Effect? Remove their successes, and check your remaining success.
- Did you succeed? Assign the Effect, and take any appropriate Paradox (one per highest Sphere level for vulgar Effects, plus one if there are witnesses).
- Did you fail? If you did but didn't botch, take any appropriate Paradox, and watch the Effect fizzle.
- Did you botch? If so, assign the Paradox appropriate to a botch instead of the normal amount.

  Coincidental Botch: Gain one point of Paradox per dot in the highest Sphere used.

  Vulgar Botch without Witnesses: Gain one point of Paradox for botching + one per dot in the highest Sphere.

  Vulgar Botch with Witnesses: Gain two points of Paradox + two points per dot in the highest Sphere.
- Did you get more than five points of Paradox? If so, the Storyteller might roll for Backlash.

Magic Reference Charts

• The Magical Difficulties chart offers the pluses and minuses of some possible circumstances, but it doesn't cover every possibility. Adjudicate additional modifiers with this chart as a guide, but remember that no more than three points of modification can affect a single Effect roll.

• Use the Magical Feats chart to determine the rough required successes for most magical Effects. Compare with the Degree of Success chart to determine how well the Effect does what was desired. For large Effects, it's best to use an extended roll to score enough successes.

• Check the Damage and Duration chart to see how much damage or benefit an Effect had or how long it will last. The Aggravated Damage list explains which types of attacks inflict aggravated wounds automatically; other types do lethal or bashing damage unless the Storyteller rules that the attack is sufficiently severe.

• Remember that these charts are guidelines. Keep the spirit of magic in mind, not the "roolz." Magic is a tough art, but it's also rewarding. Be fair, and promote the story.

Magical Difficulties

(Maximum modifier: +/-3. Minimum difficulty 3, maximum 9. Extra modifiers add to threshold, requiring extra successes.)

Activity	Difficulty Modifier
Researches lore on subject before using magic	-1 to -3
Has item resonating with target's essence (sympathetic magic)	-1 to -3
Near a Node	-1 to -3
Uses a specialty focus	-1
Uses a unique focus	-1
Uses a focus when it's not required	-1
Extra time spent on each step of magic (Spending several turns for one roll instead of one turn)	-1
Spending Quintessence	-1 per point, maximum of -3 to final difficulty
Appropriate Resonance (personal or from Tass)	-1
Opposed Resonance (personal or from Tass)	+1
Distant or hidden subject	+1
Fast-casting	+1
Mage distracted	+1 to +3
Mage in conflict with Avatar	+1 to +3
Domino effect	+1 to +3
Outlandish or greater feat	+1 to +3
Surpassing a necessary focus	+3

Magical Feats

(Do not use the chart for direct damage Effects; use the damage/duration chart.)

Feat	Successes Required
• Simple feat	1
(lighting a candle by touch, enhancing your senses defending yourself from a mental attack with Mind)	
• Standard feat	2
(creating a small fire at range, sensing someone else with Mind or Life magic, healing yourself)	
• Difficult feat	3
(igniting a flammable object at range, reading or affecting someone's emotions with Mind magic, transforming yourself)	
• Impressive feat	4
(Blasting someone with fire, forcing someone to perform an action, altering someone else's shape in a minor way)	
• Mighty feat	5-10
(Blowing down a wall, altering someone's psyche, conjuring a fantastic living creature)	
• Outlandish feat	10-20
(Blowing apart a car, turning a small mob into drones, binding a potent spirit)	
• Godlike feat	20 and up, up, up
(Blowing up a building, putting a whole city to sleep, rewriting your own Pattern permanently)	

Remember that area and duration are generally independent of the actual feat's required successes. In some cases, the Damage and Duration chart can give an idea of the scale of an Effect.

Damage and Duration

Scoring Damage: Each success expended to score damage inflicts up to two levels of damage. For Mind attacks, this damage is bashing; for most other Spheres, it's lethal. Charged with Quintessence, it's aggravated. Forces attacks inflict one extra level of damage automatically.

Scoring Duration: Each success expended on duration extends the duration beyond instant/ one turn. One additional success extends the duration to a scene; two extra successes, a day; three extra successes, a full story; four extra successes, six months; five extra successes, the Storyteller's option. Scoring double the normal successes required for a complete success on the Effect may make it permanent, at the Storyteller's option.

Scoring Area: Affecting a Pattern other than the mage himself requires a success. Each additional Pattern affected after the first requires an extra success. Affecting a large area requires additional successes at the Storyteller's discretion. A giant ball of flame is harder to make than a simple, single bolt of fire.

Example of Total Scoring: A mage scores four successes on a vulgar fire blast. Two successes are used for damage, so it inflicts five levels of aggravated damage (four for the successes, one for a Forces Effect, aggravated for fire). One success is used because it's affecting a target other than the mage, and the last success is used to strike an additional target. Two targets are struck, each taking five levels of aggravated fire damage.

Degree of Success

Botch: The mage fails to bend the Tapestry correctly, and the entire Effect comes crashing down. No Effect occurs, and the mage gains Paradox.

Total failure: No successes, but no botch. Includes successes cancelled by ones rolled or by thresholds. The spell has no effect, yet. The mage may continue, but with cumulative difficulty penalty of one. He may also quit and start over. Paradox accumulates for vulgar Effects just as if the spell had succeeded.

Beginning success: Some successes, but less than 50%. The magic has not formed completely, but it can still be finished properly. Continuing the Effect incurs a cumulative difficulty penalty of one, if desired. If the mage stops now, the Effect has only some minor, trivial result, and Paradox accrues normally.

Partial success: 50% of the necessary successes. The mystic accomplishes what he set out to do, but not as well as he would have liked. The Effect is incomplete, missing some pieces or in some way flawed. The mage can continue to accumulate successes if desired, at an increased difficulty, or he may stop, take the appropriate Paradox and leave the Effect at this semi-functional state.

Success: 100% of the successes required. The mage does exactly what he wanted to do.

Extraordinary success: 150% or better. The mage not only succeeds, he succeeds brilliantly. The Effect has a much greater range and strength than he hoped for originally, but not too much to go outside the bounds of the mage's intent. Some all-or-nothing Effects might not have extraordinary results (you did it or you didn't), at the Storyteller's discretion.

Correspondence Ranges

Successes	Range	Connection
One	Line of sight	Body sample
Two	Very familiar	Close possession or companion
Three	Familiar	Possession or casual friend
Four	Visited once	Acquaintance or object used once
Five	Described location	Briefly touched or met object or person
Six+	Anywhere on Earth	no connection

Gauntlet

Area	Difficulty	Successes Needed
Node	3	One
Deep Wilderness	5	Two
Rural Countryside	6	Three
Most Urban Areas	7	Four
Downtown	8	Five
Technocratic Lab*	9	Five+

* Note that Technocratic Dimensional Science treats such an area as a Node.

The Gauntlet may vary by up to two points due to local conditions. A haunted, abandoned lot in the middle of the city at night has a lower Gauntlet than the rest of downtown, while a carefully trimmed and maintained woodland inside of a biodome has a higher Gauntlet.

Actually reaching across the Gauntlet or stepping into the spirit world causes one level of aggravated damage for each failure on the die roll. See the Spirit Sphere for details.

Time Lines

Successes	Effect Time-span
One	Within a year
Two	Five years
Three	20 years
Four	50 years
Five	100 years
Six+	500 years
10+	1000 years or more

Remember, these limits apply only to reaching or looking through Time, not to the actual duration of lasting Effects. Some areas may be blocked from sight, and others may be "fuzzy" due to probability.

"Not good, not good at all," Mark whispered to himself as he peered over the wall of pallets. "'Oh, it will be no problem,' I said, 'Just an in and out, let's go see what they have there job.' No sweat. Me and my big mouth." Mark crouched behind the wood and thought furiously. *Five agents. Just what I bloody well need,* Mark thought with disgust. *This was supposed to be a cake walk. Well, nothing to do now but see what I can see and get the hell out with my skin intact.* Moving silently across the warehouse he watched the cyborgs as they went about their jobs, moving crates and boxes, pulling things from the aisles, then packing them.

"What the hell is going on here? HIT Marks doing grunt work? Nobody is going to believe this." Creeping forward, he moved thought three aisles, pulling one of the boxes open at random. Looking inside he saw several books, all of the same type, wrapped together. Pulling one out he moved quickly back to his hiding place and began to flip thought it. After about twenty minutes he shook his head and put it down.

"Okay, training manuals. Well, this could come in handy." Hearing a click Mark spun around just in time to see one of the hitmarks pointing its hand at him. "SHIT!" he yelled, rolling to the side as the crate he was leaning against brutes into flame.

"Damn damn DAMN!" he muttered, jumping over several boxes and trying like hell not to leave a clean line of fire. *Come on, you can do it, just over there,* he urged himself on. Throwing the contents of one of his pockets away from him, he caused another pallet fifteen feet away to burst into flames. Then ran to the other side of the warehouse and dived throughout a door to an office.

Maybe a minute 'til they find me, he thought. *I have to make this good.*

Mark reached out his hand and made a quick twist. Where before there was nothing, in his hand there suddenly rested a star-like amulet of silver and iron. Reversing his grip, he held the amulet outward, crooking his arm in a curious gesture. *45 seconds, Mark. Move it,* he chided himself. He quickly traced the amulet in a convoluted pattern in the air, chanting softly as he went, his arm almost a blur in his haste. Then as his chanting reached a fevered pitch he stopped and frowned.

"God damnit, it doesn't work that way anymore." Looking around, he laughed at himself and pushed his was through a glass door and ran down the parking lot.

"Oh well, going out the back door always made more sense to me anyway."

Chapter Five: Rules

Mage is a game of stories, about creating fantastic legends of people who break all the rules. Yet, like any game, **Mage** has its own set of rules. Rules exist to provide a consistent base for playing the game. Everyone gets a fair shot, an idea of how the world works and a means to arbitrate disputes or random occurrences.

Just as the characters in a **Mage** game break all the rules of reality, though, the game itself has rules that are meant to be broken. The goal of a good **Mage** game is to have fun, whether by telling a story, indulging in a little action or reminiscing about old times. Since every player plays for enjoyment, it's important to remember that the rules take second-seat to the entertainment. It's the fun of the game that counts, not how closely everyone cleaves to some imaginary canonical standard. Of course, the more rules you toss out the window, the more free-form your game gets, but the great stories often come from the heroes who defy all established laws and sense. Use your best judgement to decide when to bend, when to break and when to throw away the rules completely. In the meantime, these rules will give you a quick and consistent base for game moderation.

Time

Running time is a constant consideration. Do you know where your characters are? When did they get there? How long will it take for them to finish their critical goals, and will they have time for a donut on the side?

Whenever the game is played, time passes for the characters. While noon is always followed by one o'clock and the sun continues to rise and set in the characters' world (assuming you're on Earth!), there's no need to roleplay out every second of the characters' lives. Sometimes game time passes relatively normally, such as during a conversation. At other times, the Storyteller will declare that an hour, a night or even a week has passed if nothing interesting or important is going on. During combat or other tense and fast-paced situations, time may even pass faster for the players than it does for the characters as the details of combat, car chases or similar events play out.

To help better quantify and describe the passage of time without being burdened with lengthy charts or calculations, **Mage** uses six basic units to describe game time.

- **Turn:** The amount of time your character needs to perform a fairly simple action. One turn normally takes between three seconds and three minutes, depending on the current pace of the game. In combat and similar stress situations, turns are almost always three seconds long.

• **Scene:** Just like in movies and plays, a scene is the time taken by a single event happening at a single location. A fast and furious combat in an Iteration X lab, a lengthy and complex conversation in the characters' Chantry and a ritual performed under the light of the full moon each take one scene. A single scene can take anywhere from a few minutes to many hours, and it contains exactly as many turns as are needed. Scenes that contain only conversation and similar social interactions usually do not contain separate turns.

• **Chapter:** An independent part of the story, usually played out in a single game session. Most chapters consist of a number of scenes connected by periods of downtime. Chapters in plays or novels are a good example of the same sort of time period. Chapters usually encompass between one hour and several weeks of game time, but they may run much longer on occasion.

• **Story:** Sometimes known as a scenario or an adventure, a story is a connected series of chapters that proceed from an introduction, to some form of conflict, to some resolution. Some stories require many chapters to complete, while others are finished after a single chapter.

• **Chronicle:** A series of stories connected by the presence of the same characters and the events surrounding them. Some chronicles involve a single story-arc composed of a closely linked series of stories, while others consist of a sequence of mostly independent stories that are only linked by the presence of the same characters. Chronicles usually take between a few weeks and a few years of game time, lasting between a few months and a few years of play.

• **Downtime:** Time that is "glossed over" with brief descriptions by the Storyteller rather than played out turn-by-turn or scene-by-scene. When a Storyteller says, "All of the characters rest and recover for the next two days," or, "Your characters spend the next two hours gathering the props and tools needed for the big ritual," rather than letting the characters actually play out either of these events, he is invoking downtime. Downtime is used to play through trivial or tedious time periods quickly and to control the time and pacing of a game.

Managing Downtime

Downtime is an immensely helpful way to maintain pacing and interest in a game. It is also when characters take care of the mundane details of their lives, study and otherwise learn to improve themselves (not to mention when the players spend experience points). Downtime is also often necessary for characters to heal and to recover from the mental and physical stresses of their adventures. Since the Storyteller always controls the amount of downtime provided, she can decide when to allow characters time to relax and when to run them on the ragged edge of sleep-deprived sanity.

A helpful technique for downtime, if the Storyteller decides to place a couple of weeks (or months, or years) of downtime between games, is the idea of downtime activities. The players write down some ideas of what their characters do with the time, and they let this list sketch out a broader picture than the more personal actions usually played in a game session. A character might seek to check up on his Influence or manage a business, for example, all through the course of multiple mundane and time-consuming tasks. Better still, these actions bubble into all sorts of plot hooks for the next game.

Actions

During any game, your character will do many things. Some of these tasks are considered actions, while others aren't. In brief, an action is a task at which your character has a chance of failure or interruption due to the vagaries of chance, skill or outside forces. Speech, breathing and similar simple basic tasks aren't considered actions, but almost everything else is. Everything from performing a magical Effect to climbing a ladder is an action. One action typically takes one turn of game time to complete.

Taking action is easy. You tell your Storyteller what you are planning to have your character do. At this point, the Storyteller must figure out if this action succeeds or fails. A die roll might be involved to determine the outcome of random events, or the Storyteller may make a judgement by fiat. The Storyteller then regales you with the outcome of your character's feats, whether successful or not.

In general, actions fall into three categories: automatic actions, impossible actions and disputed actions. Whenever a player describes an action, Storytellers must first decide if the action is either automatic or impossible. For such actions no dice are required. Otherwise, the action moves into disputed territory, and it becomes time to resolve the consequences of success or failure.

Many actions are simple enough that they are considered automatic. Unless some unseen or hostile forces are at work, your character can walk across an empty street, eat dinner, or read a street sign printed in her native language automatically. Such actions are successful automatically, and they require no dice or other mechanics.

Impossible actions are as easy to adjudicate as automatic actions. A mage with no knowledge of computers cannot simply hack into the Technocracy's computers for data, and no mage — no matter how powerful — can stop the Earth from revolving around the sun. For these and similarly outrageous actions, the Storyteller will let you know that your character has no chance of performing such a feat.

However, the entire range of actions that your character *might* be able to accomplish lies between the trivial and the impossible. Whether your character is driving in a high-speed chase, creating a powerful talisman, or to shooting a foe in a gunfight, there is a chance that your character might succeed and a chance that your character might fail. In these situations, the Storyteller will ask you to roll dice to determine whether the action succeeds or fails.

Rolling Dice

In any situation where an action's outcome is in doubt, the result is decided by a combination of chance and the character's Traits. **Mage** uses a simple, easy and time-tested chance-based mechanic: rolling dice. In all cases, the dice used in **Mage** are 10-sided dice, which you can find at any game store and many bookstores. The Storyteller will need a dozen or more such dice, while players may need up to 10. Of course, dice can be shared around — 20 dice is usually enough for most gaming groups.

Players roll dice to determine the outcome of any action where both success and failure are reasonable possibilities. Your character's Traits affect the number of dice you roll, and they have a direct effect on the chance that your character will succeed at the action.

Ratings

While a character's personality, hopes and dreams are determined purely by your own imagination, her capabilities are defined by her Traits — her innate aptitudes and learned abilities. With the exceptions of Arete, Quintessence, Paradox and Willpower, all Traits have a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 5. A 0 in a Trait represents a complete lack of knowledge or competence, while a 5 is the pinnacle of human achievement. Most people in the World of Darkness have Traits ranging from 1 to 3. A 4 represents an excellent degree of ability, while a 5 is extremely rare and quite exceptional. However, certain supernatural monsters can have Traits greater than 5, and mages can use their magic to increase their Traits above human norms temporarily.

Think of Trait ratings as similar to the "star" rating system for hotels and movies. A rating of 1 is fairly dubious, while a rating of 5 is truly excellent. In some unfortunate circumstances, a character might also have a zero in a Trait. A zero would normally be reserved for Abilities that a character never learned or developed, but magical injury, extreme physical damage or severe mental disability could reduce a character to a 0 in an Attribute.

Trait ratings appear in the following format:

X	Abysmal/ Totally Untrained
•	Poor/ Novice
••	Average/ Beginning Professional
•••	Good/ Trained Professional
••••	Exceptional/ Top-Notch Professional
•••••	Superb/ World-Class Champion
••••••	Legendary

Whenever you roll dice, you roll one die for every dot in the appropriate Trait. For instance, if your character needs to solve a complex riddle over the course of several days, and she has three dots of Intelligence, you'd roll three dice. However, with the exception of Willpower, Arete and Paradox rolls, you almost never use only a single Trait in a roll. Most often, when you use an Attribute (p. 101) in a roll (such as rolling your dice in Perception to find something), you also add in dice equal to your score in an Ability (p. 105) associated with the specific roll.

For example, if Colin the Hermetic were attempting to understand a complex book on metaphysical philosophy the Storyteller might have his player roll Intelligence + Academics — an Attribute plus an Ability. If Colin had an Intelligence of 3 and an Academics of 4, his player would pick up three dice for the Attribute and four dice for the Ability, rolling the total of seven dice. These dice make up the dice pool for the roll. In most cases, a single such dice pool is the total number of dice you can roll in one turn. However, some actions take longer than a turn, and it is also possible (if more difficult) to perform multiple actions in a single turn. See "Extended Actions" and "Multiple Actions" for further information.

In some cases, a single Trait is used in a roll; in most cases two Traits (one Attribute and one Ability) are used in a roll. However, there are no cases in which more than two Traits make up a dice pool. Since Arete and Willpower both have maximum scores of 10, and Attributes and Abilities both have maximum scores of five, normal humans can never roll more than 10 dice in a dice pool. Only the most exceptional individuals in the world ever roll 10 dice in a dice pool. Mages' ability to alter the very fabric of reality means than they can sometimes roll more than 10 dice in a dice pool, but doing so is almost always a rare and special event.

Difficulties

Now that you're rolling great handfuls of dice and you're throwing together every conceivable combination of Attributes and Abilities to figure out what you're doing, the next question is that of what you're trying to roll. Whenever your character performs an action that requires a roll, the Storyteller will tell you the appropriate difficulty number. A difficulty number is always a number between 2 and 10. Each time one of the dice you roll scores that number or higher, you are considered to have rolled a success. For example, if an action has a difficulty of 6 (the most common difficulty number) and you roll 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, you rolled three successes. The more successes you roll, the better your character did. You need only score one success for your character to perform most actions, but it's a

Reflexives

Not everything that a character does counts as an action. For instance, spending a Willpower point to assure a single automatic success on a roll is considered to take less than a second of game time. No dice are rolled to merely spend the point, and it is almost always done while the character is performing some other action. This and other "free actions" are called reflexives. Reflexives are simply feats that do not require taking an action to accomplish.

Reflexives include such actions as soaking damage, making a Willpower roll, or yelling, "Look out, she's right behind you!" Reflexives such as these are not full actions. If your character is hit, and you must roll to soak damage, you don't reduce her die pool when firing a gun in the same round. Some reflexives, like soaking damage or noticing blatant magic use, are automatic, requiring no choice or statement on the part of the player. Other decisions, like spending a point of Willpower or Quintessence, must be stated by the player before the affected task is rolled. Both sorts of reflexives take no real time.

Difficulty and Success Examples

Here's a quick list of some simple difficulty ratings.

Difficulties	
Three	Easy (jumping a narrow creek)
Four	Routine (changing a tire)
Five	Straightforward (installing moderately user-friendly software)
Six	Standard (firing a gun in combat)
Seven	Challenging (picking a high quality lock)
Eight	Difficult (rebuilding a wrecked engine block)
Nine	Exceptionally difficult (picking a high quality lock with improvised tools)

Degrees of Success

One Success	Marginal (keeping a car running until you can get it into the shop)
Two Successes	Moderate (making an interesting but pedestrian speech)
Three Successes	Complete (fixing something so that it's good as new)
Four Successes	Exceptional (writing a top-selling novel)
Five or More Successes	Phenomenal (giving a performance that people will remember for many years)

marginal success. Three or more successes usually means that you've succeeded completely.

The lower the difficulty number is, the easier the action is. A difficulty of 6 indicates that the task is neither particular easy nor especially difficult. Of course, various modifiers can come into play, so don't expect every task to be equally simple!

The Storyteller should decide on the difficulty for all actions. Only the easiest actions have a difficulty of 2 or 3. A difficulty 2 task is so simple it's rarely worth the trouble to roll. A difficulty 9 task is extremely hard, and success is unlikely for all but the most skilled. Difficulty 10 tasks are almost impossible, for you have an equal chance of botching as you do of succeeding, regardless of the number of dice you roll. Only especially onerous tasks set by the Storyteller will have a difficulty of 10. Almost all tasks will thus have difficulties ranging from 3 to 9, and the majority will range from 4 to 8.

A roll of 10 on a task is always a success. If you manage to score a 10, you've blown away the most difficult problem, no matter how complex. The only way you could still fail an action in this case is if the Storyteller decided that the action was impossible, but cruelly made you roll the dice anyway to string you along.

Failure

If you score no successes at all in a roll, your character fails to achieve the desired result. He misses his shot, the lengthy and complex ritual produces no result other than melted candles and clouds of incense, or the code remains beyond his ability to crack. The exact results of failure are up to the Storyteller to decide. However, they are rarely catastrophic — certainly much less bad than a botch.

Example: *Raven the Verbena attempts to overhear a conversation between a suspected Syndicate agent and a Virtual Adept he knows. Unfortunately, the two are talking in a crowded subway station with trains going by. Not wanting to get close enough that his spying will be obvious, Raven appears to be waiting to use a pay phone while attempting to listen from 15 feet away. Rebecca the Storyteller tells Raven's player, Richard, to roll his Perception + Alertness*

Multiple Actions

In the busy and dangerous life of a mage, you are occasionally going to want to have your characters perform more than one action per turn. Whether an Ecstatic is driving in a high-speed chase while shooting out the window at the car behind her, or an Akashic Brother is attempting to simultaneously attack and dodge in a martial arts match, you can have your character attempt such actions, but it's difficult. As the character tries to coordinate more actions, he has more trouble finishing all of them successfully.

You must first declare the total number of actions that you want your character to perform. You then subtract a number of dice equal to the number of actions from your dice pool for the first action. All additional actions also lose an extra die from their pools, and this loss is cumulative. If a dice pool is reduced to zero or below then the character cannot attempt that action. Except when using defensive maneuvers (see p. 239), you can usually choose the order of their character's multiple actions. In general, the most important action goes first, since it will have the lowest penalty.

Example: *Jeff is playing Mary Chen, a member of the Akashic Brotherhood, and he wishes her to surprise two people guarding a suspected Progenitor lab. She's on the ledge of a nearby building, and she hopes to jump over to them and strike each one with a punch. By doing so all in one turn, she will hopefully take them completely by surprise. Chen has Dexterity 4, Brawl 3 and Athletics 2. Since Mary must jump over the guards before she can kick them, Jeff calculates Mary's die pool for the jump (Dexterity 4 + Athletics 2 = six dice), and then subtracts three dice from it (because Mary is taking a total of three actions), for a final dice pool of three. The first punch has a die pool of seven (Dexterity 4 + Brawl 3), minus four (minus three for three actions, and minus one for being the second multiple action), for a total pool of three. The final punch has a dice pool of two (seven, minus three for the number of actions, minus an additional two for being the third actions attempted). Mary will need luck as well as skill to succeed at all of this activity.*

Mages using Time Effects (pp. 189-194) or certain other speed-enhancing capabilities may speed their bodies and reactions up to allow them take multiple actions without any penalties. However, none of these extra actions may be further subdivided.

(difficulty 8). Raven's dice pool for this roll is five dice. Richard rolls 2, 7, 6, 4, 5 — no successes. Rebecca rules that Raven could only catch a word or two of the conversation, and that he has no idea what the two conspirators are talking about.

Botches

Sometimes things go wrong enough to ruin your effort, or perhaps your entire day. The last important rule about dice in the Storyteller system is the "rule of one," also known as botching. Whenever a die comes up one, it cancels a single success. If you roll three successes and three ones, you score (in total) no successes, and your character fails. Sometimes life's just like that.

The easiest way to keep track of this rule is to set aside one of your successful dice with each 1 that comes up. If you have any successes left, then your character succeeded; if you don't, he didn't. As stated previously, you fail if you roll as many or more 1s than successes.

Sometimes your character will really screw up. If you ever roll no successes at all, *and* get one or more 1s, you botch. Rolling no successes and no 1s or even eight 1s and a single success are both merely ordinary failures. Botches require that you roll at least one 1 and no successes even before taking away successful dice.

Botches are considerably worse than ordinary failures. Not only did your character fail, something significantly bad happened in addition. While an ordinary failure on a Stealth roll means your character *might* have be detected, botching a Stealth roll involves knocking over something loud, or stepping on a dry twig, essentially guaranteeing that he will be noticed. Similarly, botches in combat indicate that not only did your character fail to hit your target, but his weapon broke, or he shot one of his companions by accident.

There's no table or list of botches provided here. It is up to Storytellers to decide both the type and magnitude of the botch. As a rough guide, Storytellers are free to decide that the more 1s rolled during a botch, the worse the botch is. If you roll a single 1 when shooting a gun in combat, your character's gun may jam. If four or more 1s are rolled, accidentally shooting a friend or an ally, or even having the gun explode in your character's hand, might be reasonable results.

Automatic Success

Rolling huge handfuls of dice may be great fun when your character is trying to understand the inner workings of some vastly powerful technomagical construct, but it is rather less enjoyable when the same character is simply trying to perform a minor repair on her car. While even a relatively simple task may be a worthy challenge for a complete novice, the same task is trivially easy for an expert. Therefore, **Mage** has a simple and easy system for determining automatic successes for easy tasks.

If the number of dice in your character's dice pool equals or exceeds the difficulty number of the task, your character succeeds automatically. No die roll is necessary. Since an automatic success is equivalent to rolling a single (marginal) success, this system is less than useful for all resisted tasks, and it cannot be used for combat or similarly stressful tasks. Also, if the quality of the success is at issue, you will probably want to roll the dice anyway, to try to achieve more successes. However, for simple and especially for often-repeated actions, this system should speed up activity considerably.

Of course, there is another more taxing method of getting an automatic success on any roll: Simply spend a Willpower point (p. 125). You can do so a maximum of once per turn. Because your character has a limited supply of Willpower this tactic should be reserved for emergencies or other important situations.

Trying It Again

When you fail at a task, it is often somewhat harder to try a second time. This increased difficulty is produced by a combination of stress and the fact that some portions of the task may simply exceed your ability. Failure to pick a lock or repair a device simply means that the character did not succeed, not that he can never succeed at this task. Characters who fail at a task may usually try again. However, the Storyteller has the option of increasing the difficulty number of the second attempt by one. If the second attempt also fails, then the third attempt increases the difficulty by two (and so on until the difficulty pushes up past a nine). From there, the matter gets *really* tough, and it's likely that the character will not succeed at all (see "Thresholds").

Increased difficulties should be invoked only in certain cases, like climbing a wall, hacking into a computer system, repairing a device or interrogating a prisoner, where being completely unable to perform the task is a reasonable option. Perhaps the wall is simply too slick, or the computer security is too complex and unfamiliar.

However, retries without penalty are possible in such situations if instead of merely attempting to retry the task the character finds some new piece of information or equipment to aid in the endeavor. Anything from buying a fancier set of lock picks, to stealing a new password, would count as new equipment or information, but only as long as significant thought or effort went in to obtaining it. As long as the character has obtained such information or equipment then a roll may be retried without penalty. Of course, repeated efforts to obtain new information or equipment should become successively more difficult!

In situations such as shooting at an opponent, detecting an ambush or driving to evade pursuit, the situation itself is complex and rapidly changing enough that repeated rolls may always be made without penalty. In other situations, like defusing a bomb that is about to go off, or to jump across a deep chasm, failure is often final and retries are impossible since the character is no longer capable of such actions.

Example: *Father Michael, a priest who belongs to the Celestial Chorus, is not having a good day. He's in a meeting with his bishop and a wealthy land developer. The developer is offering to buy Father Michael's church and put up an office building instead. Unfortunately, this church happens to contain a powerful Node. Father Michael attempts to persuade his bishop that the Church needs a beautiful old building more than it needs several million dollars. Father Michael makes an impassioned speech to his bishop about the value of tradition over money to help sway him against the developer's tempting offer. The Storyteller suggests that Father Michael's player, Dawn, roll Charisma + Expression (difficulty 6) in addition to roleplaying the speech. Dawn rolls and fails. Father Michael's speech*

sounds unconvincing and backward to the bishop, who is thinking more about how much several million dollars will help the church's youth programs. Father Michael realizes his mistake and begins now to talk about how valuable that building is to the community and how the Church would lose numerous parishioners if it were torn down. Because of Father Michael's previous failure, the Storyteller tells Dawn that the difficulty of this roll is now 7. Another failure might make the bishop sign the deal just to shut Father Michael up.

Complications

The preceding rules provide the basics needed to resolve most situations, and they are sufficient for chronicles where die-rolling is kept strictly to a minimum. However, those rules don't cover the full range of possible situations. What happens if your character is hacking into a computer network and the system administrator is actively attempting to stop you? In the same situation, what happens if your friend is attempting to help you hack into the system from another computer?

The various additions and complications listed here are designed to add extra color and detail to games. While not strictly necessary to play the game, they often add both realism and suspense to a chronicle. As always, the Storyteller should decide if these rules should be used, preferably in consultation with the players. The goal should be to have a fun and enjoyable game. For some people, the best game involves using as few rules as possible, while detail and realism are the keys to a good game for others. The following additions are all quite general, and they apply to a wide variety of circumstances.

Extended Actions

Often, complex or difficult tasks require multiple successes to complete. For example, many successes are generally needed to design and build a complex piece of machinery or to extract all possible information from a prisoner. Usually such lengthy tasks also require a considerable amount of time. Instead of a single action that takes one turn to perform, and that requires only a single roll, many turns (and possibly many scenes) are needed; many rolls may be involved as well.

Any action that can succeed with a single success on the die roll is called a simple action. Shooting a gun, jumping a chasm or even making a short speech are all simple actions whose success or failure depends on a single die roll. Actions that require multiple successes to be even marginally successful are called extended actions. Building an airplane, searching an entire library for a single quote or seducing someone are all examples of extended actions that require both multiple turns and multiple die rolls to complete. Most actions in **Mage** are simple actions, but ambitious mages engaged in difficult projects often perform extended actions. Given the difficulty of performing the most powerful feats of magic, magical rituals are often the most common form of extended action found in this game.

In any extended action, you roll the character's dice pool multiple times. Depending on the circumstances, you may end up rolling once a turn, once a scene or even once a week. Regardless, successes are totaled from roll to roll, and the goal is to accumulate the necessary number of successes to complete the task. Unfortunately, each additional roll both lengthens the time necessary to complete the task and increases the likelihood of a botch. While a simple failure on any of the individual rolls merely means that you make no progress during that turn, some disaster occurs if any of the individual rolls botches. Not only are all previous successes lost, but the desired result may well be even more difficult to achieve.

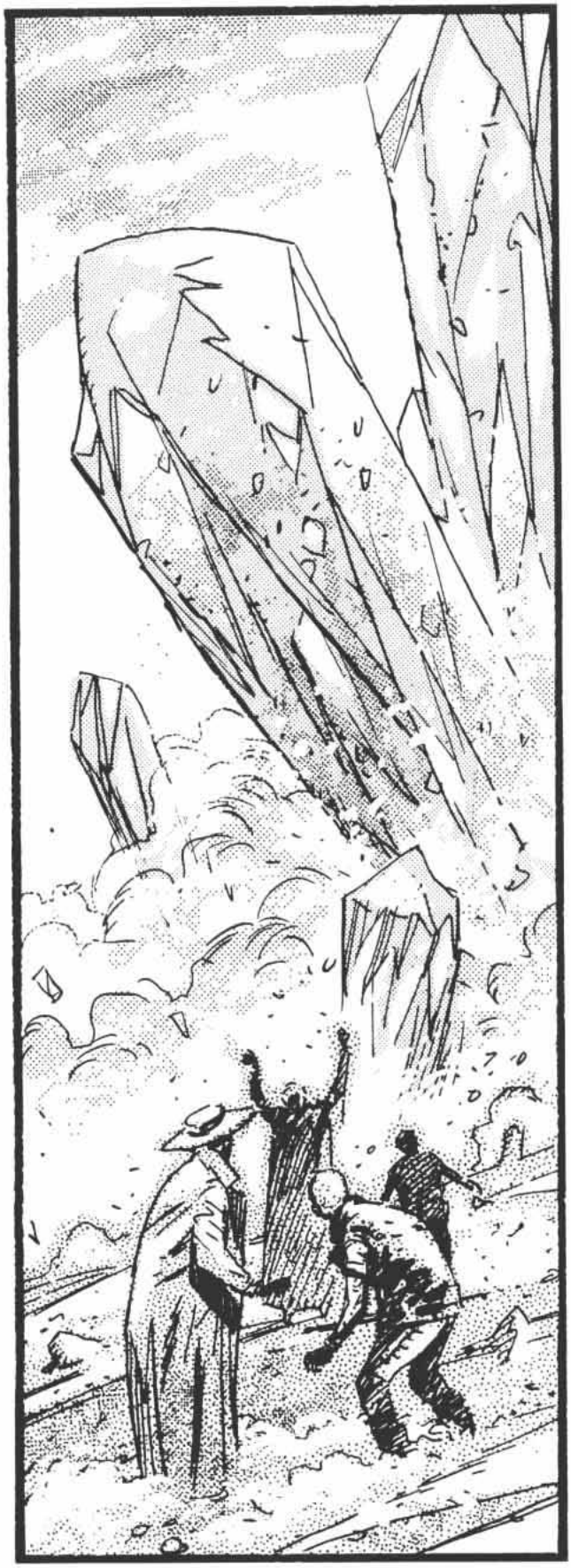
For example, if your character attempts to summon a powerful Umbrood, each roll might represent an hour of chanting, gesturing and reciting incantations. If you know a foul Nephandus is planning to attack your character in five hours, then you will need to achieve the required number of successes in five rolls. If any of these rolls is a botch, not only is all previous effort wasted, but one or more props used in decorating and preparing the ritual area are likely ruined, and your character may well have summoned a hostile spirit by mistake. In some cases, a botch may indicate that no further rolls are possible. A botch while attempting to repair a complex device often indicates that the device was destroyed and is now a mass of useless scrap that can never be repaired.

In cases where there is no time pressure, extended actions may be continued as long as desired, but in the hectic and dangerous life of a mage, who really has time to chant for 36 hours straight? The task descriptions in Chapter Six frequently refer to extended actions when describing difficult or lengthy tasks. However, such actions should not be overused. For the game to be enjoyable for everyone, it should not always be bogged down with endless 12-hour rituals or similarly lengthy tasks. Time-pressure and the need to act quickly should keep extended actions from intruding unduly on the most intense or action-packed portions of a game.

Example: *After a highly successful raid on an Iteration X lab, Jag, the chantry's Virtual Adept, manages to steal the parts for a top-of-the-line Trinary computer that comes complete with a full state-of-the-art virtual-reality rig. Unfortunately, the computer was damaged during the raid when it just happened to take a bullet meant for Jag. Jag wants to repair the device. Since the rig suffered only two levels of damage, the Storyteller rules that it requires only five successes to repair. Unfortunately, it is an experimental prototype, so the difficulty necessary to repair it is 9. Jag's Intelligence + Technology dice pool is only 7, so he's definitely going to need to make this an extended task. The Storyteller rules that fixing it will take some time, so a new roll can be made only once a day. Jag's player Robert rolls seven dice the first day. He rolls 1, 9, 10, 3, 5, 6, 6 — one success; a good, but unexceptional beginning. The next two rolls don't net Jag any successes — the work is harder than he thought. He lucks out on the fourth day and rolls two successes; he then rolls another success on both the fifth and sixth days. After resting and taking a shower Jag is ready to test his new computer, which took almost a full week of nearly constant work to repair. If he had botched any of these rolls he would have likely wrecked it beyond all hope of salvage. Note that six days of work has now been compressed into a few minutes of dice rolling.*

Resisted Actions

A single roll with a single difficulty number is often insufficient to represent an active struggle between two characters. For instance, two characters may be engaged in a tug of war to see who can grab a potent magical staff. In such a case, you



and your opponent make a resisted roll. Each party rolls dice, and the character with the most successes wins. Often the difficulty number of such rolls equals the normal difficulty to perform a similar unresisted task. However, if one party has an advantage he uses a lower difficulty number; in other cases, both parties use some Trait of the opponent as the difficulty number.

Regardless of how the roll is determined, your character scores only a number of successes equal to the amount by which you exceed your opponent's successes. Consider a boxing match between your character and another player's character in which you need five successes over the course of the match to knock your opponent out. If you roll five successes and your opponent rolls four in the same turn, you gain only one success. Thus, your character wouldn't knock the other out, but he would be in slightly better shape as the fight goes on. In general, resisted actions are the most difficult tasks a character will perform, and large numbers of successes will be quite rare unless the character is facing completely incompetent opposition.

Some actions like wresting contests, car chases or computer-hacking attempts can be both extended and resisted. In such cases, one or both parties must achieve a certain number of successes to succeed. The first one to achieve the required number of successes wins the contest. Since each success by the opponent effectively subtracts successes, actions that are both extended and resisted can require a large number of rolls and a considerable expenditure of both time and effort for the characters (and players) involved.

Example: *Using his hot new computer, Jag is now ready to get into some serious trouble. No longer content with merely hacking into various corporations' payroll records and making himself loads of money, Jag decides that he'll repay the favor a friend did for him six month back and investigate Allco Chemicals, a company that he suspects is owned secretly by a Technocracy front. If he finds anything damaging in their high-security records he'll email it to the EPA and several newspapers. He may even post it anonymously on the internet. Even if Allco isn't prosecuted, it'll likely be ruined by bad publicity. Unfortunately, the folks at Allco Chemicals are aware of the dangers of their top files being uncovered, so they employ sysops to monitor their network regularly. Cass is the on-duty sysop at Allco, and she notices almost immediately that there may have been an unauthorized intrusion. Unfortunately, she cannot kick Jag out immediately, since the software he is using prevents her from discovering exactly who the unauthorized user is. After telling Robert that Jag is fairly sure his intrusion has been detected, the Storyteller decides to use a single resisted roll. If Robert succeeds, Jag has managed to cover his tracks sufficiently to fool Cass; if Cass wins out, she knows that there is a hacker, and she may take steps to remove or identify the intruder. The Storyteller has Robert roll Jag's Intelligence (4) + Computer (4), resisted by Cass' Intelligence (3) + Computer (3). Allco has a large network which uses security software, but Jag is using a Trinary computer and cracking software, so his difficulty number is 7. Cass is on her home turf, but she's facing someone who's using a Trinary computer, so her difficulty is also 7. Robert scores a phenomenal four successes, while Cass manages only two. Cass' successes subtract from Jag's, so his access is rather limited while he's inside and undetected. If he's feeling really lucky, he could try another resisted action to gain deeper access.*

Teamwork

Fortunately, while mages may have to perform extremely difficult feats, they can also ask their friends and companions for help. In any situation where two or more individuals can effectively help each other, characters can work together to collect the needed successes. While primarily used when performing extended actions, teamwork can be used for everything from performing first aid, to searching a room or breaking down a door. For all such tasks, two or more players can roll separately and add their successes together. However, each roll *is* separate, and different characters may never combine their Traits into a single die pool. While successes are combined, each character succeeds, fails or botches separately. Depending on the actual project, a botch may affect only the character who rolled it, or it may ruin the entire project.

Teamwork can be used in a wide variety of situations ranging from performing a magical ritual, to tailing a suspected enemy. However, it is not the solution to all problems. It won't work if there simply isn't room enough for more than one person to work on something, or in situations like seducing or fast-talking someone where additional participants tend get in the way. Storytellers must decide for themselves whether teamwork would aid or hinder a specific endeavor.

Example: *Loraine, one of Jag's companions, has been kidnapped from her apartment. Jag and two other member of his chantry are combing the apartment looking for clues as the identity of the kidnapper. The three split up and search the apartment top to bottom. The Storyteller asks each of the three players to roll. The Storyteller knows that Loraine was kidnapped by a HIT Mark, and that the only significant clue is a small piece of the creature's pseudoflesh that Loraine managed to tear off while struggling to escape. The Storyteller decides that the group will need five successes on a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 7) to find this clue in Loraine's apartment. Jag has a Perception of 4 and an Investigation of 1. One of his allies, Nessa, has a Perception of 3 and an Investigation of 3, while his other companion, Jules, has a Perception of 3 and an Investigation of 1. Jag's player rolls 7, 4, 1, 9, 8, scoring three successes and one 1; he nets two successes. Nessa's player rolls 2, 8, 10, 6, 6, 7 — three successes. Jules' player rolls 5, 3, 4, 4 — no success. Between the three of them they have exactly five successes. The Storyteller rules that Nessa (who obtained the most successes) notices the torn bit of pseudoflesh, and the three gather to discuss what they will do next.*

Thresholds

The rule for thresholds is a bit of a departure from the usual revised Storyteller rules. The Storyteller system takes into account modifiers for actions, but in **Mage**, modifiers have a tendency to push numbers around a lot — and giving everything a difficulty of 10 doesn't accurately simulate the Herculean effort necessary to complete some of the feats that mages tend to try.

