



A Campaign Supplement for

CHAMPIONS
THE SUPER-ROLE-PLAYING GAME

#405

MYSTIC MASTERS™



by Allen Varney

MYSTIC MASTERS™

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INTRODUCTION

Eerie incantations. Evil sorcerers. Infernal monsters and dazzling energy bolts. Exotic dimensions, further away than distant galaxies, but as close as a step through a gateway. Enter a world of magic — comic-book magic!

Some of the longest-running comics tell tales of super-powered magicians. These stalwarts defend Earth from demonic wizards or creatures of dark enchantment. Against these awesome forces, the hero can rely only on his magic, his indomitable will, and, of course, the justice of his cause.

Not so different from fantasy stories in literature? Maybe. Storytellers have created tales of magic since stories were told. Book racks today abound with examples. Roleplaying games got their start by giving players the chance to adventure in fantastic worlds and fight orcs and dragons. There is even a HERO campaign book for this, *Fantasy Hero*.

But none of these treat magic the way the comics do. And *Champions* doesn't concentrate specifically on magic the way comics present it.

Now there is *Mystic Masters*.

In this supplement to *Champions*, you'll learn how to conduct a super-powered campaign based on comic-style magic. Find out how to build sorcerous characters, and what Powers work well with their conceptions. Here are magical effects like astral form that simulate the spells of comic-book magic. The Optional Rules section includes modifications to some existing Powers, to match the ways they work in stories of magic. And you'll tour the infinite dimensions of magic with a complete new campaign setting, including NPCs and villains both major and minor.

Proceed, student. May the Eleven Lights of Luathon shine upon your path!

ABOUT THIS BOOK

There are three sections in this supplement. Their contents:

Optional Rules: Astral form, Gates, and new approaches to Disadvantages and Power Modifiers that better reflect the comic-book magic genre. All of these rules are entirely optional; use the ones you like and discard the rest.

Campaigning: This chapter comes in four sections.

First, "How Does Magic Work?" gives the informal system that seems to govern magic in the comics. Learn about the four sources of magic and the ranks of spell difficulty.

"Creating a Magician" describes general considerations in designing magical characters. It also offers a dozen types of magical origins often seen in the comics.

"Gaming The Genre" gives advice on running magical heroes in any kind of campaign, as well as hard-won lessons in designing a workable campaign centered on magic, handling problems unique to mystical hero campaigns, and adapting existing Hero Games products to their needs. This section outlines the virtues and limitations of the "narrow campaign," a premise with a restricted but intense background.

Finally, "Dimension Design" treats an issue central to the magical genre. Learn the philosophy of designing comic-book dimensions, and how to build super-Powers into the very fabric of reality.

Sourcebook describes a sample campaign in detail. Here are useful members of a supporting cast, major villains, a headquarters, and magical spells and items designed using the rules in this supplement. There are also several magical adventures designed for either a full-blown mystical campaign or a traditional superheroic setting. In one, you can bring deceased player characters back from the dead!

USING THIS SUPPLEMENT

Gamemasters should read this entire book to become familiar with the genre, its game mechanics, and the campaign advice. Players should read the first two sections, New Rules and Campaigning, but nothing else. The GM who uses the given campaign premise may want the players to read certain portions of the sourcebook section as well.

Mystic Masters, like other *Champions* campaign supplements, describes one comic-book sub-genre in great detail. This book gives you everything you need to start a campaign focussing on comic-book mysticism. But if the subject doesn't excite you to such a degree, you can still use much of this material in a traditional superheroic campaign.

Many of the optional new rules adapt easily to any game. And since regular supers occasionally cross over to other realms, the dimensions and design guidelines presented are useful for any heroes.

Perhaps most importantly, this book provides insight into the unique ways that comic books handle magic. Whether your heroes encounter the supernatural in every session or just once every dozen adventures, *Mystic Masters* can enhance any brush with magic. If a super in your traditional campaign has a magical origin, this supplement can inspire ideas for handling both the character and his surroundings.

Of course, I'd like to think *Mystic Masters* can satisfy every reader simply with the transcendent quality of its deathless prose. But I don't count on this. After all, I'm no magician.

— Allen Varney



This section describes optional new rules, new Powers, and modifications of existing Powers that reflect comic-book magic more accurately.

Everything in this section is optional! Many of these changes would be inappropriate for a conventional superheroic campaign. In many cases they affect game balance, especially against non-magicians. Look over each of these Powers and modifications before allowing it into your campaign.



ADJUSTING THE GAME

Before introducing the optional rules and Powers, we first examine how well the existing rules simulate a magical campaign. Why should anything be adjusted?

Champions brilliantly simulates standard four-color comics, but it doesn't always work as well for the peculiar sub-genre of superheroic magic. For example:

Assume reasonable campaign standards of 60 Active Point attacks and 20 or 30 Active Point defenses. In the existing rules, two magicians with EGOs of 20 and 20 points of Mental Defense are virtually unable to affect each other with Mental Powers. One can get +10 on the other; big deal. Likewise, a 60 Active Point Mental Power can't do much against a crowd of normals. In the magic-based comics, however, magicians get the narrative equivalent of +20 or +30 on one another. And they push around roomfuls of normals with ease!

Superhero magic is actually a different genre from standard superheroics, and so some Powers are handled differently in a magical campaign. How should the game be adjusted?

EMPHASIZE THE MENTAL

The key is to increase the effectiveness of Mental Powers. In traditional comics, mentalists don't usually push around other heroes with ease, so *Champions* makes Mental Powers relatively expensive. But in magical stories Mental Powers are much more powerful. Therefore, they should either cost less or work better.

The best way to do this is for the GM to assign everyone in the campaign — heroes, villains, and NPCs alike — a Vulnerability — 2x Effect from Mental Magic — which is worth no points. After a mental attack, the defender doubles the result before applying defenses. A 6d6 Ego Attack that produces a roll of 21 STUN would actually inflict 42 STUN (before the target subtracts defenses).

This elevates mentalists to the supremacy they enjoy in magical stories. But it calls for an extra calculation in each mental attack. To make things simpler, the GM can allow the character to actually roll the doubled number of dice. Thus a character who spent 60 points on Ego Attack would roll 12d6 to determine the amount of damage.

It works like, pardon the term, magic. With the equivalent of 20 or 24d6, one wizard gets +30 effect on another if the player rolls well. Area Effect attacks against normals are so strong the player needn't worry about rolling. Just like it works in the magical comics!

For campaigns "in a vacuum," where the characters will never meet traditional superheroes, it's easier to let the character roll the doubled number of dice. If the campaign is part of an entire comic-book universe, however, where the

masters of arcane arts occasionally team up with caped crimefighters, use the Vulnerability system. And always remember that wizards are more powerful in mystic campaigns than in regular superheroic campaigns.

BASED ON EGO COMBAT VALUE

As for normal Mental Powers, all characters should have a 2x Vulnerability to all Powers bought with this Advantage. A 3d6 Drain, with the Based on ECV Advantage, would thus be doubled before being applied to Power Defenses.

ADJUSTING EXISTING ABILITIES

This section fine-tunes some existing Powers and Power modifiers, to more accurately reflect the magic of high-powered sorcerers. As always, the GM is free to pick and choose, using only the rules he feels comfortable with.

ADJUSTMENT POWERS

For Absorption, Aid, Drain, and Transfer purposes, "magic" usually counts as a single special effect. Since virtually everything in a typical *Mystic Masters* campaign works as some form of magic, the existing Advantage levels ("any one magic Power," +1/4 Advantage; "all magic Powers," +2 Advantage) become very cost-efficient.

The GM may require characters to be more specific when defining their Adjustment Powers. Thus a character might only be able to Drain Powers based on "Fire Magic" or "Voodoo", rather than simply magic.

On the other hand, character designs in this supplement retain the existing price structure. Sure, let the players get a bonus — because the villains get the same bonus...

DETECT MAGIC

Detect Magic, as depicted most often in the comics, is purchased as a Detect with Sense, Range and Discriminatory, for 15 points. It falls in the Mental sense group. Here is a suggested modification to the Power:

Analysis: If the character has bought Discriminatory Sense for his Detect Magic, he can diagnose details of a spell. His ability to analyze the spell is governed by how well he makes his modified Detect roll.

If he makes his adjusted roll by 5 or more, he learns all pertinent details (subject to GM discretion) of the spell — its effect, function or duration if appropriate, the procedures or passwords used to trigger it, and perhaps even who cast it.

If he makes the roll, but not by 5, he learns details of the spell according to how well he succeeds. If he make the roll exactly, he learns only the general Power level of the spell (i.e., its point total). Making it by 1-4 reveals the effect, especially if the effect is dangerous to the character. The more the roll is made by, the more information can be gained.

EGO ATTACK

In the rules, an Ego Attack does no BODY damage, just like an NND attack. But in the comics buildings (and heroes) are frequently reduced to smoking ruins from mystic blasts that are clearly EGO-based. At the GM's option, certain Ego Attacks can be defined as doing BODY (just as certain NNDs can be defined as doing BODY). This should not become the standard; many attacks that look like damaging Ego Attacks are RKAs, perhaps with the "Based on ECV" Advantage.

IMAGES (OBSCURE)

A common effect in the comic books is obscurity: making an object difficult, but not impossible, to see. You could just handle this with a Limitation on Invisibility, but a far more elegant approach is to use Images.

Simply build an Images Power as usual, with the -1 Limitation, *Only Simulates Empty Space*. To spot the obscured object requires a PER roll, at -1 for every +3 points spent on the Images spell. ("Empty Space" is considered a solid, simple image, giving a +0 to the PER roll.)

This is also a good effect to tack onto another spell, in order to hide it from Detect Magic. An add-on obscurity costs less than the Invisible Advantage on large spells, and has a more interesting effect. Simply purchase the Image Power as *Only Simulates No Magic Here* (-1), applied to the sense *Detect Magic* and Linked to the spell in question. The Image spell, since it is in the same hex as the larger spell, is likewise hidden from detection.

With a few modifications, this sort of spell can also fool Detect Magic into mistaking one kind of spell for another. The PCs find a wand that apparently has healing Powers; they use it on a wounded ally, then discover that it was really Extra-Dimensional Movement, Area Effect, Usable Against Others!