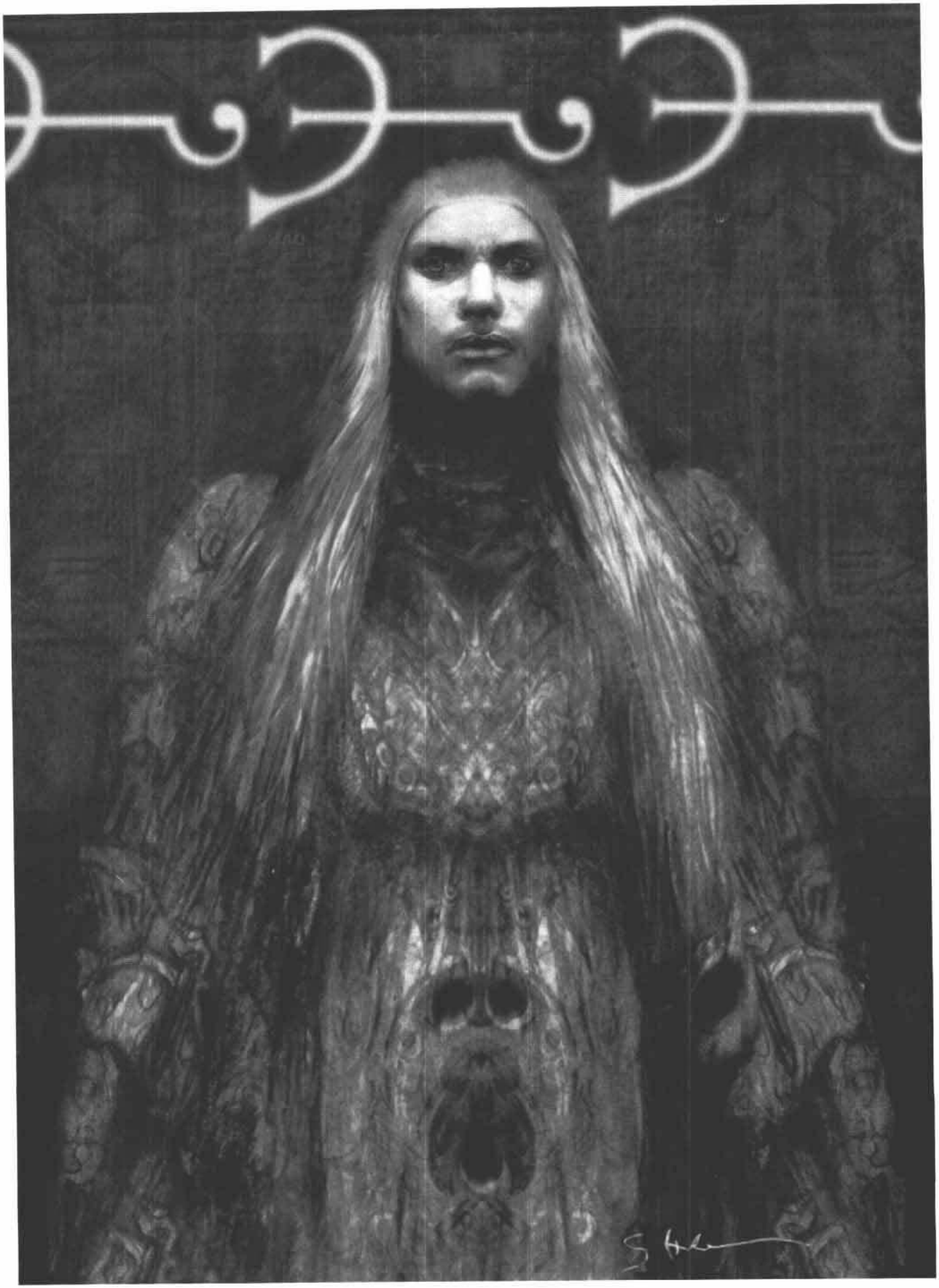
When you take modifiers that should push a difficulty rating past 9, you generate a threshold instead. Each additional point of difficulty instead takes away one success from your final roll. That success never happened — the task was so hard that you just barely managed to complete it. If your threshold takes away all of your successes, your character fails; although he gave a good try, the job was just too tough. Should the threshold remove all of your successes and leave you with any ones on your dice, your character botches. (Watch out, because actions with a threshold tend to botch *a lot*.) You have to take away successes due to thresholds before you take away successes due to rolling ones, as well. Fortunately, a threshold alone cannot force you to botch. If the threshold removes all of your successes and there is threshold left over, but you didn't score any ones, the roll is still a simple failure.

Occasionally, an action may call for a threshold without modifying difficulty. It's possible to call for an action at difficulty six with a threshold of three, for instance; in such a case, you'd have to score at least four 6s on your roll to succeed at all. This mechanic could represent a task that's not particularly difficult, but that does require a lot of work to accomplish.

Example: *Mark Gillan needs to climb up a slippery ladder in the middle of a rainstorm, so that he can get away from a Hermetic pursuer and reach his foci back home. Normally, the difficulty would be a 6 or 7 to climb a ladder in a hurry, but it's stormy and rainy, so the Storyteller rules that the difficulty increases to 8. The Hermetic mage fires off a quick Effect to make Mark slip, and it causes a further modifier of two. Instead of pushing the difficulty to a 10, the difficulty goes to 9 and the task gets a threshold of one. Mark's player rolls his Dexterity + Athletics and scores four successes, but one of them goes away due to the threshold. Mark does a great job of climbing, but the circumstances are so rough that even his incredible feat just manages to get him up the ladder in time!*

The Golden Rule

The most important rule of all, and the only one truly worth following, is that *there are no inviolable rules*. This is your game. Your own gaming group should make of it what it will. Whether you want to run your game in a diceless (or nearly diceless) fashion, or you want to roll for every task, more power to you. Even if you want to get highly experimental and have everyone play four mages of widely varying power levels and rotate Storytellers every session, as long as everyone is having fun then you are running a good game and using the rules correctly (for you). The rules in this book should be considered nothing more than useful guidelines. They're not mandatory strictures on the only correct way to play **Mage** or explore the World of Darkness. You know what's best in your own game, so have fun and use the rules with which you feel most comfortable.



Stacy smoothed out her dress one last time before stepping out of the elevator. Looking at the scrap of paper in her hand, she double-checked the suite number, then approached room 201. Pausing at the door, she took a deep breath. "Okay girl, now or never. You can do this." Pulling herself up, she put on her best smiles and smoothed the dress again. "You got it, just smile, walk in charm the pants off every one, get the information and get out, no problem."

She opened the door and moved like she knew what she was doing — and then stopped cold. There sitting behind the secretary's desk was the meanest, oldest secretary she'd ever seen. *Oh, damn*, she thought, but she never let her expression change as she approached the desk.

Summoning her confidence like a shield, Stacy took a breath and put on a charming smile. "I'm Stacy Zurck, FBI special task force. I am here to look over mister Jonathan Hart's records. I believe that my office called ahead." As Stacy spoke, her mind raced. *Okay, just the way he taught you. You know what you want her to think. So make it happen. Use your authority, your body language, your psychology.*

For a moment, the older lady frowned — just for a moment. "Let me see if someone took the call," she grumbled. She started to flip thought a pad of phone messages. Leaning forward, Stacy looked down at the pages, then pointed at one. "There's the call. Now, if you please, I would like to look over his records. Which one is his office?"

The secretary looked at the blank message, then looked up at Stacy and nodded. "It's the third one on the left. It should be open. If you need anything just ask."

Stacy smiled again and walked to the office, letting out a breath that she didn't realize she had been holding. "Okay, step one down. Just a few more to go. Dante, where ever you are, I am going to kill you for making me come looking for you."

Chapter Six: Systems and Drama

Because mages have a wonderful tendency to find themselves in all manner of bizarre situations, you'll often need to figure out how a character might get out of a tough spot. The basic rules in Chapter Five describe the quick process of determining outcomes when random factors enter play. For more detail, you can use the systems presented here, covering everything from sneaking around to fighting to charismatic oratory and beyond.

Of course, the systems described here are only suggestions. Doubtless, situations will arise where a different mechanic — or none at all — is more appropriate. Use whatever makes the most sense for the occasion, as long as it's fair and consistent. Don't forget to stack your odds according to the roleplaying at hand. A player's moving performance (or uninspired play) should definitely take some part in the success or failure of the character's endeavor. The character may be better at some things than the player, but the player should at least make an effort in all cases. From there, you can let the dice fall where they may, and then decide an outcome based on chance, performance or some combination of the two.

Dramatic Systems

Your character has various capabilities recorded on his character sheet as Attributes and Abilities. All of these Traits have been described in Chapter Three. However, these Traits are only really useful if you know how to use them. The following rules give relatively detailed explanations for a wide variety of tasks that the characters may encounter. In the vast majority of the cases, you simply add together an Attribute and Ability and make a roll. If the task falls within a character's specialty (p. 117), the player may be able to roll additional dice if he scores one or more 10s on this roll.

The rules listed here are far from inclusive. If a task that is not listed here comes up, the Storyteller should extrapolate from the given examples and create new tasks. In many cases, the simplest method is to decide first whether the task is easy, somewhat difficult or very difficult. Next, the Storyteller assigns a difficulty based on this estimate and decides on the exact outcome based on the number of successes rolled. For tasks that come up frequently, it may be useful for the Storyteller to actually write down rules similar to the ones in this chapter to maintain consistency and fairness. Remember that if the character does not have at least one dot in a necessary Knowledge, the player cannot even make a roll, and characters without a

needed Skill receive a difficulty penalty of one when the player rolls his Attribute dice.

Automatic Feats

Automatic feats require the character to take an action, but they don't involve die rolls. The following are common automatic feats:

• **Getting to Feet:** Characters may normally rise from the ground in one turn without making a roll. Getting up and performing a second action in the same round requires a multiple action (see "Multiple Actions" on p. 215) with a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 4) to rise successfully.

• **Grabbing Foci:** Whether it's a crystal in a pocket or a large device stored in the character's backpack, mages are assumed to know where they keep all of their foci, and they can usually obtain them with little trouble. After all, foci are the tools of magic, and only the most foolish mage would misplace them. However, a character with a rucksack stuffed full of large, clumsy foci may still have to spend several turns to find a specific one amidst the clutter. Even a focus stored in an easily accessible pocket normally requires an action to get out and ready. If the character wishes to both ready and use a focus in the same turn then the player must reduce his die pool appropriately (see "Multiple Actions" on p. 215).

• **Movement:** Characters may walk, jog or run. While walking, a character moves seven yards per turn, and he may perform most other actions without penalty. While jogging, characters move at (12 + Dexterity) yards per turn. When running, characters move at (20 + [3 x Dexterity]) yards per turn.

Characters may move up to half of their maximum running speed in a turn and still take a normal action. Normally, doing so entails moving, then stopping to perform an action. Acting while moving is possible, but each yard moved subtracts one die from the action's pool (see p. 239 for further details). Note that injured characters (p. 246) may have their maximum speed reduced.

• **Readying Weapon:** Whether drawing a sword from a scabbard or reloading a pistol with a spare clip, readying a weapon takes one turn and does not normally require a roll. However, attempting to perform other actions in this same turn (including attempting to use the weapon on the same turn in which you ready it) requires multiple actions. The player must reduce his dice pool (see "Multiple Actions" p. 215) and roll Dexterity + Melee or Firearms (difficulty 4) to ready the weapon successfully.

• **Starting a Vehicle:** Doing so requires no roll, but it does take an action.

• **Yielding:** The character lets the character with the next-highest initiative (p. 236) act first. The character may still act at the end of the turn, after other characters have acted. If all the characters (both player and Storyteller) yield, no one acts during that turn.

Physical Feats

• **Climbing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** If your character climbs an inclined or vertical surface (rocky slope, side of building), roll Dexterity + Athletics. Climbing is normally an extended roll. For an average climb, your character moves 10 feet per success. The Storyteller is free to adjust this distance based on difficulty (easier climbs with numerous handholds or good climbing gear: 15 or 20 feet per success; harder climbs on sheer surfaces or with no climbing gear: five feet per success). Weather, the quality of climbing gear, the type of handholds and numerous similar factors all affect the rate of travel. The extended action lasts until your character has achieved enough successes to reach her goal. Failure merely means the character made no progress in a turn, while a botch can mean that she got stuck or possibly even fell.

• **Driving [Dexterity + Drive]:** A Drive roll is not required simply to operate a vehicle under normal circumstances. Anyone with one or more dots in Drive can drive from point A to point B without difficulty. However, players whose characters have no Drive skills must make rolls every time said characters attempt to operate a vehicle. Bad weather, high speed, unruly passengers, obstacles and complex maneuvers turn a normal drive into something much more difficult. Given the vast range of potential problems encountered while driving, the exact difficulties are up to the Storyteller. The base difficulty for any driving roll is 3, which merely indicates a mildly difficult situation like heavy traffic or bad weather. A simple failure at a driving roll rarely indicates anything more serious than skidding to a stop or possibly getting a minor ticket (if a police officer is nearby). Botches usually result in some form of accident or mechanical failure. At slow speeds, this misfortune can be anything from a flat tire to a bent fender. However, a botch can result in a deadly accident at high speeds or on bad roads.

In especially difficult driving conditions, a simple failure may require a second roll. A failure in this roll indicates that the driver has lost control of the vehicle or gotten into a moderate accident, while a botch indicates a lethal crash. Success means the severe consequences were averted and the driver merely stalled or skidded to a stop. Except when performing chases (see "Pursuit") multiple successes on a driving roll rarely indicate anything more than truly skillful driving. The following difficulties are also added to all pursuits performed using an automobile:

Hazard	Difficulty Modifier
Heavy Traffic	+1
Bad Weather (severe thunderstorm)	+1
Severe Weather (hurricane, blizzard)	+2
Poor Road (only if going faster than 20 mph)	+1
Off-Road	+2

The type of vehicle driven also affects both how fast the character can drive and how well she is able to control the vehicle. In the following table, Safe Speed indicates the maximum speed a character can operate a vehicle without penalty. For every 10 mph over that speed, the difficulty of all driving rolls increases by one. Also, the *maximum* number of dice the driver's player can have in her dice pool is equal to the

Maneuver rating of the vehicle. Even an excellent driver can only control a tank so well.

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max Speed	Maneuver
Moped	30	50	5
Tank	60	100	4
Bus	60	100	3
18-Wheeler	70	110	4
Sedan	70	120	5
Minivan	70	120	6
Compact	70	120	6
Small Motorcycle	60	100	8
Sporty Compact	100	140	7
Sports Car	110	160	8
Large Motorcycle	110	150	8
Luxury Sedan	85	155	7
SUV	70	115	6
Formula One Racer	140	240	10

• **Encumbrance [Strength]:** Although mages need to carry around their foci, Talismans and trinkets, they can only carry so much. For the bookish scholar who absolutely must carry his entire library, physical limitations may be a hindrance. A character can carry about 25 pounds per dot of Strength without too much trouble. Beyond this limit, the character suffers a difficulty penalty of one to all physical skills due to the weight and bulk, and every additional 25 pounds halves the character's base movement. At double the normal weight limit, the character can't even move.

Note that characters may be able to drag or push more than they can carry, and that the bulk of an object may make it impossible to carry due to the difficulty of lugging it around corners, getting a grip on it and so on.

• **Intrusion [Dexterity or Intelligence + Technology]:** If your character doesn't have the key to a locked door, or he needs to enter an area with an alarm system discretely, intrusion rolls will be necessary. While characters may try multiple times to open a lock, and they can even use extended tasks to pick a lock slowly and carefully, bypassing an alarm system requires success on the first attempt. All intrusion tasks require some tools. Improvised tools like paperclips increase the difficulty of rolls by at least one, while elaborate tools like lockguns and code analyzers reduce the difficulty of such rolls by two or more when used against the specific type of lock they are designed to defeat. Any failure on an intrusion roll sets off all alarms, as does any failure to pick a lock that is connected to an alarm. Botches indicate that tools break, you left fingerprints and other identifying traces all over the lock, or similar disasters occurred.

While car alarms are mostly ignored in the World of Darkness, most house and building alarms notify the police or a private security agency instantly. In general, picking mechanical locks requires a Dexterity + Technology roll, while picking electronic locks and bypassing alarm systems requires an Intelligence + Technology roll.

Characters must have a minimum Skill level to even attempt to open a sophisticated lock. Technology 1 will open most house and car locks, but cracking a safe or a keypad lock requires Technology 2.

The Technology Skill also allows characters to create elaborate security systems for their laboratories, houses or temples. Whether building a mechanical lock or designing a portable alarm system using invisible lasers and automated rifles, the procedure is the same. The character must take several hours to several weeks (depending on the complexity of the system being designed), and the players must make an Intelligence + Technology roll. Use a standard difficulty of 6 unless the character has especially poor or good tools and equipment. A single success gives a system with a difficulty of 4 and each additional success raises the difficulty by one.

Locks	Difficulty
Briefcase or Old Car	4
Modern Car or House	5
Deadbolts & Wall Safes	6
Corporate Keypads or Card-swipes	7
Bank Vault, Top Secret Keypads or Card-swipes	8
High Security Voice or Retina Print locks	9
Fort Knox or the NSA Weapons Lab	10

• **Jumping [Strength, or Strength + Athletics for a running jump]:** Jump rolls normally have a difficulty of three. Each success on this roll propels your character two feet vertically or four feet horizontally. Jumping from a springy surface like a diving board adds a foot to each distance, and using a flexible pole triples the distance jumped. However, pole-vaulting increases the difficulty to 4. To jump successfully, a character must obtain enough successes to clear the distance between her and her destination. On a failure, the character fails to jump the needed distance, but the player may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (normally versus difficulty 6) to allow the character to safely grab a ledge, flagpole or other projection as she falls. Botches usually result in the character either tripping over her own feet, or falling to her doom, depending on the exact circumstances.

Before jumping, a character may spend a turn attempting to gauge the difficulty of the jump. Three or more successes on a Perception + Athletics rolls (difficulty 6) allows one to determine the exact number of successes needed to make the jump.

• **Lifting/Breaking [Strength or Willpower]:** The following chart provides the minimum Strength required to deadlift or break various weights without a die roll. Players may roll to affect heavier weights than their characters' strength allows. This roll is made with Willpower instead of Strength, and it has a difficulty of 9. Each success advances the character one level up the chart.

Strength	Feats	Lift
1	Crush a beer can	40 lbs.
2	Break a wooden chair	100 lbs.
3	Break down a wooden door	250 lbs.
4	Break a 2"x 4" board	400 lbs.
5	Break open a metal fire door	650 lbs.
6	Throw a motorcycle	800 lbs.
7	Flip over a small car	900 lbs.
8	Break a 3' lead pipe	1000 lbs.
9	Punch through a cement wall	1200 lbs.
10	Rip open a steel drum	1500 lbs.
11	Punch through 1" sheet metal	2000 lbs.
12	Break or uproot a metal lamppost	3000 lbs.
13	Throw a station wagon	4000 lbs.
14	Rip a limousine in half	5000 lbs.
15	Throw a truck	6000 lbs.

Characters can (and often need to) work together to lift an object. Doing so is ordinary teamwork. The characters' total Strength adds to any Willpower successes rolled. Both lifting and breaking are all or nothing — if you fail the roll, nothing happens. At the Storyteller's discretion, failing a Strength roll by one point may allow a character to drag a heavy object a short distance or damage a heavy door enough that repeated attempts may open it eventually. On a botch, the character strains something or drops the object on his foot. In either case, the character generally takes one level of bashing damage.

• **Pursuit [Dexterity + Athletics/Drive]:** While following someone at a discrete distance provides useful information, so does chasing people down and capturing them. Pursuit can be performed on foot, using Dexterity + Athletics, or in a vehicle using Dexterity + Drive. In both cases, the procedure is identical. Frequently, no rolls are needed; the faster creature or vehicle automatically catches up with the slower one. However, if the two individuals or vehicles are of nearly equal speed, or if there are back alleys or branching corridors that might allow the person being pursued to evade the pursuer, use the system here.

Pursuit is an extended action. The target of the pursuit begins with a number of successes equal to his distance from the pursuer. When running, the target gains one success for every two yards distance; in vehicle chases, one success gains 10 yards.

Each turn, both parties roll and add the new successes to the total. If the pursuer accumulates more successes than the target she can catch up with the target and attempt to attack or restrain the target physically. If the target continues to accumulate successes, he pulls farther away from the pursuer. Each success the target accumulates beyond the pursuer's total provides a difficulty penalty of one to all Perception rolls he may need to make when the target attempts to hide or evade detection. If either party botches, the character has stumbled, skidded to a stop or otherwise completely ceased moving, allowing the other party to escape or catch up.

Shadowing [Dexterity + Stealth]: Following a target can also reveal large amounts of useful information. Following a target who has been bugged, or whose location is being tracked with orbital spy

satellites is trivially easy. The pursuers rarely if ever need to be within sight of the target. Even exceptionally wary targets must still make Intelligence + Alertness rolls at a difficulty of 9 to notice that the character keeps showing up nearby. However, if the character does not have such high-tech equipment available, the character must follow the target physically.

Following requires a Dexterity + Stealth roll, resisted by a Perception + Alertness roll by the target. Circumstances modify the difficulty for each roll. Targets who are distracted, lost in thought or performing other tasks have higher difficulties, while wary targets who suspect pursuit have a bonus. Similarly, stalking someone through dimly lit, crowded, noisy streets may only have a difficulty of 4, while following someone undetected through an empty parking lot at noon could have a difficulty as high as 9.

If the character recruits companions to assist in following a target, the task becomes much easier. Having two or more characters switch off following the subject allows the pursuers to use teamwork. When pursuing someone using a car or motorcycle replace Stealth with Drive. Remember that each dot of the *Arcane* Background adds one to the difficulty of all rolls to spot the pursuer.

• **Sleight of Hand [Dexterity + Stealth]:** While placing a tiny bug on someone is relatively simple, picking someone's pocket or planting a larger object on someone is considerably more difficult. The procedure is identical for all such larceny, though. Typically, a resisted roll is in order, pitting the rogue's Dexterity + Stealth against the subject's Perception + Alertness, with a difficulty of 6 on both sides. Increase the difficulty by one to place or remove the object if it is the size of a wallet or even a pocket watch. The difficulty of the target noticing this intrusion decreases by one as well. Afterward, any causal examination of the pocket will normally turn up the absence of an expected item, or the presence of an unfamiliar one. However, the target will not be aware of how the item came to be added or removed. Failure simply indicates that the character didn't manage to plant or steal the item in question, and it adds the usual successive attempt penalty if the character tries again. A botch results in being caught in the act.

• **Sneaking [Dexterity + Stealth]:** Whether attempting to infiltrate a Progenitor Lab or evading a stakeout on her house, a character may be called on to sneak around so as to avoid detection. Sneaking uses Dexterity + Stealth as a resisted action against any observer's Perception + Alertness. The difficulty of both rolls is usually 6. Distractions, camouflaged clothing or poor lighting can reduce the sneaking character's difficulty by two, as can knowing exactly where the watchers are located. Superior vantage points, infrared sensors or similar advantages can negate all penalties for darkness and lower the observer's difficulty's by up to two as well. Remember that the *Arcane* Background reduces the difficulty of all sneaking rolls by one per dot. On a botched sneaking roll, the character accidentally bumps into one of the observers, makes a loud noise, or otherwise alerts them to her presence.

• **Stealing [Dexterity + Stealth, Perception + Streetwise]:** Whether a mage needs a computer disk off of an enemy's desk, or simply a can of food from a convenience store, stealing can be a remarkably useful activity — as long as the character doesn't get caught. To steal an object, roll Dexterity + Stealth in a resisted roll against any observers' Perception + Alertness. The difficulty of both rolls is based on the size of the object and the degree of distraction. See the rules for placing bugs (under "Surveillance") for further information. The use of bulky clothing and similar tricks can reduce the difficulty by up to two points. Failure means the theft is detected, and a botch means that it is obvious even to those who were not watching for it. A successful Perception + Streetwise roll (difficulty 8) allows the character to determine in advance both the difficulty of this task and the relative alertness of any potential observers.

• **Swimming [Stamina + Athletics]:** Any character with one or more dots in Athletics is assumed to know how to swim. Long-distance or long-duration swimming requires successful Swimming rolls versus a difficulty determined by the water conditions. Swimming in a pool is normally difficulty 4, while trying to do so in arctic waters during a severe storm would be difficulty 10. Only one roll per hour is required merely to stay afloat; actual distance swimming requires one roll every 15 minutes. On a failure, the character flounders, and the player must roll again before the character begins taking suffocation damage. On a botch, the character begins taking suffocation damage immediately.

• **Throwing [Dexterity + Athletics]:** Objects (like grenades or knives) weighing three pounds or less can be thrown [Strength x 5] yards. Each additional two pounds of mass decreases this distance by five yards (heavy objects cannot be thrown very far). If an object can be lifted, but not thrown, it may only be hurled a yard or two.

Storytellers can increase throwing distance for aerodynamic objects like frisbees, or reduce them for particularly unwieldy objects like televisions. Merely throwing an object far away requires no roll. Throwing an object at a target accurately requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll versus a difficulty of 6 (up to half the object's maximum range) or 7 (from half to maximum range). This difficulty can be adjusted for easily thrown objects, high winds and similar external circumstances. A failure results in missing the target and a botch usually results in the object being dropped before it is thrown, or in accidentally hitting one of the thrower's companions.

Social Tasks

• **Facedown [Charisma + Intimidation]:** Large egos and overweening pride are common results of finding that one has the power to reshape reality to one's whims. When two characters attempt to face each other down, with each one daring the other to back down or look away first, use the following system: Each party rolls Charisma + Intimidation versus a difficulty of the opponent's current Willpower. The first one who accumulates his opponents Wits + 5 in successes, wins. At this point, the other character either backs down, looks away or spends a point of Willpower to stand firm, forcing a new extended roll. Using impressive magic and similar props can lower the difficulty of this roll.

• **Fast-Talk [Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** While theatrical performances and passionate speeches can both sway a crowd, sometimes you simply need a cop to keep from hauling you in and

searching you, the judge to let you off one more time or the customer to buy your expensive snake oil. In such cases, coming up with a rapid succession of half-truths, partial explanations and a few carefully hidden lies can allow a character to confuse and bewilder his opponent into agreement. This action is a resisted one that pits your character's Manipulation + Subterfuge against the target's Willpower. Whoever scores the most successes wins. On a tie, both parties roll again and the conversation continues. If the character wins, the subject agrees to something similar to what the character desires. More successes increase the degree of agreement and the amount the subject is willing to do for the character. Failure is simply that, and a botch usually indicates that the character has angered the subject.

• **Fitting In [Charisma + Expression and/or Wits + Academics]:** Sometimes, the best way to obtain information is to find it out directly from the people who know it. Attempting to do so means that the character may have to attempt to fit into a foreign culture or subculture. While most citizens of the First World understand the basics of middle class society, fitting into an immigrant community, a city's homeless population or the closed and paranoid ranks of the intelligence community requires an extensive knowledge and understanding of the culture or subculture in question.

The first step is to look the part. A successful Charisma + Expression roll allows a character to dress like any member of a well-known culture or subculture. The difficulty of this roll is normally 5, but it can be as high as 7 for more difficult feats like believable cross-dressing or dressing down to street level. A single success allows the character to appear to be the desired type of person, and additional successes increase the degree to which the character appears to fit in. With just this roll, a character can impersonate a member of a different social class, dress for a particular subculture or pretend to be a member of a well-known professional community like the police or the military.

However, to impersonate a member of a completely foreign subculture like the homeless, a religious or immigrant community or the members of a secretive organization like the NSA, merely looking the part is not sufficient. After the Expression roll, you must make a Wits + Academics roll with a difficulty based on the community. Relatively open immigrant communities would have a difficulty of 6, closed communities or the homeless would have a difficulty of 7, and highly secretive groups such as religious cults or the Technocracy would have difficulties of 8 or higher.

A single success allows the character to move, respond and act like a new or relatively inexperienced (or slow) member of this community. Additional successes increase the character's perceived status and competence. Failure means the impersonation is unsuccessful, and a botch means that the character is believed to be someone who is spying on or members of that community maliciously. Additional Wits + Academics rolls may be necessary whenever the character faces an unknown or unfamiliar situation in this culture.

• **Impersonation [Charisma + Expression and Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** Making others believe that you are someone they know and trust is a wonderful, if extremely risky, method of

obtaining a great deal of useful information. Even if your character has the perfect disguise (something easily provided by the proper magic) and knows a great deal about the person being impersonated, it all comes down to how well the character can pull it off. The best actors can impersonate someone's dear friend, while someone nervous, timid or simply unskilled cannot even become someone's long-lost third cousin believably. Impersonation requires two rolls. First it is necessary to look, sound and move like the target. A Charisma + Expression roll (difficulty 8) is required to obtain the desired appearance. If the character does not have access to the target or, at minimum, extensive visual and audio recordings of the target moving, the difficulty of this roll increases by *at least* one. Access to someone who has spent a significant amount of time with the target and who can help correct any obvious mistakes will reduce the difficulty level by one or two. One success gives a basic resemblance, but three or more successes help the character pass inspection by anyone who knows the target well. Five or more successes means that even the target's own parents won't know the difference.

If the character can manage to keep interactions to casual greetings and nods of acknowledgment, no further rolls are necessary. However, the character will likely be called on to actually pass as the target while interacting with individuals who know the target. When the character interacts with someone, the player must make a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll with a difficulty based on how well the person knows the target. Casual acquaintances only require a difficulty of 5, coworkers and ordinary friends usually require a difficulty of 7, and spouses, long-term friends and similar people raise the difficulty to 8 or 9. A failure on this roll reflects odd, incongruous behavior. At this point, the player must roll again in a roll resisted the observer's Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6). Success mollifies these fears, while another failure or a botch on either roll reveals the character to be an imposter.

• **Interrogation [Manipulation + Intimidation or Charisma + Intimidation]:** In the war for reality, obtaining your opponent's secrets can be vitally important. There are several different methods of interrogation, careful questioning, threats and physical or mental torture. Each is an equally valid method, but they all work best when used in combination.

Questioning is accomplished using a Charisma + Intimidation roll resisted by the subject's Willpower. The difficulty of both rolls is usually 6, although promises and other inducements (like offering the captive a tempting meal) can reduce the difficulty of the interrogator's roll. Well-crafted lies like faked confessions by the subject's comrades can also aid this type of interrogation. Generally, a roll occurs at the beginning of each separate line of questioning.

Threats and torture both require the interrogator's player to make a Manipulation + Interrogation roll, which the subject's player resists either by rolling Willpower or Stamina +3 (whichever is higher). Threats, yelling and perhaps a slap or a glass of cold water to the face will not harm the subject, but these tactics break down his will to resist.

When actually torturing the subject, whether with loud noises and flashing lights, or with pliers and car batteries, make a roll each turn. Under mental torture, the subject loses one point of temporary Willpower per scene; under physical torture, the subject loses one health level (bashing or lethal at the interrogator's choice) per turn. Doing lethal damage to the subject reduces difficulty of the interrogation rolls by two, but it risks killing the subject as well.

Alternating questioning with either threats or torture in a "good cop/ bad cop" ploy is often quite effective. The two interrogators can combine their successes in teamwork.

On a failure, the subject lies, babbles or simply remains silent. On a botch, the subject lies extremely convincingly, falls unconscious or possibly even dies (if physical torture is being used).

• **Oration [Charisma + Leadership]:** Whether trying to rouse a crowd to anger, preach to a congregation or simply attempting to con a corporate board of directors into funding your latest crazed invention, the capacity to sway the emotions and beliefs of large numbers of people can literally create or destroy nations. When your character addresses any audience, from a small jury to an enormous congregation, roll Charisma + Leadership. While the difficulty is typically 6, it should be lowered if the character is delivering a message with which the crowd is predisposed to agree. If the crowd finds the message disturbing or threatening (or if it is already hostile or unruly for external reasons), the difficulty should be increased. A priest attempting to preach to rival gangs on the verge of a fight will have a much harder time than a shaman addressing his tribe before an important battle.

While a single success will sway the crowd to agree with you on basic points, getting full funding from the board of directors or making a long-term lasting impression on a crowd usually requires multiple successes. Failure indicates that the crowd loses interest or disagrees, and a botch indicates that you have angered or upset the crowd enough that they disagree with your ideas more than they did before. In some circumstances, a botch may even result in violence. Competing oration, like rival lawyers in a trial, are treated as resisted actions, with the difficulty being set by the quality of evidence and witnesses provided by each side.

• **Performance [Charisma + Performance]:** Sometimes art or drama can affect lives more than threats, money or even magic. If properly done, art can shape opinion or belief better than the most impassioned speech. From a pagan priestess leading a Samhain ritual to an actor performing *Hamlet*, all performance involves a careful crafting of emotion, planning and spontaneity. To convey the proper mood and tone to the audience, coven-folk or other observers, the player must make a Charisma + Performance roll. While the difficulty is usually 6, a particularly receptive or hostile audience (and other external conditions) can alter this difficulty. A single success indicates that the performance was successful, if not terribly moving, while five or more successes produce a performance that the audience members will remember for the rest of their lives.

Mental Tasks

• **Academic Knowledge [Intelligence + Academics]:** Not all conflicts are fought with guns or high technology. When you are trying to win the war for reality, a knowledge of history,

philosophy and literature can also be vitally important. When confronted with an academic question, characters with one or more dots in Academics are assumed to know the basics of history and literature. They know who wrote *Moby Dick*, and when the Constitution was signed. For anything more complex, you must roll. Reasonably common knowledge has a difficulty of 3 or 4, while knowing the composer of an obscure 16th century folk-song or the major exploits of Sir Thomas Moore's eldest grandchild might have a difficulty of 8 or 9. A single success give the character basic knowledge of the question. Three or more successes provides both detailed knowledge of the subject and knowledge of a number of books or web sites that provide corroborating information. Note your character could perform an extended task by sifting through knowledge, ruminating on facts and reaching a conclusion through logic or insight.

• **Building Devices [Intelligence + Technology]:** Building a device from scratch is quite difficult, but it can also be highly rewarding. Players of characters who want to actually create a device from scratch much make a Intelligence + Technology roll. In almost all cases, this roll is performed as an extended task.

If the device is one of which a design already exists, then merely duplicating it requires that the player make an appropriate roll to learn more about it. Highly complex and secret devices like military supercomputers or guided missiles usually require that the character obtain this data illegally. Simple devices like ultra-light planes, clocks, or radio receivers do not require this research since most competent inventors are assumed to already know how such devices function. Research of this sort is generally a separate task previous to the building of the actual device, of course.

Actually constructing a device requires that the character have the proper tools and parts. While a truly brilliant inventor might be able to make an ultra-light plane out of coat hangers, duct tape and a lawn-mower engine, doing so is far from easy. In all cases, the character is assumed to actually build the device from scratch. Merely assembling a device from a kit which includes all of the necessary parts is much easier (the same difficulty as jury-rigging a device, except that the result is fully functional).

As with repairing or improving a device, it is also possible to jury-rig an invention. Once again, jury-rigging reduces the difficulty of the rolls by two and halves the number of successes required (round up). Jury-rigged devices will fail after a scene or two. In general, once such a device has failed, its remains are useless junk that cannot be salvaged easily for another purpose.

• **Creation [variable]:** Mages are inherently creative and dynamic people, so it's only natural that many find ways to express themselves through art, writing or craftsmanship. Such non-technological arts can be beautiful, utilitarian, valuable or any combination of many characteristics. At the very least, artistic creations may provide insight into the mage's emotions and drives, a potent gauge of enlightened will.

The rolls necessary to create works of art are as varied as the forms of artistic expression. Writing a clear piece of prose or a moving poem or song could require a use of Perception + Expression, while a painting or statue might involve Perception or Dexterity + Crafts. Computer-generated graphics and patterns could even stem from Intelligence + Computer. The difficulty of the creation often varies according to the medium, but it's never *easy* to create. You should decide what your character is creating and roll according to the Storyteller's judgement of the task parameters and difficulty. Multiple successes indicate a masterful work, while few successes showcase a quaint but not particularly potent or inspired piece. On a botch, the character either wrecks his medium completely or creates something utterly repugnant while remaining oblivious to its failings.

Creative works can sometimes showcase a mage's inner nature, messages from the Avatar or mystical insight. A mage who "lets go" and paints or writes freely may find hidden messages in her works, perhaps leading to a Seeking.

• **Cryptography [Intelligence + Linguistics or Computer]:** Many mages are secretive and paranoid by their very nature. As a result, many of the more important books on magic and related topics are kept in code. Among the most paranoid mages, even their journals and notes are written in code. A simple Mind Effect allows a mage to read or write in a known code, but decoding an unknown code becomes much more difficult. Some Traditions even use ciphers to hold multiple layers of understanding in their texts, so cryptography is an important study for more scholastic mages.

Today there are two methods of deciphering codes: by hand and by computer. Written texts can be deciphered in either fashion, but in order to use a computer, you must enter the text first. Computer records that are kept in code can also be decoded in either fashion. However, typical computer encryption and passwords are handled using the Hacking rules (see pp. 231-232).

Depending on the preferred method, decoding is accomplished using an Intelligence + Linguistics or an Intelligence + Computer roll. Typically, the difficulty of these rolls lies between 8 and 10. Using a Trinary, mainframe or supercomputer lowers the difficulty of computer translation by one or two, while working with a complex mathematical cipher with nothing more than a pencil and a ream of paper may push the

Device	Difficulty	# of Successes
Simple Mechanical or Electric device	4	2
Simple Electronic device (radio, tape player)	5	3
Complex mechanical or electric device (automobile, complex clockwork device)	6	5
Personal computers or other complex electronic devices	7	10
Very large, extremely complex device (mainframe computer, jet fighter)	8	20
Complex experimental prototypes (Unusual and Extraordinary Devices)	9	30

difficulty even higher. Cryptography is an extended task, with each roll cracking more of the code. Any botch rolled during this process is not obvious until the end, when nonsense results.

The primary advantage of using a computer is that it speeds up cryptography greatly. When breaking a code by hand, days, weeks or months of game time may pass between when the player makes rolls out of game. Using a computer generally reduces the game time between rolls to minutes, hours or days. The use of a particularly powerful computer reduces this time even more. Extremely complex computer codes can, of course, fight against this advantage. Codes based on schemes like large prime-number encryption may still require weeks or months of mainframe time to solve, and such complex computer codes are practically unsolvable by hand.

Intuition and puzzlework can play an important role in cryptography. You may use Wits + Enigmas to try to get a handle on a simple code; every two successes on such a supporting roll reduces the decryption difficulty of the subsequent task by one (to a maximum of three). Failure means that your character wastes time mulling the code over pointlessly, while a botch causes the first attempt at decoding to fail automatically (as your character approaches the code from the wrong conceptual direction). For some codes, intuition is really the only way to work — certain mathematical ciphers are non-reversible, and such codes can really only be guessed at.

Cryptography is also used in creating codes. Building a cipher is an extended task, and the code-maker can accumulate as many successes as desired. The total number of successes scored then indicates the number of successes required to break the code. Botching such an extended code-creation roll means that the character inserts an improper coding or screws up his notes, thus losing all the work accumulated. Creating a code is usually difficulty 5 — fairly easy.

• **Destroying Devices [Perception + Technology]:** For every device that a mad scientist invents, there's a hero or villain who needs to destroy it. Whether the character is trying to disable a speeding car or destroy a dangerous robot, having a high Technology rating allows the character to find the weak points of any complex device and target them effectively. All such rolls involve Perception + Technology. While normally performed as a single quick roll, finding a device's weak points can also be performed as an extended task, if the character has 10 minutes or more to examine the device in question carefully. Success in this roll allows the character to find a critical location on the device. Any attack on this location that penetrates the device's armor will disable or destroy the device. To find such a weak point, the character must take at least one full turn to examine or observe the device.

• **Detecting the Supernatural [Perception + Awareness]:** While having one dot in an appropriate Sphere is the best way of detecting various types of supernatural manifestations, even mages (and some Sleepers) without such abilities can "sense" things. Perception + Awareness is the standard way to detect everything from magic to the undead. Detecting nearby coincidental magic is a normal difficulty of 6, while detecting nearby vulgar magic is rarely more than difficulty 5.

Device	Difficulty
Simple mechanical or electric device	8
Simple electronic device (radio, tape player)	7
Complex mechanical or electric device (automobile, complex clockwork device)	6
Personal computers or other complex electronic devices	5
Very large, extremely complex device (mainframe computer, jet fighter)	4
Complex experimental prototypes (unusual and extraordinary devices)	3
Add +1 or even +2 to this number if the device is built to be extremely sturdy.	
Degree of Damage	**# of Successes**
Minor damage that impairs the device severely until simple repairs are made	1
Minor damage that stops the device completely until minor repairs are made	3
Device is rendered non-functional until one or more critical parts are replaced	5
Device is destroyed and may explode (only if the device can explode)	8

Detecting nearby Nodes, vampires or shapeshifters is somewhat more difficult, and detecting hunters, faeries and especially ghosts is quite difficult (minimum difficulty of 8). In all cases, a single success reveals the presence of something odd nearby, while multiple successes *might* provide further information.

If your character has enough time, you can make an extended Awareness roll. The mage scrutinizes the area or just clears his mind to feel for "something weird." A failure on an Awareness roll means that no particular information is gained, while a botch may cause a character to become firmly convinced that a perfectly mundane target is terribly dangerous or odd, or vice versa.

• **Foraging [Intelligence + Survival]:** While unprepared modern urbanites can have severe problems if caught out in the wilderness without proper equipment, someone who knows what she's doing can normally find food, water and adequate shelter. A normal Intelligence + Survival roll allows a character to find any of the above, in quantities adequate for one person, within an hour or two. Additional successes are required for each additional untrained person the character aids. If necessary, this roll can be made an extended task, but doing so will leave the character little time for other endeavors. Especially rich landscapes or bountiful seasons like summer or late spring reduce the difficulty of this roll. Difficult environments like deserts or the arctic, and poor weather can raise the difficulty of such tests significantly. Survival in a verdant temperate forest in the late spring might have a difficulty of only 4, while a similar roll in the heart of the Sahara desert would have a difficulty of at least 9. Botching this roll indicates that the character falls, eats something poisonous or otherwise suffers from exposure or the harshness of the wilderness, typically taking some amount of damage (determined by the Storyteller).

• **Fortune-Telling [Perception + Awareness]:** While Time and Correspondence magic can give a mage visions of the future or of distance places, there are other less accurate, but wholly coincidental methods of acquiring unusual information. Any character with the Awareness skill may employ some means of divination like Tarot cards, a pendulum or even a crystal ball. Doing so typically takes a short time, depending on the medium. At the conclusion, roll Perception + Awareness.

Fortune-telling applies only to specific questions about single events, such as a character wondering if one of her companions is secretly a traitor, or which gift a dear friend would appreciate most. All questions asked must have relatively simple answers. The answers provided by fortune-telling usually consist of yes, no or maybe, and they merely indicate whether the event in question is likely or unlikely. The difficulty of all fortune-telling rolls is at least 8, with difficult and complex questions raising the difficulty to 9 or 10. One usually needs at least three successes to obtain a meaningful response. Additional successes provide slightly more information. A failure provides no information, while a botch provides an incorrect answer.