LIFE SUPPORT

Many magicians can protect themselves underwater, in a vacuum, or in the acidic mists of alien dimensions. However, it is not always automatic; sometimes the magicians must cast "spells of protection." These spells do not appear to cost Endurance, and once they're turned on, they may even continue working when the magician is knocked out.

To simulate this, the GM may rule that Life Support only works when the character consciously wills it on. This works as a special effect and is worth no Limitation Bonus, unless the GM says otherwise.

DETECTABLE

A spell may be more obvious or detectable than normal. In *Mystic Masters* this is a -1/4 Limitation.

Ordinarily, a magical spell is detectable in the same way any Power is visible — only when the spell costs Endurance, and then only while it is actually being cast and someone is around to perceive it. Usually, any magical spell can also be detected and analyzed with Detect Magic.

A Detectable spell automatically gives other nearby magicians a chance to perceive the spell, regardless of whether they were paying attention. All adepts get a Perception Roll or Detect Magic roll (whichever is higher) at normal range modifiers; if the roll succeeds, the Detectable spell has set off a magical "alarm" that tells the adept exactly what spell is being cast (no Detect Magic analysis is required).

An "adept" can be defined as anyone with mental or magical Powers, knowledge of or skill in magic, or just anyone with a high EGO. A spell may be Detectable due to the caster's lack of control, inexperience, high power levels, unusual or exotic style of magic, or for many other reasons.

Usually normals and non-adepts sense detectable magic; they feel something strange is happening, but cannot easily identify the nature of the spell. However, the GM can adjust the detectable spell's effect in different circumstances.

DOES KNOCKBACK

Ego attacks and other unusual attack powers do knockback all the time in the mystic-arts comics. This +1/4 Advantage, bought for the attack, lets this Power do knockback. Compute the BODY rolled on the effect dice, even though the power does not do BODY damage, and roll normally for knockback based on the BODY total. If the optional rules for mental damage are being used, do not use these rules when calculating Knockback.

Example: *Lady Corinne has bought a 6d6 Ego Attack, with this advantage, for $60 \times (1 + 1/4) = 75$ points. She attacks Delaxor the Destroyer, rolling 25 STUN and 7 "BODY". She rolls 2d6 for knockback, totalling 5. Delaxor is knocked back 2 inches.*

TRANS-DIMENSIONAL

This is an Advantage that allows characters to use a Power to affect other dimensions. Although normally applied to Clairvoyance or Mind Scan, it can be used with any Power that has purchased the Advantage *Indirect* to the +1/2 or +3/4 level. For +1/2 (in addition to cost for *Indirect*), the character can use the Power on a single other dimension. For +1/4 additional Advantage, the character can use the Power on any related group of dimensions (the 9 hells, the outer planes, etc.) For +1/4 additional Advantage, the character can use the Power on any dimension.

This Advantage does not involve any geographical distance; its user must still calculate range modifiers normally while in this dimension. For more information, see *Extra-Dimensional Movement* in *Champions*, page 68.

Example: *Delaxor the Destroyer, Emperor of the Earth Elementals, wants to create an attack that will work through the dimensions — "Delaxors' Dreadful Damnation". He purchases a 12d6 Energy Blast with the Advantage "Indirect" (for +1/2). He then purchases the Advantage "Trans-dimensional" at the +3/4 level, which means that Delaxor can use the attack on all the elemental dimensions. The Active Cost is $60 \times (2 + 3/4) = 135$.*

With this Power, Delaxor can attack targets in other dimensions. However, he still must see them first (by buying Clairvoyance or Mind Scan). Moreover, he must trace range normally — he can't use this Power to attack someone on the other side of the dimension that he is already in.

Trans-Dimensional is an extremely potent Advantage. It is intended primarily for sensory Powers — not attacks. GMs should regulate its use very carefully.

TRIGGER

As described in *Champions*, this Advantage lets the character define a set of conditions that activates a Power effect while the character is not around or unable to act. This section discusses the Trigger Advantage as it functions in magical comics.

To set a trigger, the character casts the spell or uses the Power on a target, either a person (including himself), object, or location, rolling to hit and spending END normally but not rolling the effect. Casting the spell and setting the trigger is a half-Phase action, or takes the spell's usual casting time, whichever is longer.

At any time thereafter, the spell or Power activates when the condition is met. The spell cannot "wear off" before being activated; duration is effectively limitless. It costs no additional END at the time it activates. The spell works once, then is gone. If the spell is bought as Persistent, 0 END, it remains active after being triggered; it can then be triggered again.

All triggered spells affect the target on which they are cast. Thus, casting an 8d6 Energy Blast on a rock, triggered to go off whenever someone touches it, will simply result in a pile of gravel, not an injured intruder. Most triggered Powers will thus have advantages like Explosion, Damage Shield, or Usable Against Others. Any triggered attack that requires a roll uses Characteristics of 0. Skill levels may be purchased that only add to the OCV of a triggered attack; they cost 5 points apiece, added on to the active point cost of the Power.

Example: *Lady Corinne builds a "pacifistic" trap into her magic sanctum: Anyone stepping on the floor in front of her door flies backward 10". This is bought as 25 STR Telekinesis, Triggered. The attack has an OCV of 0 — a nimble or prepared intruder can avoid the trap easily, but an unsuspecting trespasser often gets hit, and is gently thrown backward for one Phase.*

MULTIPLE TRIGGERS

Only one spell and trigger can work on a target. The spell can include several Power effects, as long as they are all Linked to go off together. If more than one separate triggered spell is cast on the same target, the one with the higher active point total takes effect and is set, while the lesser spell and trigger are dispelled or do not take effect. Both spells cost END from their casters.

A character can buy a spell and trigger with the Advantage *Difficult to Dispel* to protect against another trigger dispelling it. This Advantage doubles the Active Point totals for the purposes of being dispelled only.

REMOVING OR DISABLING TRIGGERS

A character can always dispel his own spell and trigger automatically with a half-Phase action. He can be anywhere when he does this, even in another dimension.

He may also specify, as part of a trigger, a condition that the spell is not triggered by him, specific agents or friends, or a given specific situation.

For example, a wizard could trap a door with an explosive Energy Blast, but set it so that it does not trigger when he or his teammates (defined by name) go through the door. Or he

could say the Blast will trigger only for the fourth person through the door, or only for animals that pass through, or for anyone who does not speak the correct password clearly.

A wizard cannot set a condition involving value judgments such as "all who are badly disposed toward me", unless the spell includes the ability to make that judgement (like Telepathy). The GM decides the suitability of any condition.

Others may remove your trigger permanently with Dispel, or Suppress that exceeds the Active Points total of the spell. The Trigger Advantage increases the spell's active points, of course, making it more difficult to Dispel or Suppress.

SAMPLE TRIGGERS

- (1) **Escape clause:** Cast the spell on yourself, so that it works when you have been knocked out, mentally controlled, or otherwise rendered helpless. Master villains apply this Advantage to movement spells, such as Extra-Dimensional Movement or Teleport, to allow an escape route. Fanatical henchmen buy Energy Blast or other attacks that work on themselves and their surroundings, giving the magical equivalent of a spy's cyanide tooth.
- (2) **Wards:** Cast an Area Effect One Hex Ego Attack on a doorway, and set it to work when someone passes through it; or cast a Teleport ward on an object, so that it brings the object to you when someone touches it.
- (3) **Passwords:** Cast Telekinesis on a huge stone blocking a portal, so that when someone says "Open Sesame," the stone is moved aside. The same condition specifies that the stone is moved back one turn later. Your Telekinesis must be Persistent, or the stone will only move once.
- (4) **Anti-ward:** Cast on an object, this trigger extradimensionally teleports anyone who touches that object, with an attendant Extra-Dimensional Movement Drain. This is a useful plot device, not to mention a villainous thing to do.

GESTURES AND INCANTATIONS

One of the neatest things about comic-book magicians is their propensity for gesticulation and rhymed incantations. However, these never seem to limit the magicians.

In a superheroic campaign gestures and incantations should work as special effects, except perhaps for powerful ritual enchantments. They don't limit the character; in fact, the GM can give small die-roll bonuses to players that use dramatic hand movements and compose appropriate invocations. This rewards good roleplaying.

TALENTS

Several of the Talents often appear in magical comics as spells. For example, Universal Translator shows up as "a simple spell of comprehension."

The GM can allow these Talents to be purchased as Powers, with Advantages and Limitations and as part of Power Frameworks. They can be bought with the Limitation *Costs END*. In any case, the Talent should not work unless the magician consciously turns it on.

Appropriate Talents include Absolute Time Sense, Bump of Direction, Combat Sense, Danger Sense, Immunity, Simulate Death, and Universal Translator. The GM may allow other Talents as Powers with a good rationale. However, Find Weakness should never be allowed as a Power.



ASTRAL FORM

Astral form is a "spirit form" that the character can send out from his body if he's mystically adept. In astral form the character is invisible, except to other mystics. While his physical body remains inert, his awareness can travel anywhere on Earth, penetrate solids, see and hear normally, and often use Mental Powers. In some comics, astral form is a standard skill for beginning mystics.

There are two basic ways to simulate astral form:

THE DESOLIDIFICATION APPROACH

First, the character can purchase Desolidification with the special "astral form" modifier. He can then purchase invisibility to normal senses, but *not* to the mental sense group. This should be bought linked to the Desolidification. For movement, the character could purchase Flight or Teleport, with either one having a large noncombat multiple. The character could also buy Extra-Dimensional Movement and FTL Movement, again, linked to the Desolidification. The character can buy any of these with Advantages like *0 END*, *Persistent*, etc.

Good Limitations for these Powers include *Concentration*, and *astral form has no connection with body* (-1), which means that the character cannot automatically return safely to his body; if he loses track of its location, he must find it.

The character can also purchase mental attacks with the +2 Advantage *Affects Solid*. This allows him to affect characters in the real world while in astral form.

With astral form built in this way, two Astral characters can attack each other. In addition astral characters are vulnerable to magical or mental attacks.