Additional questions can be asked to clarify an answer, but each additional question raises the difficulty of this roll by one. Divination never provides definitive or detailed answers, but it proves useful when a character has no other means of finding an answer. Furthermore, while divination always requires props and a minimum of several turns of effort, it can easily be used as the basis for coincidental magic.

• **Hacking [Intelligence/Wits + Computer]:** Anyone with computer skills can perform most ordinary, legitimate computer applications. However, breaking into other people's computers is usually quite difficult. The accompanying chart details the time and difficulty levels for hacking various systems. All hacking rolls use Intelligence (for long-term hacking) or Wits (for fast response) + Computer. A failure on this roll indicates that the hacker cannot gain access to the system, while a botch means that the hacking has been detected — which often means that a system operator on the other end will trace the hacker's location immediately. Success means that the hacker actually penetrated the system.

The number of successes that you obtain on a hacking roll is the total number of dice you can use while working on the system. Even if a hacker has a Intelligence + Computer total of 9 dice, if he only rolls two successes he can only use two of these dice while inside the system. Hacking rolls can be made extended tasks, but doing so increases the risk since the hacker is working with the system for longer time. Note that it's possible to try to "upgrade access" once the hacker is inside the system, by putting additional

successes toward the access limit. However, this action suffers a difficulty penalty of one each time you roll to upgrade access. If you didn't find the backdoors and passwords right off, it takes progressively more work to think of better ones, after all.

Once inside the system, you must make further rolls to alter programs or to locate the exact file desired. Finding a file containing information on a specific subject is normally difficulty 6. If the hacker knows all or part of the actual name and location of this file, the difficulty reduces substantially, by up to a maximum of three. Multiple successes reveal multiple files on the same subject (if multiple files exist), or pinpoint the file exactly. Sorting though a computer for a correlation between various disparate bits of data or other complex and demanding tasks increases the difficulty. Actually altering programs on the fly is tough; the hacker must find the proper data, dive into it and (hopefully with the proper editing programs) figure it out and manipulate it. Aside from uploading or downloading information, a hacker's options are limited unless he wants to try runtime data alteration, which generally requires yet *another* separate extended success roll. Truly complex maneuvers are best left to magic. Again, a botch on any of these rolls reveals the presence of a hacker to the system operator.

If a hacker is discovered, all hacking rolls become resisted rolls between the hacker and the system operator (which can be a good thing if the sysop is incompetent...). If the system operator ever accumulates five successes in this resisted test, the hacker is ejected and the sysop may make another roll to find any backdoors the hacker left. The difficulty and number of successes required varies according to the hacker's precautions and skills. If the hacker wins by five or more successes, she is fully inside the system (even if she was not inside before), and she may obtain additional data before the sysop can attempt to eject her again. Such rolls suffer from the usual limit of the hacker's initial success, though, due to limits on access.

Sysops in the secure systems used by large corporations or the government look for hackers regularly. Once every four to 12 hours, (depending on the security level of the system) a sweep may occur. The Storyteller rolls the sysop's Intelligence + Computer, and checks successes against a difficulty of the hacker's Intelligence + Computer. In some highly secure systems used by the military, the intelligence community or the Technocracy, system operators look for hackers continually, and sweeps occur as often as once an hour. Once a hacker has been detected, the sysop may either attempt to eject him, or wait to see what he does. It's also possible for a sysop to send a trace program or a nasty virus after the hacker. Although doing so is usually illegal, it's certainly a possible threat to hackers in very secure or secret systems. In this case, the sysop is essentially "hacking the hacker," but he doesn't need to roll to gain access (the hacker's already inside the sysop's system, after all). In fact, he could very well fire a program bomb right down the line into an unsuspecting hacker's core. Thankfully, such programs can only wipe information or reprogram the computer, or very rarely cause the computer to do something that physically damages itself. Programs can't be made to cause computers to explode without technomagical influence.

System	Hours	Difficulty
Palmtop	1	5
Laptop or PC	2	6
Mini or small network	3	7
Mainframe or large network	4	8
Supercomputer	5	9
Trinary Computer	+/- 2	+/- 1
Security Software	+1/-3	+1/-3
Sloppy Filing	+1/-3	+1/-3
Cracking Software	-1/-3	-1/-3
Social Engineering	-1/-3	-1/-3
Backdoor	-4	-2

Hours: The number of in-game hours required between each roll of the extended task. This number relates the time that it takes to actually hack into the system and locate the desired files. Once there, the hacker must then alter or download these files.

Trinary Computers: Trinary computers are intrinsically more powerful than ordinary binary computers. If the hacker is using a Trinary computer, she reduces the time required to hack into another system by two hours and reduces the difficulty of all her computer rolls by one. Conversely, if the hacker is attempting to hack into a system based around one or more Trinary computers, she must increase the time by two hours and the difficulty of all computer rolls by one. If the hacker uses a Trinary computer to hack into another Trinary computer, the bonuses and penalties cancel out.

Security Software: This software encrypts files and prevents unauthorized intrusion. Characters can write their own security software, but doing so requires weeks of work. At the end of this time, make a single Intelligence + Computer roll with a difficulty of 7. For every two successes rolled (round up), the software increases the difficulty of all unauthorized intrusion by one. Most businesses buy their security software. Commercial security software will not add more than three to the difficulty of hacking rolls.

Sloppy Filing: Some people do not label their files in any sort of logical manner, and they are not careful about what directories they place them in. Everyone using such a computer (even legitimate users) receives a difficulty penalty of one to all Computer and Research rolls involving that computer. In addition, all tasks performed on that computer take longer than they would on cleaner system — double the usual times, for a simple guideline.

Cracking Software: Cracking software allows hackers to view code, finds patterns and generate long strings of possible passwords more easily. When going up against any system with good security software, both cracking software and social engineering are advised. It is possible for a character to write her own cracking software. (In fact, most hackers do.) The procedure is the same as writing security software, except that the difficulty is 8. It is also possible to design cracking software for specific systems. Doing so means that the software will work only on a system running certain programs, but creating cracking software for a specific system has a difficulty of only 6.

Social Engineering: In many cases, hacking is simply too risky and difficult to be done without external aid. At this

point, "social engineering" often comes into play. Even a single password, acquired by discrete spying (or raiding a business's trash) can reduce the difficulty of the hacking roll by one or two. If all else fails, bribing or threatening someone into revealing their password can do wonders, as long as the person does not report the incident.

Backdoor: Once a hacker has entered a system, she can leave bits of code that will allow her to enter the same system more quickly and easily at a future time. System operators can detect backdoors, but only if they are looking for them. Ordinary commercial and academic systems are usually checked only every few months, but high-security systems get checked on a weekly, or sometimes a daily basis (for top-secret government, Technocracy and other conspiracy-level systems).

Palmtop: A pocket-size Personal Data Assistant or mini-laptop.

PC or Laptop: A typical home or office computer.

Mini or Small Network: A moderately powerful computer or several dozen PCs all in a network. Both arrangements are typical of moderate-sized businesses or small local governments.

Mainframe or Large Network: Large, extremely powerful computers and/ or hundreds of PCs linked together. Both arrangements are typical of large corporations, governments or universities.

Supercomputers: Large, state of the art computers used by cutting-edge computer firms, NASA, the intelligence community and the Technocracy.

For some more ideas about hacking, the Web and the Net in **Mage**, check out **Digital Web 2.0**.

• **Improving Devices [Intelligence + Technology]:** Everyone wants a car that can go faster or a computer with more processing power. If you don't have the contacts or the money to pay someone else to soup up your gear, then you'll need to do it yourself! Minor or temporary improvements are often relatively easy. However, making any significant, permanent improvement to a device requires significant work, especially if the device is already well made.

Jury-rigged improvements can improve the performance of a vehicle or device temporarily. However, after a scene of use (or two scenes at most), the device will suffer minor damage or failure that impairs its function. The "improvements" must then be removed, or the device will suffer serious damage the next time it is used. The rules for jury-rigging improvements are the same as for jury-rigging repairs: reduce the difficulty by two and halve the number of successes needed. Therefore, jury-rigged improvements are easier to implement, but they aren't built for the long haul.

All permanent improvements require extended tasks. While making significant improvements to a device is often quite difficult, using magic to produce such effects is often relatively easy. This type of magic is usually coincidental as the mage actually tinkers with the device in some useful manner. Naturally, the border between technomagic and a finely tuned device is a thin, often coincidental one.

• **Inventing [Intelligence + Science]:** Creating completely new devices is a very complex task. Before you can even attempt an inventing roll, you must first devise a concept for a device and make an Intelligence + Science roll to reflect your character's development and refinement of the theory. Remember that no amount of success will allow the character to violate known physical laws without the use of magic! Perpetual motion machines, teleportation booths and antigravity fliers are simply impossible to invent using mundane means. However, creating the fastest computer ever made, or making a car controlled by the driver's thought patterns, are merely extraordinarily difficult, not impossible.

Science rolls for inventing things are always extended tasks, and without magical aid, many inventions require weeks, months or even years between rolls as the inventor researches her new ideas. Also, once the theoretical work of inventing is

Type of Device	Difficulty	
Cheap and poorly made	5	
Average commercial quality	6	
Expensive and well-made	7	
Best commercial quality	8	
Custom-made	9	
Cutting-edge prototype (unusual and extraordinary devices)	10	
Degree of Improvement	**# of Successes**	
Minor (up to 20%) improvements in speed or other easily modified characteristics	5	
Major (50-100%) improvements in some easily modified characteristic	10	
Adding new capabilities to the device	20	
Invention	**Difficulty**	**# of Successes**
A moderately improved version of an existing cutting-edge device	8	5
A significantly improved version of an existing cutting-edge device	9	10
A device based on completely new and revolutionary principles like the first laser or transistor	10	20

done, the device must actually be built. As always, mages with a penchant for inventing rarely stick to purely mundane means when performing this research. Even a single dot in Matter or Forces can lower the difficulty of these rolls.

Once you've succeeded in an invention task, you can use Building Devices or Creation (listed previously) for some guidelines on actually putting it together. Remember that the character must also get the parts from somewhere. If your device requires a supply of enriched plutonium, for example, you've got a whole set of stories cut out for you.

• **Investigation [Perception + Investigation]:** When carefully searching a room or looking for clues, there're quite a few techniques that the diligent investigator can use. A simple Perception + Alertness roll allows characters to spot desired clues that are simply lost amidst clutter. However, to find objects that have been deliberately hidden or tiny traces that might become valuable clues, you need Investigation. You should make a Perception + Investigation roll, with the difficulty determined by exactly how well the objects are hidden or how faint the clues are. Looking for small out-of-place elements may have a difficulty of 4 to 6, while seeking a deliberately carefully hidden object or panel, especially if the character doesn't know what to search for, may be difficulty 9 or 10. A single success reveals basic information, obvious clues and common hiding places, while multiple successes provide both detailed information and deductions based on this evidence. Botches indicate either the location of false clues, or the accidental destruction of clues or hidden objects.

• **Meditation [Stamina/Intelligence + Meditation]:** In the complex and dangerous life of a mage, being able to bring mind, body and spirit into harmony (even briefly) can be invaluable. Meditation has many uses. Most simply, tired mages use meditation as a more rapid method of catching up on lost sleep. Roll Stamina + Meditation versus a difficulty of 8. Each success covers for one hour of sleep. This type of meditation takes approximately 20 or 30 minutes. A failure simply indicates that the mage can't concentrate enough to still his mind; a botch means that the character falls asleep.

Mind-body unity can also help a character understand complex situations. When a character takes five or 10 minutes to meditate on a subject, you can make an Intelligence + Meditation roll versus a difficulty of 8 and add each success to a single Enigmas or Awareness roll on the topic. Failing on this Meditation roll does no real damage; it simply indicates that the mage did not gain any special insight, though of course it takes up time. A botch means that the mage comes to an erroneous conclusion, and thus increases the subsequent roll's difficulty by two.

• **Repair [Dexterity + Technology]:** Sometimes the only way to fix something is to do it yourself. When a character wishes to repair any mechanical or electronic device, you roll Dexterity + Technology. The difficulty is determined by the complexity of the task (see the associated chart). All but the easiest repairs require multiple successes. Since most repair tasks are extended actions by their very nature, multiple rolls add together to complete the repair. However, each additional roll adds to the amount of time the repair takes to complete.

Rapid, jury-rigged repairs are possible. Such repairs take much less time and effort to complete, but they will fail again in a short time, leaving the device worse off than before. When making jury-rigged repairs, reduce the difficulty by two and then halve (round down) the number of successes required. However, the device will operate for only one scene before it will need further repairs (which now incur an additional difficulty penalty of one). Attempting to make any repairs without the necessary tools adds two to all difficulty numbers automatically. Fortunately, Matter magic can often substitute for proper tools, and it can be used coincidentally to make damage less severe than it first appears to be.

Botches usually result in either injury to the repairer or damage to the device being repaired.

Device	Difficulty
Simple mechanical or electric device	4
Simple electronic device (radio, tape player)	5
Complex mechanical or electric device (automobile, complex clockwork device)	6
Personal computers or other complex electronic devices	7
Very large, extremely complex device (mainframe computer, jet fighter)	8
Complex experimental prototypes (unusual and extraordinary devices)	9
Job	**# of Successes**
Minor damage (loose wire, flat tire)	1
Technical glitch	2
Electronic malfunctions	5
Moderate damage	5
Upgrades, installing replacement parts	10
Complete overhauls or rebuilds	20

• **Research [Intelligence + Investigation/Computer]:** Regardless of Tradition or Convention, the vast majority of mages are fascinated with all sorts of knowledge and information. Also, finding out esoteric information about your opponents is one of the best methods of defeating them. While the Computer Knowledge is often used when dealing with computer files and locating data on the Internet, Research includes everything from uncovering dusty tomes in ancient libraries to finding a newspaper article on the microfiche.

Simply finding a book in a public library does not require a research roll. Research allows the character to discover information that is rare or obscure, such as material in disorganized private libraries or facts hidden in only a few rare archives. In all cases, you roll Intelligence + Investigation. A single success provides information in the most easily accessible source. Two or three successes provides information from all moderately accessible sources, and four or more successes generally indicate that the character has found all the information available on that topic in the library or archive being examined. Particularly rare information may require additional successes for discovery, though, and the desired information may simply be unavailable in some cases. You can't just short-circuit a story with a single Investigation roll for a piece of totally unknown information!

• **Surveillance [Perception + Alertness, Perception + Technology or Dexterity + Stealth]:** Watching or listening in on others can yield all sorts of useful information. However, the key is to do so in a discreet manner. Today there are two primary methods of performing such surveillance: either using your own eyes and ears, or using some form of surveillance technology like laser microphones, hidden cameras or the ever-popular bugs. Observing someone covertly through direct observation requires that a player make a Perception + Alertness roll. The difficulty and number of successes depends both on how far away the target is, and what sort of information the character is looking or listening for. Reading a newspaper headline across a room or listening in on a conversation might require a difficulty of 5, while overhearing a whispered conversation at the next table or noticing the details of a badge someone flashes from across a room could have a difficulty of 9. The number of successes scored determines exactly how much information the character receives. One success gives basic, vague information, three successes usually gives all the information the character was looking for, and more than three successes reveals additional useful information that the character didn't expect.

Direct electronic surveillance using shotgun microphones or similar devices is handled in a manner similar to direct observation. The appropriate roll is Perception + Technology. The degree of information revealed by various numbers of successes is the same. However, the difficulty of the roll is determined by the particulars of the situation. Using a shotgun microphone or a laser microphone to listen to a clearly visible conversation in a nearby office building might only have a difficulty of 5. However, placing a bug in a large room so that it will pick up the conversation of people who will later wander around that room might have a difficulty as high as 9.

Actually placing a bug on a person allows the character to pick up the location of the target and what the target is saying easily. However, it is best to avoid being noticed while placing a bug! Placing a bug in a discreet location requires a Dexterity + Stealth roll. This roll is a resisted roll against the target's Perception + Alertness if the target is not sufficiently distracted.

The difficulty of placing a bug depends on your ingenuity. Walking up and patting the target's back normally has a difficulty of 5 and slipping it into a pocket would have a difficulty of 7. Placing adhesive on a bug and having the target walk on it would have a difficulty of 3, assuming that you can get the target to walk in the right place. Targets involved in loud arguments or other serious distractions would roll at a difficulty of 9. Targets who are a performing normal activities (like sitting and eating dinner) roll at a difficulty of 7, and targets who are suspicious and wary roll at a difficulty of 5.

Success allows the character to place a bug without notice, failure alerts the target immediately that the character is attempting to do something odd, and a botch allows the target to see the bug itself clearly. If this roll succeeds, every success achieved also subtracts one success from any further Perception + Alertness rolls to notice the bug. Normally, the target's player does not make such rolls unless he has some reason to suspect that a bug has been placed. Note that electronic bug-detection devices can usually find normal bugs without any special rolls, as long as the operator knows what to look for.

• **Tracking [Perception + Survival]:** In general, tracking in most urban areas is quite difficult without an incredibly keen sense of smell (which Life Magic can provide) or similar magical aid. However, tracking becomes much easier in wilderness areas, deserted back alleys, rooftops or any place where the signs of someone's passing are unlikely to be disturbed. While footprints or trails of blood are the most easily followed tracks, skilled trackers can follow someone using only subtle signs like broken twigs, scuff marks on linoleum or even a few threads caught on a bush.

Use a Perception + Survival roll for tracking. Mud, dust and similar aids that hold a print or carry a trail well reduce the difficulty of the roll. Rain or otherwise poor tracking conditions, can raise the difficulty to 9 or higher. A single success allows the character to follow the trail, though at a halting speed and with little assurance of accuracy. Additional successes provide extra information on the subject, including facts such as the approximate speed, the target's weight or whether the subject was accompanied (or followed) by anyone else.

Using magically enhanced smell or sight to track by scent or hyper-acute vision is relatively similar to more mundane tracking, except that you make a Perception + Alertness roll instead. In such a case, your knowledge of the terrain is less important than your raw sensory capability.

• **Umbral Navigation [Perception + Cosmology]:** In light of the Reckoning and the coming Armageddon, the barrier between worlds has become dangerous, making Umbral travel even more so. Getting into the spirit worlds can be deadly in its own right. Even so, merely entering the Umbra is only the beginning. Once there, the character must also determine where he is and how to get to his destination. Mages who lack the knowledge and power to simply appear at their desired destination often make long and harrowing journeys through the spirit worlds. In all cases, you must make a Perception + Cosmology roll to in order to have your character navigate the Umbra successfully. If you're just trying to "appear" at the desired place (assuming that such a jump is even possible), this roll determines your accuracy in getting close to the desired spot. For longer journeys, the navigation roll provides an idea of how long it will take to get to the destination, as well as how skillfully the character avoids various hazards.

A single success on this roll provides a workable (if often difficult) path to this destination, while multiple successes provide a quicker and easier path. If two different groups are both travelling to the same destination, the one with the most successes on this roll will generally arrive first. A failure leaves the character unable to remember or find a good route; the character may start off and become unable to find the way, or he may find an old route blocked off. A botch results in the character becoming lost and heading off for some unknown, and perhaps unknowable, destination.

When a character is lost in the Umbra, you must make a roll using the difficulties listed to determine the character's present position before attempting to go anywhere else. Because of the fluid nature of the Umbra, the difficulty of this roll depends more

on the destination than on any easy measurement of paths or byways. It is always much easier to return from the Deep Umbra to the Penumbra than it is to travel to the Deep Umbra.

Realm	Difficulty
Penumbra	5
Middle or High Umbra	6
Low Umbra	7
Maya and various other Umbral Realms	8
Deep Umbra	9

• **Understanding the Unexplained [Intelligence + Enigmas/ Occult]:** When dealing with the foul magic of the Nephandi, the madness of the Marauders or the motivations of wholly alien beings from the far reaches of the Umbra, mages often encounter situations that are beyond the reach of mere mortal reason and understanding. Whether attempting to discern the purpose of a Nephandic ritual from observation or to understand the nature of a newly encountered Umbral being or realm, the character must transcend normal logic and reason and seek answers in riddles, esoteric philosophy, or simple introspection. In such situations an Intelligence + Enigmas rolls is necessary to see if the character can comprehend the twisted order within the apparent chaos. When attempting to understand unknown magic theory, students can rely on the results of an Intelligence + Occult roll instead.

Questions about relatively familiar topics like magic (to mages, anyway) usually have a difficulty of 6. Understanding bizarre spirits or similarly inhuman topics usually has a difficulty of 7 or higher, especially if the beings in question are from beyond the Horizon. A single success indicates a very vague and basic understanding. Three or more successes indicate that the character understands as much as mere mortals can about such oddities. Five or more successes on this roll should result in an significant flash of insight such as inexplicably understanding not only what a ritual was for, but the overall plan of which it is part. Failure in this roll results in incomprehension. A botch usually represents an incorrect understanding, which can be dangerous if the character acts on inaccurate knowledge. However, when dealing with particularly powerful or exotic situations, a botch could even result in the character reacting with fear or anger as his mind is simply unable to deal with the strangeness of the situation. In some cases a botch could even result in a temporary derangement.

Combat Systems

Combat is a chaotic whirlwind of bullets, fists, spells and weapons, but it can be broken down to conform to various sorts of procedures. By breaking up combat according to a few simple systems, you can run battle scenes that invoke the full flash and flair of magical destruction or down-and-dirty havoc.

That said, combat's no real substitute for some long-term planning, but in most games, it's inevitable. Conflict drives mages forward, and eventually something snaps.

Besides, a well-run battle can be a lot of fun.

Combat Turns

In real life, combat often involves a vast multitude of events happening nearly simultaneously. In a game, that mass of activity would be exceptionally confusing and difficult to run. Therefore, combat is divided into a series of turns (generally three seconds each). Each combat turn is further divided into three stages.

Stage One: Initiative

This step determines what order characters are acting in, and it is the point at which you decide what your character is doing. First, every player rolls one die for her character, and the Storyteller rolls one die for each of her characters. The result of this roll is then added to the character's initiative rating [Dexterity + Wits]. The character with the highest total acts first, and the remaining characters act in decreasing order. If two characters have the same initiative total, the one with the highest initiative rating goes first. If this number is also the same, the two characters act simultaneously.

Storytellers who don't wish to keep track of multiple initiatives for numerous characters can roll a single die for all their own characters. Note that wound penalties do take away from a character's initiative rating.

Once initiative rolls have been made, each player (and the Storyteller) must declare what her character(s) are doing for the turn. At this time, it is also necessary to state if your character will perform multiple actions, cast magical Effects, use Willpower or Quintessence or perform any other strangeness. Players must declare their characters' actions in the reverse order of initiative, so the character with the lowest (last) initiative number declares first, and the character with the highest (first) initiative declares last. Faster characters are thus allowed the opportunity to anticipate and react to the actions of slower characters.

All characters' actions occur at their rank in the order of initiative. There are only three exceptions to this rule. Characters can delay their actions and act at any time after their normal initiative. This delay normally allows characters to prepare for aborted actions or other surprises. Characters who delay their actions can go before a character with a slower initiative automatically. If two characters who have both delayed their actions wish to act simultaneously, the one with the higher initiative score for the turn always acts first.

Also, defensive actions (see "Aborting Actions" and "Defensive Maneuvers" in the next section) may be performed at any time in a turn, as long as your character has a free action. Defensive actions are the *only* actions that can be performed before your character's initiative score for the turn.

Finally, all multiple actions (including extra actions gained through the use of magical Effects) occur at the end of the turn. If several characters all take multiple actions, these actions

occur in order of the characters' initiative ratings. As always, defensive actions that are part of any multiple actions occur whenever they are needed to avert an attack. (It might be more realistic to "phase" multiple actions through the turn, but that would also be unnecessarily complex.)

Stage Two: Attack

Attacks are the central part of combat. Now players and the Storyteller roll to attempt to harm, kill or otherwise affect each others' characters. Here, the success or failures of these various efforts are determined as well as their potential effects on their targets. During this stage, you'll roll various Attribute + Ability combinations depending on the type of combat.

• **Close Combat:** Use Dexterity + Brawl for unarmed combat and Dexterity + Melee for combat involving hand-held weapons.

• **Ranged Combat:** Use Dexterity + Firearms for gun fights and Dexterity + Athletics for thrown weapons.

Remember that you simply default to the base for non-magical combat (usually Dexterity) if your character does not have points in the necessary Ability.

For melee and ranged combat, the weapon your character uses influences the damage, and possibly the attack rolls. Check the weapon's statistics on either the Melee Weapons chart or the Ranged Weapons chart.

While various modifiers change this number, most attack rolls are made versus a difficulty of 6. In all cases, a lack of successes on a resisted attack roll means that the attack simply fails to hit. A botch creates some major or minor catastrophe perhaps involving unintentional damage to your character, or to one of her comrades or weapons.

Stage Three: Resolution

Once an attack occurs, the Storyteller must figure out and describe what happened. In the simplest terms, resolution is merely the Storyteller describing how many levels of damage your character took or how the magic affected her. Of course, saying, "Your shot hits him squarely in the head; he falls down, instantly dead with his brains splattered all over the pavement," is considerably more gripping and dramatic than, "Your bullet does eight health levels of lethal damage, and he goes down." Even in combat, the emphasis should be on drama and story, not merely on rules and numbers!

However, rules and numbers are nonetheless vital to combat. Every success above the first on an attack roll equals an additional die you can add to your damage dice pool. While a knife may do only a base of two levels of damage in the hands of a weak character, this same knife does eight dice of damage — easily killing an unarmored opponent — if the player rolls six successes on the attack roll. Thus, a skillful opponent can be just as dangerous as a strong one, or one with a powerful weapon.

Adding Up Damage

When a mage suffers multiple types of damage, the most dangerous types go on the top of the health track, while the rest "moves down" and fills up the mage's Health chart. If your mage

has suffered two levels of bashing damage then takes one level of lethal damage, you'll put an extra line through the top box of the Health chart — turning the slash into an "X" — and then add a slash to the next empty box. If your mage takes an aggravated wound, then the top box would get a vertical line through it, turning the "X" into an asterisk, while the next box would get slashed again into an "X" and yet another level of bashing damage would go on the bottom.

Soak

Characters can resist a certain amount of physical trauma; doing so is called soaking damage. Your character's soak dice pool is equal to her Stamina. Mages and other physically normal humans can only attempt to soak bashing damage (reflecting the body's resilience to such attacks). Mages cannot normally soak slashes, punctures, burns and other forms of lethal or aggravated damage. Life Effects (or various armoring Effects using Matter) are required to allow a mage to attempt to soak lethal damage. Vampires, werewolves and other supernatural monsters may soak both bashing and lethal damage, which is one of the many reasons such creatures are considered highly dangerous.

After an attack has hit and inflicted damage, the defender's player may make a soak roll to resist. This action is considered reflexive; characters need not take a turn or take a multiple action to soak. *Unless otherwise stated, all soak rolls are made versus difficulty* 6. Each success on the soak roll subtracts one level of damage from the attack. Like damage rolls, soak rolls may fail, but they cannot normally botch.

Example: *Mioshi the Shinto Dreamspeaker has a Stamina of 4. A mugger wielding a club attacks her and scores three levels of bashing damage. Mioshi may soak this attack with four dice (one for each point of her Stamina). She rolls 1, 7, 9, 8. The 1 cancels out one success, leaving two successes. She avoids two of the three health levels inflicted by the club, taking only a single level of damage. If the mugger had used a knife instead, she would not have been able to soak this damage, and she would have taken the full three health levels of damage.*

Cinematic Damage

In high-action games, mages will be standing up to gunfire, screaming through the streets at high speeds and generally living on the edge. For such a chronicle, you may choose to alter the soak rules. Like anything else, you can change the rules freely to suit your game, but this particular case bears special mention because it's a simple change that can have a profound impact on the game.

For a high-action game, just allow mages to soak lethal damage with a difficulty of 8. This mechanic still makes lethal damage nasty, but it gives a small margin of success for weak attacks and makes deadly combat much more survivable. Of course, if you use this rule, you should apply it to other mages and mortals, too; mages are physically indistinguishable from humans anyway.

Note that doing this can easily encourage a game to become an action-fest, and it can even get somewhat ridiculous ("That bullet just bounced off his chest?"), so take care.

Armor

Armor absorbs damage, so it adds to your character's soak. The armor's rating adds to your character's base soak for purposes of reducing damage. Even better, armor also provides protection against all forms of lethal damage and most purely physical forms of aggravated damage. A character with a Stamina of 3 who is also wearing [two dots of] armor has five soak dice versus bashing damage and two dice versus lethal and (physical) aggravated damage.

Light armor offers a small (but often essential) degree of protection but does not hinder mobility. Heavy armor provides a lot of protection, but it slows your character down significantly. Unfortunately, armor is not indestructible. If the damage rolled from a single attack equals twice the armor's rating, the armor is destroyed. If you want to get complex, you can go with penetration ratings; each time the armor is penetrated (an attack scores more damage than the armor's rating), the armor loses one rating until it's gone. Armor types and their ratings are described on page 244.

Combat Maneuvers

Opponents can fire back and forth at one another all day, but where's the variety in that? These maneuvers give you many choices for what your character can do in combat. Instead of merely rolling to hit, damage and soak, you can plan your character's moves and work out (hopefully) effective strategies. Most of the maneuvers listed here take one action to execute.

General Maneuvers

• **Aborting Actions:** You can abandon any declared action in favor of a defense as long as your character has one or more actions remaining. A successful Willpower roll versus difficulty 6 (or the expenditure of a Willpower point) is required for a character to abort an action and perform a block, dodge or parry instead. The expenditure of the Willpower point for this purpose may be declared at the time of the abort. Aborting an action is considered a reflexive and not an action in itself.

• **Ambush:** An ambush is a surprise sneak attack. The attacker pits Dexterity + Stealth in a resisted roll against the target's Perception + Alertness. If the attacker wins, she can make one free, attack on the target, and she adds any extra successes from the Stealth roll to her attack die pool. On a tie, the attacker still attacks first, but the defender is free to take a defensive maneuver. If the defender wins, he spots the ambush in advance, and both sides roll initiative normally. Targets already in combat cannot be ambushed. Of course, some situations may make it impossible to ambush a target. The Storyteller has final say about when an ambush is or isn't plausible.

• **Blind Fighting/Fire:** Close-combat attacks made in pitch darkness or when blind usually incur a difficulty penalty of two, and ranged attacks cannot be made accurately. A successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8) will allow a ranged attack at +3 difficulty, and various Forces, Mind, Life or Correspondence Effects can negate this penalty completely.

• **Flank and Rear Attacks:** Characters attacking a target from the flank gain one additional attack die, while characters attacking a target from the rear gain two additional attack dice.

Maneuver Characteristics

Combat Maneuvers typically have a difficulty of 6. Maneuvers with specific combat effects may modify the attack roll, the difficulty or the damage dice pool.

Traits: The Trait combination used for the action being taken. If your character lacks the needed Ability, default to the base Attribute.

Accuracy: The dice added to the roll to hit an opponent. A "+3" adds three dice to the dice pool for the maneuver.

Difficulty: Any additions or subtractions to a maneuver's difficulty (which is normally 6). A "+2" means the difficulty increases from 6 to 8.

Damage: The base damage dice pool used.

• **Movement:** Characters may move up to one half their maximum running distance and still act without penalty (see "Movement" on p. 223). Other maneuvers like jumping over obstacles or leaping down from a height may be considered separate actions, depending on their complexity.

• **Multiple Actions:** If you declare multiple actions, subtract dice from the total dice pool equal to the number of actions taken. Each action after the first loses an additional die. If a character spends an entire round performing purely defensive actions, the Desperate Defense rules apply instead (see below).

• **Targeting:** Aiming for a specific location adds to the difficulty of an attack, but it can bypass cover or armor as well as increasing the damage done by an attack. At the Storyteller's discretion, some targeted attacks (such as striking at a weapon) may have special results.

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage Modifier
Medium (arm, briefcase)	+1	none
Small (hand, head, laptop computer)	+2	+1
Precise (eye, heart, lock)	+3	+2

Defensive Maneuvers

Everyone in combat is assumed to attempt to avoid being hit. That's why attack rolls are necessary. No roll is needed to hit bound captives or others stationary, immobile targets who cannot avoid the blow. However, there's a significant difference between merely moving around in an attempt to avoid being hit while actively doing something else, and purposefully choosing to make defense your character's first priority.

You can announce that your character is taking a defensive action before any of the character's opponents makes an attack roll, as long as your character has an action left to perform. Defensive actions can be declared at the character's initiative or you can abort a planned action and perform a defensive maneuver instead. As stated earlier, aborting an action requires a successful Willpower roll. If the Willpower roll fails, the character performs the previously declared actions. Spending a Willpower point allows a character to abort an action automatically.

There are three defensive maneuvers: block, dodge and parry. Using these three maneuvers, your character can defend against almost any attack, but each of the maneuvers works best in different situations. For example, a character can dodge any attack, even one coming from an uncertain source. However, the character must have sufficient room to dodge. It is impossible to dodge while crowded in a narrow hallway. While blocking and parrying both require considerably less room, neither can be used if your character doesn't know where the attack is coming from.

Defensive maneuvers all use the same basic system. The defensive action is a resisted roll against the opponent's attack roll. Unless the attacker scores more successes than the defender, he fails to hit. Even if the attacker succeeds, the successes you gained in the defensive maneuver are subtracted from the attacker's successes, lowering the potential damage of the attack. Even if it fails to stop a blow, a defensive maneuver will usually lessen it.

• **Block:** A Dexterity + Brawl maneuver that uses your character's own body to deflect bashing hand to hand attacks. Lethal or aggravated attacks cannot be blocked unless the defender is wearing armor, using magic or using some sort of specialized training (like the Do of the Akashic Brotherhood).

• **Dodge:** A Dexterity + Dodge maneuver where the character simply jumps, bobs or weaves out of the way of a hand-to-hand attack. Dodging requires several feet of space, and characters must block or parry if there isn't room to maneuver. Dodging missile weapons is also possible, but the character must move at least one yard and end up prone or in cover. At this point, cover rules apply against further attacks by guns and other missile weapons. Unlike the other two maneuvers, you do not need to specify the attack being dodged. Choosing to dodge means that the character dodges the first attack directed at her in a turn, unless you choose specifically to dodge a particular attack.

• **Parry:** A Dexterity + Melee maneuver that uses a weapon to block a hand-to-hand attack. If an attacker makes a Brawl attack and the character parries with a weapon that causes lethal damage, the attacker can actually be injured by a parry. If the defender rolls more successes in the resisted action to parry, the defender may make a normal attack roll plus any remaining successes against the attacker.

Each of these defensive maneuvers can be performed as part of a multiple action. A parry followed by a weapon strike, or a shot followed by a dodge, are popular and exceptionally useful combinations. While both maneuvers are less efficient than when performed alone, combining an attack with a defensive maneuver allows your character to do both in a single turn.

• **Desperate Defense:** Sometimes, all a character wants to do is to avoid being hit. Instead of using defensive maneuvers as part of a multiple action, you can state that your character spends the entire turn defending using a single defensive maneuver. This action is called desperate defense. The normal multiple action rules are not used for all-out defense. Instead, your character has her full dice pool against the first attack, and loses one die (cumulatively) for each subsequent defensive action made in that turn. Remember also that all actions, including defensive actions, suffer difficulty penalties against multiple attackers. Avoiding multiple

attacks is more difficult than avoiding one, and avoiding attacks from several different targets is even harder.

Close-Combat Maneuvers

The following is merely a list of the most commonly used close-combat maneuvers. Feel free to develop other more specialized maneuvers for your character (subject to your Storyteller's approval). Most Brawl attacks do bashing damage, while most weapon attacks do lethal damage. Look for the type of damage after each maneuver, and see the Melee Weapons chart for further information. Magic, circumstance or simply dramatic effect can modify the difficulty and damage level of all maneuvers listed here. Remember that even in combat, a good, exciting story should always take precedence over rules.

• **Clinch:** On a successful attack roll, the attacker grabs the target and begins to squeeze. On the first turn the attacker rolls Strength dice in damage. On each succeeding turn, both attackers act at their normal initiative. Each combatant can either inflict damage automatically (roll soak normally) or attempt to break the clinch. No other actions are possible until one combatant breaks free. To escape a clinch, make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. If the escaping character succeeds she breaks free, otherwise the clinch continues for the next turn.

Traits: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength (Bashing)

• **Close:** It is difficult to attack with a short weapon like a knife or a punch when facing someone with a sword or baseball bat. A character facing an attacker with a longer weapon must close in one yard and then strike. Closing causes the character to lose one die from the attack roll.

• **Disarm:** When striking an opponent's weapon, the attacker must make an attack roll at a difficulty penalty of one (typically 7). If successful, the attacker rolls damage normally. If the successes rolled exceed the opponent's Strength (with no soak roll), the opponent takes no damage, but is disarmed. A botch usually results in the attacker dropping her weapon instead, or taking normal damage if attempting a disarm while bare-handed.

Traits: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Special

• **Hold:** Intended to immobilize a target, this attack inflicts no damage. On a successful roll, the attacker holds the target until the subject's next action. Then, both combatants make a resisted Strength + Brawl roll. The subject remains immobilized and unable to take any physical action until the player rolls more successes than the attacker.

Traits: Strength + Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** None

• **Jab Pistol:** On a successful roll, the character jabs a pistol directly against the opponent's body and pulls the trigger. When used at this range, the damage is considerably higher; add two dice of damage to all such attacks. (If using rubber bullets, the damage is not increased, but it becomes lethal.) This maneuver is not for the faint of heart, and it often results in the character being covered in gore. Also, a skilled opponent can disarm someone using this attack. Since the gun is being used

as a hand-to-hand weapon, the Melee Skill is used. Only pistols can be used for this maneuver.

Traits: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** By weapon type + 2 (Lethal)

• **Kick:** Kicking covers everything from a simple front kick to a leaping side kick. The base attack roll incurs a difficulty penalty of one, and the base damage equals the attacker's Strength plus one die. Both ratings may be modified at the Storyteller's discretion, depending on their difficulty or potential damage. Steel-toed boots and similar foot gear usually raise kick damage by one or two.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +1 (Bashing)

• **Multiple Opponents:** Characters fighting multiple opponents in close combat suffer cumulative attack and defense penalties of one per additional opponent (to a maximum of four). A character who battles three opponents at once suffers a difficulty penalty of two to all attack and defense rolls.

• **Strike:** The attacker lashes out with a fist. The base damage is the attacker's Strength. At the Storyteller's discretion, more complex or difficult punches may do more damage.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength (Bashing)

• **Sweep:** The character uses her own legs to trip an opponent. The target takes Strength damage, and the player must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 8) or suffer a knockdown (see "Maneuver Complications," p. 242). The attacker can use a staff, chain or similar weapon to perform a sweep. The effect is the same, but the target takes damage based on the weapon used.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/Melee **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Str/per weapon type (Bashing), knockdown

• **Tackle:** The character rushes her opponent, tackling him to the ground. This attack roll for a tackle incurs a difficulty penalty of one, and it inflicts Strength +1 damage. Both combatants must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7) or suffer a knockdown (see "Maneuver Complications," p. 242). If the target (but not the attacker) is not knocked down, he is unbalanced and suffers a difficulty penalty of one to all actions for the next full turn.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/Do **Difficulty:** 8
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength +1 (Bashing)

• **Weapon Strike:** A stab, slash or overhead swing, depending on the weapon used. See the Melee Weapons chart on page 243 for further information.

Traits: Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Normal **Damage:** Strength + Weapon (See Melee Weapons chart)

Ranged Combat Maneuvers

Today, most lethal combat involves firearms. The following maneuvers are a list of the basic actions possible during a firefight. Don't feel limited only to maneuvers on this list; Storytellers can allow other creative maneuvers at their discretion. See the Ranged Weapons chart (p. 243) for specific information on various weapons.

• **Aiming:** Attackers add one die to their attack pool for their next shot for every turn spent aiming. The maximum number of dice that can be added in this way equals the character's Perception. Characters must have at least one dot of Firearms to aim. A scope or laser sight adds two more dice to the attacker's pool in the first turn of aiming (in addition to those added from Perception). Attackers may do nothing but aim during this time. Also, it isn't possible to aim at a target moving faster than a walk unless the character is using a laser sight.

• **Automatic Fire:** The weapon unloads its entire clip of ammunition in a single attack against a single target. The attacker makes an ordinary attack roll, adding 10 additional dice. However, the attack gains a difficulty penalty of two due to recoil from the weapon. As always, extra successes add to the weapon's damage dice pool. When using automatic fire, the attack cannot target specific parts of the body. Only weapons capable of fully automatic fire can use this maneuver.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +2
Accuracy: +10 dice **Damage:** Special

• **Cover:** Hiding behind large objects makes you harder to hit. As such, taking cover increases the attacker's difficulty to hit a target, as well as the target's difficulty to fire back. All cover types list both the increased difficulty for someone attacking a target in that type of cover and the increased difficulty caused by firing from such cover. Note that difficulties for combatants who are both under cover are cumulative. If one combatant is hiding behind a telephone pole and other has ducked behind a wall, attacks by either one against the other have a difficulty penalty of two.

Cover Type	Difficulty To Be Hit	Difficulty To Hit
Light (lying prone, hiding behind a telephone pole)	+1	0
Good (behind a wall)	+2	+1
Superior (only head exposed)	+3	+3

• **Multiple Shots:** An attacker may take a multiple action and fire several shots in a turn. As always, the first shot's die pool decreases by the total number of shots fired, and the dice pool of each subsequent shot decreases by an additional die, cumulative. The attacker can fire any number of shots up to the weapon's maximum rate of fire. See the Ranged Weapons chart for details.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** Normal
Accuracy: Multiple Action **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Range:** The Ranged Weapons chart lists the short range for each weapon. Attacks made at this range are versus difficulty 6. Twice this range is the weapon's maximum range. Attacks made up to maximum range are versus difficulty 8. Attacks made against targets within two meters are considered point-blank. Point-blank shots have a difficulty of 4. Actually shoving a gun against someone's body is considered a close-combat maneuver (see p. 240).

• **Reloading:** Reloading requires one full turn, but it does not require a roll. Like other maneuvers, reloading can be performed as part of a multiple-action sequence.

• **Strafing:** Instead of aiming at a single target, weapons capable of fully automatic fire can affect an entire area. Strafing adds 10 dice to accuracy on a standard attack roll and empties the weapon's clip. The attacker divides any successes gained evenly among all targets within the area being strafed (these successes add to the targets' damage pools normally). A maximum of three yards can be strafed with this maneuver. The large amount of recoil from this maneuver increases the difficulty by two.