THE CLAIRENTIENCE APPROACH

CONSTRUCTION

Mystic Masters takes a different approach to astral form. In many magical comic-books, the astral form can do all the above, *and* travel anywhere in an instant. To simulate this, the astral form used throughout *Mystic Masters* starts with Clair sentience. The character pays 20 points to see at a distance, +10 to hear, and +10 to use mental senses; the astral form cannot smell, taste or touch.

The base range is 200". Fourteen range doublings increase the cost to 110 points and give a range of around 18,000 kilometers — more than sufficient to reach anywhere on Earth.

Take the Power at 0 END and Persistent (+1), and purchase the +3/4 Invisible Advantage (making it invisible to all but the mental sense group).

Limitations on the resulting 302-point horror:

- The physical body remains at 0 DCV and can't move (-1);
- The astral form takes STUN and BODY from mental attacks, or magical attacks with the Affects Desolid Advantage (-1);
- The astral form has no connection to its physical body (-1). This means that if somebody steals the body while the character is gone, he won't know where it went! Mind Scan or Detect helps here.
- These limitations reduce the astral form's real cost to 75 points.

If this seems too high for beginning wizards, the GM can increase the character's point base, specifically to pay for the astral form. For example, each character could start with a 175 point base, of which 75 points must be spent on astral form.

RULES

Characters with this type astral form can see each other and attack one another with EGO-based (but not physical) Powers. They cannot usually interact with Desolidified characters; the GM may rule otherwise if the special effects of the Desolidification involve magical or psychic origins.

Astral forms spend END and recover normally. The physical body can do nothing, but can be located by Mind Scan due to characteristic autonomic brain activity. Mind Scan, as a mental Power, can also detect the astral form.

The form moves as fast as thought, but the character's perceptions don't always keep up. When he moves, the terrain speeds by in a blur. Therefore, though he can go anywhere in one Phase, he can't explore along his route.

Since astral form is technically based on Clair sentience, the character can define a destination at the beginning of his Phase. Boom, he's there (zero Phase action). Orienting himself and looking around takes half a Phase. He can then travel astrally again in the same Phase. So he could check out two places per Phase that are indefinitely far apart. The maximum distance can be increased as per the normal rules for Clair sentience (including the appropriate Limitations).

Astral Form, as currently designed, has no time limit; the character can use it for as long as he has END. If the character would like to have a limit on how long he can use the astral form, this might be worth a Limitation, according to how limiting the GM thought it would be.

USING ASTRAL FORM

Regardless of which type of astral form is used, there are numerous guidelines and optional modifications on how the GM can help simulate comic-book astral forms.

PERCEPTIONS

A character can see and hear in astral form just as he would in physical form. If his form arrives in a dark room, he is as blind as he would be if he visited it in person. (Of course, he can buy special senses that work only in astral form.)

Astral forms are usually bought to be invisible to all senses except Mental Awareness and appropriate Detects (this is the standard for the *Mystic Masters* version, above). A character can make his astral form visible and audible automatically in his Phase, as a zero-Phase action; he can also turn it invisible again in his Phase, but he cannot do both in the same Phase. He cannot make it selectively invisible to normal sight but visible to infrared, N-ray, etc.

DAMAGE

If an astral form is Suppressed, Dispelled, or Drained, the spirit instantly returns to its physical body, and cannot reappear until the attack wears off. However, if the Power is 0 END and Persistent, an astral form that is stunned or knocked out does not "snap back" to its physical body.

An astral character who takes enough damage dies, and the physical body stops working at that moment. Similarly, if the body is killed, the astral form dies as well.

SHELTERS

As an optional modification, the GM can allow the spirit to live after the body itself has been destroyed. This should only be done in special circumstances, and only when it furthers the GM's plot. The spirit will grow weaker and weaker, until finally it disappears. The GM might allow the spirit to slow this process by occupying another living being (the "shelter"). The astral form usually has no control over the shelter, and must eventually die unless its original body is revived. The GM might allow the astral form to control the shelter with Mind Control if he can use this Power through the astral form. In any case, the astral form must eventually reunite with its own body (or a permanent host) or it will perish.

SIZE

The astral form is usually the same size as the host body, but the GM can allow this to vary as a special effect. Think of two battling forms that grow as large as skyscrapers, in a truly heroic magical battles. Or a form could shrink to mosquito size to seem less significant.

Such variation in size makes no difference in the game, and is free — but only as long as it makes no difference! If it has a game effect, the player must simulate the effect with the appropriate Power(s). For instance, if a sorcerer wants to grow to skyscraper size so he can crush his opponent, that's Growth. If he wants to shrink to find out if a target has a serious heart condition, he should buy either Shrinking, Microscopic Vision, or a Detect with some Limitations.

SHAPE

The astral form is usually a projection of the caster's own self-image. It looks like whatever he wants. But by definition, the form is recognizably him, whatever its trappings. Anyone who sees the astral form always knows its identity, unless the magician conceals himself with Images, Mental Illusions, Disguise, or Shapeshift Usable in astral form.

COMMENTS

Astral forms are almost indispensable in true mystic campaigns. But they alter adventures significantly, and the GM should be ready for the differences.

For one thing, astral forms are superb spies and messengers. Reconnaissance becomes trivial. And if a villain plans to ambush a DNPC at the home base while the heroes are off in Tibet, he'd best be careful. They can pop back home for a rescue mission on extremely short notice. And without magical means, they can't be seen or stopped!

In a mystic campaign, this isn't much of a problem, since those magical means are very common. But the GM should be very hesitant to let the powerful astral form described here into a straightforward superhero setting. Remember, by the numbers, it's a 302 Active Point Power. Just because someone has the points, don't feel obligated to allow him to buy it.

EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL MOVEMENT

This is a key element of the magical-hero genre. For this kind of campaign, you may wish to modify the existing Extra-Dimensional Movement Power with these optional rules.

DIMENSIONAL MOVEMENT SKILLS

These two skills let a magician teleport accurately. Without them, a magician could end up in the wrong dimension or never teleport at all.

DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL

This EGO-based skill gives the character the ability to cross the dimensions accurately and safely.

For a -1/2 Limitation on the cost of Extra-Dimensional Movement, this skill is required simply for success. Otherwise, this skill is used to determine how quickly the character arrives at his destination, and what encounters (if any) he has along the way. This skill is used not only for Extra-Dimensional Movement, but also for Clairsentience, astral form, and Mind Scan used across dimensions.

For example, if a character blew his Dimensional Travel skill roll very badly (by rolling a 17, say), the GM might decide that the character's clumsy breach of dimensional barriers alerted some malevolent demon or wizard.

On the other hand, if the character made his roll by half or more, the GM might say that the journey was unusually swift, giving the character more time to carry out his mission in the other dimension.

Typical modifiers for this skill: -1 to -3, for traveling to very distant or very isolated dimensions; -5 (or a Skill vs. Skill Roll), for attempting to break through a dimensional barrier erected to prevent entry; +1 to +5, for following a familiar route to an often-visited dimension.

DIMENSIONAL AREA KNOWLEDGE

This skill works like a regular Area Knowledge, giving the character thorough knowledge of a dimension. This includes not only what that dimension contains, but also how to get there and how to get back. This Knowledge Skill gives a character knowledge of the dimension's topography, denizens, major cities, politics, dangers, etc.

The GM may call for a Dimensional Area Knowledge roll whenever a character is trying to find a specific location in the dimension. Dimensional Area Knowledge is also a complementary roll to the Dimensional Travel skill.

GATES

In mystic adventures, magicians often conjure gates between widely distant locations or between dimensions. Anyone can go from one location, or "endpoint," to the other through the gate. Through it, even non-magicians can attack targets at the other endpoint.

To buy a gate, the character should buy either Teleport or Extra-Dimensional Movement. To this he applies the Advantages *Continuous* and *Usable By Others*, and a new Limitation: *Open at Both Ends* (-1/2). This Limitation means that the gate can be used to move in both directions; it can transport individuals from A to B, and from B to A. It can only be bought for teleport or Extra-Dimensional Movement that have the Advantage *Continuous and Usable By Others*. Gates are usually bought with several levels of 2x mass. They are often bought with the Advantage *Area Effect* and the Limitation *Stays Open Until Character's Next Phase* (-1/2).

Mystic Masters assumes that a Gate has been bought with several levels of increased mass, and a one-hex Area Effect, as well as the Limitations described above. Some characters may use gates as the special effect for their Extra-Dimensional Movement, though the Power works in the usual manner and does not have this Advantage. This is fine. The rules below describe gates in terms of game effects; a hero who doesn't want these effects for his Extra-Dimensional Movement ignores them and just buys the regular ability.

For most purposes, a gate works like the ordinary Extra-Dimensional Movement or Teleport Power. Go in here, come out somewhere else. The same restrictions on range, destination, and so forth apply. Regarding mass, the gate can only transport so much mass in a given Phase. If more mass is put in the gate, the gate will only be able to process up to its maximum mass; the rest will have to wait until the gate's next Phase (as determined by the caster's Speed). An extremely massive character might take several Phases to move through the gate; in the meanwhile the gate would be clogged and couldn't transport anyone or anything else.

Example: *Hendrick the Hermit has set up a gate to Tarrador, the fetid home of a demon princeling. This is Extra-Dimensional Movement to a single other location, so the base cost is 20 points. Hendrick doesn't want to worry about mass, so he buys an additional x125 mass, for 35 points. He then applies the Advantages "Continuous" (+1), "Usable By Others" (+1/2), and "Area Effect (one hex)" (+1/2). The Active Cost is 105 points.*

Now Hendrick applies Limitations: "Open at Both Ends" (-1/2), "Stays Open Until Caster's Next Phase" (-1/2). The final cost is 105 (1+1) = 52.

Hendrick now has a gate that will open to Tarrador. The gate can transport a maximum of 12,500 kg on any of Hendrick's Phases; this total can be from earth to Tarrador, Tarrador to earth, or any combination. Since the massive demon weighs 50,000 kg, it will take him 4 Phases to move through the gate — which just might be enough time for Hendrick to get away if something goes wrong.

USING GATES

Gates are like normal teleportation, but with two important differences:

(1) **Continuous:** A gate normally exists at both endpoints until the caster's next Phase. This means that for a period of time, anyone — including bad guys and normals — can use the gate. The caster can maintain the gate in subsequent phases by expending END, and can still move and attack normally.