Once successes have been divided evenly, the attacker assigns any leftover successes as desired. If fewer successes are rolled than there are targets, only one may be assigned to each of the targets who are affected. If only one target is within this area, only half the successes affect him.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +2
Accuracy: +10 **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Short Burst:** The attacker gains two additional dice on a single attack and expends three to five shots from the weapon's clip. Only specially designated weapons may perform this maneuver; see the Ranged Weapons chart for details. Attacks incur a difficulty penalty of one due to recoil. As with automatic fire, the damage dice are based on a single bullet from the weapon.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** +1
Accuracy: +2 **Damage:** Weapon type

• **Two Weapons:** Firing two weapons does more damage, and it looks very intimidating. Sadly, it is also more complicated. Attacking in this fashion is considered a multiple action. In addition, the attacker suffers a difficulty penalty of one for her off hand (unless she is ambidextrous). By performing even more multiple actions, the attacker takes multiple shots with each weapon, up to their fire rates.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Difficulty:** Normal/+1 off hand
Accuracy: Multiple Action **Damage:** Weapon type

Maneuver Complications

Characters encounter the following combat complications most commonly. The Storyteller may add others as desired, of course.

• **Blinded:** Blinded characters incur a difficulty penalty of two to all actions. Also, add two dice to all attack rolls made against blind characters. Certain magical Effects negate these penalties.

• **Dazed:** If a character takes more than his Stamina in damage from a single attack (Stamina +2 for supernatural monsters), the character is dazed. The character must spend his next full turn shaking off the affects of this attack. Only actual damage levels that the character does not soak can daze him.

• **Immobilization:** Add two dice to any attack rolls made against an immobilized target (i.e., targets who are clinched, handcuffed or otherwise restrained) who is still able to struggle. Attacks hit automatically (and all dice in the attacker's attack pool are added to damage) if the target is immobilized completely (hog-tied, unconscious or otherwise paralyzed).

• **Knockdown:** The victim falls down, and the player may make a Dexterity + Athletics roll. If successful, the character may get to her feet immediately, but her initiative decreases by two for the next turn. If this roll fails, the character must spend her next action climbing to her feet. If this roll botches, the character lands badly and takes an additional level of bashing damage. Attacks directed against a prone character add one die. All Brawling or Melee attacks made by knocked-down characters take a penalty of two.

Maneuvers like a sweep, tackle and throw are all intended to knock targets down. However, any especially forceful attacks may send the victim sprawling on the ground. Such cases are best left to the Storyteller's discretion, and they should occur when they are most dramatically appropriate.

Special Weapons

Butterfly Swords: Looking like wide sabers or short cutlasses, these weapons are normally used in pairs, and they're designed for chopping and hacking your opponent into many pieces. When using two of these weapons in a multiple action (to make two attacks, two parries or one attack and one parry), trained characters gain one additional die for each attack or parry. This benefit results in a loss of only one die from the first action and two dice from the second.

Fighting Chain: Known as a manrikigusari in Japan, this weapon is a heavy chain that is approximately one inch thick and six to eight feet long with plum-sized weights on either end. While this weapon does not do enormous amounts of damage, its flexibility means that all attempts to parry or block it suffer an increase by two in difficulty. In addition, the chain wraps around either the opponent's body or weapon if the block or parry fails (respectively). At this point, the attacker can use the chain to knock an opponent down or disarm her if the attacker can succeed in a Strength + Melee roll resisted by the target's Strength + Athletics.

Nunchaku: A Japanese weapon composed of two heavy sticks joined by a short chain. They are twirled rapidly spinning and striking from unexpected directions. While nunchaku are more difficult to use than most weapons, they can be used in pairs like Butterfly Swords (one extra die to multiple attacks).

Sai: This Japanese weapon was originally adapted from a short, three-pronged pitchfork. It was designed as a sword catcher, and it aids a disarming maneuver greatly. Using this weapon to attempt to disarm someone reduces the difficulty of the attack roll by two (typically down to five).

Shuriken: Also known as throwing stars, these small weapons do little damage. However, they can be thrown in groups easily. Instead of using the normal multiple attack rules each additional shuriken thrown adds one to the difficulty of the roll and one die to the damage dice pool.

Tonfa: Derived from an Okinawan rice-grinder, a tonfa is an L-shaped piece of wood that can be used both as an effective club and a blocking aid. To block, the tonfa is held by its short side so that the longer portion protects the user's forearm. When used to aid a block, the difficulty of the block roll decreases by one. The tonfa also allows the user to block weapons (even ones that do lethal or aggravated damage) safely.

Close Combat Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Block	Dex + Brawl	Special	Normal	(R)
Clinch	Str + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str (C)
Disarm	Dex + Melee	Normal	+1	Special
Dodge	Dex + Dodge	Special	Normal	(R)
Hold	Str + Brawl	Normal	Normal	(C)
Jab Pistol	Dex + Melee	Normal	Normal	Weapon +2
Kick	Dex + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1 or 5
Parry	Dex + Melee	Special	Normal	(R)
Strike	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str or 4
Sweep	Dex + Brawl/Melee	Normal	+1	Str (K)
Tackle	Str + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1 (K)
Weapon Strike	Dex + Melee	Normal	Normal	Weapon

(C): The maneuver carries over on successive turns.

(K): The maneuver causes Knockdown

(R): The maneuver reduces an opponent's attack success.

All attacks made using Brawling do Bashing damage, except when striking the head.

All attacks made with Melee do either Bashing or Lethal damage depending on the weapon used.

Ranged Combat Maneuvers

Maneuver	Traits	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Automatic Fire	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
Multiple Shots	Dex + Firearms	Special	Normal	Weapon
Strafing	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
3-Round Burst	Dex + Firearms	+2	+1	Weapon
Two Weapons	Dex + Firearms	Special	+1/off-hand	Weapon

Melee Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Difficulty	Conceal
Sap	Strength + 1 B	Normal	P
Club	Strength + 1 B	Normal	T
Knife	Strength + 1 L	Normal	J
Saber	Strength + 2 L	Normal	T
Katana	Strength + 3 L	Normal	T
Axe	Strength + 3 L	Normal	N
Butterfly Knife	Strength + 2 L	+1 in pairs	J
Nunchaku	Strength + 2 B	+1 in pairs	J
Tonfa	Strength + 1 B	-1 to Block	T
Sai	Strength +1 L	-2 to disarm	J
Fighting Chain	Strength +2 B	+1	T

"B" denotes a weapon that does bashing damage. "L" denotes a weapon that does lethal damage.

Ranged Weapons

Type	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal
Revolver, Lt. (.38 Special)	4	12	3	6	P
Revolver, Hvy (.44 Magnum)	6	35	2	6	J
X-5 Protector (revolver)	6 (or special)	40	3	8	J
Pistol, Lt. (9mm)	4	20	4	17+1	P
Pistol, Hvy. (Colt .45)	5	30	3	7+1	J
X-5 Protector* (semi-auto)	5 (or special)	40	4	12+1	J
Taser	5	5≠	2	2	J
Rifle (30.06)	8	200	1	5+1	N
SMG, Small* (Ingram Mac-10)	4	25	3	30+1	J
SMG, Large* Uzi (9 mm)	4	50	3	32+1	T
Assault Rifle* Steyr-Aug (5.56 mm)	7	150	3	42+1	N
Shotgun (12 Gauge pump)	8	20	1	5+1	T
Shotgun (12-Gauge semi-auto)	8	20	3	8+1	T
Crossbow	5	20	1	1	T
Compound Bow**	4	30	1	1	N
Shuriken	2	5	Special	1	P

Damage: Indicates the damage dice pool. All firearms, bows and crossbows do lethal damage, except tasers, which do only bashing damage.

Range: This is the maximum normal range in yards. All ranged weapons can be used at twice this range, but such long-range attacks are at +2 difficulty.

Rate: The maximum number of bullets or short bursts that the gun can fire in a single turn. This rate does not apply to full-auto or spray attacks, only one of which can be made in a normal turn.

Clip: The number of shells a gun can hold. The +1 indicates that a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

Concealment: P = Can be carried in a pocket; J = can be carried in a jacket; T = can be hidden in a trenchcoat; N = impossible to conceal

≠ 5 yards is also the maximum range at which a taser can be used.

* Indicates the weapon is capable of three-round bursts, full-auto and sprays.

** Indicates that this weapon requires a minimum Strength 3 to use.

Armor

Class	Armor Rating	Penalty
Class One (reinforced clothing)	1	0
Class Two (armor T-shirt)	2	1
Class Three (Kevlar vest)	3	2
Class Four (flak jacket)	4	3
Class Five (full riot gear)	5	4

Armor adds its rating to the character's soak dice pool against bashing, lethal and aggravated damage. However, armor also subtracts a number of dice from dice pools related to bodily coordination and agility (most Dexterity-based dice pools). The number of dice subtracted is listed in the penalty column. Attackers may target unprotected portions of the defender and thus ignore the armor rating. The Storyteller assigns difficulty penalties for such targeting, usually +1 for Class One-Three armors and +2 for Class Four and Five armors.

X-5 Protector: This weapon is the premier handgun used by the Technocracy. Made entirely of composite material, it is effectively invisible to metal detectors, although X-ray and others sensors will still reveal its presence. This weapon can hold a wide variety of different types of ammunition, including all of the special ammunition listed. All polycarbonate ammunition for the X-5 is caseless, which allows the weapon to hold more shots. This property prevents the bullets from being detected by metal detectors as well.

The X-5 comes as either a revolver or a semi-automatic, both of which are equipped with laser sights. When using the revolver, the character can select any of the different types of ammunition loaded in the weapon at the touch of a button. The semiautomatic version lacks this feature, but it is capable of both automatic and burst fire. When using gas or explosive shells, a computerized firing mechanism allows the user to cause tear gas and explosive shells to explode anywhere along their flight path. It is possible to cause a shell to explode above or beside a target that is impossible to hit directly.

Taser: Tasers shoot tiny darts that are connected to the gun by thin wires. Tasers are quite easy to use, generating a reduction in difficulty. Also, once the darts have hit, the attacker can shock the target repeatedly on the following turn, unless the target either moves more than five meters from the attacker or uses a full action to remove the darts.

Special Ammunition

Ectoplasmic Disrupters [damage: 5, aggravated, special]: These bullets are available only to agents of the technocracy and a few Tradition mages (mostly Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether) who have stolen or duplicated them. They are designed to track a wraith's ectoplasmic residue. Detonating in contact with an ectoplasmic trail they explode in a blast of energy that damages wraiths and other undead, but they do not affect humans or other living creatures. When they are manufactured, these bullets must be infused with Quintessence using Prime 2. However, they are considered extraordinary devices, not Wonders.

Explosive Shells [damage: 6, lethal]: In effect a miniature grenade, this shell can be used only in shotguns or the X-5 Protector. When this shell explodes it does six dice of damage to anything it hits. Reduce this damage by one die for every yard away from the target that it explodes. If used in a shotgun, these shells explode on impact, but if used in an X-5 Protector, the shell can be set to detonate anywhere along its trajectory.

Flechettes [damage: 7, lethal]: Flechettes are tiny, nail-like darts that can be fired in vast numbers from special shells in any shotgun or in the X-5 Protector. Flechettes are exceptionally good at penetrating normal, modern body armor. Subtract two from the value of all armor against which they are used. Flechette shells are quite rare and highly illegal. Note that flechettes have a tendency to flatten ineffectively against hard surfaces, so old metal armor or high-tech composite laminates may actually get double their normal defensive value.

Incendiary Rounds [damage: 4, aggravated]: Made of phosphorus and other similarly flammable compounds, these bullets catch fire in air and do burning damage to any target they strike. In addition to the initial damage they do, incendiary bullets also ignite any flammable objects, as well as doing two dice of aggravated damage the next round.

Rubber Bullets [damage: varies, bashing]: Rubber bullets do the same damage as normal bullets. However, since they bounce off targets instead of penetrating, they do bashing instead of lethal damage.

Taser Bullets [damage: 5, bashing]: These Technocracy-created bullets consist of a specially reinforced firing casing and an exceptionally powerful capacitor that discharges a high-voltage blast on impact. The effect is identical to that produced by a taser, except that taser bullets are fired as ordinary bullets and have a much longer range. Taser bullets cannot be recharged, but they can be manufactured using advanced, but mundane means. Unlike tasers, taser bullets do not receive a bonus to hit. However, like tasers they do affect targets for two rounds. Initial damage from taser bullets is bashing, as with a rubber bullet.

Tear Gas [damage: special, bashing]: Useable only in shotguns or the X-5 Protector, tear gas shells create a cloud of tear gas over a two-meter radius. Unless they succeed in a soak roll, everyone in this cloud takes one level of bashing damage every round. In addition, everyone in the gas cloud must reduce all dice pools by two as their eyes tear up and they cough and choke. These reduced die pools last for 30 minutes after leaving the cloud. Wearing a gas mask or similar protective gear will protect the character from all effects of tear gas. Unless used in a small sealed room, tear gas dissipates within 20 turns indoors and 5 turns outdoors. If used in a shotgun, these shells explode on impact; if used in an X-5 Protector, the shell can be set to detonate anywhere along its trajectory.

Teflon Bullets [damage: varies, lethal]: Teflon bullets are simply ordinary bullets coated with Teflon. They are designed to penetrate armor and reduce the value of any armor they are used against by one die. Use of Teflon bullets is highly illegal. Shotgun shells cannot be Teflon coated.

Health

As mentioned earlier, your character has a Health chart consisting of seven health levels. Being physically mortal, injury, accident and disease can all impair mages seriously or even kill them.

The Health Chart

The Health chart on the character sheet helps you track your character's current physical condition. It also lists the dice pool penalty imposed by each level of injury taken. The more your character is injured, the less effective she is, until she eventually becomes completely incapacitated or dies. The seven health levels range from Bruised to Incapacitated. Characters can also be at full health (no injury boxes checked) or dead. Each unsoaked damage level that your character takes causes one health level of damage which must then be marked off on you character sheet. The mark made depends on the type of damage inflicted (see "Applying Damage" on p. 246).

The number immediately to the left of the lowest marked box is the character's current dice penalty. Since serious injury

also results in loss of function, this penalty becomes more severe the more your character is damaged. This penalty subtracts from your character's dice pool for all actions (but not from reflexives like soak) until the wounds heals. As can be seen from the Health chart, injuries also impair the character's movement.

Health

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty	Movement Penalty
Bruised	0	Character is bruised a bit, but he suffers no penalties from damage.
Hurt	-1	Character is hurt superficially, and he suffers no movement hindrance.
Injured	-1	Character suffers minor injuries, and his movement is inhibited mildly (halve maximum running speed).
Wounded	-2	Character suffers significant damage, and he may not run (though she may still walk).
Mauled	-2	Character is injured badly, and he may only hobble about (three yards/turn).
Crippled	-5	Character is catastrophically injured, and he may only crawl (one yard/turn).
Incapacitated	n/a	Character loses consciousness from the pain and trauma. No actions are possible.
Dead		Tag 'im, bag 'im, notify his next of kin.

Applying Damage

As noted earlier, there are three types of damage in **Mage**. Bashing damage includes all forms of temporary injury, bruises, minor cuts and other damage caused by punches, clubs and similar forms of blunt trauma. Lethal damage consists of permanent, killing wounds, including those caused by guns, swords, knives or other deadly weapons. Humans die quite easily from lethal damage. Aggravated damage covers damage from magic, supernatural monsters and particularly deadly sources like high levels of radiation. All three types of injury are cumulative, and the combined injury determines your character's current health level. Specifics on each type of damage follow:

Example: *Ithica the Hermetic is researching ancient magic at a node when a werewolf attacks her. She has already taken a level of bashing damage from a rock the werewolf threw. (Ithica's Health chart is noted with a "/" in the Bruised box). The werewolf then closes and attacks her with it's claws, doing two levels of aggravated damage. Ithica's chart is now marked with an "*" in the Bruised and Hurt health levels, and a "/" in the Injured box (essentially moving the rock's damage two levels down the chart). The combined damage subtracts one die from all her action pools. In a desperate effort, she strikes her staff into the ground and channels the node's Quintessence into a deadly blast, killing the werewolf instantly.*

Bashing Damage

Bashing damage is damage that temporarily injures or incapacitates. While sufficient amounts of it can kill, it doesn't inflict bleeding injuries. This is primarily blunt trauma: fist attacks, battering, short falls (under 20 feet), or Mind attacks. This also includes energy or chemical attacks that are designed to render the victim unconscious, such as stun guns or knockout gas. When a character who is Incapacitated due to bashing damage takes further bashing damage, each additional new bashing level of damage (while soaked like bashing damage) is marked with a second slash on the highest bashing level of damage, changing it into a level of lethal damage. In this way, bashing levels turn progressively into lethal damage levels. Once your character's Health chart fills with lethal damage, the next level of damage, whether bashing, lethal or aggravated, kills her. While it is difficult, it is quite possible to punch or kick someone to death.

Lethal Damage

Lethal damage is damage that causes tissue dissociation (read "bleeding wounds more severe than pressure cuts"). This includes damage that tears, punctures, rends, or lacerates the skin, as well as impact damage severe enough to rupture internal organs and chemical attacks that kill large groups of cells. Knives, bullets, pipe bombs, falls of more than 20 feet, icepicks, stampeding elephants, drowning, mustard gas, and blunt trauma to the head are all sources of lethal damage. Lethal damage is intended to kill or maim, and anyone using weapons that cause it is willing to kill his opponent. Some less direct, but equally deadly forms of damage like electricity and most poisons also do lethal damage. Lethal damage heals quite slowly, and a character usually requires medical attention or magical treatment before he can recover fully. When a character has been brought to Incapacitated solely though lethal damage, the next level of damage inflicted (regardless of type) kills the character.

Aggravated Damage

Some damage is so severe and deadly that even the most powerful magic has great difficulty repairing it. Damage caused by vulgar magic that attacks the victim's Pattern directly falls into this category, as does damage from attacks made by the fangs, claws and unnatural powers of supernatural monsters like werewolves and vampires. In addition, damage that affects the character's whole body, like radiation, or exposure to vacuum, explosions or other massive trauma, is also aggravated. Aggravated damage can be healed only by using vulgar Life Effects or with time and rest. On top of that, a mage must spend a minimum of one point of Quintessence to heal each level of aggravated damage. In all other ways, aggravated damage should be treated as ordinary lethal damage. It takes just as long time to heal, and it makes a mage just as dead.

Healing Damage

Healing Bashing Damage

Bashing damage up to the Wounded level does not require medical care; it will heal on its own in a few hours. Bashing damage beyond Wounded may have more serious consequences. Your character's vision or hearing may be impaired from a concussion, or internal bruising may cause her excruciating pain. In all cases, proper medical treatment (or the right magical Effect) will remove such problems.

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised to Wounded	One hour
Mauled	Three hours
Crippled	Six hours
Incapacitated	12 hours

Once bashing damage reaches Incapacitated, further bashing wounds are "X'd" over previous bashing levels, making them lethal. At that point, recovery times for lethal damage apply.

Healing Lethal and Aggravated Damage

Lethal damage can easily be deadly, hence the name. Lethal wounds bleed, become infected or otherwise continue to worsen on their own. Only Life magic or medical treatment can prevent such problems. Any lethal damage beyond the Hurt damage level requires medical treatment to prevent the wounds from degrading.

Untreated lethal wounds worsen by one level of lethal damage per day. If severe wounds go untreated long enough, the character will die. However, any successes on an Intelligence + Medicine roll will stabilize the wound sufficiently so that it can heal normally. Even after initial first-aid has been administered, characters who have been reduced to Crippled or Incapacitated require frequent medical attention in order to recover fully. Incapacitated characters require constant attention to keep them clean and fed since they are essentially helpless and immobile. If a character Incapacitated by lethal damage receives any further damage (of any sort), he dies.

Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

Recovery

Minor wounds simply require time to heal. However, medical attention or magic is required to recover from bashing damage worse than Wounded or lethal damage greater than Hurt. The accompanying chart lists the time required to heal various levels of damage. In all cases, the times listed are cumulative. A character who has taken three levels of lethal damage requires 11 days to recover fully (one day + three days + one week). A character who has taken two levels of lethal damage and one level of bashing damage would require one hour of rest to recover the bashing level, and four days to recover the two levels of lethal damage.

The recovery times listed in the healing charts assume that the character receives only rest and basic first aid. These times can be reduced significantly if the character is treated with modern medicine. If the character is treated by a fully trained physician (two dots in Medicine) using the full range of normal modern drugs and treatments, the character heals each health level at one category faster on the Health chart. For long-term recovery of lethal damage, the character must see a physician at least once a week. Crippled and Incapacitated characters must instead see a physician once a day. If the character interrupts this treatment at any point, future healing occurs at the normal rate until treatment resumes.

If a highly skilled physician (four or more dots in Medicine) treats the character with access to the best modern medicinal techniques he recovers each health level at two categories faster on the health chart. If this treatment is interrupted, normal healing rates apply. Also, without magical assistance, each level of bashing damage still takes at least one hour to heal, and each level of lethal damage takes at least one full day to heal. Of course, the proper use of Life Effects can speed healing time greatly.

Example: *Aeon, a wealthy Virtual Adept, is attacked by muggers and left for dead. His Health is reduced to Crippled from two levels of bashing damage and four levels of lethal damage. Fortunately, he is rushed to a state-of-the-art hospital where his excellent personal physician (Medicine 4) and treatment are such that he heals all injuries two categories more quickly. He heals the Crippled and Mauled bashing levels in only an hour each, and the Wounded level of lethal damage in three days. From there, each level of lethal damage requires only a single day to heal, putting Aeon back on his feet in six days and two hours instead of over a month. When it comes to medicine, it pays to use the very best!*

Other Sources of Injury

Combat is only one of many methods by which a character suffers damage.

Disease, Drugs, and Poison

Drugs and diseases affect all mortals, causing effects ranging from minor impairment to rapid, painful death. While there are numerous drugs, poisons and diseases that your character may encounter, the effects of some common ones are listed here:

- **Alcohol:** Every two drinks taken causes one die of bashing damage. The dice-pool reductions fade as the character recovers. Extremely heavy drinking can produce effects that last for many hours after the last drink; this damage represents hangovers and similar effects.
- **Cocaine/crack/speed:** Characters taking strong stimulants receive an extra action every turn, just as if they had used a Time Effect to speed up (but without the danger of Paradox). However, taking cocaine and similar drugs also tends to make characters recklessly overconfident, and the character takes two levels of bashing damage for every dose she has taken once the drug wears off. Repeated dosages will put off this backlash, but the result will be even worse once the drugs wear off. One

dose of cocaine or crack generally lasts for only an hour, while one dose of speed lasts up to six hours.

• **Hallucinogens:** Drugs like Peyote, LSD and Psilocybin mushrooms produce mildly to radically altered perceptions depending on both the drug taken and the dosage. At minimum, your character reduces all dice pools by one to three dice because the character is distracted and has difficulty concentrating. In addition, stronger hallucinogens will actually cause your character to perceive sights, sounds and other sensations that are not actually present. At the Storyteller's discretion, hallucinogens may also increase or decrease the difficulty of performing certain magical Effects. While a Son of Ether may simply be less able to work her inventions, a Dreamspeaker or Ecstatic may receive a temporary reduction to the difficulty of all magic involving Spirit or Time. All of these effects generally last between six and 12 hours. Hallucinogens cause no direct damage.

• **Heroin/morphine/barbiturates:** Each dose subtracts one from the character's Dexterity-based dice pools and inflicts one level of bashing damage. However, these drugs also deaden pain significantly. Each dose taken also subtracts two from all die-pool penalties caused by injuries.

• **Marijuana:** Pot alters your character's sense of time, produces a moderate feeling of euphoria and reduces all dice pools involving Perception by one die. However, marijuana does no outright damage to your character, and the effects fade within an hour or two.

The Toxin Rating

Most disease, drugs and poisons that do actual harm do bashing damage, but particularly deadly examples actually do lethal damage. Regardless of the type of damage done, all such forms of harm have a Toxin Rating indicating the levels of damage caused. Since only a few rare poisons created by the Nephandi and the Technocracy are capable of doing aggravated damage, Life Effects can heal most such injuries.

Once all damage from a disease has been healed, the patient is cured. The following table lists the damage caused by a few common diseases or poisons. Those that do bashing damage are followed by a (B), while those that do lethal damage are marked with an (L). In all cases, the damage indicated by the Toxin rating is the damage from one dose of the poison, or the full-blown manifestations of the disease. Multiple doses are cumulative. Most diseases that do lethal damage continue to affect their victims until the victim is treated or dead.

Toxin Rating	Disease	Poison or Drug
One	Cold (B)	Alcohol (B), Cocaine (B)
Two	Chicken Pox (B), Measles (L), Food poisoning (B)	Methanol (L)
Three	Influenza (B), Pneumonia (L)	Ptomaine (B)
Four	Tuberculosis (L)	Ammonia (L)
Five	AIDS (L)	Bleach (L)
Six	Black Plague (L)	Strong Acids (L)
Seven	Ebola (L)	Cyanide (L)

Electrocution

Electricity can be both a source of extreme danger and a potent weapon. The strength of the electric current determines the amount of lethal damage a character takes from electrocution. She suffers the listed damage dice each turn until contact with the electricity halts. Contact with electric current locks the victim's muscles, which sometimes causes the character to be unable to pull away from the current. In such cases, roll Strength versus a difficulty of 9 to pull away. As stated previously, electrocution always causes lethal damage that is not soaked by most armor.

Health Levels/Turn	Electrical Source
Two	Minor; wall socket
Four	Major; protective fence
Six	Severe; junction box
Eight	Fatal; main line feed, subway rail

Characters who are reduced to Incapacitated due to electrical injuries may suffer permanent damage from burns and nerve damage. This damage can take the form of physical impairment (reduced Physical Attributes), brain and nerve damage (reduced Mental Attributes), or disfigurement from burns and scarring (reduced Appearance). The degree and type of this damage is up to the Storyteller.

Falling

When climbing or jumping, a botched Dexterity + Athletics roll normally results in a fall. The character takes one die of bashing damage for every 10 feet (round down) that she falls before hitting something solid. Falling damage may be soaked normally, but landing on sharp objects usually causes lethal damage. Falls of more than 100 feet result in the character reaching terminal velocity. The maximum damage from a fall is 10 dice. However, falls of more than 100 feet are considered lethal damage unless the character lands on something specially cushioned. Even worse, any armor your character wears in a terminal-velocity fall functions at only half its rating (round down), since armor is not designed to cushion falls.

Fire

Widely regarded as one of the most horrible forms of injury and death, fire can do tremendous amounts of damage to a character quite rapidly. The size of a fire determines the number of damage dice it inflicts on a character every round of exposure. Fire damage is always aggravated — that is the nature of fire,

releasing Patterns to turn them back into chaotic Quintessence — and armor not designed specifically to resist heat does not protect against it. Should a character have some (usually magical) method of soaking the damage from a fire, the heat of the fire determines the difficulty of this soak roll.

Health Levels/Turn	Size of Fire
One	Torch; a limb or similar sized part of the body is burned
Two	Bonfire; half the character's body is exposed to flame
Three	Raging inferno; the character's body is engulfed in flame

Soak Difficulties	Heat of Fire
3	Heat of a candle (first-degree burns)
5	Heat of a campfire (second-degree burns)
7	Heat of a Bunsen burner (third-degree burns)
8	Heat of an electrical fire
9	Heat of a chemical fire
10	Molten metal or lava

Suffocation and Drowning

Air is necessary for all human life, including mages. Humans can hold their breath for a length of time depending on their Stamina (see the chart). Characters can extend this time by spending Willpower points. Each point spent gives the character another 30 seconds. If a character cannot obtain breathable air when this time runs out, she will suffocate or drown at the rate of one health level a turn. This damage heals like bashing damage, but it cannot be soaked, nor does it even need to be rolled. Suffocation damage is automatic, and the character dies one turn after reaching Incapacitated. However, anyone trained in first aid (Medicine 1+) can resuscitate the character if the resuscitation is supplied within five minutes. If the character drowns in cold water, this time extends by up to half an hour.

Stamina	Holding Breath
1	30 seconds
2	One minute
3	Two minutes
4	Four minutes
5	Eight minutes
6	15 minutes
7	20 minutes
8	30 minutes

"Tell me about the magic castle again! Tell me about the knights and the wizard and the dragons. Please tell me again," the little boy pleaded, hopping up onto his bed. "Just one more time, please." He squirmed, his eyes bright, as he looked up at his erstwhile mentor.

The old man chuckled and gently patted the young man's head fondly. "Very well, one last time, but I think I have told you this story at least ten times in the last week. You never tire of it, do you?"

The boy moved his hair out of his eyes. "No, I love hearing about it. It's much better than the things in the books at school." He put on a happy smile to charm the old man.

Smiling at the boy in return, the old man made himself comfortable. The wizened wrinkles of his aged face creased under his pleasant gaze, and he seemed for a moment the very visage of a wizened sage. "Where do you want me to start? The beginning again, or at a certain point?"

"Hmmm," the boy mused, obviously thinking about the proposition. "I don't know, start where you want to start. No, wait! I want to hear about how the place was started. And of the men that built it. And the guardians that protected it. I like hearing about them."

With a contented look upon his face, the man looked out the window and was quiet for a few minutes. Finally he took a deep breath and spoke in a reverent tone. "Long long ago, there lived a collection of scholars and magicians. These were men and women of great learning, and great vision. But in those times, as now, people feared what they could not understand or did not know. So these men decided to build a castle in the sky, away from the eyes of men. They gathered together the best builders to make the walls strong and thick. And the mightiest warriors, to watch the walls and keep all in side safe. And when it was done, they made a field of light around it, to make it so that none but those invited could approach."

For a moment, the boy screwed up his face, trying to picture a cloud castle surrounded by light. Then he jumped off his bed and pulled out his box of blocks. "Show me what it looked like," he said dumping the contents of the box all over the floor.

The man knelt down and started to put blocks together. "If I remember right, the walls were shaped like this." His wrinkled hands moved with surety as he built the keep proper. "The inner walls were like this. And the building was full of all sorts of rooms and halls and secret passages."

The boys' eyes widened as he scooted closer. "Show me! How did they work? Where do they go?"

The elderly man smiled and pointed to the main keep. "In the main hall, behind one of the tapestries was a block you could push. And it opened a door." He traced his finger across the floor to a spot a foot away from the block castle. "It came out here." The man tilted his head to the side then, hearing something, and patted the boy on the head softly. "I hear Nana coming. You better get ready for bed. I will come and talk to you tomorrow."

The door to his room opened a crack and Nana stuck her head in. "Time for bed, Tomas. Who was that you were talking to?"

Thomas crawled under his covers and laid his head on the pillow. "Oh, no one really, Nana. Just Mister P."

Nana smiled and nodded with the knowing look of an indulgent babysitter. "Oh, him again. Well you say hi to him for me next time you see him." She shut the door and walked down the hall. "Little boys and their overactive imaginations. But I love them anyway."

Chapter Seven: A History of the Ascension War

Mages have existed alongside humanity for all of history (and prehistory). From the earliest shamans, priests and sorcerers to the modern physicists and philosophers, humans have sought means to control, shape or explain the universe. When two cultures meet, their knowledge and methods of the world inevitably clash. The Ascension War is the greatest and most important of all such conflicts. Each of the four factions of mage society champions a reality that is completely incompatible with the other three.

In these modern times, there is no room for bystanders and fence sitters; only combatants and casualties. Those who do not fight to defend their ways are doomed to fade away — even history will forget them.

The Ascension War

There is a war.

It is a war fought for the hearts, minds and souls of humanity. It is a war of truth and belief, of faith and reality. It is not fought with swords, bombs, guns or spears; it is fought with words, ideology, thoughts and philosophy. Blood is shed and people die.

Mages call this conflict the Ascension War. The winners will do more than re-write history — they will write humanity's future. The victors will lay out the map of human destiny, whether that destiny leads to descent into genocidal war, unification through technology or a celebration of individual Ascension.

Four factions battle for the right to define this truth, and the stakes are high. One faction says truth is personal, another that truth is universal. A third claims there can be no truth. And the fourth, if it could form an opinion, would claim that truth is mutable.

The Reckoning

There once was a war.

The Ascension War is over, according to the Technocracy. The Council of Nine nearly falls when a long-dead menace returns to lay waste to Concordia, and an explosion heard around the Tellurian heralds the annihilation of Doissetep and the loss of many of the Hermetics' greatest mages. These two blows weaken the Traditions greatly. Coupled with Sleeper

advances in cloning, genetic engineering, neural-interface technology, the recent mapping of Mars and improved treatments for AIDS and cancer, these events show the increasing acceptance of the Technocratic paradigm.

The "losers" have their own opinions. Their magic works, new willworkers Awaken regularly (if not often) and pockets of humanity persist where the old ways still dominate. However, there's no hope for a war to return the Mythic Age now. Humanity has chosen, and its choice is to remove all responsibility from itself. Magic, mysticism and inspiration belong to those who will grasp them, but they will no longer — and never again — be tools for all humanity. The Ascension War appears to be over.

More ominously, the mysterious appearance of a red star that shines across the Umbra with a corrupted light gives rise to speculation that darker powers still have trumps to play. Perhaps more disturbing, mysterious storms sweep the Dark Umbra, an event that awakened several maleficent and powerful spirits of the dead. On a final note, the Union faced and destroyed a vampire of godlike power; perhaps only one of several. The world is unraveling, and it seems that the signs of Armageddon are near.

A History of the Awakened

The Beginning

Magical thought derives from two basic — and incompatible — philosophies. The first states that the power to alter reality flows from within, from personal enlightenment. The second defines magic as an external process — either via communion with deities and powerful spirits, or through the use of tools to observe, measure and control the universe. Either method allows the Awakened to manipulate reality through force of will. All other refinements evolved from this division into the incredible variety extant in the modern day.

The Awakened have always been rare. The shard of sentient Prime that allows the use of magic is the birthright of a very select few (perhaps one person per two or three million in the present day). Worldwide Awakening is theoretically possible through mass Ascension, but few modern mages believe there was ever a time when any human being could alter reality with a thought. Through insight and power, magic-workers have guided humanity through example (not control) for all history. Through the examples they present, the events they set in motion and the knowledge they present to the un-Awakened, mages remain a potent and *subtle* force in human development.

At no time in human history (including the present) have mages ever actually controlled human society. Even the Technocracy guides by example rather than tyranny.

The earliest mages had many names, titles and labels. The Verbena refer to the Wyck, who wandered the Earth as a force of primordial change. The Akashic Brotherhood claims that its Tradition arose from a village where all humanity was one, while its rivals among the Euthanatoi find the origin of magic in the first human comprehension of mortality. Whoever the first mages were, they were said to have performed great deeds and lived for centuries. Paradox, as it is known today, may not have even existed — the membrane that divides the possible and impossible was very thin and tenuous indeed.

In the early days, the division between the mages (who worked magic and acknowledged it as such) and the philosopher-scientists (who believed all phenomena derived from a set pattern of elements, laws and equations simply waiting to be discovered) sprang up from the same roots. It was centuries before the division of philosophies led to serious conflict. Such philosophical conflict served more as a friendly rivalry than as the bloody Ascension War of modern times. Further divisions within the two schools of thought further divided mages into loose associations — the Traditions had not yet come into being. Mages simply existed on the sidelines of human culture, expanding their power and knowledge, using it for personal goals, whether beneficial or harmful to the Sleepers around them. With the more fluid boundaries of reality, mages had much more freedom to explore different possibilities and ideas. This time period (prehistory to 3000 years ago) is usually referred to as the Low Mythic Age.

Human culture expanded, evolved and diversified. Many cultures grew and defined themselves — with or without mage influence — and the free flow of possibility settled or stagnated. The world of this time was a patchwork of culture and paradigm. Humans fought wars for territory and commerce — and mages fought alongside them to expand their paradigms into other areas. One god's worshippers battled another's for the right to control worship and define the paradigm. New philosophies and governments vied against each other for dominance. Tribes, cities and eventually nation-states contested for the right to control territory, populations and even belief. The victors established magical possibility in a region simply by converting the population over a period of generations to their ways. Most such conflicts were unintentional, but over time, mages saw the effect human belief had on their magic. They discovered that beliefs favorable to their methods made magic easier and competing magic more difficult. These mages fought to establish territories where their philosophies prevailed and defended them against all comers. This time began the High Mythic Age. The benefit was a flowering of magical and scientific thought, of variety in philosophies previously undreamed.

The High Mythic Ages also saw a division of magical arts: the reality-shaping magic of the Awakened and the more static exploitation of magical law by those who lacked the potential for such. Sorcery — the use of magical laws and theories to shape the world in a predictable manner — arose during these times. As reality's boundaries solidified, mages found that their arts became more difficult to apply. That the great powers they drew upon in past times were bounded by increasingly narrow restrictions. They could still call on their powers, but Paradox would strike down those who stepped too far outside the

boundaries. Eternal life, levitation of mountains and fortresses, huge storms or the summoning of otherworldly allies became increasingly difficult. Different schools of magical thought evolved as the restrictions forced greater definition of cause and effect, from backwoods witchcraft to high Hermetic Art. Alchemy, high philosophy, miracle working, spiritual communion, physical sciences, artifice construction, worship and faith, refinement of the Self and consciousness alteration all sprang up from older practices. The various schools allied with and turned against each other, and bitter conflict ensued on several fronts. The Order of Hermes was perhaps the first to adopt a policy of extermination toward different magical thought, but it spread like wildfire through magical societies.

The constant strife distracted mages from Sleeper society. Plague, famine and persecution spread like wildfire through mundane populations as the Awakened neglected them to battle over the relative truths of science versus sorcery. Sleepers didn't need the help of battling wizards to start warring among themselves (mankind has always excelled at conflict), but the mages' vicious battles inflicted vast areas with the taint of Resonance from such destruction, causing greater misery to spread through both Awakened and Sleeper populations. The sins of the few poisoned the well for everyone. As a consequence, Paradox drew an even tighter noose around the fluid possibility of magic and the Sleepers grew disenchanted with magic-workers.

The Ascension War

The true war for the Sleepers' hearts and minds began in 1325, when an alliance of philosopher-scientists, the Order of Reason, allied under the tenet that a single unified truth was a better option than a thousand warring possibilities. Unique among magical societies of the time, they shared a common vision and purpose. The Order declared war on "... Sorcerers, Nightgaunts, Faerie, Boggies, Wytches, Dyvells, Changelings, Werebeasts, and all divers Creatures of the Night." The Order sought to break the supernatural hold over humanity through the promotion of science and reason over mysticism and magic.

Each of the Order's Conventions had different methods to achieve the same goals. Craftmasons sought to divine common patterns among the spheres of influence (also called the Prime Elements or the Keystones). Meanwhile, the Cabal of Pure Thought's soldiers joined Sleeper Inquisitors in hunting and stomping out the supernatural, aiding them with "God-given" magic. Even in the Far East, emperors and shogun sponsored the high philosophers and artificers who aided them in overcoming their foes. University instructors and religious leaders taught and preached the ascendancy of humanity over nature while attacking magical rivals. The shifting beliefs from the fantastic to the rational distanced the Penumbra from the material world — thus thickening the Gauntlet. Void Seekers plotted courses to distant lands while the Celestial Masters mapped the known world. Conquistadors and colonials brought the Order of

Reason's ideals to other continents and nations, destroying native cultures and replacing them with more acceptable beliefs. The Pogrom had begun.

Progress was slow but implacable. Although Paradox struck down the earliest advances (flying machines, cannon, clockwork soldiers), persistence, ferocity and the subtle use of propaganda through Sleeper society made it possible to guide humanity toward a more acceptable world-view. The process worked even better than the Order of Reason had expected, as Sleeper scientists took hints and expanded them into full-fledged fields of study, creating technologies and originating ideas the Order hadn't imagined. The Order's more militant branches continued to hunt down, kill, convert or drive away the mages.

The mages looked for a scapegoat — at first, they lashed out at each other or the Sleepers around them. As the tides of humanity shifted away from them and warfare and plague spread across the world, even the Awakened in other lands and continents felt the repercussions as the Order of Reason progressed slowly toward its vision of One World, One Belief. Finally, the mages realized that something had to be done. Over a century after the Order of Reason's founding, three mages of rival orders — a Hermetic wizard, a Christian miracle-worker and a descendant of the primordial Wyck — decided that the internecine battles must end. With help from other like-minded mages, they traveled the Earth in search of others amenable to their goals and gathered a convocation of Awakened to establish an alliance for mutual protection from the Order's attacks.

The mages rallied around the vision of personal "Ascension" and the restoration of magical wonder to the world, and they brought their magical might to bear. Unfortunately, the newly founded Council suffered setbacks from the beginning. One Tradition disbanded, another virtually walked out, and internal dissension raged. Many Traditionalists held to the Council's ideals, but the Council of Nine lacked the Order of Reason's unity of purpose and philosophy. The Mythic Ages came to a brutal end.

The Age of Reason

Without a strong rival to oppose the Order of Reason, it brought its own vision of Ascension to the world. The Order sought to subjugate and convert all cultures it came across. Many good works were done in the name of science and progress, but the Inner Circle of the Order eventually lost sight of its goals. The leaders of the Order chose instead to exploit the resources and wealth of other lands and capture and burn "devil worshippers." The Order performed great deeds, but it ravaged entire civilizations in the name of advancement. The world shook under the clash of new innovations against age-old belief.

The Nephandi exploited the rise of the Industrial Revolution. They latched onto the Order's greed, leading them to progress at the expense of the human spirit. The Marauders, always at the fringes, exploded in numbers and power in an almost "allergic" reaction to the increasingly rigid restrictions on magical possibility. The Traditions continued to feud among themselves or hide from the Order's soldiers. African and Native American shamans brought grievances before the Council of Nine against their European brethren for excesses wrought in the name of "colonialism," but they were rebuffed or ignored. Many quit the Council altogether, returning to their homelands to die or suffer enslavement along with their people. The Order of Reason, reorganized as the Technocracy, taking full advantage of the erupting chaos.

The mystic backlash of the 1800s along with the addition of two new (and unpredictable) Conventions to the Technocracy (the Electrodyne and Difference Engineers) gave the Traditions an extra edge. Subtle mages reminded a future-shocked world of the wondrous past. Primitivism, occultism, radical art, religious revival, ethnic resurgence and magical societies captured imaginations across the civilized world and undermined the Technocracy's paradigm.

The Technocracy reviewed its mission and goals. The Void Seekers and Celestial Masters left earth to guard the Horizon against menaces from the Deep Umbra, the last vestiges of faith and religion were purged from the new Order and the race for new and better devices — flying machines, automobiles, tanks, machine guns and poison gas — was on.

Global War

The First World War shocked the Technocrats out of their complacency. For the first time, they saw the widespread, horrific consequences of their once-benevolent ideals. Most of an entire generation of young men died in trenches, fighting for a few feet of ground at a time. Machine guns, poison gas and other weapons of terror made war a bloodier proposition than ever seen before. The Technocracy suffered a schism as the more idealistic members sought to undo or minimize the damage they'd allowed to happen, while others charged full-bore, intent on pushing progress to the limit. Nephandi reveled in the bloodshed, using it to further their hideous goals. Some engineered carnage on a grand scale as offerings to their malefic masters, while others sought it as a diversion. The Traditions exploited the Union's schism, using their new foothold to explore new possibilities in fiction and art.

The Second World War tore through both the Council of Nine and the Technocratic Union as mages and scientists alike divided against each other across national and political lines. The Union's Inner Circle voted unanimously to support the Axis in a bid for global unification: Over half of the Symposium walked out in disgust. Even the most loyal Technocrats worked against Hitler's regime when the depths of atrocity became apparent. Purges and vendettas raged within the Union as hideously efficient war machines rolled off assembly lines. The Council, crippled by constant infighting and the Ahl-i-Batin's defection, divided against itself with equal ferocity. Many Hermetics, Sons of Ether and Verbena sided with the Axis, Chinese and Japanese Akashics attacked one another viciously. The Difference Engineers violated direct orders from the Inner Circle and supported the Allies openly. Numerous Marauders Awakened in the midst of the warfare, driven mad by the mass slaughter of millions through atrocity and on the battlefield. The Nephandi, on the other hand, prospered in the midst of such carnage.

Rumors claim that as the body counts grew, the Inner Circle suffered its own internal conflict. The Technocrats who supported the Allies' cause won and briefly allied with the Council of Nine to expel the most powerful Nephandi back to the Outer Darkness. Like the wartime Sleeper alliance, this too fell apart as soon as the war ended. Word of the Technocratic revolt was silenced and the Pogrom resumed. The Virtual Adepts, decimated by Technocratic retaliation for their disobedience, defected to the Council of Nine, filling the Ahl-i-Batin's seat. From the war's chaos and aftermath, all sides suffered. Virtual Adept Alan Turing's death ripped a hole in the Gauntlet into a virtual reality called the Digital Web, creating a new front for the Ascension War. The shadows of mass media, pollution, weaponry and nuclear power stacked the deck in the Technocracy's favor.

Technocratic Victory...

Technology and scientific knowledge continues to advance at a frantic pace — no single human can hope to keep up. Sleeper society clamors for the next advancement — the newest microprocessors, cellular phones, medicines, movies, etc — and the Union is only happy to oblige. Sleepers push advances along all possible lines of inquiry, seeking explanations for all aspects of the universe, from the most common traits of life to the farthest reaches of the universe. Nearly all aspects of visible reality have been named, defined and explained.

The Traditions have lost. The Ascension War is over. The Crafts worldwide have been destroyed or forced to align with the Traditions for safety. Gone are the days when Tradition mages could attack the Union on its own world-wide terms and hope to succeed. Now they must work quietly, as far behind the scenes as possible with as much subtlety as they can muster. Today, they war for the freedom to let mankind define his own reality, and for their very survival.

...Or Defeat?

With the burgeoning expansion of knowledge through scientific inquiry, several Technocratic scientists have noticed that the Union's philosophy, first established in the 14th century, cannot define or explain everything, nor eliminate such deviant factors. With each year, these flaws grow larger and larger, and the Technocracy is hard-pressed to find a way to close them up before the Traditions find ways to exploit them — such flaws mark the advancement of many Etherite theories into the Consensus.

Despite the Technocracy's theories, mystic mages continue to work their powers in defiance of "scientific law." Sleepers beat the Technocracy to the newest invention occasionally, while ultra-tech devices fail from their own complexity and audacity. The Technocratic Union can't explain everything, and its fear at what it cannot explain only grows. Internally, some elements favor harsher sanctions against the

supernatural, while others desire to discover and incorporate the stranger elements that refuse to leave the world.

The most crippling setbacks come from Sleepers themselves. Founded originally to defend humanity from the excesses of the supernatural and promote the common good with the spread of science, the Technocracy has followed its credo too far and too blindly. It has continued to exterminate mages and supernatural creatures as part of an indoctrinated program from centuries ago. It removes all power of choice from the hands of the Masses, convinced that Sleepers are not competent to guide their own destinies. However, it divests the Sleepers of free will, imagination and dreams in doing so — the very qualities necessary to make advances and more Enlightened scientists possible at all. The world "settles" instead of seeking out new answers and new puzzles. Sleepers are content and complacent in their modern world. Change is eradicated by the mandate of the Masses, forcing even the Technocracy to conform to the lowest expectations. The Traditions can no longer bring magic back to a world that doesn't want it, but the Technocracy may be next, if their own vision of the future is exchanged for a banal, unchanging world where the Sleepers demand nothing more, nothing new and nothing different.

Only time will tell how successful the Union will be....

Tears slide down Del's face as he carries Melissa into to his haven, kicking the door almost off its hinges in his rush to get her to somewhere safe. He does not even pause at his sanctum's door; with an ear-shattering scream he shatters it with his own rage. Setting Melissa's body on the floor he digs thought his books, talking to himself because he has nobody else to blame.

"We are gods!" he screams. "I rule this world! *Nothing* happens here without my design! She can't die — I will not *let* her die!" He tears books from the walls, from the shelves; he grabs at sigils, designs, patterns and devices. Yanking open an ancient tome he flips through pages quickly, his mind racing. "Constructs, spirits, monstrosities — *none* of them can fight me. *None.* I am master of my own life! Not a slave to chance... random bullets... the same *stupid* crimes that hit everyone else. Not me! Not *us*!" His eyes move from the book to Melissa's body, blood slowly leaking out of the bullet wound cutting up across her chest. Gazing at her the tears start to flow again. "No, I must concentrate, no time now. No time at all."

He returns to the book and reads over several passages quickly, nodding to himself now and then. In his fevered mind the magic takes form. After twenty minutes of reading he puts the book down and looks around his room to be certain that he has all that he needs.

His path clear in his mind, he moves quickly around the room, gathering all that he will need. Setting it all down next to Melissa's body, he slowly looks her up and down and sighs to himself. "I can't live with out you. I will not live with out you." Taking a knife from his things he slowly cuts her clothing off, careful not to scratch her skin. "Soon love, soon."

Pulling the now ruined clothes out from under her, he throws them to the corner and sets about positioning her correctly, legs spread, arms straight out, head tilted back. He mutters to himself, building his own confidence in his actions: "Yes, just like this. Soon you will be back with me." He picks up the knife again and slowly begins to carve symbols on her desecrated flesh, taking time to be sure that they are all correct, not one out of place. Over the next hour he slowly works, covering her from head to toe, his eyes wide and wild at what he is doing but pressing on. When she is done he stands and looks over his work, checking again and again to make sure that all is correct. Seeing that it is all as it should be, he sprinkles chalk about her in a tight circle; the chalk picks up slowly flowing, congealing blood. Another, larger circle follows the first; he takes his time to make sure they are perfect. From a bag of silvery powder he casts down sigils, symbols of power that gather energies around her body and prevent her spirit's flight; with a damp finger he traces the silver glyphs on her body and on the floor inside the circles. Each step takes all of his concentration in turn. Finally, he takes four black candles and places them by each of her limbs, followed by a red one that takes its place near her head. A whispered invocation brings flame to each candle and then he starts to chant. From deep in his chest a guttural, inhuman sound bubbles forth: "Unuway, wingwog ga, sultay, urla." Again and again, he repeats the simple but damning phrase.

After six incantations the light dims, the candle flames lower. Shivering, Del casts his gaze futilely about the room as a voice susurratingly hisses through the air. "What do you want?" it speaks. "What do you want?" it repeats, almost like an echo.

Dell gathers himself up and forces himself to speak through his dry mouth. "I want her back. Bring her back to me."

A dry chuckle fills the room. "Just that? Very well. And my price?"

Shaking his head Dell speaks louder, confident in his sacrifice. "Anything you wish."

Suddenly, all light flees from the room. With a sudden flash it returns only moments later. There on the floor is Melissa, siting up and looking at her body. She slowly glides her hands across her now flawless skin. Taking Del's hands in hers she pulls him down on to her. "Come here my love. We have much to do."

Chapter Eight: Storytelling

In the Beginning...

Long before the written word — before records and books and computers and video tapes — humans crouched around the fire and told stories to each other. They did so to scare away the dark, to comfort, to impart information, to teach morals and to entertain.

Let us tell each other a story.

I'll tell you of a mage, growing into her power, learning to survive and adapt in a world that's become totally alien, yet utterly familiar. You'll tell me of her trials and tribulations, of the lessons she must learn, the places she visits and the people she meets. I'll weave from your words a tapestry of what she does, how she feels and what she says. We shall craft this story together, you and I, and together we shall see it come to completion.

Sound like fun?

Then stay tuned.

Make no mistake, storytelling can be hard work. It takes hours of thought, research, plotting and scheming. It takes a quick and agile mind, capable of reacting to the player's every plan and concept. It takes panache.

But when it all comes together at story's end — when the players stand and cheer or sit awestruck at the sight of some wonder — all the time and effort is worthwhile.

That is when you are truly a Storyteller.

What is a Storyteller?

The Storyteller is the cornerstone of a **Mage** game. While the players act out the role(s) of their characters, the Storyteller directs everything and everyone else in the game. When the characters stop at an all-night diner, it's the Storyteller who speaks the role of the waitress, the bus boy and the rednecks who are pretty damn sure that the characters are up to no good. When the characters get into a fight, the Storyteller adjudicates the action (with the help of the dice), controls their opponents, determines when (or if) reinforcements show up and decides what happens to all of the handgun rounds that miss. And when they perform some mighty ritual, it's with the Storyteller's help that that ritual is conceived and realized.

It sounds like a lot to manage, and it is. Storytelling is not something that everyone can do well. But this chapter will give you the tools you need to be an effective Storyteller. We'll show you how to lay the foundation for your chronicles with ideals and themes, build the walls with intriguing stories and sub-plots and create the soaring arches with characterization and development.

Some Dos and Don'ts

Before we get started on all of the deep mysteries of thematic considerations, building a chronicle, telling stories, characterization, special effects and all of the other cool stuff,

let's talk about some basic things a Storyteller needs to do (and avoid) in order to have a successful chronicle:

Master the rules; don't be mastered by them.

The rules are a tool to assist you and your players in adjudicating what happens. They aren't necessary for everyone, and they are not the be-all and end-all of the game. When they don't make sense, change them. If you don't like them, ignore them. Never give them more power over your story than you have.

To put it another way: Don't ever let the rules get in the way of telling a good story.

Show; don't tell.

Use every one of the characters' senses to show the universe around them. Describe everything they see, feel, touch and taste. Encourage your players to do the same. When they want to talk to someone, make them roleplay it out; when they do something, have them describe how. Let them elaborate their motions, mannerisms and emotive responses. Make them conscious, all the time, of the world around their characters and how they interact with it.

Keep the pace of the game moving.

There are 168 hours in a week. So when you are playing, you should be playing. Deal with all of the administrative stuff (handling experience, setting up the next meeting, character issues, rules questions) outside of game time whenever possible. Spend a whole meeting time before you start up the game just to take care of such questions and to build compelling characters. Spend a half-hour or so after each game decompressing and letting your players catch up on their experience and their questions about how the game ran. Don't waste precious game time on these issues.

Keep the players involved.

Ask your players questions about the game, listen to the answers. Try to incorporate their characters' back-stories and background ideas into your setting when possible. Doing so takes some of the world-building load off your shoulders. Make sure their characters have things to do. While idle hands may not do the Devil's work, bored players can be the death of a chronicle.

Keep records.

Write down everything that you think might be important about the game. If you tell them the Virtual Adept loves Kung Pao chicken, write it down. If you give them a clue about a Nephandic opponent, write it down. If they find the address for their enemies' secret lair, write it down. Laptops work really well to keep this information straight, if you can afford one. If not, keep a pad of paper and a pen in your Storyteller's toolkit.

Prepare ahead of the game session.

Many Storytellers like to play things fast and loose, preparing only very little ahead of the session, making things up as they go. Improvising thus gives them lots of flexibility during play, but it can be utter death for a **Mage** Storyteller. **Mage** is such a freeform and flexible setting that, a Storyteller can get swamped by things that need to be made up, adjudicated and guessed at without some advance preparation. While this fluidity also makes it hard to prepare ahead of time, there are some basic pieces that the Storyteller can prepare ahead of time to make her life a little easier. These pieces include characters the Storyteller knows the players' characters are likely to meet, places he knows they are likely to go and contingencies for things they are likely to do.

Don't abuse the stereotypes.

Think about how many times you see the anarchic Virtual Adept, the unfeeling MiB, the slovenly security guard and the punctilious bureaucrat in **Mage** chronicles. If you need both hands to count the occurrences, you may be overusing stereotypical characters. Mix things up instead. Try characterizing a MiB who is a Grateful Dead fan, hates DEA agents and is secretly in love with one of the characters. Or the bureaucrat who really is trying to help people, cutting through red tape and paperwork for cases that she thinks are worthy. See how your players react to an alert and careful security guard, a quiet bartender who just doesn't care about their problems or the computer nerd who actually has a life outside of his parent's basement. These characters are the people your players will remember. Keep your characters varied and interesting, and you will keep your players on their toes and interested.

Remember your limits.

While you shouldn't be afraid to stretch your limits as a Storyteller, you should have an idea of what you do best. If you know you are a good guns-'n'-blood action type Storyteller who can't stand deep mystery stuff, don't build a chronicle based around Hercule Poirot and Agatha Christie. If you do, you'll be miserable, and so will your players. Of course, you shouldn't be afraid to try new things. Rather, you should try them in the context of a chronicle that has a different focus. For example, if you are running a mystery game, and you've never run a sheer combat-focused scenario, don't be afraid to throw one in (keeping your players in mind, of course). If you do well, and your players enjoy it, then you can always run a more combat-oriented chronicle later. If you decide you don't like that style, there's no lasting harm done, and you can move on with your original chronicle unharmed.

Don't lord it over the players.

Nobody hates a bully, and it can be easy for a Storyteller to turn into one without even meaning to. The Storyteller is the final authority, but that authority should be used in pursuit of having fun. If you demand that it's your game, and that your players must do what you want or else, you will find it solely your game. While one-player games can be interesting, no-player games aren't all that much fun... or, at least, they aren't any more fun that just plain writing.

Don't be too stingy... or too generous.

This warning applies to almost everything: information, rewards, praise, criticism, success and failure. If you make your players work hard for their accomplishments and then deny those accomplishments at the last moment, your players will feel cheated. Conversely, if you give them things with no effort and no sense of

achievement, they will similarly feel cheated. Walk the balance between feast and famine, and your players will thank you for it.

Don't Worry.

When the players hit you with a curve ball, when a character suddenly gets up and goes feisty on you unexpectedly, when the whole house of cards is crumbling down around your ears, relax. Call a break, take a deep breath, pull your thoughts together and puzzle through what is going to happen next. Better to call a break than to end up breaking your game. Surprises will occur a lot when you start storytelling, but you will become more able to predict what your players could do as you get more experienced, and you'll be able to handle things better. You'll also find that experience brings the ability to deal with unexpected situations more smoothly through improvisation. If the chronicle just gets to be too much, step away from it for a while and run something else for a couple of weeks. This point is a great time to let someone else take over, or to run a one-shot.

Inspirations and Beginnings

Mage is, at its heart, a game about ideas; how they mold us, how we mold them, the limits we set on them, the limits they set on us and how those synergies mold reality itself. It seems only fitting, then, that every good **Mage** chronicle starts with an idea or two. They might come from reading through this rulebook, or one of the supplements, something that struck you as particularly interesting. They might come from books you've read, or a movie you saw, or a comic you enjoyed. Maybe the world screamed out for more adventures, or maybe you weren't satisfied with the ones you read or saw. They could be something you made up on your own, or something someone mentioned once that resonated within you. Even songs can inspire. Wherever they came from, you need ideas before you can go any further with your chronicle.

Before you think too much about your new idea, you might want to consider who you are going to have playing in your game. In an ideal situation, you have enough gamer friends that you can invite the ones who will appreciate your game's concept, create characters that are appropriate for the game and cooperate with you by understanding the genre conventions and strictures that will make your game come alive.

In the real world, such is rarely the case, which means that you are going to have to compromise. If your original chronicle concept is about a group of Tradition Technomancers coming to terms with their Technocracy cousins, and one player comes up with an Akashic Brother and the other a technophobic Dreamspeaker, someone is going to have to compromise! Exactly who compromises for a game depends on the exact circumstances. In this particular case, you can probably get by with the original concept; the character concepts the players have come up with aren't completely unworkable. The Akashic can fit in, with a little work. You might propose a Gun Fu style modern martial-artist a la Chow Yun Fat or Jackie Chan. The Dreamspeaker is harder to reconcile into the game; you might have to simply ask the player to come up with a different character concept. But if your player is willing to work with you, you might be able to make the character work. Toning down the technophobia and giving the character some very strong ties to one or more of the other characters (so the character won't just get disgusted and leave) is a start.

Of course, if all of your players want to play Dreamspeakers, Hermetics and Verbena, you will be doing a lot more compromising in terms of your chronicle. In fact, you may need to go back and find a different concept for your chronicle under those circumstances — maybe a doomed fight against the Technocracy, or a group of "primitives" forced into an unlikely alliance with members of the Technocracy against a greater threat.

This point is also the one at which you need to talk to your players about what kind of game they want to play. If you want to run a quiet game of self-exploration and personal horror, and your players just want to kick Technocracy ass, there are going to have to be some discussions about differing expectations and how to accommodate them.

Listen to Your Players

You have to listen to your players throughout the chronicle, but most especially when you are setting up. Your players are going to have things they want to do, places or events that they want to see and ideas on what they think the chronicle is about, just like you do. While you may not be able to accommodate their every whim, you won't know whether you can or not if you don't talk to them about their wishes.

Of course, your players shouldn't necessarily get everything they want; sometimes what they want will mean that you won't have any fun running the game, and then what's the point? However, denying them everything they want means that they won't be having any fun either. As always, a chronicle is often a compromise between your desires and those of your players, with the end goal of everyone having a good time.

Keep Notes

All good Storytellers agree on the importance of keeping good notes, especially during the beginning of a chronicle. Whether you jot them into a small pad you carry in your back pocket, scribble them onto a PDA or set up a massive database on your computer, the notes you take will help jog your memory later. Write down character concepts, images that strike you while you are walking, little bits of dialogue you overhear or make up that you think might be useful, interactions between strangers on the street, even names of stores that you might want to incorporate into your game. Depending on your memory and your style, these notes could be fragmentary, meticulous or somewhere in between. They should vary as the need arises.

A Dying Magic

Now that you have an idea of what your chronicle will be about, you need somewhere to set it. You need a setting for your stories that will expose the wonders and powers that permeate a **Mage** story, somewhere that will reflect the themes and structure of your chronicle, and bring them into sharp focus. Some things to consider about the World of Darkness, when planning the locales your players' characters will visit include:

Loss of Hope

In the World of Darkness, hope might not be dead, but it's certainly on life support. So many people find their dreams crushed and their lives ruined (often for what seems to be no reason whatsoever), that most don't bother to even have dreams or aspirations anymore. For some, just surviving another day is too much to hope for.

Conspiracies of Shadow and Light

Shadowy conspiracies vie for control of the World of Darkness. Vampires rule the cities from behind networks of agents and ghouls. The Technocracy influences everything from the educational system to mass media. The Traditions still have their agents spread throughout different governmental and corporate groups, pulling strings and influencing actions. Hundreds of little conspiracies vie for control of everything from the local police department to the largest corporation. All of these groups expend time and effort in furthering their own agendas, counteracting those who are opposed to them (or that they think are opposed to them) and investigating those they know nothing about. Much of this energy is wasted, and it creates a level of casual paranoia and subversion in many of these same agencies and corporations that further drains those groups.

They Say the Earth is Dying

The World of Darkness is slowly decaying into entropy. The rainforests are all but gone, the cities are crumbling into ruins, and the seas fester under the weight of years of pollution and mismanagement. Even the most far-flung nightmares of the environmental movement in our universe are either already reality in the World of Darkness, or they are becoming so rapidly.

The End of the World as We Know It

The Millennium brings with it tales of devastation and woe, and predictions of worse. Even the Technocracy, it's rumored, has an "Apocalypse Forecast" that predicts the possible end of the Earth in the next few years. Millennial fever has struck the World of Darkness, hard, and it's tough to ignore the portents that the End Times are near. Some deny it, some revel in it, and others try their best to soldier on, all the time wondering why they bother.

This is the heart of the World of Darkness; a place of decaying grandeur, of quiet desperation and raging violence. Your cities should be dark and grim places, full of ruined buildings, boarded up houses and empty shops. The slums are dangerous, the suburbs mindless and the office buildings hopeless.

Hope and Change

But **Mage** is more than a reflection of desperate hopelessness. **Mage** is also about mysteries, wonder, magic and hope. The Awakened are agents of change, people who are uniquely capable, in a world of the powerless, to give their desires life, to bring a chance to those who have none — and your locales should reflect this aspect as well. Show your players the ancient university, struggling to hold on, but still full of subtle grandeur and wisdom; a community in the inner city, reclaiming its streets from the violence and brutality that once held it down. Give them the park in the center of town, all but abandoned by humanity, but claimed now by the Fair Folk and the werewolves. Make these places overgrown and seedy, with a savage sort of beauty.

Where you place your chronicle's "base" is an important decision, but don't feel pressured by anything other than your imagination. You can set your chronicle in Tokyo, Tunguska or the dark side of the moon if you want. There are no demographics that state that your hometown can't be a hotbed of Awakened activity. Mages go where they want to, where they are needed or where their destinies take them. Maybe your hometown is really a nexus for ley lines and occult powers, or maybe ancient Dreamspeaker shamans buried a hideous evil there ages ago that has warped the magic around your town ever since. This kind of background information doesn't even have to play a major part in your chronicle, though it certainly can.

Another thing you shouldn't worry about when using your own city as the background for your chronicle is strict accuracy. If your city has no high-tech industrial section, but you want to run games centered around the Technocracy, put in some technology centers or office parks on the outskirts. If you want a zoo for a particular scene, make one up, either in the city, or in a nearby one. After all, the World of Darkness is a reflection of our world, and doesn't have to be exactly the same. Altering things thus can hammer home the idea that the universe your characters reside in isn't exactly our own and that things don't always work the way they do here.

Chronicle of Ages

So now you have some basic ideas of what you want to do, you have a group of players who have some idea of what they want to play, and you have a setting in which to base your chronicle. Now it's time to start thinking about the chronicle itself.

A chronicle is the overarching story behind a Storyteller's game. Unlike campaigns in other games — which are often episodic and lacking in structure — a chronicle has a finite framework. It has a definite beginning, middle, climax and denouement. In this way, it's similar to a novel or series of novels, although the analogy is a very loose one.

A chronicle has no mandatory length. Rather, it should last long enough to tell a particular story or set of stories. A chronicle detailing the final few days of a corrupt cabal might last only half a dozen play sessions, covering two or four stories, while a chronicle about the rise and fall of a particular chantry might take years of play to cover, and dozens or hundreds of individual stories. It all depends on how grand your goals are, and how much you want to do. If you're not sure about how long you want to run, think small. Consider a single city, a specific theme, a simple purpose. ("This chronicle is about the time a group of Tradition mages found out about a *barabbus* Progenitor's plot to depopulate the Third World using hormone-laced genetically engineered crop seeds, and what they did about the plot. The theme is one of conservation, and that sometimes seemingly responsible actions have dangerous precipitators.") If you want to set up a longer-term game, think bigger. ("This chronicle is about a mixed chantry devoted to trying to undo the harms done to Sleepers by mages, and, when possible, to bring those responsible to justice. It will cover the creation, rise to prominence and eventual corruption and dissolution of the Chantry, over a century or so. The theme will be one of stewardship and responsibility.")

The key is that the chronicle does have, in fact, an ending, a place where the story is over. While there may well be chronicles that follow afterwards, based on the events in the previous chronicle, they are separate entities. They tell different stories, though some of the characters and places remain the same.

Chronicles are based around a theme, some concept or thought that binds the stories in the chronicle together into a seamless whole. The theme does not have to be central in every story, nor does it preclude other, lesser themes, in the whole chronicle or in a single story. But it is a thread that recurs in many of the stories of the chronicle, and it governs the chronicle's overall tone and feel. Some ideas that are particularly suitable for a **Mage** chronicle include:

With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

Mages have great power; of this fact there can be no doubt. Even apprentices can perform acts that would stun and amaze Sleepers. The characters are new apprentices, just learning to deal with their powers, and they have begun to feel the awesome burdens these powers confer. Common themes include sacrifice, honor, hope and responsibility.

The Ascension War

Although the Ascension War is essentially over, some cabals and Chantries refuse to give up, fighting on in some deluded attempt to remake the entire world in their image. Some fight because it's all they know, some because they have too much energy (physical, emotional and magical) invested in the war to stop now, and some because they think they have nothing better to do. For whatever reason, they have taken on a seemingly hopeless battle. This chronicle is well suited for a group of players who want a lot of action and aren't very

concerned about character survival. Relevant themes include loyalty, courage, sacrifice and the horrors of war.

Destiny's Pawns

Mages are masters of creation in control of their surroundings, their actions and their desires... or are they? The characters have been Awakened for some purpose that is often hinted at, but never brought to their attention directly. Their Avatars are powerful, and many have advantages like the *Dream* or *Destiny* Backgrounds. The characters may rebel against their destinies, or go along with them, but they will always be affected by what has been foretold. Themes for this chronicle include predestination versus free will, independence, rebellion and pride.

The Quest for Ascension

Many mages still pursue the goal of personal Ascension, even while not knowing exactly what it is they are looking for. The characters are pursuing Ascension more avidly than most, perhaps too avidly. This theme explores what the characters are willing to do to achieve an unknown reward. What price will they pay — what deeds will they commit — to achieve Ascension? Themes for this chronicle include greed, redemption, perfection, humanity, loyalty and compassion.

Exploring the Unknown

The Sleepers may think the world is all but totally mapped and codified, but mages and Technocrats know better. The characters are magical explorers, investigating the most remote corners of our world, and venturing off into others on occasion (if they can get past the Gauntlet, of course). In the course of their journeys, the characters will find terrible secrets, wondrous vistas and maybe solutions to some of their (or someone else's) problems. Common themes include responsibility, exploration, ethics and passion.

Unearthing Ancient Secrets

The players are seekers after ancient mysteries: relics from lost civilizations or mages, tomes of mystic knowledge and other sources of power. They might intend to harness these powers themselves, turn them over to those more capable of neutralizing or using them, or they might be trying to destroy them to prevent them from being misused. (Technocrats are especially prone to choosing the last solution.) This type of chronicle stresses not only discovery and exploration, but the lures of power and its many temptations. They also bring on the horrible terror of learning things Man was not Meant to Know, and questions of how the characters will deal with Things they Cannot Control.

Chains of Denial

Some mages revel in their Awakening and new-found powers, while others try to deny their heritage and abilities, seeking to stay "normal." Yet Awakening is not something that can be undone, and it will dominate her life forever once a person has walked the path of the mage. The characters refuse to acknowledge this fact for whatever reason, and they are trying to live as normal a life as possible under the circumstances. Of course, life has a way of confronting them with just how abnormal it becomes when one is Awakened.... Common

themes for this kind of chronicle include mystery, loyalty to family, responsibility, wonder, denial and illusion.

A Gathering of Powers

The characters are members of one of the remaining powerful chantries, scheming and plotting to gain power in the inner council of the chantry. They may have their own opinions on how the chantry should be run, or they may be supporting their Master, who is making a bid for leadership of the council. This chronicle stresses the internal power politics, intrigue, and betrayal in halls of the chantry, while chaos reigns outside. Themes appropriate for this chronicle include trust, friendship, corruption, and loyalty.

Guardians of Humanity

While the Conventions of the Technocracy proclaim themselves the defenders of the Masses, they are not the only Awakened to take on that role. The players are young mages who have set themselves up as defenders of a local community or city, trying to protect the Sleepers from the many dangers that wander the night. Of course, it can be difficult to tell what things that stalk the night are evil, which are misguided, and which ones are simply hungry in the World of Darkness. It is even harder to tell which of those who give you help do so out of altruism and which have their own agendas. Common themes include power, honor, corruption, loyalty and betrayal.

Forging the Chains

In many games, the group of characters is assumed to simply exist, sometimes for no good reason. The characters hang together because, well, they have to, or the game goes to hell. While this pseudo-unity can work for some types of games and for some themes, there are certainly better ways of organizing a party so that the characters have some reason (and advantage) for being together. The cabal exists for just this reason: to give the characters some common frame of reference, a purpose and a group that they can belong to.

Of course, before they can feel a part of a cabal, the cabal has to exist. Therefore, you and your players have to invent it. The cabal should definitely be a joint creation. If you simply create a cabal by fiat and assign all of the roles therein, it can easily stifle your players and make them very uncomfortable. Laying out some guidelines, and what you think you will need is great; laying down dictates is normally a bad idea.

Creating the Group

The first thing you need to do is determine the group's purpose in coming together. Are the characters thrown together by some disaster, or have they been handpicked for some purpose? Are they just the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons, or are they the wrong people, in the wrong place, for all the wrong reasons? Some reasons for cabals coming together include:

Tools of the Chantry

The characters are lower-ranking members of one of the few remaining powerful Earthbound Chantries, organized into a semi-independent cabal for some purpose by the ruling council of the chantry. This group would have access to powerful mystical — and possibly temporal — power when they can convince the chantry that it's needed, but it would also be subject to the whims of the council that created it, as well as the politics inherent in any large organization.

Weapons of the Master

Similar to the previous category, the characters are Apprentices of one of the last remaining Masters left on Earth (or one of the few who are able to breach the Gauntlet reliably). These characters will likely have much less support in terms of raw power, although having a master as a patron is never something to sneer at. However, they won't have to put up with the political games of a chantry either, which makes this option a good choice for players who dislike political games.

Wayward Apprentices

This cabal is caught in the lurch when its Master was either killed or had to retreat beyond the Gauntlet. Now the mages are simply trying to get by, with little power and even less knowledge. This concept is a great one for a group of new players. They don't have to know a lot about the World of Darkness, because their characters don't necessarily either (and an experienced player or two might play servants of the missing mage, or lower-powered allies). It can also be a refreshing change for jaded players, who can try and see what it feels like to be a newbie, without any knowledge or power, once again.

Disaster's Victims

Some disasters bring with them an outbreak of Awakenings, as people with strong latent Avatars are put in situations where they have to rely on their nascent magical powers just to survive. This cabal concept is also good for a group of players new to the World of Darkness, as the characters are probably not going to get found for a while unless they are pretty blatant about what they're doing. Making sure that this group of strangers — brought together temporarily by disaster and their unique experiences — doesn't separate again as soon as the disaster is over does require some careful character and initial story construction, however.

Masters of the City

The players are the only Awakened in a smaller city. Possibly they have moved there from somewhere else after being trained, maybe their masters have moved away (or disappeared suddenly), leaving them "in charge." They might even be self-taught Orphans. In any case, they find themselves the only magicians in a city of Sleepers and other supernatural creatures. With no real support, they must fend for themselves. This kind

of cabal needs careful construction of the surroundings. With no help, at least at first, the characters can't be dropped into a totally hostile environment, or they are unlikely to live out the night.

The Outcasts

For whatever reason, the characters have no other group to call home. They might be mages thrown out of the Traditions (which takes something pretty bad these days), Technocracy agents who have "quit" or Hollow Ones who have either left or been thrown out of their former clique. They might even be some of the few surviving Orphans. In any case, there is safety in numbers, and everyone needs someone to talk to.

A Common Foe

Someone is out to get the characters. It could be someone they know or just someone who knows them. In any case, they have allied with each other to discover and destroy this common enemy. This concept requires some careful pre-game work to answer why this enemy is out to get them and what can they do to stop him. It also sets a strong tone for the chronicle. While not every story will be about their fight against this enemy, the threat will always be lurking over the characters.

One thing that needs to be decided about every cabal is the amount to which internal manipulation, treachery and betrayal will be tolerated or condoned. Again, this facet of play is something that needs to be discussed with the players. Some people love a rollicking story of deceit and back-stabbing amongst friends, while some get very upset by such behavior. Others love treachery as long as it stays on the outside. The decision of the troupe doesn't usually have to be formalized in any sort of rule. Instead, it's best to just keep the consensus in mind when creating the characters. By tailoring each character's personality and ambitions carefully at startup, a Storyteller can help prevent dissension in the ranks, or foster it.

Everyone Has A Role To Play

One thing many Storytellers forget to do when sitting with the players creating characters is to think about what role in the party each character is going to play — that is, what unique strengths (and weaknesses) the characters are going to give the group. Now, in reality, a given group of people won't necessarily have someone who can fight, a computer wizard, a doctor and a cat burglar in it, to make sure all of the things a group might need to do are covered, and your cabal doesn't need to either. However, an assembled group, rather than one created by circumstance, usually will be set up to maximize its capabilities.

Mages are more than human in some ways, however, and they are carried on tides of destiny and fate that most mortals never experience. This influence affects their actions and circumstances at times. Therefore, don't be afraid to work with your players in defining overt roles that the characters play in the group.

One reason for considering what role a character will play in a group is to make sure no one steals all of the limelight or "screen time." Basically, you want to give every player a chance for her character to shine — to have, if not a moment of glory, then at least an important moment. Doing so is a lot easier to manage when each character has something he does better than the other members of the cabal. This specialization should not be the only thing the character does. Every character should be in the group for some reason.

What roles are necessary, who should have them and how important they are vary; a chronicle that is wrapped in mysteries and riddles will need a different mix of roles than one set on an Umbral craft. Typically, each character should have one primary role, and one or more secondary roles. As the number of characters goes down, the number of roles each character should have goes up. You should keep these roles in mind when designing stories and setting up the chronicle (and when generating characters), but there is no reason to write them down, except maybe in your chronicle's design notes. These roles are for your benefit. Nobody is going to be gaining Willpower because of them, they aren't hard and fast (and in some chronicles, it would be expected that they would change and grow as time passes), and they certainly shouldn't be seen as straitjackets.

Listed here are some of the more common roles that you find in chronicles, though this list is not a comprehensive set. Most of these examples are things that characters do rather than aspects of their personality. Although choosing personality roles (making sure the group has a cynic, an optimist, a martyr, etc.) is certainly something that can be looked at, doing so tends to be much more subjective than the roles we've listed here. The roles listed are also very general; a Sniper might be a hermetic fire mage, a Dreamspeaker who uses spirit-guided arrows, or a real live Marine sniper, who happens to also be a mage.

Information Sources

These characters are based primarily around the gathering and dispensation of information. They can learn almost anything by wits, magic and sometimes a good right hook. Information Sources tend to be important in almost all chronicles, but they are very important in games that revolve around mysteries, enigmas and discovery.

Warriors

These characters hurt things and break people. Depending on your chronicle, you may or may not have anyone in the cabal who focuses thus, but most chronicles will need at least a couple of characters who can handle themselves in a fight.

Sneaks

Sneaks are, well, sneaky. They are the sort of people who break into places, leave a note on the refrigerator and then leave. In some chronicles, a sneak is positively vital; in others, he is a total waste of a character, except maybe as a secondary role.

The Face

As in, the face the cabal presents to the rest of the world. These characters are the talkers, the diplomats, the press agents of the cabal. They can be important in almost any

chronicle, and they are vital in chronicles that involve a lot of politics or deal-making.

The Tinkerer

The Tinkerer is involved with fixing things or with breaking them. Tinkerers are useful when the cabal is going to have stuff around. Note that "things" and "stuff" are defined very loosely here. Depending on the chronicle, they might mean magical artifacts, actual physical objects (cars, computers, guns, Umbral craft) or just the ancient spells that hold a Chantry together.

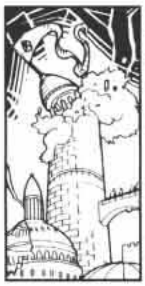
Healer

A Healer is the person who patches up the characters (and others, when feeling magnanimous) when they get injured. Most combat-based chronicles will need at least one, but so will a chronicle based around a group of CDC agents.

Broker

The Broker is the guy who gets stuff for the cabal. Stuff is once again defined rather loosely. Depending on the character concept, it might be artifacts, weapons, people, influence or a safe place to sleep.

A Cast of Thousands



So, you have your stage set. All the props are in the prop room, your players' characters are ready, you have the frameworks for at least some of your scripts and everything seems to be ready.

Not yet. You're still missing a bunch of very important pieces: your characters.

Without the horde of extras, supporting cast, love interests, antagonists and random passersby on the streets, your world is going to be a very lonely place. And those Storyteller characters are just as important as everything else in your game. Without believable extras, the rest of the world just becomes an elaborate backdrop, filled with cardboard standup placeholders where people should be.

Of course, you don't have to create an elaborate, multi-page write up on every individual that ever appears in your chronicle. After all, some people exist in your story for only a short period of time, then move off-screen, never to be seen again. They "exist" only long enough for them to walk in, do what they are intended to do, and then leave.

But if your players figure that out, it can crush their belief in the game. So you need to know enough about your characters to make sure that never happens. Even some simple notes scribbled on an index card can make the difference.

Stories of Old

Well, we've set up our chronicle, detailed the themes, created the locations and created some of the most important Storyteller characters. We've organized our troupe of players and gotten their characters designed and built. Now we have to settle down and start designing some stories to run.

Conflict

Every good story is about conflict of some kind. Conflict can be internal (mage versus her fears) or external (mage versus Nephandus), and a story can have more than one conflict in it. For example, the story of a Hermetic mage being tempted by a Nephandus has conflict between the Nephandus and the mage, but it should also deal with the feelings of the mage. Will she succumb to her lust for power and quick advancement, at the possible cost of her soul, or will she resist? While it is certainly possible to have a story that is simply a "slice of life," dealing with the day to day life of the Awakened, these stories can be made a lot better by the addition of a few minor conflicts. Will the mage use his powers to get out of a speeding ticket? Does she give in to her impatience and use Mind to force those ahead of her out of line? How does he react to the mugging in the alley by his home?

Some of the more common conflicts found in **Mage** chronicles include:

Mage versus Mage

Mages fight other mages over resources, differences in opinion and cosmology, age-old slights and for no real discernable reason at all. In short, mages fight for all the reasons Sleepers fight. Whether Tradition, chantry, cabal or individual mage, it's not uncommon for one or more mages to attack others; even in the same cabal. The passions that fuel mages' magic also fuel their rage.

Mage battles are supposed to be handled through certámen, but intrigue, assassination and espionage are also common between mages, as are more esoteric duels. The ongoing theoretical debates in scientific journals between members of the Sons of Ether and Iteration X are one example of a long-standing duel of sorts.

Mage versus Technocracy

Some in the Traditions refuse to acknowledge that the scope of the Ascension War has changed. While many have realized that the constant fighting is futile — that there are better ways of using their energies — others have too much invested in the war on a personal or emotional level to let it go. They throw themselves against the Technocratic juggernaut again and again, sometimes winning some small victory, sometimes dying in the process.

Others (perhaps they're smarter; perhaps they're just sneakier) continue to fight the war on their own terms. By subverting the dominant paradigm quietly, trying to work their magic into the

same cracks in the Consensus that allow for vampires and werewolves, they try to make themselves such an integral part of human mythology that they cannot be wiped out.

And perhaps the sneakiest group of all (or maybe just the most deluded) try to work from the inside. Playing a dangerous game, they attempt to rework the Technocracy — if not from the inside (few are that foolhardy), then with help from the inside — by influencing those members of the Technocracy who seek to reform its evils. But who is doing the manipulating is always the question....

Mage versus Hunter

It can be hard to tell what is evil and what is good in the World of Darkness. It can be even harder, sometimes, to care. While some hunters and mages have (carefully) reached tentative alliances against a common foe, hunters often lump mages in with the rest of the Earth's supernatural population and attack them as savagely as they do vampires and werewolves. Fortunately, it's just as hard for a human hunter to tell a mage from a human as it is for anyone else. As for the more gifted sorts of hunters, you can see their effects in **Hunter: The Reckoning**. Suffice to say that the Sleepers aren't just sheep any more.

Mage versus Mortals

Mortals make up the majority of the Earth's population (even if it often doesn't seem that way), and minor conflicts with mortals are as unavoidable for mages as they are for Sleepers. Mages just have more tools for dealing with these battles. While those who are unaware of a mage's power are rarely a direct threat, they can still be nuisances (especially in the case of reporters investigating weird occurrences or police detectives asking about strange disappearances). Besides, not all Sleepers are completely unaware of magic. Groups like the Arcanum have much more knowledge about the Traditions than most suspect, and there are plenty of cults and groups that have just enough knowledge to be dangerous.

Mage versus Family

If the mage still has connections to his former life, these connections can make their lives a lot more interesting. How do you save the world from evil every night when your kids need to be tucked in, your wife is convinced you're having an affair with that long-haired hippie bitch in the sandals, or your mom wants to make sure you get your homework done?

Mages versus the Supernatural

Mages tend to interact with more of the supernatural beings and creations of the Earth than others: Their quest for power takes them to many places and to see many beings. Mages may deal with Bygones, werewolves, mummies, vampires, ghosts and Umbrood spirits in their lives, and each makes an interesting opponent. There are other things out there, too, creatures that defy classification and refuse to leave the Earth. Sometimes these things have appetites or predilections that will draw them

into conflict with mages; sometimes they'll be the object of magely quests. Just about anything unexplainable could be fodder for a mage's adventures.

Mage versus Nature

Natural disasters are a fact of life, and Awakening does not provide immunity to the elements. Stories based in harsh climates can feature the environment itself as a major opponent. While magic can make dealing with an ice storm easier, it does not make it *easy*. The more holistic Traditions tend to deal with the forces of nature extensively. Verbena and Dreamspeakers can have interesting conflicts as they try to press their beliefs, which include a respect for the whimsical vagaries of nature's power.

Mage versus Self

Best kept in check for more experienced roleplayers, this conflict is internal. The mage must face and defeat some aspect of herself like fear, self-doubt, self-loathing, a lack of confidence or pride. In order to succeed at some other task, she must first deal with her own weakness. This conflict can often be part of a Seeking, but it does not need to be necessarily.

Mage versus the Unknown

Something or someone is out to get the mage, but he has no idea who or what it is! This conflict is great for a story that concentrates on a horrific or terrifying tone, but it can also relieve the tension of an otherwise suspenseful chronicle if the unknown foe turns out to be benign after all.

The Talespinner

So now we have everything set. We have a chronicle, stories to tell in that chronicle, locations in which to set that chronicle and characters to populate that chronicle, everything seems set.

But everything we've done so far has been preparation — very important, even vital, but not the whole thing. Now let's talk about storytelling itself.

The Basics

There are a few things you have to master in order to be a good Storyteller. Tricks and techniques abound that will make your stories shine, your characters sparkle and your action explode. These tricks include:

Description: Engage all of your players' senses. Tell them what things look like, describe how the sound of gunfire bounces off the buildings, evoke the sensation of thick hemp ropes binding them together and the smell of rotting fruit wafting from the creature before them. Telling your players, "You walk down the street towards the Technocracy facility," gets the point across ably enough. However, it's much more effective to tell them, "The day is uncharacteristically sunny as you walk down the crowded streets toward the building that houses Darren, Hyde & Stepanski Limited. Before you, the Cheng building looms like a steel and basalt monolith, dark and foreboding even in this bright day. The crowds, mostly older men and women in carefully pressed suits, seem almost to part like the Red Sea as you approach, leaving you a clear path to the front entrance and the lobby beyond." The one thing you should be concerned about is over-describing the emotions or responses of the characters, which is properly the job of the players. You can suggest a tone ("dark and foreboding"), but just telling a player, "You're terrified," is usually inappropriate, unless there is some outside force dictating the character's reaction.