Since the Power is not Usable Against Others, anyone entering the gate can choose whether or not to go through the gate. Even if the gate were made larger (with Area Effect Radius, for example), everyone in the area can choose whether to use the gate. (The caster is the only one who can control where the gate goes, of course.)

The gate is clearly visible unless bought with Invisible Power Effects. Anyone can see the destination and can talk with or Presence-attack those on the other side.

(2) **Attacking:** The gate itself cannot be used as an attack, but anyone can attack through it. Anyone in the vicinity of a gate always sees it "head on," so he can trace a line of sight to the other side. The view shows what the character would see if he stood at a corresponding location at the other endpoint and looked toward the gate.

The gate itself cannot be damaged by an attack, although it can be dispelled or suppressed.

FIXED GATES

These are permanent "wormholes" in space that connect two points at a distance. Buy the gate at 0 END and *Persistent* (+1), then take the -2 Limitation *Independent* to make it permanent.

One or both of the points can be mobile. For example, a headquarters portal might connect to a vehicle. A mobile endpoint is usually attached to some object or Focus. The object does not move instantly from place to place; it moves only as fast as its movement abilities allow.

The gate gets the same Focus Limitation bonus whether one or both endpoints work through a Focus. The Focus is not just the mobile endpoint, but some object or feature of the gate that, when removed, prevents it from working.

Usually a fixed gate connects no more than two endpoints. If it connects multiple endpoints, the user can choose his destination, unless the gate has some randomizing Limitation (Activation Roll, Requires Skill Roll, No Conscious Control, conditional Power, etc.).

DISADVANTAGES

Here are a couple of ways to use Disadvantages to help simulate magic in a magical campaign. As always, the GM should check the Disadvantages carefully, and if they aren't disadvantageous, then they aren't worth any points.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

The usual Distinctive Features Disadvantage assumes that everyone can detect the character's distinctive trait. Some features are only distinctive to a certain group and may only be detected in certain conditions.

For instance, a Shape Shifted magical creature might be detected as magical by mystic adepts. A mutant who looks normal might only be recognized as a mutant by those who carry an exotic technological device.

In the context of a magical superhero campaign, a character with this Disadvantage is inherently magical, so that any adept knows of his nature and potential weaknesses. Normals and non-adepts don't necessarily recognize anything unusual about the character. The number of individuals who can recognize the character, rather than the Distinctive Feature's concealability, is what determines the Disadvantage's value.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: CONDITIONAL

Points	Concealability
5	Only small group can identify character OR identification requires technology or major effort
10	Large group can identify character OR identification requires simple tests
15	Everyone can identify character immediately
Bonus	Reaction
+0	Noticed and recognized
+5	Always noted; causes major reaction or prejudice
+10	Causes extreme reaction (abject fear, unabiding lust, complete disgust)

PROHIBITION (HUNTED)

A hero may be prohibited by oath or by a higher Power from engaging in some useful activity. This differs from a Psychological Limitation. A Psychological Limitation represents the character's own attitudes; A prohibition is enforced by someone else. Thus a hero may perform the prohibited activity without an EGO roll, and perhaps even without suffering mental stress. But if the violation is discovered, the hero suffers punishment.

Prohibition is handled similarly to the Disadvantage *Hunted*. However, instead of an Appearance Roll, there is a bonus for how restrictive the prohibition is. (This corresponds to how frequently the hunter will show up.) The capabilities of the enforcer indicate how powerful the enforcer is, and how likely it is that he will catch any transgressions. The motivation indicates how harshly the enforcer will punish the character for transgressions.

PROHIBITION (HUNTED)

Points	Capabilities
5	Enforcer is Less Powerful than PC
10	Enforcer is As Powerful as PC
15	Enforcer is More Powerful than PC
+5	Enforcer Has Extensive Noncombat Influence (NCI)
-5	Enforcer is limited to a certain geographical area or dimension
Bonus	How Restrictive is Prohibited Activity
+0	Will restrict character occasionally (8 or less)
+5	Will restrict character frequently (11 or less)
+10	Will restrict character very frequently (14 or less)
Bonus	Motivation
-5	Enforcer will mildly punish the character for a transgression (loss of position, banishment, must undertake a quest)
+0	Enforcer will harshly punish transgressions (loss of power, possessions, or life)

Examples: *The mystic priests of Chakra-Dal are prohibited from speaking to non-adepts, upon penalty of death. The priests enforce the death penalty themselves; since there are a great number of them they are more powerful than the character, for a 15 point base. However, they are limited to Tibet, this is -5 points. The priests spend most of their time up in the mountains, so speaking to non-adepts is only occasionally restrictive, for +0 points. The punishment is harsh, for -0 points. This adds up to 10 point Disadvantage. Any time one of the mystic priests talks to an outsider, there is a good chance that one of his brethren will hear of it, and then the entire priesthood will try to hunt him down and kill him.*

Alternately, members of the Worldwide Coven of Witches are prohibited from attacking each other directly. This is enforced by another witch, who is as powerful as the character (10 points) Since they're a contentious lot, this activity is frequently restrictive (+5 points). The consequences (expulsion from the coven) are severe but not life-threatening (-5 points). The total Disadvantage is 10 points.

The GM should be careful when determining how restrictive the activity is: it should be something that the character **must** do. Remember, this is the same as the roll for a Hunted; if the activity is "frequently" restricted, that means that the character should break the prohibition every other adventure or so. If the activity is something that the character can simply avoid, then the Disadvantage is worth fewer points, or perhaps none at all. "Never wears purple" or "Cannot go to Antarctica" are examples of Prohibition abuse — in most campaigns, the situations would never come up. The GM should also discourage Prohibitions that completely remove the character from most of the campaign's activities. Being prohibited from fighting has little place among superheroic magicians.



This section discusses the elements that make up the adventures of superheroic magicians. The first part discusses the system of comic-book magic. Then comes *Creating a Magician*, which shows how to create comic-book wizards, and their enemies.

Next, a long section called *Gaming the Genre* looks at what goes into a comic-book campaign; it also offers advice about creating a campaign premise, appropriate villains, and goals for the PCs.

The final section discusses the philosophy of dimension design. Many stories of superheroic magicians take them to bizarre alien universes. This section describes many kinds of dimensions, and the varying functions they serve in stories.



HOW DOES MAGIC WORK?

The short answer to this section's title is, of course, "any way you want it to work." But it helps if the workings of magic are internally consistent.

Whether or not they're aware of it, the GM and players together make decisions about these workings during character creation. For instance, if a character draws power from a magical jewel, then magic obviously can be stored or channeled by physical objects.

The flexibility of the HERO System lets you build assumptions into the campaign. House rules, such as "No healing allowed" or "All time travel magic must be bought 10x END cost," govern the rules of magic.

In fantasy literature these rules vary widely, and the GM's choices are many. Fantasy magic systems are discussed at length in another Hero product, *The Spell Book*.

Fortunately, comic-book magic is different—it's almost all the same. The GM doesn't have to make as many decisions to simulate magic as it works in the genre.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMIC-BOOK MAGIC

In fantasy stories spellcasters often flirt with disaster, for magic is shown as a fickle force. Poorly understood, fantasy magic can turn on foolish mortals in a moment. A wizard who fails to incant his incantation properly may be consumed in hellfire or turned into a parrakeet.

Not so the comic-book magician.

The best one-word description of comics magic is *control*. Except in peculiar and specific plot circumstances, most magicians in these stories never mess up their spells. The adept gestures, shields spring up before him, energy blasts go off, and he vaults into another dimension. No sweat.

The magic of comics works like most super-powers. It's reliable, not fickle. It has predictable effects and graded levels of strength. The uncertain element is the caster himself: Can he marshal the courage and will to achieve his ends? There are other characteristics of comic-book magic:

Few can use it: Every comic book about magicians consistently assumes that magic is not for everyone. Only a select few can pursue it. Successful study of the mystic arts requires discipline and also benefits from natural talent. Higher magic can even involve purification rituals; the impure cannot use some ultrapowerful magical items.

The level of magical talent in the general population is best left unstated, so as to avoid restricting future story options. Suppose, for example, a master villain plans to make monsters out of everyone in Chicago who has "magic potential." It reduces tension for the PCs if the campaign has already established that only one in a hundred million is magically talented. That means the master villain's plan creates maybe one scrawny monster out in the suburbs. Wow. But if one in ten has the metagene — look out!

Easy to gain new magic: In some fantasy games, a major limiting factor on wizards is that they have to scrounge new spells from dungeons far and wide. Comic-book magicians have a far easier time. They can usually find any spell they need, whether by browsing through their libraries of prehistoric scrolls, studying with an aged mentor, or just improvising on the fly. Gaining new spells is primarily a matter of logistics, and mere logistics in comics are usually worry-free.

SOURCES OF MAGIC

Where does this magic come from, anyway? In the comics different sorts of magic draw on a different source of magical energy. Each can be represented by different game effects. In a role-playing setting, each method works best in different circumstances.

Which methods should you allow in your campaign? If you don't want to worry about it, there's no problem in leaving the methods unspecified. If you decide to allow some but not others, each choice has effects on the campaign, as described on the following page.



PERSONAL MAGIC

The magician draws on his own physical or spiritual energies to power his spell. This method gives the magician total control over the magic, but drains his strength more than either of the other methods.

In game terms: Any power that costs full Endurance can be defined as Personal Magic. Personal energies may also be implied by the Concentrate, Extra Time, and Increased Endurance Cost limitations. A magician using this magic may even incur BODY damage. ("Takes 1 BODY per use" is a limitation, the bonus based on how often the character uses the Power, and whether he has convenient access to healing magic or Regeneration.)

In campaign terms: The virtue of Personal Magic is flexibility. It allows virtually any magical effect not prohibited in the campaign's ground rules.

Beginning magicians should rely entirely on Personal Magic, unless they have peculiar, largely unconscious aptitudes (see the "Wild Talent" origin below). Among masters, Personal Magic is an index of the sorcerer's real power, when reduced to his minimum resources.

If there is Personal Magic in the campaign: Magicians become versatile characters (very suited to the genre); their END stats become more important (also genre); but if this is the only method the PCs have, they may never achieve great power levels (this is non-genre).