Characterization: Everyone your players run into is an individual, and they should all be treated accordingly. Doing so isn't always easy though; after all, you have an entire world to populate and characterize! So fixate on the characters your players interact with the most, whether they are the bartenders at the bar at which your players hang out or the major antagonists. Give these people as much detail and reality as the players' characters have. Give them hobbies, history, background, reasons for doing what they do, hates, fears, loves and expectations. Even minor characters, should stand out in some fashion. Maybe the game designer they run into at a convention is a huge professional wrestling fan, for example. Even a single distinguishing trait can give your players something to hook onto, some feature they can grab, which makes your life a little easier. If you do your job, the players will start to fill in details for you.

One thing you should always be sure to do is to make your Awakened characters mages. Mages are not just people with superpowers. They are people who have been through an incredible experience and come through the other side a different person. Ghosts walk in their footsteps, the fae give them counsel, and the mysteries of the world shape (and are shaped by) their thoughts. This experience can't help but change a person, and the older a mage gets, the odder he may seem to younger, less eccentric associates. Stress the inhuman amounts of power even a younger mage has access to and the different ways in which he uses it.

Dialogue: "Show, don't tell" is the motto of the good Storyteller, and nowhere is it more true than in the conversations that take place in your chronicle. Whether between members of the cabal, or between a player and a Storyteller character, don't short-change conversations if you can possibly avoid it. Act them out! Your characters will feel much more alive and real to your players if they don't appear to just be puppets through which you feed your players information and challenges. So roleplay them out and get into it! Use facial expressions, accents, speech and physical mannerisms to give your characters a sense of reality. Don't worry if it feels awkward at first. Roleplaying your conversations takes work and practice to perfect, not to mention a little courage as well. After all, it certainly can seem a little silly. But relax; the people you're gaming with are friends, and they understand when things go poorly. While handing out experience for good roleplaying might seem a little like Pavlovian training, you might want to try it. It really does work for some players.

Action: Whether you want your combat scenes short and deadly (to make your players avoid them whenever possible) or cinematic and fun, you're going to want to keep them moving and

exciting. If your pulse isn't racing, there's a good chance your players aren't getting into it either. Bullets fly with a howl when they miss, or a bloody splat when they hit. Bodies should lurch, bones break and necks twist with a sickening crunch. When your players (or their opponents) pay the price for vulgar magic, make it worth their while: Auras should crackle, shields should sparkle, and mystic bolts should blast through their targets. (Certámen duels are a great place to really cut loose on the descriptions.) Keep the dice as out of the way as possible; figure out the results, and then interpret them with as much elan as possible. Other action sequences should be equally charged with energy. Breaking into a Hermetic chantry to steal some artifact should leave the players as worried as any combat does. The main thing is that the experience should be as intense as possible. Even if your players go out of their way to avoid combat whenever possible, the combats (and other action scenes they are in) should never be forgettable.

Alternate Settings

This book assumes that most chronicles will be set in the last days of the 20th century, or the first days of the 21st, and that Storytellers will basically use the background provided. But end of the millennium technopunks and mystic warriors trying to survive in a world of dying magic and fierce opposition from a faceless enemy is only one possible way to run a **Mage** game. Alternate settings are great for one-shot stories, or short chronicles; you get to explore a different world without compromising your main chronicle. With a little more work and thought, an alternate setting can be used as a long-term chronicle as well.

All of History in Which to Play

Mages have existed throughout the centuries — as long as there have been humans, apparently, there have been those amongst us gifted with special powers. Witches, medicine men, artificers, sorcerers, wise ones — they have been known by many names, but the Awakened have always been a part of our lives. A Storyteller can easily decide to set her chronicle in almost any time period, exploring what life was like for the Awakened in different eras.

White Wolf's historical lines provide a good jumping-off point for a historical game: **Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade**, in particular, is designed around the idea. **Vampire: The Dark Ages** raises questions of what the magi were doing while the undead roamed the earth openly, and **Werewolf: The Wild West** conjures up images of spell-slinging hombres with enchanted Peacemakers and Lakota shamans summoning up the Ghost Dance. (Also see R. Talsorian's excellent *Sixguns and Sorcery* and Pinnacle Games' *Deadlands* for alternate looks at the Weird Wild West.)

But history doesn't end there. What about a **Mage** game set in pre-history, exploring the first rifts between the mystics who would grow to be the Tradition mages and the toolmakers that evolved into the Technocracy? Or you could walk through the gin-joints, dockside warehouses and basement laboratories of the 1920s, and witness the rise and fall of the Sons of Ether. Race against time to keep mystical artifacts and ancient secrets out of the hands of the Nazis, or wander with the Kuei-jin through the spectacle and majesty of the Shou Dynasty.

History-based games can be one-shot adventures, continuing aspects of a chronicle set in the present day, or full fledged chronicles of their own. However you decide to explore history, don't feel shackled by it. Just because something happened a certain way in our world doesn't mean it necessarily had to happen that way in yours....

To Infinity and Beyond!

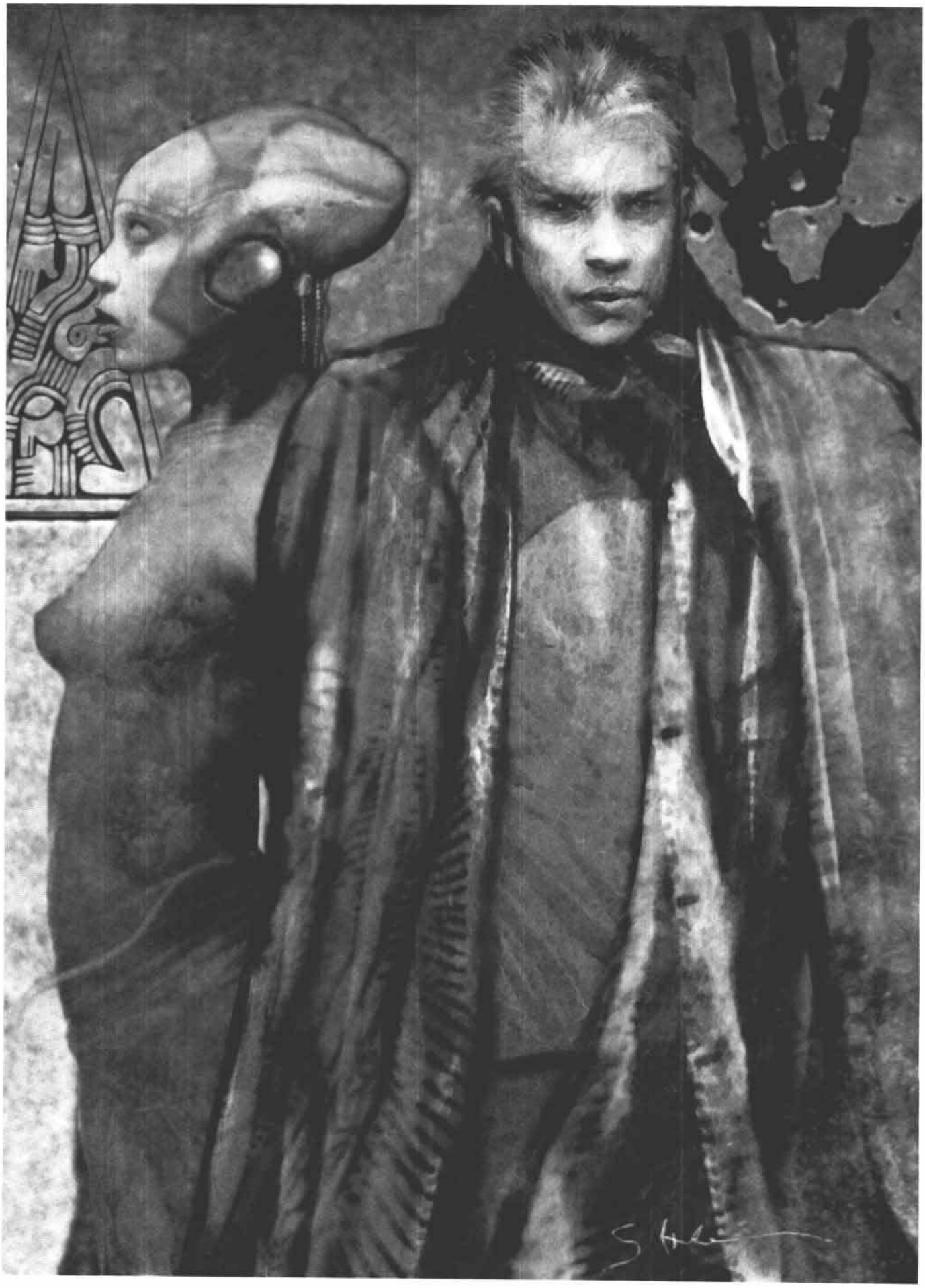
Beyond the hardened barriers and crystalline blades of the Gauntlet are trapped hundreds of Tradition mages and Technocracy agents. Void Engineer astronauts and space marines, Hermetic astromancers, Etherite explorers and Dreamspeaker wanderers, all remain cut off from their home planet, bereft of any hope for support or reinforcement.

These mages and agents are finding space/ the Umbra an increasingly hostile place. Nephandic mages, creatures from the Outer Beyond, hostile aliens and Marauders are all threats to their survival. Without Earth's help, the exiled mages find themselves turning to their former enemies, the Technocracy, for assistance, while the defenders of humanity find themselves forced, in some cases, to ally themselves with the very Reality Deviants they once hunted.

Realms of Dream and Wonder

You hold in your hands but one possibility, one world among millions. Thousands of others live on the bookshelves of your library, in your video collection, in your notebook of ideas, in previous campaigns, comic books, your music collection and a score of other sources. We've given you the tools to bring those worlds reality. All you have to do is breathe on them, and they will spring to life like Galatea.

You see, all of the background in this book, and in the other **Mage** sourcebooks, are just suggestions. You can tweak and mold them as you will, or reject them altogether. It's *your* chronicle; tell the stories you want to tell. If you want to tell stories of a shattered Earth, a million planetoids held together through magic, or of a far-reaching galactic empire based on a thaumaturgical order of wizard-knights, supported by their Technomancer pages, do it. If you want to re-create adventures from your favorite fantasy novels, or you want to build on the half-remembered fragments of a favorite TV show from childhood, see if you can get a troupe of players together, and have fun!



ALERT! ALERT! CODE RED! THIS IS NOT A DRILL! REPEAT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL!

Smile jumped out of her bunk, slamming her head on the low ceiling, and grimaced. *Always on my sleep cycle*, she thought as she pulled on her flight suit. *Every time, dammit.* The klackon and stale voice of the computer continued to blare out the alert and she grabbed her helmet and dashed out the door, almost colliding with Roberts. "Any idea what it is this time?" she asked, running next to him, pulling on her helmet as they approached the hangar.

"I have absolutely no idea. You know that Command never tells us anything," Roberts fumed as he pushed open the doors and dashed to the craft. "It's always the same." His voice took on a sarcastic recruiter-like tone. "You are the protectors of the Earth from threats both internal and external!" He rolled his eyes, returning to his normal demeanor. "But they never tell us what we are fighting — just point us at it and tell us to blast it." The smile in his voice broke the bitterness of his words." But then again, without them, we wouldn't get to have so much fun, would we?"

Smile laughed as she hopped into her cockpit. Her fingers flew over the controls, mentally going over her checklist. She closed the helmet over her head, brought the microphone on-line and continued the usual tirade. "Oh yes, so much fun, risking our asses so that the higher-up Earthsiders can show positive growth numbers to *their* higher-ups. You ever realize that in joining in, we submitted ourselves to the worst of what the corporation has to offer?"

Robert's voice crackled in her ear as the mikes finally came on line. "Oh yes, but the pay is good, we get to play with cutting edge equipment, and the advancement opportunities are wonderful. You ready?"

Smile looked over her shoulder at her wingman and gave him the thumbs up. "In 5... 4... 3... 2...1..." Slamming the throttle forward, she pushed her small craft into rapid acceleration. The ship punched out of the hangar and quickly rose above the base.

"Luna base to Red 3 and 4. We have three craft approaching from Io base. Intercept and destroy. Good luck you two."

Smile's fingers flew smoothly over her console, pulling up approach vectors and all known intel on the approaching crafts. Finally a small grin spread across her lips. "Roger that, Luna Base. Roberts, you stay on my wing. When we see them you engage Charley and pull it away. I'll take the other two."

Roberts laughed and formed up on her right. "Going to hog all the action again, boss? I'm never going to get my ace if you keep this up."

Smile just shook her head and started arming weapons. "Five minutes until visual range. You got any last words you want to get off your chest, Roberts, just in case?" she continued with their long-standing ritual. Following true to form, Roberts whispered back through the mike, "I'm pregnant." She could almost hear his grin.

Smile started to give her stock response but was cut short by her craft rocking hard and spinning out of control. "What the fuck!" she screamed, yanking the stick around and trying hard to get back in control.

"Sorry, Smile," came Roberts' sad voice over the intercom. "But I can't let you stop those ships from getting to Earth. They're too important. The outsiders want them to arrive safely."

Smile cursed to herself and finally got her ship to level out. "Why Roberts? Why did you do it?" she began with the usual line of stalling. She worked to get her weapons on line. *Just keep talking, you traitorous sumbitch*, she thought.

"I have no choice Smile, not any..." his voice tapered off as he realized that her spin had put her behind him and that her cycling craft would quickly come into just the right arc to finish what he started. With one pull of her finger three solid beams of supercharged matter slammed into his craft, causing it to glow brightly for a split second, then drift apart in sparkling motes of light. Turning her ship back toward the approaching craft, she spared a moment to glance at the damage read out, then toggled the mike. "Base, this is Red 3. Red 4 has gone hostile and has been retired, am now proceeding to echo point to engage approaching craft. Red 3 out."

Outnumbered three to one, damaged craft and no back up, Smile thought as she raced away from Luna Base.

"Smile, Smile," she laughed to herself, screaming toward death. "You could still be working fast food."

Chapter Nine: Antagonists

Although mages may bend reality at their fingertips, even they are not immune to the depredations of the World of Darkness' other denizens. Rival mages present unique difficulties, and mages who travel the spirit worlds may find themselves face-to-face with creatures that men have not dreamed about in centuries.

This chapter gives some guidelines for antagonistic characters, as well as an idea of their powers and how they might fit into a chronicle.

Marauders

The mad ones are whirling dervishes of chaos, disorder and dynamic potential. A Marauder's very presence disrupts the world around her with seeming impunity. These "chaos mages" are the exact opposite of the Technocracy. Each of these magical psychopaths is unique in her own very special, insane way. Marauders sit near the top of the Union's hit list, given their near-invulnerability to Paradox and total disregard for the laws of nature.

It's believed that Marauders were once normal mages who somehow fell into bottomless Quiets, or whose psyches were shattered irreparably by Awakening. Many Awakened in both the Traditions and Technocracy see Orphans as the primary source of Marauders, as very few within these factions Awaken into the ways of chaos themselves.

The origins of most Marauders will probably remain a mystery, since no living Marauder can or will explain how he came to be as he is. Many are incapable of intelligible conversation, and those who can communicate seem unaware that they're different or disruptive. Although all are insane by any conventional sense, no magical, mundane or scientific means of healing or treating mental disorders gets through to them. Neither the serenity of Akashic meditation nor the **Mindscaping** Effect of the NWO works.

A few Awakened have made a study of Marauder activity, but they find it difficult to discover any common goals. Some megalomaniacal Marauders seek to accumulate as much power as possible, while others believe that they serve Infernal lords. A few believe that the world differs in some significant way from that which others perceive. Each Marauder is unique in some exaggerated and bizarre fashion — even ones who seem relatively sane. Some seemingly work to bring about another Mythic Age by repeatedly

assaulting modern reality through magical terrorism, often leading a pack of Bygones through holes ripped into the Gauntlet. At best, it could be said that Marauders have no common goal or identity.

With the Gauntlet thickening and reality hardening, most Marauders have vanished. It's uncertain what happened to them, but apparently, the upper limit on their deviance from accepted reality has diminished greatly. The blatantly insane and dangerous Marauders are simply no more. Unfortunately, a few dozen remain on Earth. Despite their comparatively greater stability, they are still a great danger to Traditionalist and Technocrat alike, as they continue their chaotic disruption across the world. Fortunately, they're somewhat more susceptible to Paradox and termination.

The most disruptive Marauders still reside in the Umbra, which makes them a danger to Dreamspeakers, Void Engineers, Etherites and others who still explore the Umbral depths. Some theorize that the more twisted Marauders somehow Awaken in the Umbra, but a few mad Awakenings have happened on Earth. Most Marauders seek out places where the Tapestry is thin, although such places are more rare now than ever. With few places to hide, they lash out at the world (and sometimes die) in pyrotechnic displays of raw, uncontrolled power.

Many might see Marauders as cosmically comic figures. This is not the case; they are madness incarnate. There is no room in a Marauder's mind or soul for rational thought. The chaos that makes up their thoughts and actions taints and distorts everything it touches. Their magic creates heavy Resonance that causes ceaseless strings of random (and sometimes dangerous) events to occur.

Methods to the Madness

Marauders are subject to a permanent Quiet that deforms their perceptions and reactions to the world around them constantly. Mages who become Marauders gain one point of permanent Quiet for every three points of Paradox he has (or causes) when he becomes a Marauder. Those whose Quiets exceed 5 are simply ejected from reality, cast too far adrift from Earth to remain on the near side of the Gauntlet.

Paradox

Contrary to popular belief, Marauders are not immune to Paradox, simply very resistant. Here are the rules on how it affects them:

• Coincidental magic generates no backlash unless the Marauder's player botches his Effect. Vulgar magic generates backlash, but no automatic Paradox. Calculate what the backlash should be according to the normal rules (page 195).

• For every point of Quiet the Marauder has, subtract three points of Backlash. Only what's left over affects the Marauder. Unfortunately, the Backlash will rebound on the nearest Awakened, in search of a scapegoat. Inflict the Backlash that didn't hit the Marauder on the nearest Awakened character and apply whatever is appropriate — Paradox Burn, Flaws, Spirits or whatever seems appropriate at the time. It's a good idea to make the Backlash reflect the Marauder's Quiet.

• When a Marauder botches a vulgar magical Effect, her permanent Quiet increases by one per 1 rolled on the dice. This progression leads to many Marauders getting ejected from the Consensus.

Quiet

Quiet Score	Degree of Madness
1	One constant, simple difference between inner and outer realities. For example, the Marauder may believe that everyone he hears is speaking French or Latin.
2-3	The Marauder's universe is different from reality in a few basic ways, but he can still communicate in and understand the world. For example, the Marauder might believe that he's in Victorian England, and he'll perceive all events around him through that lens.
4-6	The Marauder's world has little to do with reality, but most of the important events and people he knows are "translated" for him. The Marauder may believe that she's an angel in Heaven, or a demon in Hell. She might live in a fictitious world popularized by the media, or one from her own imagination. At 6+ Quiet, the Marauder simply fades from reality and is banished to the Umbra.
7-9	Any communication between the Marauder and non-telepaths is impossible. A powerful Marauder at this stage no longer sees the world around him in any resemblance to its actual appearance. Examples might include the perception that he's on a completely alien world populated by ambulatory crystals, or that he's some kind of mythic, Bygone creature (like a dragon). Marauders at this stage are trapped beyond the Gauntlet. Thanks to Resonance, reality shreds and reforms around them constantly to match their delusions. This constant disruption in the Tapestry makes them easy targets for the Void Engineers' Border Corps Division patrols, so most are beyond the Horizon.
10+	Nothing can support a Marauder separated thus from reality. Her perceptions are literally incomprehensible to any human or humanlike being (perhaps the Oracles might have a chance). She's trapped beyond the Horizon, but she remains a danger to Awakened who travel the Deep Umbra.

• The Marauder can move back up the Quiet chart after such a botch by interacting with people whose reality doesn't match his. This Quiet bleeds off at the rate of one point per week until it reaches its former level as his delusions readjust to their normal weirdness.

High Weirdness

Marauders are known for pulling off Effects that should be impossible for them. How does that teenager Awaken with the ability to transform an entire building into a living creature when Adepts and Masters have difficulty pulling off the same Effect? Rules don't always apply to Marauders, but such high-powered Effects should be saved for dramatically appropriate moments and not pulled off every other time he casts a spell. Marauders aren't always predictable, and they may occasionally have less power than normal also.

A good guideline for such wild talents would be to limit such things to once or twice a story, or if you feel particularly cruel, once or twice per session.

Marauder

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Cosmology 4, Dodge 2, Enigmas 4, Expression 2, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Meditation 1, Occult 1, Research 1, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 2, Avatar 3, Destiny 2

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Spirit 2, Time 2

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 3

Paradox: 0 (Quiet 2)

Resonance: (Dynamic) Crazed, (Entropic) Anxious, (Static) Vibrating

Nephandi

"Nephandi" describes a fractious group of mages who generally have only one thing in common: They have all chosen to pass through the Cauls in order to turn their Avatars inside-out to serve powerful spirits that can be described only as "corruption incarnate." As far as most mages and Technocrats know, Nephandi pursue the corruption of all beings in the universe, in the mad hopes of driving all beings away from their morals and all that is light, good and creative. Ultimately, speculators believe, the Nephandi seek nothing less than the destruction of the universe. Some of the Fallen were born for the Path of Descent, others rejected the ideals of Ascension to take up corruption's banner.

Although many of the Awakened on the dark path have supposedly been exiled from Earth, many remain and many more join the cause regularly despite all efforts to drive them out. Few Awakened can study the ways of the Fallen without risking the Fall themselves. It is not always advisable to know one's enemies.

The Fallen are not simply evil; they embody corruption and destruction. Stories tell of the Nephandic Rebirth, where

Malleus Neffandorum

This infamous sixth-century text describes the ranks, practices and beliefs of the Nephandi in elaborate (and deceptive) detail. Many well-intentioned mages have sought this tome out to study the enemy and better understand him, not realizing that this book was written to lure the unwary.

Not all Awakened who read this book in hopes of insight into the Fallen succumb to its temptations, but enough do that those librarians who possess a copy are usually very careful about whom they allow to read it. Some believe that this text possesses a malefic Resonance that subtly draws the reader into a slow, almost imperceptible (at first) change in attitude that nearly always leads to a degeneration of the soul and eventual Infernal servitude. Fortunately, it's easy to avoid the risk if one is aware if it.

In truth, this book does have a certain corrupt taint. But, the fact is that those who Fall after reading it only do so because they succumb to the carefully placed temptations. The author was a past master of the arts of temptation, and he applied his skill to the book carefully.

As for the information, it's just factual enough to be dangerous to the reader. Most Tradition mages believe that one of the Batini wrote this text after extensive time spent studying the Nephandi. The Ahl-i-Batin often claimed they were immune to corruption, even within the Cauls. They said their Avatars were perfectly balanced light and darkness, so the reversal of the Avatar did not affect them. As is often said though, "Pride goeth before a Fall." The author was indeed one of the Ahl-i-Batin, one of the *Iblisi* who succumbed to the corruption of the Fallen.

a mage steps into the Cauls and has her Avatar inverted, twisted and corrupted. Such choice, it is said, must be deliberate. Afterward, the mage becomes a living Avatar of whichever Nephandic lord he now serves. Since all factions loathe an obvious Nephandus, the Fallen conceal their actions behind temptation, masquerade and betrayal.

The Nephandi seem to have two agendas. The first is to actively corrupt and claim human souls (or Avatars) for their masters. An Awakened Avatar is a fantastic prize that the Nephandi seek above all else. To accomplish this goal, they are quite skillful in ferreting out their target's heart's desire and using it against him with great deftness and subtlety. Whatever the wish, the Nephandus is prepared to grant it (or appear to) in exchange for the minor price of one soul. The author of the *Malleus Neffandorum* explains that souls are all that sustains the Nephandic Lords during their exile in the Outer Darkness.

The Nephandi's second overriding agenda is a quest to return their Dark Lords to Earth. Undoubtedly, many believe that they will reap unthinkable rewards for such a victory. Undoubtedly, that victory would destroy the Earth and all life on it.

The Nephandi serve as a twisted reflection of their rivals. Where other Awakened would seek to exalt themselves and humanity, Nephandi seek to drag everyone down into their Descent. They will be satisfied when only oblivion remains. In

service to this primal darkness, they study Qlipphothic Spheres, twisted reflections of the normal Spheres designed to mirror the bubbling, festering morass of primal creation and destruction.

The Harrowing

Recently, a nightmarish storm burst out across the Dark Umbra, making travel across the Gauntlet dangerous and travel into the Dark Umbra lethal. The storm brought multitudes of dark spirits, perhaps the wraithly equivalent of the Nephandi. Despite the ill omen this maelstrom seemed to represent, it apparently robbed numerous Nephandi of their powers and the support of their Dark Lords. The Union and Traditions both took the opportunity to root out and destroy as many of the Fallen as possible.

This event is the second recorded instance of such a storm cutting the Nephandi off from their power. The first time was during World War II, when the Traditions and Conventions combined forces to assault them. At the height of the battle, the Nephandi were confused and nearly powerless. Some tried to call on allies who never answered. A few Euthanatos mages established that a storm had broken out across the Dark Umbra at roughly the same time. Neither the Traditions nor the Conventions know the cause for these storms, nor why it robs the Nephandi of their power, but both factions are willing to exploit the opportunity to rid the world of more Fallen.

The Servants

Nephandi come in two flavors. The *Widderslainte* are born to be corrupt; their Avatars are new incarnations of slain Nephandi. Even before their Awakening, they're cruel, devious and manipulative. Afterward, they're true terrors. These Nephandi are precisely the reason the Traditions use the punishment of Gilgul on every Nephandus they can; rehabilitation seems unlikely. There are a few cases where a recycled Fallen Avatar once again returned to the Path of Ascension, but such is rare.

The *barabbi* are Awakened who have chosen, or were tempted, into the Fall. Once on the Path of Ascension, each has chosen to enter the Cauls and spread the taint. Many believe that they serve as a necessary balance to the Traditions and their vision of Ascension. The *barabbi* serve as the dark mirror, seekers of the Descent. "Without true darkness," one might say as she tortures a mage to death, "you would go blind." These traitors are hunted ruthlessly, subjected to Gilgul and executed whenever possible.

Neither sort operates overtly. Given the universal hatred they face, Nephandi work quietly, using all sorts of subtle tactics to draw their victims (or future compatriots) into their webs. The Nephandi's tools are temptation, emotion, desire, fear and even suspicion. Direct confrontation nearly always means defeat for the Nephandi.

The Masters

Nephandi serve several masters of various temperaments and origins. The best-known of the Dark Lords are the Demon Lords, or the Infernal. Nephandi who serve the Infernal mortgage their souls in hopes of receiving a better position in Hell. Most figure they're already damned, so they might as well try to get an advantage at the outset. Infernalists assemble cults with unassuming names like the "Church of the New Light," or the "Blissful Waters Brotherhood." They use these fronts to draw in recruits — both Awakened and Sleeper. Behind closed doors, they preach their masters' Word. Most are tempters and corrupters who subscribe to a creed of pure selfishness and instant gratification. They tend to not be overly violent or destructive.

The Malfean Nephandi serve incarnations of such twisted concepts as hatred, cruelty, violence, greed, power and desire. These entities (known collectively as the Maeljin Incarna) reside in a twisted, corrupt Realm called Malfeas. Malfean Nephandi often demonstrate their loyalty by walking the "Black Labyrinth," a powerful Caul in the heart of Malfeas itself. Malfeans are seen as a bit "disturbing" by other Nephandi, perhaps due to their connection to a particularly *visceral* embodiment of corruption. They often use the same tools as the Infernalists, but they also create twisted servants called fomori, created by fusing a spirit of corruption with a human soul. All are dedicated to the ultimate destruction of the universe.

Finally, the most alien of the Nephandi are the K'llashaa. They serve the bizarre and insane Lords of the Outer Darkness, a varied group of godlike beings who seem to embody purely irrational and inhuman impulses. The minions of the Howling Void are the most violent of the Nephandi, especially given that to prove their conversion, they must betray friends and loved ones, desecrate nodes and holy sites, violate innocents and more. Many K'llashaa gather cults to their multi-syllabic nearly unpronounceable Lord's name and commit the most vile and depraved acts with the greatest sense of reverence.

Nephandus

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 3, Expression 4, Leadership 4, Meditation 2, Occult 3, Subterfuge 4
Backgrounds: Avatar 2, Destiny 1, Sanctum 1, Talisman 3
Arete: 4
Spheres: (Qlipphothic) Entropy 3, Spirit 3
Willpower: 8
Quintessence: 2
Paradox: 0
Resonance: (Dynamic) Slippery, (Entropic) Corruptive, (Static) Smothering

The Red Star

When the baleful light of a new Red Star appeared in the heavens of the Umbra, it served as a signal to many astrologically minded Nephandi. Many see it as an omen of the imminent victory of the Fallen. A few realize the great potential it represents and seek to attract its attention. Fortunately, it — or whatever is responsible for its presence — has not yet answered the pleas and offers these Nephandi have made.

Some know that it is not yet ready to blaze in its full glory across the Earth, and they seek to learn more of it in astrological studies, hoping to discover rituals or sacrifices that might serve to draw it closer to Earth and attract its attention.

Sendings

Upheaval has shaken the Earth; violent storms sweep the lands of the dead and unbelievably powerful Technocratic weapons have destroyed a virtual god, releasing its soul into the deadly storm. These cataclysms created a backlash that thickened the Gauntlet, adding a layer of Avatar-shards and making both crossing and communication dangerous to incautious mages. The storm creates hazards even for Earthbound Masters.

Mages in the Horizon, seeking a way to communicate with the Awakened stranded on Earth, created Sendings, magical messages infused with intent and released to wend their way to Earth. This technique has not proven as reliable as expected—several Sendings have absorbed Avatar-shards when they crossed the Gauntlet and somehow gained some measure of sapience and self-determination.

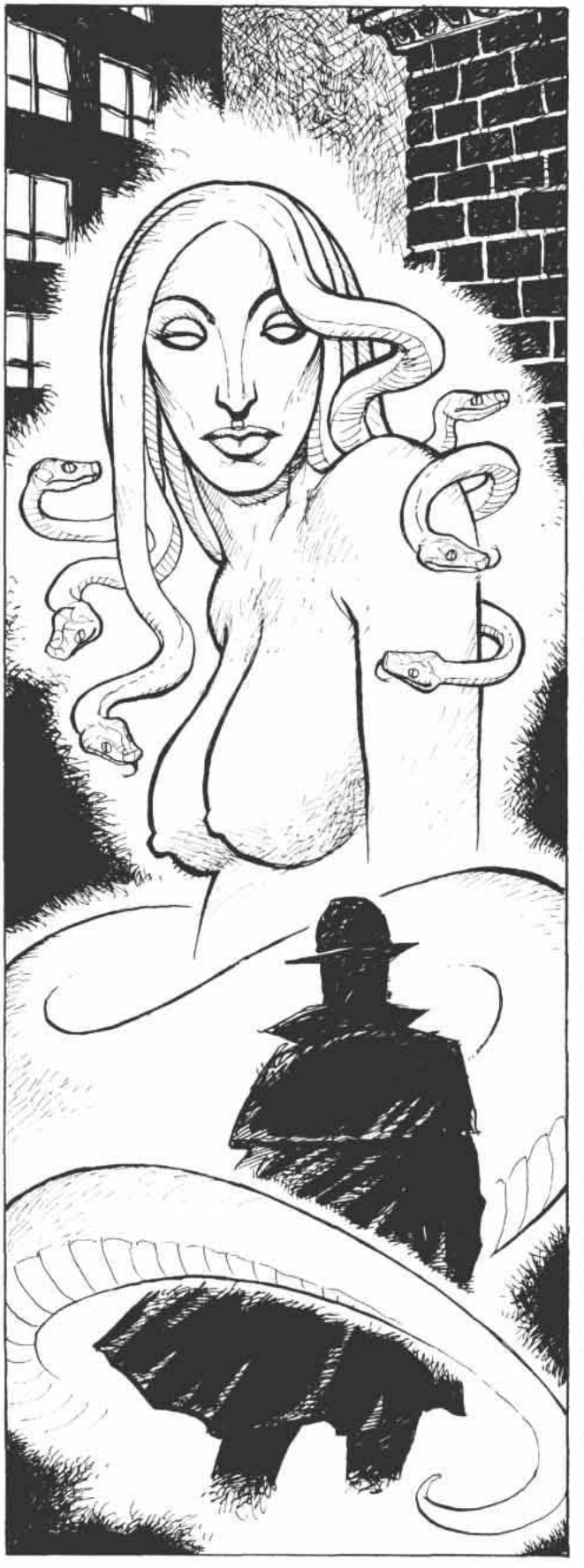
Most Sendings have one-track minds, seeking out places where the Gauntlet is thin and magic is easily drawn across, and hunting down mages as soon as they arrive on Earth. Most appear in the form of mythic creatures, usually influenced by the Avatar-shards they've absorbed and the region where they first appear.

At first, the Sendings simply delivered their messages. Many were sent back with responses, and crossed the Gauntlet a second time, picking up more shards. A few realized (with their increased awareness) that crossing the Gauntlet gave them power and intelligence, and they did so repeatedly. The remainder were used as messengers again and again, and thus have evolved more slowly.

The few highly evolved Sendings have developed strong identities and with those identities, goals. Through the shards that have granted them self-awareness, they've gained a certain mastery over magic, some incredibly so despite their relatively young age. Rumors persist of one Sending, who takes the form of Raiden, Thor or Zeus, that some mages believe is heir to a portion of the Avatar of a deceased Archmage of Forces who died defending Doissetep. While none know for sure, this Sending's ability to control weather and other forces is amazing.

Each Sending initially embodies an idea or emotion and seeks to fulfill it, whatever it may be. As they grow in power and intelligence, they expand that embodiment. Perhaps the idea of "hunger" might become "famine" with time. Each Sending carries a Resonance related directly to its core concept; the more powerful the Sending, the more powerful the Resonance. Despite their resemblance to Bygones and their developing facility with magic, they don't seem to be subject to Paradox.

The Storyteller assigns Sendings Traits as necessary. Sendings tend to take on forms that are visible only to those using Spirit perceptions, but rarely they'll take over or even create a body. There's no particular set of "generic" Traits for a Sending, and each one varies according to its original role and how it's mutated over time. In fact, if a Sending is encountered, gets away and later returns, it may have changed radically due to interaction with the Gauntlet.



Outsiders

Far from the Ascension War's factions are creatures the Traditions and Conventions are hard-pressed to explain. The mysterious vampires lurk in the shadows, concealing their nature and existence from humanity. The werewolves fight a deadly secret war for the fate of the world. Ghosts struggle to maintain a sense of identity and purpose in the face of terrible storms lashing the Dark Umbra. The fae struggle to remember who they are. Some humans have even learned of the Awakened factions, and they struggle to free the Masses from magical manipulation. Perhaps more ominously, rumors spread of humans who are unusually resistant to magic and yet possess powers unlike those ever seen before.

Mages share the World of Darkness with a great many beings who do not care about the Ascension War or want the attention of mages (except perhaps as catspaws in their private wars). Very few are interested in dealings with the Awakened.

Vampires

For nearly all of recorded human history, vampires have preyed on the Masses. They've ruled over them, manipulated them and now hide among them. Wise Awakened avoid the undead whenever possible. Those who come too close are invariably drawn into the labyrinthine nightly games vampires play, often losing blood, life or even all semblance of free will as the price. The only consolation for the Awakened is that most vampires feel the same about them.

Vampires have good reason to view mages with caution: It's fairly common knowledge among the Awakened that vampiric blood serves as potent Tass. If ingested, the blood can strengthen any human — including mages — and arrest aging. Some ambitious Awakened mount "Tass hunts" for vampiric blood. To do so is to play a dangerous game, however, since the undead have supernatural powers of their own that go untouched by Paradox. To make matters worse, they are known to fly into berserk rages when pushed too far.

All Awakened factions are intensely curious about vampiric ecology. Questions range from, "How do vampires distill Tass from human blood?" to, "How do they avoid Paradox?" Theories abound. The most common theories propose that blood serves as a carrier for "life force," or "Quintessence flow" through a living pattern. Unlike thaumivores, who must feed directly on Tass or Quintessence for nourishment, vampires absorb it from a human's Pattern. It's possible that this primal connection to humanity's life essence might provide vampires with some measure of resistance from Paradox.

Warlocks

First among all other magical traditions, the Order of Hermes reigned supreme during the Medieval era. Hermetic houses dominated European magical practices for several centuries. One house, Tremere, had particularly competitive and power-hungry leadership. The Primus of House Tremere and one of his apprentices, Goratrix, noticed that the longevity rotes developed three centuries previous were failing. In desperation, they sought a new form of immortality.

Goratrix presented a ritual that required blood stolen from vampires — he claimed that the longevity gained would not have the weaknesses inherent to the undead. Either he lied or was simply mistaken. Either way, the Tremere became a house of vampires. The blood wizards spread from Ceoris (the Tremere ancestral Chantry) throughout Europe, turning Tremere mages (and members of other houses when necessary) into undead warlocks.

When House Tremere's conversion became known, the other houses declared war on it. For nearly a century, they fought a bitter secret war to a stalemate. Some blame this war for distracting them from the Order of Reason's rise.

Young Fangbanger

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2
Abilities: Alertness 1, Brawl 2, Drive (Motorcycles) 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2
Willpower: 5

Suggested Powers: Vampires have 10 "blood points" to spend (1/turn) on the following: Increase one Physical Attribute by one, heal one health level (except those incurred by exposure to fire or sunlight) or gain one to three additional actions without splitting his dice pool. Additionally, vampires possess two or three additional dots in one physical attribute, two or three additional dice for Intimidation or the ability to look a target in the eye and give a simple command that must be followed. (To use this power, roll Manipulation + Intimidation against target's Willpower; commands that violate the target's nature require four or more successes.)

Notes: Vampires suffer one to three levels of aggravated damage per turn of exposure to sunlight or fire (depending on intensity and how much of the vampire is burning). Vampires must also sleep during the day, but they can awaken for brief periods after a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 8). To affect vampires directly, mages need both Life and Matter due to the Quintessence-infused blood sustaining the animate corpse.

Ancient Manipulator

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 4, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 2
Abilities: Academics 5, Alertness 5, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 3, Melee 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 5, Linguistics 3+, Occult 5, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 5
Willpower: 9

Suggested Powers: As the Young Fangbanger, but an Ancient has 20-30 blood points, and she may spend between four and six per turn. Additionally, most Ancients have 15-20 dots of Sphere Effects (one Effect per dot); each costs one blood

point to activate. Many are nearly impossible to attack directly: Attackers must spend a Willpower point and roll Willpower (difficulty 8) to do so, and they may act against the vampire for one turn per success. Mind magic can add dice to this roll, but it cannot block the Effect completely.

Notes: Ancients can soak fire and sunlight with three to five dice.

Werewolves

Where vampires lurk in the cities, werewolves prefer the wilderness. The shapechangers are ferocious beasts with a mastery of spirits that even many Dreamspeakers cannot match. It is known that many congregate around powerful Nodes and defend them with their dying breath. To werewolves, these Nodes are the most sacred of holy ground.

Werewolves have three forms: wolf, human and a terrifying combination of both. Sleepers who witness werewolves in this bestial war-form fall into mindless terror, then try to rationalize the incident later. Mages theorize that either belief in werewolves is so deeply ingrained in Sleepers that there simply is no way to excise it, or that Paradox somehow protects Sleeper witnesses from confronting these creatures. Whatever the reason, it serves as a potent defense.

Of all the Awakened, only a very few Dreamspeakers and Verbena manage much in the way of peaceful interaction with the werewolves. It may be that these mages are somehow related to the shapeshifters; even so, they are never allowed near werewolf Nodes. What little they've gleaned has shown the mages that werewolves are involved in some cosmological war between balance, stasis, corruption and nature. They serve hierarchies of powerful spirits more convoluted than the most knowledgeable Hermetic would dare dream.

Hot-Blooded Warrior

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Cosmology 1, Dodge 4, Enigmas 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Meditation 1, Melee 3, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Willpower: 3

Suggested Powers: All werewolves regenerate one level of bashing or lethal damage per turn, or one aggravated per day. In human or wolf form, use the listed traits. In the wolfman form, double all Physical Attributes and reduce Appearance to zero; his claws inflict Strength +1 aggravated damage. A werewolf can step into the Middle Umbra if he has a reflective surface to gaze into; roll Willpower vs. Gauntlet, with no hindrance from the Gauntlet Storm. Each warrior has a pool of "Rage" points (usually between five and seven) that he can spend to gain additional actions without splitting his dice pool. (He can spend no more Rage points than he has dots in Dexterity, however.) Werewolves regain Rage in stressful situations, such as when wounded or insulted, or when the player botches an important roll.

Additionally, some werewolves have the ability to act first every turn automatically, the power to deactivate all technology within 50 feet or the ability to sharpen his claws on a hard surface and inflict Strength +2 damage with them. (The Storyteller activates the werewolf's power to deactivate technology by spending a point of Willpower or rolling the character's Willpower against the Arete of a technomagical device.)

Notes: Werewolves suffer unsoakable aggravated wounds from silver weapons; they can attempt to soak all other damage regardless of its type. To use **Rip the Man Body** (see page 171), a mage needs both Life and Spirit at three dots due to the werewolf's half-spirit, half-flesh nature. Like vampires, werewolves fly into a berserk frenzy when angered or frightened beyond their limits.

Elder Shaitan

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Alertness 5, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Cosmology 4, Dodge 3, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Intuition 3, Leadership 5, Linguistics 2, Meditation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Willpower: 6

Suggested Powers: As per the Hot-Blooded Warrior, although she has only between three and five points in her Rage Pool. Additionally, the Shaman also effectively has Spirit 5 for purposes of interaction with spirits. Additionally, add 10-15 dots of Spheres, one Effect per dot, to simulate further mastery of werewolf powers.

Notes: As one of the eldest of her kind, the Shaman has access to many fetishes (see p. 146) and spiritual allies. Allow her to call on any spirits needed for any given situation (within reasonable limits), and assume she has fetishes with Effects appropriate for most common occasions.

Wraiths

Most mages prefer to avoid the Restless Dead rather than deal with uncomfortable reminders of their own mortality. It is thought that wraiths hold on to resolve issues left unfinished because of an untimely death, so many Euthanatoi seek to assist these souls so they may move on. Some Hollow Ones also seek out wraiths for company, but usually they do so for the thrill of getting close to death.

Even fewer mages seek to cross the line that divides the living from the dead. Death prefers to hold on to its own, and it claims many unwary mages who travel the Dark Umbra. Euthanatoi who have explored the lands of the dead sometimes speak of a storm that rages underneath the world and of a labyrinthine Realm of terror beyond that, but the dangers of visiting are extreme. Recently, the storms have surged across the world, making travel and visitations less safe than before.

With the storms, the Restless Dead have gained a nastier disposition. Mages who seek to contact or control wraiths find them more hostile and dangerous than before. Rumor among the Hollow Ones tells of a wraith with the mark of Chaos on his forehead who blamed mages for the dark storm — before trying to kill the summoner.

The Newly Dead

Attributes: Strength 2 (Only in the Dark Umbra), Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Cosmology 2, Dodge 2, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 2, Stealth 3, Intimidation 3, Occult 3, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 5

Suggested Powers: Most wraiths have 10 health levels, and they take no wound penalties. Additionally, they may be harmed only with Spirit/ Entropy magic, while manifested on Earth or by a mage who's in the Dark Umbra. They are insubstantial, therefore they may walk through solid objects at will. Wraiths also see auras, have supernaturally heightened senses (can hear distant noises as if nearby, see in near-total darkness), and they can tell if a human is near death.

Each wraith has one or two useful powers. They can enter and control dreams (as a Mind 3 Effect), manifest in the physical world (spend one Willpower per turn to appear solid, or otherwise manifest only as an apparition), affect material objects and people telekinetically (as per Forces 3, but only for kinetic-energy-based Effects) or create disturbing illusions (cold spots, rattling chains, swarms of insects, bloody writing on the walls).

Image: Wraiths often appear as they did in life, but with scars indicating the cause of their death. Many appear as idealized versions of their living selves; an elderly man might appear quite young and strong once he's passed on.

Notes: An Entropy 3/ Spirit 3 rote may be used to inflict aggravated damage. A wraith who is "killed" with bashing or lethal damage may return to haunt her tormenter later. A wraith "killed" with aggravated damage never returns.

The Old Ghost

Attributes: Strength 3 (only in the Dark Umbra), Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Cosmology 3, Dodge 3, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Subterfuge 3

Willpower: 8

Suggested Powers: As per the Newly Dead. Additionally, older ghosts are capable of possession and emotion control, and many have the ability to possess and control machines (one Willpower point per turn). A few have the power to utterly destroy anything. Treat such an attack as an Entropy 4/ Life 3 (six dice) Effect when used on living beings. The damage inflicted is unsoakable and aggravated. On objects, treat the Effect as Entropy 3/Matter 3. Either way, when the power destroys a person or object, it's utterly gone. Otherwise, give a powerful ghost between five and 10 dots of Spheres, one Effect per dot, to reflect additional powers.

Image: Old ghosts have been around for awhile; many look somewhat decayed, and the truly ancient are positively skeletal. A few use ghostly powers to conceal their disturbing appearance from others, but some choose to revel in it. Most simply use masks of various sorts to cover their true faces. Chains, swords, armor and other

accoutrements are common. Treat them as normal items if found in the Dark Umbra, except that the weapons inflict aggravated damage.

Changelings

In a world increasingly hostile to the old ways of magic, the fae still remain as a bastion of dream and belief. Of perhaps all supernatural beings, faerie have the most (and most amiable) relations with Tradition mages. Both wish to see magic return to the world and a wider acceptance of mystical belief systems take hold.

In their own way, changelings somehow inspire Sleepers to great acts of creativity and wonder. Some mages believe that with more coordination and planning, this tactic could be turned against the Union as a weapon in the Ascension War. The few faeries they've approached with the idea seem amenable to the plan, but organization has been difficult.

Like their legendary predecessors, changelings are divided into Seelie and Unseelie courts. The Seelie cultivate creativity and dreams among Sleepers, but the Unseelie stalk and terrorize them, stealing their dreams. This dichotomy is perhaps the greatest obstacle to changeling aid in engendering magic into the world.

Mischievous Child

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Dodge 4, Enigmas 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Willpower: 2

Suggested Powers: Faeries somehow conceal their true nature from Sleepers; to them, faeries appear to be normal people. Also, Sleepers who chance to pierce the disguise forget later. A faerie can enchant others to see her as she truly is and affect them with her magic more easily. She can make herself or others invisible, fly short distances, turn into a raccoon (when no one is looking), disguise herself as any other person she's seen and confuse others (six dice against target's Willpower dumbfounds the target for one turn per success).

Image: To most, the mischievous child appears as a young girl dressed in ragged jeans and a dirty T-shirt. To those who can see her true appearance, she has the ears and tail of a raccoon, and a black "mask" mark across her eyes.

Notes: Changelings are vulnerable to cold iron, and they take aggravated wounds from it. The presence of unimaginative people or those who absolutely deny the possibility of magic (such as Technocrats) can also inflict injury, although this Effect is more of a slow erosion than actual wounds.

To enchant others, roll the changeling's Willpower against the target's Willpower. One success enchants for a turn, two for a scene, three or more for a day. To affect the unenchanted magically, the child must spend a Willpower point for each target.

Noble Knight

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 5, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Suggested Abilities: Academics 3, Alertness 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Drive 3, Etiquette 4, Expression (Romantic Poetry) 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Melee 4

Willpower: 4

Suggested Powers: The knight disguises his true nature in the same manner as the mischievous child. He also possesses the ability to enchant others (so they can see him) and make them forget afterward. Additionally, when angered, those in his presence who wish to offend or attack him must roll Willpower (difficulty 8), or be cowed by his elemental fury. He may spend one Willpower point to increase the intensity for a scene, raising the difficulty to 9 and forcing victims to spend a Willpower point before rolling. The knight may call on the elements to strike down his enemies (Forces 3 Effect, five dice) or give commands that must be obeyed (Mind 2, five dice — but only once per scene against any individual). Finally, the knight may call down a terrible curse on his enemies (once per story, Storyteller discretion as to effects).

Image: To normal Sleepers, the knight appears to be an attractive (Appearance 3), well-dressed young man. To the enchanted, he is a tall, terrible, inhumanly beautiful and majestic creature. He has impossibly fine features and carries a magical sword of incredible craftsmanship.

Hunters

The supernatural is not the only opposition that mages may face. The World of Darkness holds many secrets, and there are those who would expose them to light or bury them more deeply. Some simply want to avenge the crimes perpetrated on humanity.

Most people believe the Inquisition to be long gone, its final act having played out in 1834. Mages know the truth; the Inquisition still actively hunts those who practice "the Devil's Art." The Society of Leopold, as it's called these days, maintains a veil of secrecy over its actions so deep that even the Pope is unaware of its existence.

Recently, the Austrian provincial Ingrid Bauer — known as "The Original Iron Maiden" behind her back — was appointed Inquisitor General. Her first act was to remove bans on several agonizing torture techniques her predecessor viewed with distaste. She and the Society are more than willing to use these techniques in the name of God on any mage they catch.

The Technocracy occasionally directs government agencies against Reality Deviants, especially those guilty of criminal or treasonous activities (or who can be framed for such). While they don't have absolute control, agents can ensure that certain tidbits of information fall into "the right hands." Even without Technocratic influence, most Tradition mages commonly engage in what could be seen as legally dubious activities, such as drug-trafficking, breaking-and-entering, kidnapping, murder and worse. They often cross state lines, thus making it the FBI's jurisdiction.

Elements within the American National Security Agency have long suspected outside manipulation from a body loyal to no single government. Colonel Bryant Shields directs a secret task force dedicated to rooting out and excising these double agents. The organization is the Technocracy, and if he finds one agent who will talk, he'll have the material he needs to begin a purge through several government agencies.

The Arcanum is a secret society devoted to the observation and study of supernatural creatures and events. The membership includes some of the foremost Sleeper authorities on occult knowledge in the World of Darkness. Members come from all walks of life — some are recruited for their fields of study, others are chosen for personal experience and skills. Since the Victorian era, the Arcanum's 300 academics and explorers have ventured into the world's oddest, most remote corners to learn everything they can about the unseen and the unknown.

The Arcanum is aware of the existence of the Traditions and the Technocracy, and it has a vague idea of the Ascension War. Most see mages as particularly egotistical sorcerers. Several practice hedge magic and are well-versed in the concepts of that practice. Few realize, however, that the Awakened tinker with reality on a fundamental level.

Arcanum Scholar

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 4, Alertness 3, Computer 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 2, Firearms 3, Investigation 4, Leadership 2, Linguistics 3, Occult 4, Research 4, Science 2, Stealth 3

Willpower: 5

Image: The scholar is in his late 30s, preferring conservative dress. His tweed suits don't usually fit in with many crowds, but he's got some talent for blending in.

Notes: The scholar can call the Arcanum for support if he gets into trouble. This assistance extends to cash advances, travel arrangements and safe houses, but it doesn't allow for last-minute rescues.

A New Breed?

Recently, a few rumors have begun to spread, telling of people with previously unseen powers aiding in attacks on Nephandi, only to vanish afterward. In a few cases, these hunters have attacked mages directly.

In fact, it seems that these hunters' attacks are aimed solely at those whose actions directly harm or endanger Sleepers. In one case where an Ecstatic was murdered, it was later learned that he ran a slaving ring on the side. How these hunters choose their targets is unknown, but several mages hope to make contact with one to find out. Whatever these people are, whichever powers they represent, remains a mystery.

Imbued Hunter

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

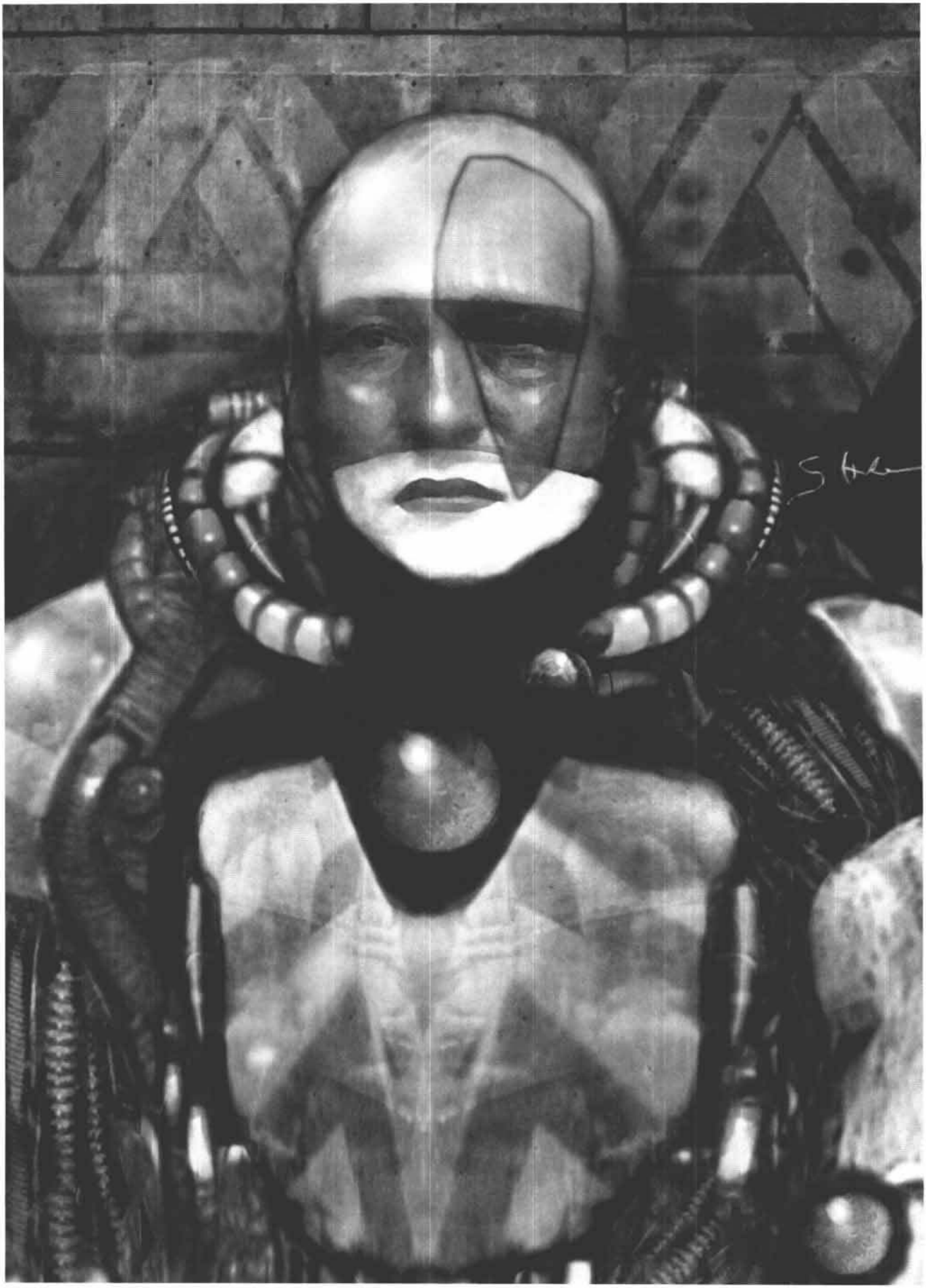
Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 3, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Technology 2

Willpower: 7

Suggested Powers: The imbued hunter is immune to any power that controls the mind or the senses. Any Mind magic intended to control her actions, thoughts or perceptions fails automatically. She recognizes vampires, werewolves and changelings on sight, and many can see wraiths. Additionally, she may charge a weapon with mystical energy, adding two dice to its damage rating. For a Willpower point, she can track any supernatural being that has fled her presence to its place of refuge. For three Willpower points, she can touch someone under supernatural mind control and restore free will to him — she may only do so once per story.

Image: The hunter doesn't look unusual in any way until she sees her prey. Once the prey appears, her baseball bat (or similar weapon) glows with a light that only other supernaturals can see and her eyes betray the inner zeal blazing within. She carries as much weaponry as she can conceal.

Notes: The hunter doesn't want to kill every supernatural entity she meets. First she tries to discover if the monster is harmful to humanity. If so, she strikes. Otherwise, she moves on. If she finds that a particularly dangerous monster has other enemies, she might approach them and offer aid. Of course, not all hunters are so benevolent... there are more than a few who would be happy to kill anything with the stench of magic.



Appendix

Merits and Flaws

Although Abilities, Attributes and Backgrounds give a good measure of differentiation between individuals, some characters have special characteristics that aren't quantified by such Traits. To represent these characteristics, you can use Merits and Flaws — special Traits that show beneficial qualities or unusual problems.

You purchase Merits and Flaws with freebie points during character creation. Each Merit or Flaw has an associated listed cost. Merits and Flaws can be taken in any combination, but no starting character can have more than seven points of Flaws (so the most freebie points a mage can have 22). Alternatively, a character can have *any one or two* Flaws regardless of their total value (even exceeding seven points), but he may have no more than those two Flaws.

Because they represent special features, Merits and Flaws may not be appropriate for particularly horrific chronicles, or ones in which you want to keep the rules simple. As such, they are a totally optional rule — and it's the Storyteller's option. *Any and all* Merits or Flaws taken should be reviewed closely by the Storyteller. Some can get rather abusive when used to "run over the rules" in the game. In such cases, the Storyteller should not hesitate to forbid the Trait, to remove an obnoxious Merit or to force the player to pay the cost to remove an inappropriate Flaw.

Merits and Flaws are divided into four broad categories: physical, mental, social and supernatural. Each category describes characteristics specific to one aspect of the character.

Physical Merits and Flaws

Acute Senses (1 or 3-pt. Merit)

Your mage has an exceptionally sharp natural sense, be it vision, taste, hearing or whatever. She can manage about twice the natural sensitivity of a human, which allows you to get a two-point reduction on difficulty for all rolls with the appropriate sense. For three points, *all* of your mage's senses are incredibly acute.

Ambidextrous (1-pt. Merit)

Your mage has equal facility with either hand. You never suffer a penalty for your character's use of either hand in performing a task, since the character has no "off-hand." The character can use both hands at once to perform two physical tasks without splitting dice pools, but he may suffer a concentration penalty (at the Storyteller's discretion), especially if the tasks are wildly different or in different arcs of vision.

Very few people are truly ambidextrous. In stressful situations, a penalty should always be assessed for the difficulty of performing actions with both hands at once.

Catlike Balance (1-pt. Merit)

Your mage possesses an innately perfect sense of balance. You reduce the difficulties of all balance-related rolls (e.g., Dexterity + Athletics to walk along a narrow ledge) by two.

Daredevil (3 pt. Merit)

Fortune favors the bold — and your mage is certainly bold. In dangerous and risky situations, he performs like a true action hero. Any time your mage takes a significantly risky action, like leaping across rooftops in a hail of gunfire or diving between two burning, colliding cars, you get to roll three extra dice and ignore one 1 on the roll. Generally, a task must have a difficulty of at least 8 and the potential to inflict three or more levels of lethal or aggravated damage in order to be considered risky in this fashion. Note that extended risky tasks, like vulgar rituals, get this bonus only at the end of the task, rather than on each roll.

Huge Size (4-pt. Merit)

Your character is abnormally large in size, possibly over seven feet tall and 400 pounds in weight. He therefore has one additional health level, and he is able to suffer more harm before he's incapacitated. Treat this health level as an extra Bruised level, with no penalties to rolls. Note that such characters definitely stand out in a crowd, they may suffer health problems later in life, and they make for easy targets. Storytellers, beware of players who take this Merit solely for the ability to soak up extra damage in combat. Remember as well that the bonus mass and health level go away if the mage uses Life magic to shift into a smaller form.

Insensible to Pain (5-pt. Merit)

Your character might be made of steel, or just hopped up on drugs (although you should also take the *Addiction* Flaw if such is the case), but whatever the cause, he doesn't hurt no matter how wounded he is. You ignore all wound penalties until your character is finally killed.

Addiction (1 or 3-pt. Flaw)

Your mage suffers an addiction to some substance, such as nicotine, alcohol or some hard drug. If the substance is relatively trivial and easily obtained, this Flaw is worth one point, and it probably won't cause any game-related difficulties. If the substance is illegal, dangerous or liable to cause health or psychological problems, the Flaw is worth three points. Some mages or constructs may be addicted to extremely unusual or magical substances. Although such substances generally don't assess any penalty, they may count as a severe addiction due to their unusual nature.

A mage who can't get his fix will go through withdrawal, with penalties assessed by the Storyteller.

Defective Sense (1-pt. Flaw)

One of your character's senses is dulled or abnormally damaged in some fashion. Perhaps the character is hard of hearing, has limited taste receptors, is color-blind or is correctably nearsighted. In each case, you suffer a two-point penalty to the difficulty of all rolls involving the flawed sense. Obviously, you cannot take this Flaw in conjunction with an *Acute Sense* of the same type!

Short (1-pt. Flaw)

A character with this Flaw is four and a half feet tall or less. The character may have trouble reaching objects on shelves, and he is certainly noticeable. Such a character runs at half the normal speed.

Disfigured (2-pt. Flaw)

A hideous disfigurement makes your character's appearance disturbing. The difficulties of all die rolls relating to social interactions increase by two. The character may not have an Appearance rating greater than 2.

One Ear/Eye (2-pt. Flaw)

Your character is missing an ear or eye, or else he has suffered damage or a birth defect that makes such an organ useless. The difficulties of all Perception rolls with the appropriate sense increase by two (just like the *Defective Sense* Flaw). Furthermore, a character with one eye increases the difficulty of all rolls involves depth-perception by one (including ranged attacks), while a character with one functional ear suffers a one-point difficulty on all rolls to determine the location of a given sound (due to the loss of binaural hearing).

Primal Marks (2-pt. Flaw)

Your mage may have an Avatar of the Primordial Essence, some totem or god of legend, or perhaps she's just gained some powerful spirit's patronage and it's set its mark on her. If the totem is an animal, she resembles what such an animal would look like in human form so strongly that people who don't even know her call her "Bear" or "Moose" or "Raven." If the Avatar is some well known god or hero, your character looks just like people would expect her to, including any particular deformities (although you do get extra points for such handicaps). Your mage looks the part so much that anyone can guess her nature at a glance, and there is some danger in that, especially if your Avatar has a legendary

enemy (as most do). Your character's totem or Avatar will also require her to protect its species or finish up its unfinished agenda.

Your mage might alternately be the descendant of some famous or infamous house: Pendragon, Murasaki, Bacon, Bathory, Borgia or Le Vey. Besides the family name, you've also inherited the family "look." Students of history can easily picture you banishing the Devil and slaying dragons, or poisoning entire families and bathing in the blood of virgins — especially since they have the illustrations that might give them this idea.

Alternately, your mage may just look the part of her profession too well. Perhaps she has the red hair and green eyes of an Irish witch, the pale eyes and dark skin of an Arabic sorcerer, the grown-together brows and elongated ring-fingers of a born shapeshifter or the intense yellow, violet or emerald green eyes of one the fae. Students of ancient lore recognize these signs, and your mage may easily become the victim of witch-hunters. However, some witches, changelings, shapeshifters and others may accord you more status in their societies if you "look the part."

Bad Sight (3-pt. Flaw)

The character has some sort of noncorrectable vision problem — a severe astigmatism, myopia or the like. This problem can't be corrected with glasses or contact lenses, and fixing it with Life magic requires extensive permanent work to bypass the problems of Pattern bleeding (and thus requires the expenditure of experience to remove the Flaw). You always suffer a two-point penalty to all rolls in which vision is a factor. Since sight is such an important sense, this Flaw is worth more than a simple *Defective Sense*.

Deformity (3-pt. Flaw)

Your mage has some kind of deformity — a misshapen limb, hunchback, clubfoot, etc. — that affects his physical abilities and interactions with others. Having a hunchback, for instance, would lower a character's Dexterity by two dots and increase the difficulty of die rolls relating to social skills by one, when appropriate. After all, a hunchback can type as well as the next guy, and social interactions aren't based on appearance over the Digital Web. It is the responsibility of the Storyteller to determine the specific effects of the chosen deformity.

Degeneration (3, 6 or 9-pt. Flaw)

Your character will die without the aid of magic or science to sustain her. She might be the victim of a disease or curse, or maybe she's something that wasn't meant to be alive in the first place.

At the lowest version of this Flaw, your character simply does not have the natural healing factor with which most mortals are born. All wounds he suffers remain until treated with magic or Technocratic science. He will not heal any damage otherwise.

At the six-point version of this Flaw, your character is actually falling apart. A hideous disease might be eating him up from inside, or maybe he's a victim of beetles and/or natural decay if he's the result of someone's half-assed necromancy. Maybe Iteration X didn't tell him that his "perfect android body" was a prototype made by the lowest bidder and that all the warranties are expiring. Whichever version you take, your character takes one health level of damage at three months, one a month later, another a week after that, one more three days beyond that, one the next day and a final one an hour after that. In short, your character's health deteriorates at an accelerated rate, following the progression for natural healing backward until he is dead. Obviously, the character doesn't heal normally, either.

With the nine-point version of this Flaw, your character falls apart at the same rate as before, but the damage is aggravated.

Obviously, this Flaw is meaningless (and should not be allowed) in short-term chronicles and one-shot games.

Diminished Attributes (Variable)

Life isn't fair. When they were passing out brains, brawn or beauty, someone else got your character's portion — maybe several of them. What this means is that your character is remarkably lacking in the social, physical or mental department. He might be a victim of disease or brain damage, or he may just have been born on the shallow end of the gene pool. It happens.

However, you [the player] have points to spend on other stuff. Real life may not be fair, but at least game reality is. However, Storytellers should be careful with this Flaw, and make certain that the player roleplays the actual realities of being shortchanged.

For each dot that you lose from your character's Attributes, you get three points back from this Flaw. This kickback isn't subject to the normal limits of seven points of Flaws, but you cannot take more than one additional Flaw without special Storyteller approval and a *damn* good story. Note that this arrangement is not fair in terms of freebie points, but it lets you make a character who's totally crippled in one area and still get some payback.

Lame (3-pt. Flaw)

Due to an unhealed injury or a missing limb, your mage has trouble walking. The character has a pronounced limp and a slow stride, and he must use some means of support to walk like a cane, leg braces or Forces magic. The character's movement speed is quartered, and running is impossible. This Flaw may also add to the difficulty of maneuvers that rely on the legs — jumps, swimming, martial-arts kicks — at the Storyteller's discretion.

Monstrous (3-pt. Flaw)

Your mage has an Appearance rating of zero. He may be the stereotypical pock-marked leper, or he may have the face and body of a demon or bug-eyed monster. Otherwise, someone just beat him with the ugly stick.

Permanent Wound (3-pt. Flaw)

Due to Pattern damage, a permanent Paradox injury or some other nastiness, you have a wound that never heals. Even if you repair the injury with magic, it reoccurs at sunset or sunrise of each day (your choice as to which). This wound causes your character to suffer the Wounded health level with lethal damage that cannot be soaked. Such damage is cumulative with other injuries (and it could kill a badly wounded mage if it reoccurs while he's already injured), but it is not self-cumulative. That is, your character's bleeding head wound doesn't cause any more damage the next morning or evening if he hasn't bothered to heal it magically for a day.

Slow Healing (3-pt. Flaw)

The mage's body's natural healing processes are slow, whether due to a bad immune system, old age, bad diet or just genetics. You heal all of your character's wounds twice as slowly as everyone else (see p. XX). All Life magic Effects heal half the damage they should, rounded down.

Deaf (4-pt. Flaw)

Your mage's natural Pattern is deaf, and the mage cannot hear at all! You fail all rolls involving hearing automatically. This Flaw increases the difficulty of many Alertness rolls by three as well, since your mage must rely on other senses for warnings and clues. Overcoming this defect with magic, as with all such Flaws, requires the use of difficult permanent rituals and the expenditure of experience points.

Mute (4-pt. Flaw)

Your mage can't speak. This shortcoming may derive from physical damage, a magical curse or a natural deformity. You may communicate with your game group to describe your character's actions, but you are not allowed to actually talk in character (and if you do so "out of character" to get your point across, your Storyteller may penalize you by awarding you fewer experience points). You can use Linguistics to learn sign language, or write (assuming your character isn't illiterate as well). Mind magic can also overcome this problem to a limited degree.

Aging (5-pt. Flaw)

Your mage is either not as spry as he used to be, or he is not yet mature. Either way, one Physical Attribute score (your choice) must be lowered by one point. This Flaw must be taken once per decade over the 40-year mark, or once for each age bracket under 15. Your character loses one dot between the ages of 11 and 14, two for being between seven and 10, and he loses three for being between four and six. If you take this Flaw to represent youth, you must also take the *Child* Flaw.

Mayfly Curse (5 or 10-pt. Flaw)

Common among Progenitor Victors and those with shifter or demonic blood, your character matures at an accelerated rate and declines at the same. At the lower level, your character ages one year every two months, which means that when you're physically 18 years old, you're chronologically three. At the higher rate, you age a year every week, making you 16 in less than four months and 52 by the end of the year. It's not much of a lifespan, certainly, but it's more than sufficient for shock troops. This Flaw can be combined with any degree of *Aging*.

Storytellers should certainly forbid this Flaw as meaningless twinkery for any short-term or one-shot games!

Blind (6-pt. Flaw)

The character has no natural sight — the world of color and vision is lost to him. You cannot even make Perception rolls that require vision, and you suffer a three-point difficulty penalty on any Alertness roll where you do have a shot, unless the matter relies exclusively on another sense. The difficulty of all Dexterity-related rolls increases by two. Your mage must target his magic by hearing, Correspondence or some other magical or mundane sense.

Paraplegic (6 pt. Flaw)

Your magician is confined to a wheelchair, completely unable to stand and move about without the aid of crutches, the chair itself or some other difficult and painful system. Your mage generally moves a single yard per turn, and doing even that much is torturous. Perhaps the wizard's body is broken by accident, or he may not have been born with any functioning limbs. This Flaw makes life very difficult, and you should consider carefully before taking it!

Social Merits and Flaws

True Love (4-pt. Merit)

Despite the bleakness of the world and the alienation that most mages suffer, your character has discovered a true love. Such love gives hope and inspiration in the face of even the greatest difficulty, for it is a sign that the world is not totally devoid of higher, purer powers. You gain one automatic success on all Willpower rolls, which can only be negated by a botch. On the other hand, you probably have to spend time rescuing your true love from danger or questing to find him or her again.

Child (1-3 pt. Flaw)

Your mage was a young child at the time of her Awakening, and he has all the problems that come with his age. People don't take him seriously, he can't get into clubs, and in particularly severe cases, people tend to ask him where his mommy is.

The value of this Flaw depends upon exactly how young your mage is. This Flaw particularly bites if your character hangs out with older mages and does all sorts of weird stuff that a child shouldn't or can't do (such as sex, drugs, self-mutilation...).

A young child character should also take the *Short* Flaw.

Dark Secret (1-pt. Flaw)

Some terrible past haunts your character. Perhaps he turned on his mentor, or maybe he is secretly in love with a *Widderslainte*. Either way, your character's secret — which should come up from time to time as the Storyteller feels it appropriate — can cause some embarrassment or trouble for your mage (although it's unlikely to get the character killed).

Mistaken Identity (1-pt. Flaw)

Your mage is *not* the reincarnation of some ancient hero or nefarious character from history, the favored child that some great animal totem set its mark upon, a powerful immortal wizard who has not been seen for a hundred years or some god come down in human form. Unfortunately, he *looks* the part, and people who value iconography more than actions will believe he fits the role. This confusion can naturally get your mage into all sorts of trouble. People may expect him to have capabilities that he doesn't, or they may blame him for problems that aren't his own.

Shy (1-pt. Flaw)

Large groups of people make your mage uncomfortable, and although he doesn't necessarily panic and flee from crowds, he has trouble dealing with such gatherings. Your mage has trouble speaking and presenting himself when the world's watching. Any time your mage interacts with strangers or becomes the center of

attention for a group of three or more other people, you suffer a difficulty penalty of three on all Social rolls.

Witch-Hunted (4-pt. Flaw)

A dangerous and skilled mortal hunter stalks your character, fully aware of what your mage is and what he can do. Worse still, the subject is intelligent and crafty, he works to negate the advantages of your character's magic, and he may extend his hunt to your companions and associates. While just about every mage can claim some enemy, this Flaw makes your mage a pariah. (Nobody wants to hang out with someone who's going to bring a psycho-killer along!) The hunter may even have friends or allies who continue to trouble your mage if your mage eludes, dissuades or kills the individual. Whatever the case, this guy wants your mage *dead*, he's not going to stop, and he has access to special resources (or, at the very least, specialized knowledge) in his quest.

Probationary Member (4-pt. Flaw)

Your character joined the Traditions (or Conventions, or appropriate Craft) recently, and he is on bad terms. He may be a former rogue who recanted, or perhaps he defected from the other side. The mage is treated with hostility and suspicion. Even a mage with a high Destiny rating is looked at askance. There's no telling if such a luminous individual will turn again to become a powerful enemy.

Mental Merits and Flaws

Ability Aptitude (1-pt. Merit)

For every human ability, there are those who have a natural flair for it. Within your character's specific Aptitude, reduce all difficulties by two. A natural linguist picks up languages easily, speaking without any trace of accent, and a crack driver can perform phenomenal car tricks with ease. This Aptitude functions for one Ability, but it can be taken multiple times for a character who's a natural with, say, computers and technology.

Special or combat Abilities, such as Do, should never have an *Ability Aptitude* associated with them.

Common Sense (1-pt. Merit)

Your mage has an exceptional body of everyday wisdom and a tendency to deduce clear courses of action in puzzling situations. Although this Merit does not give you a benefit to any die rolls, it means that the Storyteller will warn you when your character's actions violate common sense. He may even give you suggestions. This Merit is good for new players, as it gives the Storyteller an excuse to treat them lightly.

Concentration (1-pt. Merit)

By shutting out all distractions, your mage can focus intently on the task at hand. Your character is never affected by adverse situational and environmental circumstances that don't actually cause damage. Thus, you take no penalty if your mage is distracted, disturbed, pushed, jostled, hanging upside down, working in the rain or otherwise inconvenienced.

Light Sleeper (1 to 3-pt. Merit)

For one point, your mage needs less sleep than other mortals: He can function quite well on four hours a night. If the Storyteller imposes penalties on other players for sleep deprivation (one- or two-die penalties are suggested), then you are exempt. Needless to say, this Merit allows your character to accomplish a lot more with his daily activities.

For two points, your mage sleeps only about two hours per night. This resilience is quite unusual, and it lets your mage get a lot more done. It also means that he has the luxury of sleeping while on the run.

For three points, your mage is truly sleepless. You may suffer penalties from exhaustion, but he does not need shut-eye. Perhaps your mage's brain's sleep center was destroyed in an accident, or he may be something like a golem that's designed to stand forever vigilant. Regardless, the only time your mage sleeps is if he's drugged or beaten unconscious.

Lightning Calculator (1 pt. Merit)

Your character can perform complex mathematical equations in her head instantly with little error at the speed of a computer. *You* as a *player* can use a calculator during play at any time, even when your character is fleeing for her life.

Time Sense (1-pt. Merit)

Your mage has an uncanny sense of time, down to within a few seconds of accuracy. This Merit duplicates the **Perfect Time** Effect of Time 1 (p. XX), but it's natural and ever-present.

Berserker (2-pt. Merit)

The ancient Celts called this state the "Battle Fury," and when it takes over your mage, everything is tinted with a red haze as he kills. And kills. And kills some more. Your character feels no pain, and he ignores all wound penalties when berserk. Whenever your character is injured in combat, make a Willpower roll [difficulty 6 + the number of wound levels suffered so far that scene]. Add two to that difficulty if you have the *Short Fuse* Flaw (up to a maximum difficulty 10). If you fail, your character enters the battle fury, and he may ignore all wound penalties. Unfortunately, he won't know friend from foe, and he will kill until there's nothing left standing.

To end the battle fury, you must make a Willpower roll at the same difficulty. Subtract one from the difficulty if the person on the receiving end is your *True Love* or someone similarly important. Otherwise, everyone just has to run and hide until you come down.

Code of Honor (2-pt. Merit)

Your mage has some personal ethic or code of honor, above and beyond the teachings of Tradition, by which she lives. This code guides her actions, promotes higher standards and gives a clear ethical path. Your mage's belief in and struggle to uphold this code grants you two additional dice to all Willpower rolls when he acts in accordance with this code or when resisting some compulsion that might force him to

violate the code. You should work with the Storyteller to describe and flesh out the code. Note that if your mage does not uphold the code and ponder its impact on his lifestyle regularly, this Merit may be revoked.

Eidetic Memory (2-pt. Merit)

A character with an eidetic memory remembers the general sense of everything that she experiences, and she has greater ease in total recall. Under normal conditions, your character easily remembers everything that happens to her. In stressful situations (like memorizing a book during a firefight), you may need to make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) to memorize or recall the pertinent information.

Iron Will (3-pt. Merit)

When your mage makes up his mind, he's unshakable, and he can't be swayed from his goals. You receive three extra dice against all attempts to influence your mage's thoughts (though not against emotional manipulation). If your character ever run afoul of a vampire, he can shake off its his mind control powers with the expenditure of a single point of Willpower.

Compulsion (1 to 4-pt. Flaw)

There is something your mage is compelled to do or not do, and whether or not he likes this fact is immaterial. This Flaw may be psychological, physiological, or supernatural in nature. If it's purely psychological, you may roll Willpower to resist the Compulsion [difficulty 6 + the point value of the Flaw]. However, if it's physiological or supernatural, it doesn't matter how willing the mind is, since the spirit is bound or the body is crippled, and he is unable to do this thing no matter how hard he tries. The Flaw is worth two extra points if such is the case.

Compulsions can also vary. Not being able to *touch* something and not being able to *harm* it are two completely different things. An evil sorceress might not be able to physically touch an innocent, but she could still stand back and blast away with a shotgun or a spell of flaming death.

This Flaw is worth varied points, depending on the frequency and severity of the *Compulsion*.

Flaw	Compulsion
1 point	Do not cross a threshold without permission, never show fear to the enemy, never contradict a superior officer
2 points	Never refuse a reasonable bet, never betray any emotion, do not touch anything holy or consecrated to a particular faith, never harm a child
3 points	Never refuse a duel, never strike a woman, never refuse an offer of sex, never tell a lie, never take a life
4 points	Never tell the truth, dance whenever you hear music, become entranced by mirrors or beauty or books, never refuse a dare, do no harm

Deep Sleeper (1-pt. Flaw)

Snore, toss and ignore the alarm — your mage sleeps like a force of nature. Whenever your mage is trying to wake up, you suffer a difficulty penalty of two on the roll, and the mage continues to stagger along bleary-eyed and uncomprehending for the rest of the scene (with a further one-point penalty on all rolls).

Ineptitude (1-pt. Flaw)

Your mage just *sucks* at one particular Ability. Maybe he can't handle driving worth a damn, or he makes computers burst into flames and emit pink smoke. Pick one Ability in which your character has at least one dot — preferably one that will be important to your character in some fashion. (Your Storyteller will know if you do otherwise, and he has nasty ways to make you pay.) You suffer a difficulty penalty of two on all rolls with that Ability.

Nightmares (1-pt. Flaw)

Horrid nightmares afflict your mage, whether due to a natural condition like night terrors, a curse or perhaps a vivid replaying of a terrifying event. Your mage has trouble getting enough sleep, and he often wakes up horrified, soaked with sweat and exhausted. You must make a Willpower roll when your mage wakes up. Failure indicates that you lose a die from all dice pools for the rest of the day. A botched roll might indicate that the mage still believes himself to be locked in the nightmare (and Storytellers will be quick to take advantage of this impression).

Naturally, you cannot take this Flaw in conjunction with the three-point version of the *Light Sleeper* Merit!

Sleepwalker (1 to 4-pt. Flaw)

Magic? What a load of bullshit. No one in his right mind believes in magic. This is the 21st Century. You'd have to be nuts to believe in that stuff.

Unfortunately, your character *is* nuts. However, his madness is that he doesn't believe in magic no matter how much evidence he sees to the contrary. He rationalizes everything, and even if he *can* be awakened for a short time by incredibly vulgar magic, the next day he'll remember everything as a weird dream or too much acid, not an earth-shattering revelation of the true nature of reality. He *may* believe in laser guns and personal jetpacks — after all, that's science — but he refuses to believe in all the nonscientific bell, book and candle stuff. Anything outside the Consensus of modern technological society is just bunk as far as your character's concerned.

Or, alternately, your mage believes in magic, faeries, ghosts and werewolves just fine, but he refuses to believe in this strange thing called science. This worldview doesn't make much sense for a resident of the 21st Century, but it's a perfectly reasonable perspective for a visitor from the 16th.

Of course, even if your mage's conscious mind is in denial, his Avatar is quite Awake and willing to help with magic and/or technology. After all, just because you don't actually *believe* that God is going to send angels and flaming chariots to your rescue doesn't mean you shouldn't pray for Him to send them....

As a one-point Flaw, you may only engage in coincidental magic or super-science. Your mage doesn't believe in the vulgar stuff, and he disbelieves it when he sees it. (That is, your character counts as a Sleeper with regards to vulgar magic or super-science.) For a two-point Flaw, your mage doesn't believe in either magic *or* super-science, and he counts as a Sleeper

against both kinds of vulgar Effects. At double the appropriate value, your mage is able to perform vulgar magic and/ or superscience, but he counts as a Sleeper with regard to his own Effects. Moreover, he hallucinates a more rational turn of events. ("What do you mean demons dragged him down to Hell? I just said 'Damn you!' and then he dropped one of his ninja smoke grenades and ran off!") Therefore, the mage gets Paradox from his own vulgar Effects even in a sanctum!

Storytellers should be cautious with this Flaw, not allowing players to create min-maxing Technocrats who bring extra Paradox down on their enemies and none on themselves without allowing it to cause them significant problems.

Soft-Hearted (1-pt. Flaw)

Your character cannot stand to watch others suffer. Your mage avoids any situation that involves causing someone physical or emotional pain, unless you make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8).

Speech Impediment (1-pt. Flaw)

A severe lisp, stutter, cleft palate, outburst of Tourette's Syndrome or similar problem makes it difficult for your mage to speak clearly. Try to roleplay this Flaw; you suffer a two-point penalty to all verbal communication rolls.

Amnesia (2-pt. Flaw)

Your character can't remember anything about his past, his history or the events of his life. The character can still use his various Abilities, but he may not remember how he learned them. Your Storyteller has final say on your character's history, and some things may come back to surprise you. You can set aside two to five additional points of Flaws for use by the Storyteller; the Storyteller gets to pick Flaws worth *one fewer* point (thus, if you take four extra amnesiac Flaws, your Storyteller chooses three points of Flaws but you get the four freebie points). Of course, you don't know what these Flaws *are*, so you may be in for a surprise!

Deranged (2-pt. Flaw)

Due to circumstances beyond her control, your character is permanently insane. This state may result from a congenital brain disorder, or maybe she saw things she wasn't meant to see that drove her mad. Although you can overcome this insanity temporarily with Willpower, your character might never overcome its grip. However, while your mage is crazy, she is not necessarily a Marauder. Her magic or science may, in fact, be one of the few sane things about her. Choose or create a Derangement (p. XX).

Phobia (2-pt. Flaw)

Some simple stimulus, engenders an overwhelming fear in your mage. Your character might be afraid of snakes, heights or large crowds of people. You must make a Willpower roll whenever your mage is confronted by the object of terror. If you fail, your mage retreats from the situation, while a botch means that the mage flees completely out of control or curls up into a helpless ball and quivers. If forced to stand ground against such a fear (fighting a giant magical snake, for instance), you suffer a difficulty penalty of two on all rolls.

Short Fuse (2-pt. Flaw)

Your mage is quick to anger. Whenever anybody ticks off your character, you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to not go on the offensive. This Flaw is especially dangerous with the *Berserker* Merit, as it increases the difficulty of the roll to resist going berserk by two.

Vengeful (2-pt. Flaw)

Someone pissed your mage off, and he plans to get even. Your mage wants to even the score with one individual or group. This victim may or may not be an enemy — the subject may not even be aware of the perceived slight — but your mage takes it seriously and counts it as a major part of his life. You must spend a Willpower point to turn your mage away from the object of his vengeance when a situation crops up to potentially wreak havoc on the opponent in question.

Ability Deficit (5 point Flaw)

Your character is not attuned to his natural aptitudes, so you have five fewer points to spend on his Talents, Skills or Knowledges. Therefore, the most you could take on that category would be eight dots, and the least would be zero. Of course, you can still spend freebie points to take Abilities in the appropriate category. However, you cannot have any Ability in that category at three dots or higher at the start of the game.

Supernatural Merits and Flaws

Conditional Magic (1 to 6-pt. Merit or Flaw)

There is one thing in the world that is a great boon, or bane, to your character's magic. Perhaps her spells work particularly well against men, or on Tuesdays, or just after a storm, or on people dressed all in black. Maybe she's powerless to affect those who are or who bear that certain thing, such as her magic being unable to affect Christians or those who carry a piece of rowan and red thread. It may be that a certain individual gave her power over them, or perhaps it is utterly proof against her magic due to an oath she swore or spells that were placed on her.