If not: Characters become more dependent on plot-driven circumstances: local mana levels for External Magic, the favor of entities, and whatever heavy-duty Foci they find. A typical superheroic magic campaign should almost always allow Personal Magic.

EXTERNAL MAGIC

Magic appears as an ambient force in the universe. The magician can tap this force, often called "mana," to produce many effects both minor and major. These spells usually cost little of the magician's own energy, but they are unreliable in alien settings. Other dimensions may have different mana levels from the magician's home, which either weakens External spells or makes them super-powerful and uncontrollable.

In game terms: External Magic can be half or zero END cost. Other advantages should imply some level of magical mastery, such as Hole in the Middle, Increased Stun Multiplier, Personal Immunity, and Trigger. External Magic can manifest itself in a bewildering range of Variable Special Effects.

The Focus and Independent limitations can allow non-masters to use External Magic; see "Focus Magic," below. Other appropriate limitations can include Requires a Skill Roll (though failure is seldom seen in the comics), No Knockback, and Visible. The best limitation is "Only usable (or not usable) in a particular dimension" (a bonus of -1/4 to -1, depending on how often the character out of that dimension).

In campaign terms: External Magic combines the virtues of the other types: power, ease of use, and flexibility. External Magic can achieve nearly any effect, at the highest power levels allowed in the campaign, without prohibitive END costs.

The PCs' growing use of External Magic marks their advances toward mastery. However, External Magic is extremely vulnerable to circumstances. Variations in mana level and spell effects are the most dramatic ways to establish different natural laws in alien dimensions.

If there is External Magic in the campaign: Magic becomes a part of the environment, another natural resource. If this is the only method of magic, the excess or lack of mana can govern a whole adventure. But in the right circumstances, PCs can achieve the flexibility and power of the magicians in the comics.

If not: Magic as a force centers entirely in individuals, entities, or items. The environment becomes less of a factor. In supposedly magical sites like exotic dimensions or ancient ceremonial grounds, this lack of effect could be inappropriate.

BESTOWED MAGIC

Virtually all magical comics include pantheons of powerful other-dimensional entities. When called, these godlike beings bestow power on magicians who work for their goals. The power can be general aid or may increase a spell's strength.

However, a request for aid carries risks. Entities usually supply the power requested, no questions asked; but the more often a character receives aid, the more the character comes under the entity's potential control. Like the Godfather, the entity does you a favor, and will someday ask for "a favor" in return.

In game terms: Bestowed magic should be 0 END, and it often includes AVLD, Difficult to Dispel, Indirect, NND, No Range Penalty, or Penetrating advantages. Variable Advantage also applies, but not Variable Special Effects; in general, an entity bestows powers with a given special effect (e.g., fire spells or mental spells).

Good limitations include Activation (to see whether the god answers the request), conditions like "Request must suit the deity's interests," No Conscious Control, and even Always On, representing some blessing that isn't always a blessing. Side Effects would appear logical (the entity strikes you down for your insolent request), but it seldom appears in the comics except as a specific plot device.

To handle the concept that the entity eventually calls in its favors, consider creatively applying the Ablative limitation. In this case, rather than applying to the spell's defense value, it indicates how much rope the entity is giving the spellcaster to hang himself.

The first time the caster uses the bestowed magic, no problem. Each subsequent time he uses that spell, he gets an Activation Roll. Whenever the caster fails the Activation Roll, the entity still grants the spell . . . but it has grown angry or needs a handy pawn for its schemes. Soon thereafter, the entity calls in the magician for punishment or a mission assignment.

In campaign terms: The virtue of Bestowed Magic is power. Entities can grant spells that exceed the defined point limits of the campaign, at little or no END cost. This is only possible, though, because the GM can restrict these spells to the exact situations he likes.

PCs should only gain Bestowed Magic as their influence grows in the campaign world. As they contact higher entities, the plot can provide reasons why the magicians gain these benefits. Of course, the campaign effects of angering an entity are obvious.

A campaign should use entities as enabling devices. They create conditions necessary to the adventure's plot. Entities are discussed under *The Powers That Be*.

If there is Bestowed Magic in the campaign: On the positive side, the GM gains greater control of the PCs; they can't throw massive enchantments when he doesn't want them to. On the negative side, the GM gains greater control of the PCs; players feel frustration if they can only use their powers when the GM allows/wants them to.

If Bestowed Magic is the only method allowed, developing the campaign's pantheon of higher beings becomes crucial. The PCs essentially function as servants of these entities. If players sympathize with their entity's goals, fine; otherwise, the campaign risks alienating the players from an abstract struggle between misbehaving demigods.

If not: Higher powers become much less influential in the campaign, except in specific plot circumstances. PCs and fellow mortals are masters of their own destinies, but they'll never get to throw really big-deal magic.

FOCUS MAGIC

Objects can contain or harness magical energy. Their sources are the three given above, but practically, they work in different ways and have different game effects.

In game terms: Most Foci, including amulets, wands, and garments are Obvious and Unbreakable. Foci can be alive — creature familiars that are Personal, Breakable (as it were; sometimes even Fragile), and either Obvious or Inobvious.

Magical Foci are often both Personal and Universal. That is, any mystic adept can use the Focus, but non-adepts can't. In a traditional campaign where the mage is one of very few adepts, that makes the Focus Personal. In an all-magic campaign, the PCs and villains are adepts, so the identical Focus is functionally Universal.

Typically, magical Foci are bought to 0 END cost, especially the Universal ones.

Extremely powerful sorcerous artifacts are Independent and often ancient. Usually only the most powerful sorcerers can use these fully, but there is no inherent prohibition against other adepts using them as well. An interesting $-1/4$ limitation for these items is, "User cannot use more than (5x EGO) active points." This keys the device's strength to its user without limiting the device.

Note that superhero magicians sometimes command their devices over great distances, even when they don't know their locations. Though a magical device looks like a Focus, it may not work like one and thus gets no Focus bonus.

In campaign terms: The virtue of Focus Magic is ease of use. Beginning magicians can cast any spell, if only they can find the widget that embodies it.

Along with Bestowed Magic, Foci offer the highest power levels in the campaign. Each powerful item should tie into the campaign background as a story element. Quests for these items can provide adventures; finding them can produce deus ex machina plot solutions.

Like entities, powerful items should work primarily as plot devices. These items often possess a rudimentary intelligence and can vanish once their purpose is fulfilled (or fails to be fulfilled). This means the GM can let them fall into PCs' hands without worry that the campaign will become unbalanced.

If there is Focus Magic in the campaign: Players become motivated to explore their world, searching for neat treasures. PCs can cast really high-level spells without worrying about angering a given entity. Magical items are a key part of the standard comic-book magic genre.

But if they have no other magic except Foci, PCs become entirely dependent on your benevolence, leading to player frustration.

If not: Magic cannot be stored in items. So it probably relates to life energy or other circumstances of spontaneous outpouring. (This also implies prohibition of the Time Delay and Trigger advantages and most uses of the Focus and Independent limitations.) The campaign loses out on a rich source of plot devices, but PCs may gain increased importance by virtue of their inherent magic.

DEGREES OF DIFFICULTY

Some spells are more difficult to learn than others. However, the comics seldom give clues to the exact ranking of spell difficulty. This section gives advice on ranking spells in the campaign.

SOURCES OF MAGIC

Of the sources listed above, Personal and Focus Magic appear to be the easiest to learn, but Personal offers the lowest power levels, and Focus is chancy. Powerful External Magic is the mark of an accomplished sorcerer, if not necessarily a master. Bestowed Magic indicates that the magician has earned special attention, but tells little about his level of skill.

POWERS

Though exceptions exist, the GM can rank the difficulty of the magical powers according to their minimum costs — the higher the power's minimum cost, the more difficult the spell. Also, advantage levels can indicate a spell's difficulty; costly advantages indicate increased difficulty.

This principle produces ranks along the following lines. Ranks are given in terms of three levels described later in this section: novice (suitable for beginning characters), master, and Archmage (most powerful magician of a dimension).

Novice: Powers that cost 5-15 points minimum, though not attack powers. Advantages of $+1/4$ or $+1/2$. Also, most defenses, mental powers, Enhanced Senses, Missile Deflection (not Reflection), the Universal Translator Talent, and Astral Form.

Master: Powers that cost 15-30 points minimum. Advantages up to +1. Also special powers, most attack powers, most movement powers (often through Foci; seldom includes Teleportation), Dispel, Extra-Dimensional Movement (but not through time), Missile Reflection, Shape Shift, and minor Transformations.

Truly accomplished masters may also have Desolidification, Multiform, Summon, and Teleportation.

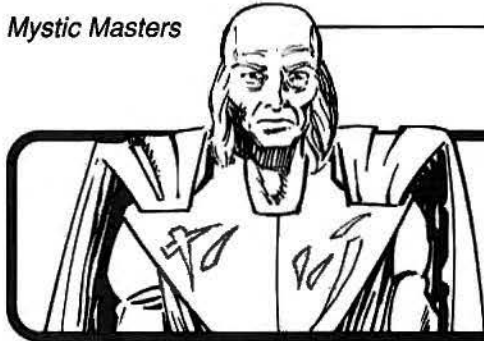
Archmage: All remaining powers. Advantages above +1, and few limitations. Also size powers (rarely seen in magical comics), major Transformations, Absorption, Teleportation, and time travel, traditionally the most difficult form of magic.

Outside the rankings: Aid and Regeneration. As discussed later in this section, comic-book magicians seldom have these, unless they are dedicated empaths or passive healers. Healing magic appears incompatible with the aggressive spirit of combat magic.

In practice, any spell's difficulty varies according to how good a story it makes. The spell that is needed to defeat Tyrannon the Conqueror is always dreadfully powerful, has never been successfully cast, and is "certain to destroy" its user. Spells that solve mere problems of logistics, such as Universal Translator or Instant Change, are treated as trivial enchantments.

Therefore, feel free to adjust this ranking as you please, to reflect what will make a good story in your own campaign.





CREATING A MAGICIAN

WHAT THEY'RE LIKE

What makes a superheroic magician? When creating characters, keep examples of comic-book magicians in mind.

Some distinguishing features of the type:

Physically active! The comic-book magician does not hang back behind his or her companions, standing stock-still and chanting incantations at a safe distance. This type of hero dives into the fight, dodges energy bolts with the best of them, and flings attack spells more or less within spitting distance.

Hardy! They're not often strong, but the magicians in the comics can take enormous amounts of punishment. They meditate for days without food or sleep, then fight trans-dimensional bad guys without breaking stride. Slugged from behind with a blackjack, they crawl to their feet and summon hordes of demons. Sure, they speak proper English and sometimes have delicate little mustaches, but these folks are no pantywaists.

Highly motivated! Comic-book magicians stand against perils that would shatter the minds of lesser people. Though they might doubt their own strength, they never question whether the fight is worthwhile.

Consider this conversation: "Gee, Mysterium, think we ought to let Dhormo-Luggurth conquer our dimension?" "I'm not sure he couldn't do a better job than what we've got now, Dr. Sinestral." This never happens in the comics.

Shy of publicity! These people seldom stick around to sign autographs. In fact, they usually wipe bystanders' memories of any knowledge of their magic. Why is this? Some of the usual motives for a secret identity apply (DNPCs would be menaced, and so forth), but there are other reasons.

First, magicians believe ordinary people would go nuts if they knew that extra-dimensional demons plot to take over Earth. Also, the magician's discipline requires concentration and freedom from distractions; if everyone knew he could cast magic, they'd pound on his door at every hour of the day for interviews, faith healing, seances, etc. Finally, magicians have powerful enemies, and public exposure would alert those enemies to their exact whereabouts and circumstances. When you're one of the few defenders of an entire dimension, you can't be too careful.

Secretive! Another way this shyness shows up: Magicians seldom explain things to non-magicians. "How do you cast those spells? What will happen to us if the bad guy wins? What does this rune do?" Though he encounters this nosiness all the time, a comic-book mage rarely replies with specifics. His attitude is, "If you have to ask, you're not cleared to know."

This feature works well in a comic book series, but don't make PCs in a roleplaying game keep their mouths shut. As a practical matter, secrecy applies only to NPCs. Fellow players are allies in the fight against evil, and so they deserve the magician's full confidence.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF MAGICAL HEROES

Broadly speaking, magical characters in the comics fall into three categories. All of the origins in the next section can apply in each category, though some are more appropriate than others. Of course, the campaign type determines the categories available to player characters.



TRADITIONAL HEROES WITH MAGICAL ORIGINS

They fire force-bolts and lift buildings, but these heroes' powers happen to come from a magical jewel, a god's blessing, or a pure heart. They could as easily be mutants or wear powered armor. They lack heavy-duty mental powers, mystical awareness, or knowledge of magical arcana.

Aside from special effects and different Hunteds (not VIPER or GENOCIDE, but demons or cults of demented wizards), these heroes can be designed and played like their non-magical equivalents using the standard *Champions* rules. This supplement deals with them only briefly.

Some appropriate origins from the next section's list include Elemental, Occult Detective, Paragon, Spirit Hybrid, and Wild Talent.

CREATURES OF MAGIC

Ghosts, demons, monsters, djinni — these characters (one hesitates to call them "heroes") don't wield magic as such, and perhaps don't even understand it, but derive their powers from an innate magical nature.

This conceptual difference can be important in campaigns that stress mystic knowledge, skill, and awareness. For example, human magicians could fight enemy wizards by exploiting subtle weaknesses in enemy spellcasting techniques, or uncovering ancient lore, or entreating powerful entities for aid. Fine, but PC manticores (for example) might just want to bash the bad guys!

Unlike most human magicians, magical creatures make good bricks. They may even have inborn immunity to some kinds of magical attack. They can work equally well in traditional campaigns or heavily magical campaigns.

Suitable origins for magical creatures from the following list include Elemental (of course), Pawn of Higher Forces, and Vengeful Hunter.

TRUE MAGICIANS

Not inherently magical themselves, these characters actually understand and wield the forces of magic to produce their powers. They are the focus of this supplement, and all of the origins on the following list are suitable as character conceptions in this category.

MAGICAL ORIGINS

This non-exhaustive list gives some backgrounds that magicians often spring from. Some of these origins can apply to any superheroic character, while others work best in a magic-oriented campaign.

Each description suggests a general origin, and possibly powers, advantages, limitations, and disadvantages. Of course, don't feel bound by these suggestions where your own character conception disagrees with them.

ELEMENTAL

The forces of nature and the universe sometimes manifest themselves as intelligent beings. These living embodiments of some facet of nature — earth, water, vegetation — protect the natural order in more flexible and delicate ways than Mother Nature can manage. You are one of these elemental creatures.

Obviously, most or all of your powers should fit an Elemental Control without strain. Disadvantages like "Unfamiliar with human culture" and "Worships Nature" would be appropriate.

Vulnerabilities and Susceptibilities may arise from the choice of element. A fire spirit could be damaged by water; an earth elemental may become powerless when separated from the Earth.

FALLEN AND REDEEMED

For whatever reason, you failed in life. You drank to excess, or treated your fellows with such arrogance they rejected your company. You may have been a criminal, a mental patient or even a money-grubbing millionaire. In any case, you lacked a sense of kinship with humanity. You suffered for it, catastrophically.

Desperate, you searched for some way out. Once you would have laughed at the possibilities of magical help. But now the study of the mystical arts has become your path to redemption. Lifted into a higher existence, you feel new awareness of the kinship of all life. You would not betray this for any price.

Any powers are appropriate for this origin. A high EGO Characteristic shows a renewed will to live, and skill levels are the fruit of intense dedication. Disadvantages could include Hunteds (people you annoyed in your former life), Dependence (some old addiction?), Physical Limitations brought on by your dissolute behavior, or Psychological Limitations like "Haunted by former transgressions" or "Lacks self-confidence."

INHERITOR OF THE MANTLE

Magic is often hereditary. You either studied with your parent, or accidentally inherited his, her, or its gifts. The predecessor is sometimes not a blood relative, but someone who designated you as his successor.

Any power is appropriate, especially those with limitations reflecting a prior user: for instance, Independent Foci passed down from the progenitor (and perhaps less controllable now?), or Activation rolls representing a need for permission to use the power! Sometimes the character must do something to inherit the mantle (like pull a sword from a stone...) An obvious Psychological Limitation is "Must better predecessor's achievements." The predecessor may be Watching the hero.

This origin, since it lacks an explanation for the hero's magic power, often dovetails with one of the other origin types. The campaign premise in the sourcebook section designates all the player characters as Inheritors of the Mantle, whatever their disparate origins.

PARAGON (CULTURAL OR MYTHIC)

In comic books, magical characters from virtually every society's folklore have been embodied as superheroes: Greek and Norse gods, shamans of Australian and American Indian cultures, Haitian voodoo priests, and even Uncle Sam. These characters exist because every culture deserves representation — equal-time heroes, as it were.

Everything about a Paragon is based on the myth or folklore from which he springs. The hero is typically a member of that culture who has somehow "connected with" the culture's forgotten past. No other generalizations are possible, except that a typical Psychological Limitation is "Unfamiliar with or intolerant of modern culture."



PAWN OF HIGHER FORCES

Magical entities often attain godlike power, and frequently they employ lesser beings to take care of minor chores like fighting evil on Earth. This character is such a lesser being, but relative to ordinary people he is awesome indeed. As often as not, he has been resurrected from the dead to accomplish some great task.

This magical hero, as the appointed emissary of a big-time power, usually commands huge power in his own right and has a great Contact. The trouble is, he's also got plenty of Hunteds, and usually a few "Prohibition" disadvantages (see the rules section). He's also got one truly nasty Watched (his boss).

Though few magical heroes are fun at parties, this character in particular can be grim. This is easy to understand, since his life is no longer his own, but it is not always ideal in a roleplaying group. Also, the Pawn's missions can drag other PCs into places they'd rather not be. Beware.

SPIRIT HYBRID

This character gained his magical power by merging with a supernatural entity. The entity can be a human spirit, giving the hero the abilities and strength of two people; a demon that possesses the hero; or one who feeds the hero power through a dimensional gateway.

Much depends on whether the hero willingly merged with the entity, or, as often happens, the hero is an unwilling victim. The hero's powers may be available all the time, or only when the entity is present: at certain times (night, a full moon, and so on) or in certain circumstances (in the presence of evil, when the hero Berserks, etc.).

The hero usually has Susceptibilities and Vulnerabilities based on the entity's weaknesses. Hero and entity may form a split personality, leading to interesting Psychological Limitations. Accidental Change is all but required.

The character's origin may imply a clear and present goal: to free himself of the entity, conquer the entity's ancient foe, or attain total unity with the entity. This can mean the PC will drop out of the campaign once the goal is fulfilled. On the other hand, the character who achieves his goal may achieve a new strength (through inner peace?) and continue in new circumstances.

If the prospect of an eventual new direction bothers you, try to avoid a definite goal when designing the character.

VENERATED PATRIARCH

Magicians sometimes live to great old age. (This probably comes of being able to return from the dead.) Whatever the reason, this character has accumulated vast skill and power over decades or centuries. But age has left him wizened, feeble, and surrounded by several lifetimes' worth of enemies.

Though his power level is often low, a Patriarch can do just about anything; Variable Power Pools with high skill rolls are the rule, if you allow these in your campaign. Pay for the Pool with big Hunteds; lowered STR, CON, and END; Vulnerabilities to Drains or physical attacks; and DNPCs (disciples, servants, associates).

The Patriarch is extremely flexible, but he runs out of steam quickly. This character works best as an NPC, or a PC for an experienced player who knows the rules and doesn't need great power to have great fun. An NPC Patriarch, the Revered Elder, appears as the PCs' patron in the sourcebook's campaign premise.

VENGEFUL HUNTER

Some magical being did something rude to you or your loved ones, and now you want to commit rudeness right back at it. Your arsenal may include extensive stealth and detective skills, heavy weapons, and perhaps a supernatural power or two. Often the power either caused your target's hostility — he may have attacked you to cut down on the competition, or arose as a result of that hostility; for example, a vampire bit you and turned you into one of its kind.