The conditions that affect your magic may be common, uncommon or rare, and the value of this Merit or Flaw depends on the rarity of the condition. The base costs listed here assume that you have a difficulty modifier of three on all Arete rolls under the given conditions. You may adjust the difficulty by one for every point more or less you devote to the Trait.

Points	Condition
1 point	Unique: The Sword of Roland, the Matriarch of the MECHA construct, Leap Year
2 points	Scarce as hen's teeth: Current or former members of the Council of Nine, your former Mentors, once in a blue moon
3 points	Rare, but not unheard of: toadstones, Swedish royalty, werewolves, rowan and red thread, the holy days of the archangels
4 points	Special order: virgins, middle eastern eye-bead charms, any member of Iteration X, during a thunderstorm
5 points	Available without much trouble: cold iron, silver, Christians, any member of the Traditions, a windy day, holy ground
6 points	Common as dirt: men, anyone who's ever been baptized, the color purple, under cloud cover, Tuesdays

Green Thumb (1-pt. Merit)

Flowers spring up in your footsteps and trees burst into bloom at your touch. Your hands are as warm as sunlight or stones from a cheery hearth. A common Merit among Verbena.

Parlor Trick (1-pt. Merit)

Your character has a natural ability to perform some small, pretty or useful bit of magic at will. This trick is nothing that can cause much damage, or even serious annoyance; it's just enough to perform some small basic task or give your mage a little flair. Your mage might be adept at the old wizard's trick of conjuring an orb of witchlight to hand or a flame to her finger. She might be a cyborg who had the bright idea of installing a light bulb or pilot light in her head for the same purpose. If your mage uses a magical sense like night-vision often, you might have the added perk that he can make his eyes glow like a vampire's, allowing him to see even in total darkness. If your character is of the scientific bent, he may be able to emit enough x-rays to use with his x-ray vision, or he could have a laser pointer installed in his index finger just for fun. You don't have to roll or spend anything to make this parlor trick work.

Storytellers should note that this Merit is provided to add color and reason to the game, not to give min-maxers a loophole to create engines of death. With this Merit, mages can light pipes without a lighter, conjure roses or martinis, have mood music play in the background or pop a penknife or a single claw out of a fingertip. Yes, you could put an eye out with one of those things, but the combat difference between a penknife, a single tiger claw, and a press-on fingernail is inconsequential.

Circumspect Avatar (2 pt. Merit)

What Avatar? Your mage has never seen her Avatar. In fact, no one's ever seen her Avatar, unless it was her reflection in the mirror, or her shadow, or something that everyone and their dog has.

Your mage does have an Avatar, but it isn't inclined to put on a show. At most, her Avatar is simply her subconscious, and it's just nudged and pushed her into finding her own Awakening.

Having a circumspect Avatar doesn't mean that your mage doesn't have Seekings and Epiphanies. Such events just tend to be rooted in reality. The mage may well find that a series of unusual events in the physical world leads her to greater enlightenment, without ever entering a dreamscape. Who needs to go rooting around in dreams and bizarre mindscapes to find out who they are?

Medium (2-pt. Merit)

Your mage is a natural conduit to the Underworld. Although this Merit does not reduce the difficulty of working Spirit magic, it does mean that your mage can hear ghosts naturally. The mage might not *see* wraiths without the right

magic, but they do tend to hang out, talk, bug the character and ask him to do things. This talent can be helpful in some cases; wraiths are eager to talk to those who can hear them. However, they often make demands, and they can be difficult to banish if the mage doesn't have enough power with Spirit.

Unaging (2-pt. Merit)

Your mage does not age, ever. Perhaps she drank an elixir in the Mythic Ages, or she tasted the Peach of Immortality, or she ate the Apples of the Hesperides, or she dined on the forbidden savor of mermaid's flesh. Perhaps she was injected with the perfect Iterator nanotech or Progenitor symbiote. Perhaps her body is composed of timeless stone or metal. Perhaps the cause is a complete mystery. Regardless, she remains unchanged as the years pass by, save for scars and accumulated knowledge.

Oracular Ability (3-pt. Merit)

No, your mage is not one of the mystic Master mages living in an ivory tower in the Deep Umbra. Neither is she a software company. What she is, is an ordinary mage with a flair for divination and glimpses into the past, present and future.

Whenever the Storyteller feels you are in the position to see a sign or portent, you may make a Perception + Awareness roll, with the difficulty relative to how well the omen is concealed. If successful, you may then roll Intelligence + Occult to interpret what you have seen, the difficulty is relative to the complexity of what you have seen. Your difficulty for all divination with magic (generally with Time) reduces by two.

Cyclic Magic (3-pt. Merit)

Your character's magic is tied to some regular and repeating cycle — night and day, the moon, the sun, the tides, the wheel of the year, or even such things as the stock market or the price of tea in China (very important for a Syndicate commodities broker). As such, your difficulties with magic fluctuate from the standard by a maximum of three, depending on what part of the cycle you set as your personal high point. You may be tied to the dark of the moon, the full moon, the Bull cycle or the Bear cycle. Regardless, while the cyclic nature of your magic is problematic, it is quite useful in some circumstances, allowing your character to schedule rituals for their times of greatest power.

Manifest Avatar (3-pt. Merit)

Most people see their Avatars only during Seekings, if at all. Your mage's drops by every day for tea, if it doesn't hang out 'round the clock. This Avatar is completely invisible to everyone but your character (and those who can read her mind), unless you take this Merit in combination with the *Allies* Background, creating the body of a person or familiar for your Avatar. In this case, your Avatar becomes your *bamf!*ing buddy, popping in and out of existence when it feels like it. If it's killed, only the mortal shell dies, not your Avatar — unless you also have the *Phylactery* Flaw, in which case your Avatar's form is immune to all physical harm, but it is manifested permanently. If such is the case, it is able to be kidnapped, transformed and so on.

Storytellers should note that an Avatar doesn't have to *say* it's an Avatar, and just because an Avatar is invested into a phylactery doesn't mean that everything that phylactery tells you is a pronouncement from your Avatar. A V-A may have his laptop as a phylactery, but unless he's also taken *Manifest Avatar* as a Merit, his laptop's warnings to update his virus software are nothing more significant than that. Likewise you may have invested your Avatar into your best friend, but that doesn't mean that everything (or anything) he says are pronouncements from your personal spirit guide. Such only happens to be the case if you take *Manifest Avatar*. Even then, why *should* your Avatar tell you he's anyone except your best friend?

A manifest Avatar can chat with you and other people like the intelligences that show up on the Web to guide Virtual Adepts and converse with their contemporaries. With the right tricks, it can even materialize to harangue you, to fight, to push you around or just make for a hot date.

Natural Channel (3-pt. Merit)

Your mage is a natural weak point in the Gauntlet between worlds. The difficulty to use magic to pierce it is one less, and spirits react a bit more favorably to the mage. If your mage finds an especially weak spot in the Gauntlet (with Awareness or Spirit 1), he can step between worlds without magic.

Stormwarden (3 or 5-pt. Merit)

For some reason, the Avatar Storm that rages across the Gauntlet has no effect upon your mage. When your mage reaches across the Gauntlet, he never suffers any injury from the storm.

For five points, your mage also protects everyone that he touches (including through Correspondence touching) and deliberately desires to shield.

Either version of this Merit is quite rare, and a whole cabal might be built around the power of one individual to travel across the Gauntlet unhindered. There's no apparent pattern to who manifests this boon — some mages who've never studied Spirit magic before suddenly discover this talent when dragged across the Umbra, while other Masters of Spirit still can't simulate it.

Unbondable (3 pt. Merit)

Vampire blood cannot enslave your mage's will. No matter how much of it she consumes, the dreaded blood bond won't take hold. For that matter, she is immune to the eternal infatuation of the incubus's kisses and enslavement to ancient Artifacts created with soul-binding powers. This Merit can be powerful — a little *too* powerful for some chronicles — if combined with the *Ghoul* Merit. Therefore, if a character wants to be a free-willed ghoul, bear a soul-binding ring safely or be in any other situation where he gets the favors of the king without having to swear fealty, the player has to pay double the usual amount.

On the flip side, your mage should not go around drinking vampire blood at random. The stolen power of undead creatures cursed by God certainly has nasty Resonance.

Fae Blood (4-pt. Merit)

Although your character is not a changeling, she's got their heritage running through her veins — literally. Faerie blood allows her to walk in the Dreaming as if she were fae herself.

While doing so exposes her to chimerical attack, it also opens her to a new and wondrous world.

In fae terms, your mage is *kinain*, a human with some innate Glamour who can learn limited cantrips fueled by her own power. (See **Changeling: The Dreaming** and **The Enchanted** for details. Note that a full mage cannot have a Glamour pool.) If your character is a hedge magician, these cantrips are a wondrous adjunct to your Paths; if she's an Awakened mage, they are inherent tricks that are Paradox-free! Her Banality is also quite low (typically two to five) and her presence is often welcome in the courts of the fae. Naturally, this sort of gift carries an obligation to play faerie politics. Nevertheless, it can be a wondrous game.

Lucky (4-pt. Merit)

Your mage is just plain lucky. Thrice per story (not per session), you can repeat a failed roll, even a botch. However, you can only do so once per roll, and you can't apply luck to rolls of magic (involving Arete, Spheres, that sort of thing).

Shapechanger Kin (4-pt. Merit)

By some quirk of fate, your mage is related to a werewolf, -cat, -raven, -bear or perhaps even one of the more mysterious breeds. The changing blood has not stirred in him — at least not in the traditional way — but it has left its mark. He's immune to the Delirium (the madness that claims those who see a werebeast's half-human form), and he has friends among whichever Breed he's related to. Having this Merit doesn't meant that he knows their secrets or that he can wander around their sacred sites without retribution, but he has a certain edge that no normal mortal can match. If your character is a sorcerer, you might be able to learn a few spirit Gifts, and an Awakened mage can use these inherent magical powers as well without threat of Paradox. However, he can never have Gnosis, the innate connection to the spirit world that all shifters share.

You've got a good chance to know some shapechanger lore, and you may share some common contacts and allies. You will probably claim some degree of affection from your relatives' tribe and some animosity from their enemies.

Twin Souls (4-pt. Merit)

Your mage's Avatar has been fragmented, and he has a "soulmate" — equal in power to his own Avatar, and similar in Essence, Nature and Demeanor. A physical twin, a look-alike, another mage or a complete stranger (possibly a Sleeper) might posses this fragment. When in physical contact with this soulmate (or spiritual mate, for actions in the Umbra), the two may share Quintessence and cast spells as one, taking the highest ratings in Arete and Spheres, also gaining an additional measure of Quintessence equal to the strength of either individual. The parts are greater than the whole. However, this joint pool must be replenished through meditation in a Node, the same as a regular pool of Quintessence. Paradox points gained from joint spells are not split, however, and each twin gains the same amount of Paradox.

With only one dot in Correspondence, your character will always know where her soulmate is. With one dot in Life, she'll know his state of health, and with one in Mind, she may share his thoughts. If one soulmate dies, the player of the other must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to avoid psychic shock. She must wait also until her soulmate's reincarnation before the power may again be shared. Soulmates are not just walking Merits; they must be presented and run as characters, preferably by different players in a group. Also note that a mage does not have to get along with her soulmate.... Twin souls are distinct and separate individuals, not just tag-team powerhouses.

Ghoul (5-pt. Merit)

At some point in time, a vampire fed your character some of her potent blood, possibly bonding her into service. Somehow, she broke free, but the blood's force has granted her some of her mistress's power. In addition to a vague knowledge of vampiric society, your character ages slowly, has an extra automatic success on any Strength roll you make, and she inflicts an extra die of damage with all hand-to-hand attacks as a corollary to that additional strength. If your game integrates **Vampire: The Masquerade** rules, your character has a blood pool, a dot in Potence and the potential to buy and use some Disciplines, specifically Potence, Fortitude and his Domitor's choice powers.

This power does not come without cost, however. Your mage must continue to feed on vampire blood occasionally. Otherwise, she regains her mortality and craves forever the sweet rush of her former mistress's essence. Should she revert (after going a month or more without the sacred vitae), she loses her supernatural might (and Disciplines) forever. (Unless she is Embraced as a vampire, in which case she gets them back at the cost of her life and Avatar.)

Note also that imbibing the cursed blood of the brood of Caine has all sorts of detrimental effects! A mage gains a dot each in Static and Entropic Resonance immediately the first time she becomes a ghoul. The unaging curse causes the mage to have difficulty with Seekings. This penalty comes on at the Storyteller's discretion, but in general, the mage has a tendency to fail in Seekings due to her own static nature and the foibles of the Curse.

Legendary Attribute (5-pt. Merit)

Your mage has a superhuman Attribute, something in which he has the potential to be greater than human. Although this Attribute is not necessarily *automatically* better, the mage could potentially exceed the bounds of human ability. Such a gift is rare and precious, and many people with this capacity never even manage to fulfill their true potential.

In your character's legendary Attribute, your character has the potential for a rating of six dots. Thus, your mage might have the Strength of Hercules or the Intelligence of Occam. This Merit does not confer such a rating automatically; it must still be purchased with Attribute points, freebie points or experience.

In addition to the potential for inhuman power, your character has some miraculous capability tied to that Attribute. A mage with legendary Stamina might have the ability to roll a soak against *any* form of damage, for instance, while a mage with legendary Wits might be able to shift his initiative category by one place in any given turn automatically. This power is generally automatic, and it is subject to the Storyteller's approval. Its

potency varies with the character's actual Attribute rating, so a character with a legendary Stamina of 1 has a weak legendary power that might grow with time and experience.

This Merit obviously has the potential for abuse, and it is not appropriate for all chronicles or characters.

Shattered Avatar (5-pt. Merit)

Although not necessarily weak, your character's Avatar has been broken to pieces. Your mage has one splinter — your *Avatar* rating, if you have one, purchased at the normal cost for that Background — and the other pieces are scattered elsewhere. However, what has been broken can be put back together, at least in this case. If you can find the other pieces of your mage's Avatar through questing and roleplaying, you may increase your *Avatar* rating after character creation.

The other pieces of your character's Avatar may be scattered about the cosmos, secreted in extradimensional hidey-holes with sphinxes and other creatures guarding them, or they may be part of a phylactery, of which you have one or more pieces. For instance, perhaps your mage's Avatar is invested in 10 mighty rings, three of which she has (and a corresponding *Avatar* rating of 3), but she must go and retrieve the others from those who have them. Or perhaps there are other mages who share your character's Avatar, and whenever your mage kills one, her *Avatar* rating grows by their *Avatar* rating. Unfortunately, the other mages who have this Avatar are out to kill her as well....

Design the nature of your shattering with your Storyteller and decide beforehand what your character must do to regain a piece of his broken spirit.

Sphere Natural (5-pt. Merit)

Your character is able to use one of the Spheres of magic with a greater degree of ease than other mages. For whatever reason (inborn talent, powerful heritage, past life, supernatural bargain, etc.), she's got an affinity for a certain kind of magic. She picked it up quickly, and she now progresses through it at an unusual rate.

During character creation, select one Sphere. From this point on, you only pay three-quarters of the normal cost (rounded down) when buying levels, rituals and similar improvements for magic of that Sphere alone. The favored Sphere must be declared at character creation, and it may be purchased only once.

Avatar Companion (7-pt. Merit)

Your mage is in a cycle of reincarnation. However, the strange thing about your mage's passages through the life-death-rebirth cycle comes from the fact that his Avatar has another lesser Avatar connected to it. This fragment also enters the reincarnation cycle, follows your mage's Avatar through each incarnation, and often retains memories of its previous incarnation.

In game terms, you have a living companion who has an Avatar linked to your own. You may have little memory of your past lives and your companion may not be Awakened, but *she* retains much of the knowledge and experience from your

previous incarnations. Thus, your mage's companion can remind him of things or teach him about lessons that he's already learned previously. Think Corum and Jhary-a-Conel.

The Storyteller creates this companion. Unless you also take the *Allies* Background, your companion has no special capabilities besides being tied to your character's cycle and remembering the past.

Dual Traditions (7 point Merit)

Your mage has been educated by two traditions. Most likely, he was a Hollow One who studied a bit of this and that, and found a couple things that made sense to him. Or, perhaps, he was Awakened by a teacher of one Tradition, but then studied under a different Master and experienced a second Epiphany through this new knowledge. For purposes of spending experience, the specialty Spheres of both Traditions come with the bonus (cheap) multiplier. Your character is more open-minded about foci as well, and he may use those of either Tradition. (The penalties for unique foci still apply.) If your mage loses his Hermetic showstone, for example, he has to go either about getting another one or rely solely on the props of his other Tradition.

True Faith (7-pt. Merit)

In a world of horror and uncertainty, your mage keeps a small core of shining faith alive. Your character has a strong belief in and love for the Almighty power that drives the universe — be it God, Allah, the Hindu pantheon, or even just faith that everything will turn out all right.

Your character has one Faith Trait. This Trait acts as a die of countermagic, and it adds to all Willpower rolls. Gaining further Traits is nigh-unto impossible, and it requires extreme work and dedication. Even a single Faith Trait indicates a character of surpassing generosity of spirit. A character must maintain a code of the utmost standards in order to keep his faith. Those who interact with the character should quickly realize that he's special, touched and devoted in a way that's rarely seen in this world, and the character should uphold the highest spiritual tenets of his belief. It's *possible* for the faithful to be antagonistic — righteous soldiers of God, perhaps — but it's very, very rare. Most of the faithful are filled with compassion, honesty and an overwhelming love for the whole of Creation.

From time to time your character might be able to perform miracles fueled with faith; the exact details of such inherent magic are up to the Storyteller. Performing such tasks may exhaust the individual's faith for a time until it can be reaffirmed, in effect lowering the Faith rating. Miracles of this sort do not garner Paradox, and they seem to stem from some unknown source. Perhaps there truly *is* a benevolent power that watches over the universe.

The Bard's Tongue (1-pt. Flaw)

Your character speaks the truth, uncannily so. Things he says tend to come true. This Flaw is not a facility for blessing or cursing, or an Effect ruled by any conscious control (use Time 2 instead). However, at least once per story, an uncomfortable truth regarding any current situation will appear in your character's head and come out his mouth. To avoid speaking prophecy, the owner of this "gift" must expend a Willpower point and take a wound of one bashing health level from the strain of resisting (especially if he bites a hole in his tongue).

Devil's Mark (1-pt. Flaw)

Somewhere along the line, your mage made a pact with a demon or devil and it funneled its foul power into him, leaving a mark in the process. This blemish (known as a witch's nipple) is dark and unwholesome looking, but it is insensitive to pain. In ages past, the "witch prickers" of the Inquisition would test these marks with special pins before they burned infernalists at the stake. In the modern day, the puritanical pricks are few and far between, and most people who see this mark will just think it's a birthmark. Despite the name "nipple," it can grow anywhere on your mage's body.

On the plus side, if you have some demonic familiar, your imp can suck Quintessence directly from your character's third nipple, with the added bonus of it being insensible to pain — a real perk when you have a cat chewing on your tit.

Echoes (1 to 5-pt. Flaw)

Your mage manifests the traditional marks associated with the supernatural. Maybe it's a little quirk like not having a shadow, or something as severe as a baleful aura. Perhaps milk curdles around your mage and mirrors break.

Look up some superstitions associated with the heritage of your mage's Tradition, and pick a few! The Storyteller determines the value of this Flaw, based on the severity of these supernatural problems.

Geasa (1 to 5-pt. Flaw; must be attached to another Flaw or Merit)

There is something your character must or must not do, and his life, his luck, his magic (and perhaps his very soul) depends on it. It may be something that has always been upon him, a Geas prophesied by druids at his birth, or a curse laid on him by faeries at his christening. It may also be a sacred oath or vow he swore, or a promise or bargain he made, and Someone (with a capital S) witnessed it and is going to hold him to it. If he disobeys, the consequences are dire, if not deadly.

The value of a Geas depends on how easily it is broken and the penalty for violating it. If the penalty is the loss of some Merit or Background, deduct the Geas' rating from the value of the Merit or Background and make that number the value of the Flaw. For example, your character's sword may be a five-point Artifact, but you have been told, "If you ever raise this blade in anger, the angels who gave it to you will take it away." Never raising one's sword in anger is a small sacrifice, so it's worth four points, making a four point Flaw.

When you take a Geas, choose the Flaw(s), Background(s), and/ or Merit(s) to which the Geas is attached. Then either lessen the final value of the Flaw(s) or decrease the cost of the Merit(s) and/ or Background(s). In the case of Merits that may be taken multiple times, you may take the Geas the same number of times to decrease the cost. However, your Geas

should be at least one point less than the total value of the Merits, Backgrounds and/or Flaws to which it's linked. In other words, you cannot get a Merit or Background for free just by piling on strictures and limitations. Storytellers should examine each Geas to make sure it makes sense in terms of story, rather than just being a pile of bizarre restrictions and commandments that could only be explained by faeries dropping acid at a christening. Storytellers should also blackball any Geas that does not cause actual problems. Losing your soul if you die is a problem, and so is losing an legendary Attribute if you lose your virginity. However, it's to be expected that you'll lose all of your Attributes, enhanced or otherwise, when you die, so this is not a legitimate problem unless your character also has some way to come back from the dead.

The point value of the Geasa suggested here is only approximate, and it will vary depending on character and circumstances.

Value	Geas
1 point	Inevitable circumstance or incredible sacrifice: When you die, if you ever let the sun touch your skin, if you ever allow your feet to touch the earth, if you ever speak another word
2 points	Almost unavoidable circumstance or significant sacrifice: Remain a virgin, never harm a living creature, never tell a lie
3 points	Everyday circumstance or common sacrifice: Never back down from a fight, never tell a secret, never refuse hospitality, never marry, never have children
4 points	Unlikely circumstance or a small sacrifice: Stop and pet every cat you see, never eat any animal product, never harm a certain type of animal or a certain type of person, never raise your sword in anger
5 points	Easily avoided circumstance or trivial sacrifice: Never break bread with a red-haired man, say your prayers every night, take your vitamins, never harm the king, don't eat ham, keep one small secret

Classic penalties for violating a Geas include suffering a dark fate, losing one's Avatar, having luck turn from good to bad (losing the *Lucky* Merit), being deserted by one's familiar (especially if the Geas was a pact you made with the beast), losing a totem, losing all one's friends and losing one's worldly possessions.

Characters may have several Geasa that may come into conflict. Cuchulainn had the Geasa to "Never refuse hospitality" and to "Never harm a dog" (his namesake). Three hags then offered him roast dog for dinner and Cuchulainn died soon after. Consequently, most mages try to keep their Geasa secret, lest they be used against them by enemy mages. Unfortunately, Geasa can be divined by a simple Entropy 1 Effect mixed with a little skill in fortune-telling as can one's destiny. Elaborate traps have been devised to force mages to violate all their Geasa in succession, leading to their flamboyant destruction. Perversely, Geasa, curses, holy vows and binding oaths are also marks of great status among certain Traditions, particularly the Akashic Brotherhood, Verbena, and Celestial Chorus, who accord status to mages with such Flaws. Simply put, unimportant people don't have Geasa or family curses, and someone who takes a binding oath or makes a sacred vow (and keeps it) is worthy of respect. Most Technomancers, on the other hand, aren't impressed by people who take vows of chastity or silence, and they are similarly blasé about those who break them.

Traditionally, there is very little that may be done about Geasa, which are simply facets of one's destiny, and curses are devilishly hard to lift (and the Flaw must be bought off if they are). However, with binding oaths, sacred vows, and bans imposed by totem spirits, characters who violate them *accidentally* may attempt to atone for their crime. A witch who has vowed to never eat any red meat, then suddenly finds ham in her pea soup, might be able to atone for the trespass by fasting and sending checks to PETA. However, if a mage violates an oath willingly and with full knowledge — and survives — he becomes an oathbreaker, one of the most foul epithets among the Traditions. The destiny of an oathbreaker is scarred permanently, and the marks show clearly to the same Entropy 1 magic that reveals a mage's destiny. As such, it is virtually impossible for an oathbreaker to find a tutor or any sort of aid among those Traditions that value one's sworn word. Some Traditions, notably the Order of Hermes and the Verbena, kill oathbreakers on sight, numbering them among the Nephandi, whose dark paths of power are the only ones left open to them. Ironically, many oathbreakers are young infernalists who foreswore their allegiance to the Dark Masters — and the binding oath they had been given — after realizing the price of that power. Destiny, however, does not play favorites, and those who break their word to Hell are just as stigmatized as those who lie to Heaven.

Characters who wish to begin as oathbreakers should take *Dark Fate* or some other curse. Occasionally there are good and noble characters who have sworn foolish oaths in the past, then have broken them rather than allow some greater evil to occur. It is impossible to erase the stain from the soul once one is foresworn, but some have friends who will still stand by them, even though most mages will spit when they say their names.

Geasa may be taken at the same time as the *Compulsion* Flaw, assuming that the *Compulsion* does not make the Geas impossible. For example, a witch could be both under a Geas and supernaturally (or just psychologically) compelled to stop and pet every cat she saw, lest she suffer a dark fate.

Crucial Component (2 to 5-pt. Flaw)

There is some raw ingredient your mage needs to work his magic, besides magic itself. This component may be something rare or esoteric, like diamonds or ghostly ectoplasm, or perhaps something common or easily obtainable, like anger, alcohol or electricity. Without this crucial component, he cannot work his magic, and if this crucial component cannot be worked into a casting, oh well — you need to find a different Effect.

This Flaw does not merely represent a Technocrat's reliance on scientific devices and scientific principles. A Virtual Adept does not need a computer to work his computations; if he had to, he could use a slide-rule or a pencil and paper, or even do them in his head — it just takes longer. But Dr. Va-Voom! requires diesel fuel to power all his Devices, and they won't work if he tries to attach solar cells or an etheric proton pack — or at least they won't work for him. This substance does not have to

be direct from the source — moonlight can be charged into moonstones and holy water can be bottled — but it does have to be properly stored, with whatever methods or rituals are appropriate. (Charged moonstones must be kept in a black velvet pouch, away from the light of the sun, while holy water must be kept in a specially blessed flask.)

Flaw	Crucial component
2 pts	sunlight, eggs, motor oil, tea, aspirin, electricity, emotion, ectoplasm
3 pts	beeswax candles, blood, fresh lavender, grave dirt, holy water, rage, spectral residue
4 pts	virgin's blood, hashish, dead humans, gold, platonic love, the fires of Hell
5 pts	diamonds, live humans, rare orchids, lightning strikes, transcendent joy, the tears of angels, any variety of Tass regardless of Resonance

Dark Fate (5-pt. Flaw)

Some terrible fate looms over your mage, and worse still, she knows it. She will die in a horrible way, or she may be doomed to suffer for eternity. Maybe she had a vision of her own Gilgul, or of entering the Cauls of the Nephandi. Your character cannot escape this fate, and it will come to haunt her sooner than she thinks. Occasionally, situations may remind your mage of the futility of her existence. You must spend a Willpower point to overcome such lassitude or else lose a die from all rolls for the rest of the day. Only the Storyteller knows the exact nature of this fate, and it's up to him to determine how it will come to pass.

Sphere Inept (5-pt. Flaw)

For some reason, your mage *sucks* at a certain kind of magic. She could be paying off some karmic debt or struggling with some metaphysical concept. Maybe she invested her knowledge in some item in a past life and she hasn't run across it yet in this incarnation.

This Flaw acts like *Sphere Natural* in reverse. Advancement in one particular Sphere (chosen at character creation) costs 1/4 more experience points than normal, rounded up. To take this Flaw, choose one Sphere *that your character plans to study*. This Flaw can be selected only once, and it must be chosen at character creation.

Phylactery (7-pt. Flaw)

Historically, a phylactery referred to a special arm wrapping with a prayer box that contained sutras, divine power and a portion of the wearer's soul. Mages refer to a phylactery as a container for the power to perform magic. Your mage's Avatar exists in the physical plane, invested into an object or place, or possibly imbued into some creature or person (such as his familiar or ally) or even a part of his body. On rare occasions, it may be invested into some nebulous concept, like a bloodline, secret society or a religion. The good news is that this object or creature is now Correspondence Range 0 in regards to yourself, which means you can sense it wherever it is, unless it's shrouded by warding. Teleporting your phylactery ring off your finger or making you drop your phylactery sword is as difficult a feat as teleporting your finger off your hand or forcing you to chop off your own arm. The bad news is that you must be in actual physical contact with your phylactery in order to work magic — even if that physical contact is long distance, like a Virtual Adept linked via modem to the mainframe in his bedroom. Moreover, you need to be very obvious about what it is you're using to perform your arts. If your mage's phylactery is his staff, your mage must wave it grandly during all invocations; if his phylactery is a crown, he must hold his head high and wear the crown everywhere he intends to do magic.

If your mage's phylactery speaks to him as his Avatar, you should also take the *Manifest Avatar* Merit. If the phylactery is an object, you should probably take the item as a unique focus. As with any unique focus, a phylactery can be repaired or retrieved if it is damaged, destroyed or stolen.

If your mage is separated from his phylactery, you may roll Perception + Awareness to sense the surroundings of where it is, depending on how the phylactery might perceive such things. If your mage's phylactery is animate (as with a cat or horse or severed-but-still-living hand) it will also do its best to find its way back to you, having the same homing sense.

Similarly, if your mage's Avatar is invested into a place, such as the Royal Forest of Dean or San Francisco, transporting him away from it, at least by magical means, is about as difficult as teleporting a city block to Istanbul. If he *is* removed from his phylactery by mundane means, his homing sense will lead him back. In cases where a phylactery is a place, the Avatar fuses with the City Father of that area. That is to say, your Avatar becomes one with the totem spirit of that particular region — Emperor Norton in San Francisco, Belle in Atlanta, a certain highly trademarked mouse in Disneyland. You should take an Avatar rating on par with the importance of your character's bailiwick. Wild places such as forests, deserts, rivers and even oceans can be linked with the same way, although your character must be in them or on them to work his magic. The Pacific Ocean is *huge*, but if that's your mage's phylactery, his connection to it ends once he sets foot on dry land. Generally speaking, it's not the *size* of an area that's important so much as the *identity*. The Queen of Angels may control most of Los Angeles, but there's a different identity to Hollywood and Malibu.

If your character's phylactery is a place, your Storyteller may also allow your character's magic to work in other places somehow linked to it. A mage with Hashberry for her Avatar could probably work her magic in other parts of San Francisco with raised difficulties the further she got from the Haight, and more powerful Avatars could probably work their magic in foreign lands tied to their spirit.

Finally, if your mage's phylactery is a concept with a physical or temporal manifestation, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Iteration X, the witch's Sabbath or the season of Christmas, you may work magic as long as your character is an accepted part of that institution. The symbols and tools representing it can be destroyed, of course, stripping your mage of his magic temporarily, but they can be replaced.

In cases of identity phylacteries, your mage loses his connection to his Avatar if he is disowned, banished, defrocked, excommunicated or otherwise kicked out. As such, members with this Flaw are intensely loyal. If the organization or other concept is destroyed, the Avatar is destroyed, but an organization cannot be destroyed until all members either die or truly renounce their loyalties. When a concept is your mage's phylactery, his Avatar is the protector or mascot of that concept.

If a mage with a phylactery ever dies, the Avatar may or may not go free, at the Storyteller's option. If it does not go free, the phylactery remains as it is, awaiting the mage to reclaim it in his next incarnation.

EPILOGUE: STRIDING FORTH INTO THE FINAL DAYS

AUGUST 12, 1999

Nothing in my life ever stays small. Though it starts that way, that's never how it ends up.

Things started going wrong at my kung fu class.

Today...

Today I went to class as always. The only real difference was that, when we reached the free sparring segment, sifu decided that I would spar with him. That was the first time that had happened. All was going well – standard sets, slowly at first, then faster as we warmed up. Then I missed a block and POW! fist in the face. I ended up on my ass on the mat, holding my nose. Took me about 15 minutes to get the bleeding stopped. I felt like a dolt. It's a typical part of practice, but an annoying one all the same. I'd missed the block, the one I had been practicing for the last 10 minutes. When I was all through bleeding, sifu wanted me to come and try again. We started up again, slow at first, then speeding up. And I felt it happen again. There was his fist coming right at my face...

Then it stopped, right there at the tip of my nose. His fist just stopped, his arm outstretched and his stance perfect as he somehow managed not to slam into my face at full speed. To make matters even stranger, sifu had a very odd and confused look on his face.

After class he asked me to come and see him the next day for a special class. Never even knew we had one of those.

AUGUST 13, 1999

Today was strange, to say the least. I think that sifu has lost it – gone totally loopy. I was the only one to show up for the special class. We didn't practice any forms or even warm up. He just wanted to talk. Asked me about my life, things I did when I was a kid. Did I have an imaginary friend? Did I have problems with school? Ever decide I wanted to grow up and be something other than a nine-to-five corporate worker?

The discussion was all very strange. Sifu went on about the way the universe worked, and how we merely perceived a part of it. He lectured on chi energy, life force, spiritualism and cognition – all the things you expect from an old and slightly odd master. I can understand traditional practices. I've seen people do some amazing things with no better explanation than the special conditioning of martial arts. But... dragons and

phoenixes and martial artists who fly through the air without wires? The notion that all of that chambara fighting in the movies comes from real people? I understand that there's a lot of philosophy in the advanced arts. This goes way beyond that, though. Sifu went on blithely about a mixed-up fantasy world like it was somehow real. Sure, there's more out there than we see or understand right now, but... no. I think I won't be back there anytime soon. I need to stay with my real life for a while.

August 16, 1999

Things are getting a little stranger of late. It's all small things, but I'm only noticing them now for some reason. I don't think that they are things that were going on before.

It's not just my life going to hell. It's really odd: a combination of things all at once, and some of them so strange to explain. Like my friends not calling anymore. Or my job — work keeps forgetting to schedule me. After two years, one would think that they remember that I work there. Janet and I have been fighting all the time, and I can't understand why. All of a sudden, everything I do offends and annoys her all to hell. We've never been like this before. NEVER. What the hell is going on? It's like my whole world is falling apart. And no matter what I do, it just keeps getting worse.

August 20, 1999

Maybe, just maybe, Sifu was right. I think I may have to go talk to him tomorrow. I did something today, and it has me a little bit — well, a lot — confused and scared. Four guys tried to jump and mug me today on the way home from work. I was frightened, of course, but I tried to keep my head. I mean, this is what I was taking kung fu for in the in first place! Dangerous city and all that. But everything changed as I backed off to try to run. It was like I knew what they were going to do — exactly. I knew where they were going to move, who would move first, what they planned; it was almost instinctive. Sure, I learned about body language and reading position and anticipating attacks, but not like this! It was all so easy. Three of them were on the ground in as many seconds. I have to admit that on some level, it was almost fun. The fighting was surreal — I just knew what to do, knew when to move to avoid their attacks and knew how to respond.

I'd put down three of the four without even thinking about what I was doing, how I was moving or why I hadn't run, handed over my wallet or wet myself, when the last guy pulled a gun. At that point, I knew that I was dead. When I say that I knew it, though, I mean on some intellectual level — it's not like I felt it the way that I felt his companions' motions and plans. A little rational part of my brain said, Now you're going to get shot, and my body moved by reflex. He didn't say anything as he raised the gun and pulled the trigger. I know he had me dead to rights, and that even an abysmal marksman couldn't miss at that range. But it didn't hit me; I ducked, I stepped aside and closed in on him. I only hit him once — just once — yet he flew back a good 20 feet.

TWENTY FEET.

I can't hit that hard. It's tough enough to throw someone six feet with momentum on your side! Nobody can hit that hard! But I did it anyway, just moved and ducked and struck and it was over. That's when I ran. I think I was more afraid of what was happening to me than of the muggers. Sprayed out on the ground, moaning and struggling, they impressed in my head that something was very wrong and that I was at the heart of it.

What is going on?

Did I actually dodge a bullet?

August 22, 1999

Janet left me today. She says that she just does not know me anymore. What the hell does that mean? I'm the same guy that I've always been. I like the same things, enjoy the same foods, laugh at the same jokes and go to the same movies. But now I'm a stranger somehow? To make matters even worse, the video store seems to have lost my paperwork. Corporate says that I do not work there and accounting never cut me a check. It took me all day to get that cleared up. Today it seems that I just can't win.

SEPTEMBER 6, 1999

I really should try to keep up with this more often. It seems that things become more real when I put them down on paper. I look back on my journal and I can't get a handle on my own disbelief at the chaos that's overtaken my life, but at the same time, I'm still in a whirl. I don't know how things will go, but the journals almost like a reminder of things that are too surreal for me to remember them right. My own memories seem fantastical until I look back and realize that they really happened.

I've been talking to sifu a lot. He's right. Nothing is how I thought it was. He says that I was sleeping, and that now I have awakened. Now I have no choice but to believe him. I have learned so much, but it can't be put into words. I want to put it down here but I don't know how to explain these feelings and perceptions. The whole world is opening up to me. It's a painful experience, but every day seems to bring something completely new. Looking back on how much everything's gone wrong, though, I just wonder whether it's worth it.

Oh yeah. I finally left my job, after having to fight every week just to get my check. The fight with management was not worth it anymore. I stay and teach at the studio now. I do not know how long I will stay with sifu, but I have so much more to learn.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1999

I woke up last night in a sweat, think I had a nightmare. Something about flame and fire, screams and people dying. I felt sick. I've never been affected like this by a dream! Hell, even when I eat Mexican food right before bed, I don't have dreams like this. I can't stop thinking about it – this vision seems to have lodged into my brain and I can't get it out. The screams are like some discordant parody of a song that you get stuck in your head. Worst of all, it's not like I can remember anything clearly. I just have the feeling that something was lost. Something very important.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1999

Something is VERY wrong. I had to take the bus today. That's not all that uncommon, since I hate cars anyway, but I forgot to get change. I rummaged in my pocket to see if I'd left any there by accident – you never know, right? Could just have some change left over from lunch the day before. I dug into my pocket and then felt like someone hit me in the gut. It was so bad that I hurled all over the entrance of the bus. The driver gave me an odd look and kicked me off. She didn't even ask if I was sick or anything, just yelled at me to get off the bus! The whole way home, everyone looked at me funny, like I was a street person or a criminal or some lower and unwanted life form. What's going on? Sifu told me that I have the power to change things, but that it'll cost me. Does being a kung fu hero immediately mean that your entire life becomes a train wreck?

SEPTEMBER 12, 1999

Sifu has disappeared.

Nobody has seen him since that night that I had the nightmare. I have been looking everywhere for him, but it is like he just vanished. There are no records, no papers, no nothing. Even the other students at the kwoon, who know that something is wrong, are hard-pressed to actually describe him – they remember him but they can't even put his face into words. I think that maybe something important happened, but for the life of me, I can't figure out what. I need to know more but I don't know where to go from here. Without sifu I'm not sure what will happen next!

SEPTEMBER 20, 1999

I've continued teaching at the kwoon, but I get this feeling that sifu won't be back. On the one side, I've discovered that these hunches and feelings can be controlled. It's like sifu said. This power is in everyone; you just have to learn to feel it and direct it. When I go through the motions of my arts I can feel it collecting. It simmers somewhere inside of me when I meditate to relax at the end of the day. On the other hand, my life is still screwed up, and it feels like there's so much that's out of my control. My landlord doesn't even ask for rent any more. He doesn't acknowledge me. I have a room, but it's like nobody recognizes me as a tenant. I've never been forthcoming with the neighbors, but now I'm only recognized when I really make an issue of it. I closed my bank account, too. After 20 minutes with the teller, they found my account (someone had mistakenly classed it as inactive) and I was able to cash it out. Turns out the IRS has been looking at the numbers. It's not like I've done anything illegal, so who knows what the hell was wrong....

I received a note from a stranger the other day. He came to the kwoon, didn't say anything and left a folded piece of paper in my gym bag. It didn't have anything on it but an address and a time. When I went to the club on the address, he wasn't there, but there was someone else that he knew. A whole group of them. It seems that I've met several others like me. But none of them know what is going on, either. It seems that the rules have changed somewhere, and no one bothered to tell the players. We are all flying blind now.

OCTOBER 10, 1999

This will be my last entry in this book. I know this won't mean much to anyone but me, but I think that I will leave this with some friends. If you read this, you will either be convinced that I'm a total crackpot, or you will know what I am talking about. Just know that now I understand that something terrible has happened. A lot of the old school keepers of the faith have disappeared. All that's left to protect this world are people like me: half-trained, and knowing just enough to get our asses in a lot of trouble. The world is a bigger place than we learned in school. Perhaps I've always felt it. Now I can do something about it. The rules that we take for granted aren't cast in stone, but some people wish they were. Still, I feel that everyone has the right to live up to the potential that sifu showed in me, and I need to keep training others and encouraging them to explore that potential. None of us know the whole truth and it seems that all we know is that we can see and do things that everyone thinks is impossible. If we can do it, then there have to be others out there who can, too. Yet some of my new friends have mentioned that they've been hunted or hounded, as if there's a conspiracy that knows about us and wants to stop us. The government? The church? Something else entirely? We're not sure. All we know is that everything we took for granted is wrong. A change has already come and another one is coming soon.

I'm going to try to find out what is going on. Wish me — wish us — luck.

Dominic LeTarry

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MAGE
THE ASCENSION

Name: | Nature: | Tradition:
Player: | Essence: | Concept:
Chronicle: | Demeanor: | Cabal:

Attributes

Physical
Strength ●OOOO
Dexterity ●OOOO
Stamina ●OOOO

Social
Charisma ●OOOO
Manipulation ●OOOO
Appearance ●OOOO

Mental
Perception ●OOOO
Intelligence ●OOOO
Wits ●OOOO

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Spheres

Correspondence OOOOO
Entropy OOOOO
Forces OOOOO
Life OOOOO
Matter OOOOO
Mind OOOOO
Prime OOOOO
Spirit OOOOO
Time OOOOO

Advantages

Backgrounds
_____ OOOOO
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Arete
● O O O O O O O O O

Willpower
● ● ● ● ● O O O O O
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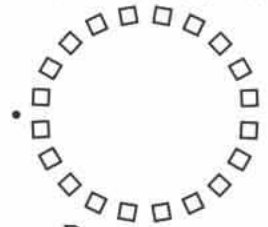
Resonance
Dynamic OOOOO
Entropic OOOOO
Static OOOOO

Quintessence


Paradox

Experience

Health
Bruised	-0 ☐
Hurt	-1 ☐
Injured	-1 ☐
Wounded	-2 ☐
Mauled	-2 ☐
Crippled	-5 ☐
Incapacitated	☐

Combat
Weapon	Difficulty	Damage

Ours is the wisdom of Solomon,
The magic of Merlin,
The fall of Icarus.
From countless ages we have dreamed,
From endless worlds we have beckoned,
From infinite choices we have suffered.
The world chokes under stifling conformity,
Hopes crumble in the fire of mediocrity,
Heroes die in the snare of pride.
Armageddon is at hand.
Reality is a lie.
The truth is magic.
Open your eyes
And Awaken.

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