Another kind of Hunter eschews stealth and weapons. This is the golem-type who seeks his target simply by following him — through walls or mortar fire, across the bottom of the ocean, etc. This Hunter needs high defenses and probably Life Support, as well as the power to fight his target toe-to-toe once he finally finds him.

Hunters pay for their abilities with Psychological Limitations; they're usually sanitarium cases. Besides the obvious "Hatred of target," consider "Obsessive," "Touchy when questioned," and "Humorless." A Hunter might logically carry on a Rivalry with another Hunter.

Vengeful Hunters appear in many stories. Armies of vampire hunters serve as the cardinal examples, but there are also demon stalkers, golems, exorcists, and fallen demigods who seek to regain their thrones. Not light-hearted as a rule, the Hunter can create the same campaign problems as the Pawn of Higher Forces (see above).



WILD TALENT

Magic comes easy to you. You were just born that way, that's all. Think of something, and wham, there it is. Sometimes it gets a little out of control, though.

Both to rein in your powers and find out more about what you can do, you may want to find someone with experience to tutor you. Meanwhile, as long as you have this gift, you have decided to become a hero and do something worthwhile with it.

This conception works alongside another motivating factor, like revenge or a love of justice. A Wild Talent should have one or more powers at very respectable levels with low END cost, but with advantages and limitations reflecting a lack of control. The character should have few or no skill levels with the power.

Typical disadvantages include youth, overconfidence, a frivolous attitude, Conditional Distinctive Features (an inherent magical aura; see rules section), unforeseen Side Effects of the talent, and maybe a Hunted (a psionic or magical agency interested in experimenting on the character).

This is the only magical conception that encourages uncontrollable magic. This idea is not usually part of the genre's conventions (see *How Does Magic Work?* above). The Wild Talent should soon gain enough skill to buy off the control limitations.

SOME TYPICAL SPECIAL EFFECTS

A character's origin and his magic's special effects go hand in hand. If you're playing (for instance) a plant elemental, you know its powers will be plant-based; its Entangle works as plants growing up out of the ground to bind opponents, its Energy Blast is a spray of thorns, and so on.

This short list describes a few different "looks" that magic displays in the comics. Actually, the comics show wide variety here. Use these special effects as inspiration for your character's own unique look:

Generic light-show. You gesture, globes of light appear at your fingertips, and bands of light arc out to strike the target. Defense spells form circular shields that can shatter under sufficient strain. These effects are not actual light; only adepts can see the show. "Light" is the way someone with Mental Awareness perceives the magical energy.

Stage magic — for real. You not only battle occult menaces older than mankind, you look fashionable doing it. Nearly always bedecked in formal evening wear, you exude class and show a fine sense of the theatrical. Consider using theatrical props as Foci or special effects: doves, cards, top hats, and so on. And intone showy incantations, like rhymes or speaking backward, to create your spells. (This need not be not an Incantation limitation, just a special effect.)

The elements. That is, weather control, fire magic, gusts of air, huge pillars of dirt or water, and so on. So often seen that it hardly merits further explanation.

Street-smart shamus magic. This sounds strange, yet the very first magicians in comics belonged to this category. You use your magical powers, whether gained by study of occult texts or as inborn psychic gifts, to help you solve crimes. Model yourself on any detective from mystery stories. Maybe you have little actual knowledge of magic, or even refuse to believe in its existence!

Props. This catchall effect describes any set of gadgets organized around your "theme." For instance, if your character is a Renaissance jongleur who found a magical gem, thereby gaining powers and immortality, he could cast all his spells through juggling props: torches for Energy Blast, a swirling screen of beanbags as a Force Wall, and so on.

Other useful magical props: bells, books, and candles, for magic with a religious theme; sceptres, orbs, and mirrors, for Oriental magic; harps, good for Greek singers or Welsh bards; cats, toads, serpents, ravens, eagles, wild dogs, and other familiars; and the usual amulets and talismans.

Named Spells. For flavor, consider naming each power/spell in the idiom appropriate to comic-book magic. For instance, call a Force Wall "the Shield of Dimitrios"; Instant Change becomes "a simple spell of concealment"; Mind Control is "Soul Shackles"; and so on.

Some of these designations include names drawn from the campaign's pantheon of higher beings or demigods. In the comics, magicians frequently call upon these beings for aid. Consult the sourcebook for a few that PCs might plausibly call on.

This idea is not for every player. But some, instead of saying "I'm going to Entangle him," find it more fun to shout, "I summon the Bountiful Bindings of Blyyat the Beneficent!"

THE BEGINNING MAGICIAN

For the next step in magician design, determine the campaign's power level. This depends on the foes the PCs will face, the places they go, and the role they play in the campaign universe.

MINOR MYSTICS

The characters exhibit small but interesting magical powers. They seldom figure among the most powerful mystics of the world.

The PCs operate in a single city or area, with occasional forays elsewhere in the world or, rarely, another dimension. They confront small-scale perils such as poltergeists, vampires, and other movie monsters; or villains with a single psychic ability, motivated by conventional goals such as money or success. Adventures spotlight intrigue, mystery elements, character interaction, and small dashes of the strange.

This is a heroic-level campaign. Start the PCs at a 50- or 75-point base, with 75 to 100 points of disadvantages.

HEAVY HITTERS

The PCs may not be the most powerful mystics in the world, but they're right up there. And perhaps they're the strongest heroes who fight for the good; the only stronger ones are evil wizards, extra-dimensional conquerors, or neutrals who have no interest in the world's fate.

These PCs frequently explore other dimensions as newcomers. They stand against fearsome monsters and major mystics. Villains want to conquer Earth or corrupt whole populations. Adventures involve large schemes and much exotic magic.

This superheroic campaign, the standard Mystic Masters level, starts PCs with a 100- or 125-point base and 150-200 points of disadvantages.

ARCHMAGI

The PCs are flat-out tops in magical power. Head to head and face to face, only other-dimensional entities even come close. But the villains have strength in numbers, and they never fight fair.

The PCs travel the infinite dimensions routinely, and they are well acquainted with those near Earth's. They battle the greatest entities of the multiverse, often preventing destruction on a cosmic scale.

This is the magical equivalent of a "galactic guardians" campaign. The PCs begin with a 200-point base and 200-250 points in disadvantages.

The following discussion assumes a standard, "heavy hitter" power level, as does the campaign premise offered in the sourcebook section.

CHARACTERISTICS

A comic-book magician's most important characteristic is, of course, EGO. A value of 20 is a practical minimum for most magical characters. In fantasy literature, some conceptions of magic place less emphasis on EGO, but that isn't how it works in the comics. These magicians exert tremendous will power and show unshakable devotion to their causes.

Another hallmark of the magician is high Intelligence. For most conceptions, scores should range from 15 and up, with 20 again a healthy standard. These people not only study ancient texts written before the Himalayas rose, they think fast on their feet and are, as a rule, quite observant. Note that some magical types, such as the Wild Talent, need not have exceptional INT.

Comic-book magicians are seldom unusually strong, but they do have massive amounts of Endurance and Recovery. Since magical bad guys (like Cthulhu) often have enormous Presence, many wizards have a high Presence bought with the -1 limitation, "Only to defend against PRE Attacks."

For the rest, the *Champions* campaign material suffices. Magician characters should consider a CON higher than the center range, but PD and ED need not be so high, since much of the combat is EGO-based.

What does this add up to? Assuming STR 10, CON 28 (to boost the END and REC levels), and values of 20 for INT, EGO, and PRE, the starting magician spends 76 points on Characteristics before he even starts thinking about Dexterity and Speed!

If players are strapped for points, the GM can increase the point base; assign additional points usable only for purchasing Characteristics; or just make the PCs start out with fewer powers and skills. This reflects their status as novices.

SKILLS

Obviously, appropriate skills vary according to conception. For instance, an Occult Detective would have Deduction and Security Systems, but a Venerated Patriarch is much less likely to bother with these mundane matters.

Almost any comic-book wizard, though, can use Martial Arts (usually the Comic-Book style). The discipline of magic extends to the body as well as the mind, and so these mages often practice unarmed combat. However, they seldom achieve skill enough to overshadow their mental or magical abilities (they don't buy additional DC of damage).

Many magicians are well-travelled, having studied the arts of magic in many backwater places both on Earth and off. Area and City Knowledges individualize the characters, often illuminating their origins and places of study.

Likewise, PCs may easily have picked up plenty of languages, including any number of dead or extra-dimensional languages. Rather than making PCs buy these individually, the GM can choose to allow characters to take the Universal Translator Talent as a magical power, even within a Multipower or other power framework. (See *Talents as Powers* in the HERO Rulesbook.)

Disguise proves useful in conjunction with Shapeshift or Transformation. Wizards often take on the form of some loved one or enemy.

Some skills that are not usually appropriate:

Espionage Skills: Bugging, Cryptography, Demolitions, Interrogation, Lip Reading, Lockpicking, Security Systems, Systems Operation, etc. These abilities should be simulated with magical spells that achieve the same effects — for example, Clairsentience (hearing) in place of Lip Reading.

High-tech Skills: Computer Programming, Electronics, Inventor, Mechanics, most of the Sciences, etc. These are not flatly prohibited by any means. Magical comic books draw frequent (and funny) contrasts between the heroes' skills in ancient magic and their inability to deal with their modern surroundings. But in general these skills do not suit the genre.

Other non-genre skills: Bribery, Bureaucratics, Climbing, Combat Driving and Piloting, Forgery, Gambling, Mimicry, Trading, and various Transport Familiarities.. Generally, there is not much call for these in comic-book magic... though players can take this as a challenge rather than a prohibition.

Novice magicians should take most skills at 8-, and can seldom achieve much more than 11-. Adepts range from 11- to 18- in most skills. Archmagi, masters of all they undertake, can achieve phenomenal skill levels.

KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

Virtually every conception allows or requires study of the mystic arts. Therefore, most PCs should be Scholars and have several Knowledge Skills. Knowledge and Professional Skills obviously vary according to campaign background. Here is a short list of suggestions:

Arcane Cults

Deities

Demonology: Western, Oriental, Other-dimensional, Demon Rulers, Demon Hierarchies

Lycanthropy (possible sub-categories according to animal)

Magicians: Archmagi, Contemporary or Past Earth, Contemporary or Past of Earth's dimension, Other-dimensional

Mysticism: Aboriginal, African, Amerind, Atlantean, Aztec, Buddhist, Chinese, Cthulhoid, Druidic, Egyptian, Eskimo/Inuit, Hindu, Incan, Indian, Islamic, Japanese, Javanese, Judeo-Christian, Lemurian, Mayan, Nazca, Pagan, Sikh, Zen, Zoroastrian, etc.

Occult Knowledge (the catchall general skill)

"Psychic Sciences": Astrology, Cartomancy, Dream interpretation, Handwriting Analysis, Molesophy (study of body moles), Numerology, Omens and superstitions, Ouija, Palmistry, Phrenology (head-bump reading), etc.

Rituals (often complementary to Arcane Cults)

Vampires: Western, Oriental, Other-dimensional

Voodoo: American or Caribbean

Witchcraft, Wicca, etc.

Yoga: Bakti, Hatha, Jnana, Karma, Raja

PERKS AND TALENTS

Contacts and Favors: In a mystic campaign useful contacts are other magicians, dimensional rulers, cosmic entities, and so on. Assuming PC magicians begin the campaign as novices, still unfamiliar with the workings of the multiverse, they should not have widespread contacts or powerful favors without good reason.

A few mundane connections never hurt (such as a clerk at a much-frequented occult bookstore). These can work as scenario hooks but otherwise are unlikely to prove useful. They can be assumed during the game, rather than paid for with points.

Followers: Mages are solitary by inclination, but it is appropriate for masters to take on disciples. (Seldom do they teach more than one at a time, though.) However, beginning PCs, who are presumably novices in the arts of magic, should not enlist followers without good reason.

Money: In the comics, magicians never appear troubled about money. This distracts from the discipline necessary for magic, not to mention the otherworldly atmosphere of magical adventures. If the campaign uses the optional money system, consider buying Wealth at the Well Off level or better.

Talents: See "Talents as Powers" in the rules section.

POWERS

In most cases, magician PCs can organize magical spells as slots in a Multipower. Beginning spellcasters often require a Focus or similar limitation that reduces the entire Multipower's cost.

Most powers are appropriate for magicians. Above all, Mental Defense is crucial; 10 to 15 points is a feasible value. Other powers seen most often include the mental powers, Detect Magic, and many kinds of Energy Blasts and Force Fields. Danger Sense is sometimes a must, at other times never seen. Don't forget Instant Change — a simple spell to conceal one's magical garb from the eyes of innocents.

Armor can be useful for traditional supers with magical origins — for example, an Arthurian knight transplanted to modern times. But in most contexts Armor lends a technological feel to the character, which is inappropriate for many wizards in the comics.

Some other powers comic-book mages seldom use: Clinging, Density Increase, Extra Limbs, Gliding, Growth, Knockback Resistance, extra Running, Shrinking, Stretching (except through a Focus, such as a magical cloak), Superleap, and Tunneling. However, any of these may be suitable for inherently magical creatures.

Note especially that many mages do not have Aid or Regeneration! One rationale for this says that the aggressive mentality necessary for combat magic is diametrically opposed to the passive, empathic attitude that healing magic requires. A magician can have one kind or the other, but not both.

This lends a welcome edge of danger to most conflicts. Magicians of any experience are usually very flexible, with many powers at their disposal. But if they can't heal damage by any means outside a first aid kit, they won't get overconfident.

ABOUT DEFENSES

Player characters in a magic campaign may require higher defenses than their traditional superheroic counterparts. Why? Because magical heroes usually lack the support structure found in conventional campaigns.

Traditional super-heroes know other NPC hero groups and organizations like UNTIL, and can borrow high-tech gadgets from the nearest FBI office. Sometimes even the weight of public opinion can help traditional heroes.

By contrast, magicians are self-reliant types who often struggle in distant dimensions, and are secretive about their foes. They don't stop in at UNTIL headquarters, and the FBI doesn't even know they exist. Magicians are often on their own, so they can use all the defenses they can afford.

The sourcebook section in this supplement offers several powerful mages who can aid the PCs from time to time. Though they work as a support structure of a kind, they suffer the same disadvantages as the PCs, and are available for help less often than a patron agency.

ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

Magical spells gain unique flavors not only through names but, like traditional super-powers, through creative advantages and limitations. So many different combinations exist that it would be futile to try to list them. This section discusses a few principles useful in simulating general types of magic.

Advantages: Based on EGO Combat Value is very appropriate, though not as powerful as in traditional adventures. Players should realize that their PCs' opponents have EGO values as high as their own!

Difficult to Dispel works well with the Time Delay and Trigger advantages, especially when it represents ancient ward spells or enchantments by powerful other-dimensional deities.

Other advantages that mimic the effects of magic include AVLD, Indirect, Invisible Power Effects, No Range Modifier, NND (defenses typically include Mental Defense, Damage Reduction vs. Mental, and magical Force Fields), Personal Immunity, and especially Variable Special Effects at the +1/2 level.

Note the new advantages mentioned in the rules section.

Limitations: Charges sounds like it works well for magical spells (letting a mage cast thus-and-so only three times a day, for instance), but you never see it in comic-book magic. These sorcerers just don't run out of appropriate spells.

However, Foci show up a lot. For a discussion of magical Foci, see *How Does Magic Work?* above.

As discussed elsewhere in this section, Gestures and Incantations show up in the comics, but seldom really limit the spellcasters. This implies that all the hand-waving and shouting are really special effects, not true limitations.

Requires a Skill Roll is seldom seen. However, an interesting -1/4 limitation on major enchantments is "Requires EGO Roll; active pts reduced by 10 for each 1 by which the roll is missed." Faith in one's inner strength sometimes governs the power of the spell being cast. Since magicians' EGOs are so high, the roll may be modified by -1 per 10 active points in the power, like the Requires Skill Roll limitation.

Just as mental attacks often do knockback in the comics (thus the "Ego Knockback" advantage in the rules section), many physical attacks do No Knockback. They appear as wavy beams of light that arc out and gently touch the target.

Other often-seen limitations include Increased Endurance Cost, Independent (usually for devices of minor power), and Visible. Concentrate appears now and then, but not for spells likely to be used in combat.

Limitations not seen in the magical comics (at least not among the heroes) include Activation, Mental Powers Based on CON, No Conscious Control, Only in Hero ID, and Side Effects. Most of these imply that the hero lacks control over his magic, which does not suit the genre. However, Wild Talents, novices, and NPC agent-type wizards, especially normal-level dabblers in the occult, can gain significant cost breaks by piling on these disads.

The rules section lists additional limitations.

Frameworks: Nearly every magician's character conception can and should include an Elemental Control (such as "Magical Creature Powers") or, preferably, a suite of spells in a Multipower. Extremely capable magicians may have separate Multipowers for attack, defense, and movement.

Variable Power Pools should always include a "Magic Skill" roll, unless the caster is a deity or demigod with total control of his magic. Pools should be restricted to Arch-mages and the greatest sorcerers of a dimension. Don't allow them to beginning magicians, and certainly not to beginning players!



APPROPRIATE DISADVANTAGES

First, Secret Identity. This works slightly differently for magicians; one of the genre's conventions is that ordinary people can't be exposed to the true nature of magic, so magicians must keep their activities secret. Magician PCs can have a "secret identity" even if they use their real names and are listed in the phone book.

Conversely, Public Identity does not always mean the magician is covered in the nightly newscasts or appears on talk shows. Public ID can apply to the community of magicians throughout the dimensions, not to the general public. If every dimensional invader knows where to find the PCs and what their powers are, the game effect is the same as a conventional Public ID. In fact, with the GM's permission, magicians could have both Secret and Public IDs!

Code Vs. Killing is often seen. There can be problems in groups where one or more magicians have Code Vs. Killing, while others don't. Some groups enjoy the conflict this creates. Others find it unpleasant if play sessions turn into policy meetings as soon as one hero fries an agent with his mystic blast. This becomes a disadvantage in a way the GM never intended it to!

Other good disadvantages for magicians: Vulnerabilities to mental powers, such as Mind Scan, Mental Illusions, and Telepathy; Watched, by the Archmage or higher-dimensional entities; and interesting minor Physical Limitations. Also note the new disadvantages in the rules section.

Superheroic magicians are a disciplined lot. So the disadvantages that don't often appear in their comics relate to lack of discipline: Accidental Change, full-scale Berserks, severe Dependence, and major Susceptibilities.





GAMING THE GENRE

With many of the important character types established, it's time to describe the types of stories — in other words, the genre — that features these magicians. This section is written for the GM rather than players. But the GM can pass along most of this information, indicating to players what their characters may do and the ways they act.

CONVENTIONS OF COMIC MAGIC

A "convention" is an assumption that allows the story to work. Without that assumption, the whole story falls apart. For instance, every superhero story assumes that a tiny domino mask completely hides the wearer's identity. In real life masks don't work that well. But this idea is vital to the story, so it's a convention.

For another example, in a superhero story characters can say as much as they want between fast-flying punches or while they move at super-speed. Without these rules, the story wouldn't be the same.

Don't confuse genre conventions with plot elements. In earlier sections we mentioned several story elements of the magic-hero story: dimensional travel, evocative spell names, demonic monsters, and so on. These elements characterize stories of comic-book magic. But no one of them, in itself, is vital to every story. So they aren't conventions.

What, then, are the genre's conventions?

1. The magical heroes are the only ones who can face the situation at hand. Invaders from other dimensions command magic that, so it's implied, would reduce traditional superheroes to blobs of protoplasm. Most heroes lack great defenses against magical attacks; more important, they lack the knowledge and skills that help against magical opponents.

This convention actually holds true for traditional superhero stories as well. After all, no group of PCs should ever be able just to call a more powerful NPC on the phone and get him to solve their problems. But in magical stories the hero's unique qualifications for his story show in high relief. The magician usually can't bring in other heroes to help, because of another important convention:

2. The magician keeps secrets that are unknown to outsiders. The heroes are privy to magical knowledge that less dedicated mortals can never understand. This secrecy, this sense that magicians walk a different road from the rest of humanity, marks a crucial genre convention. Some reasons for this secrecy appeared in the section on character design.

For players this can be both attractive and frustrating. Everyone likes to be in on a secret, but sometimes keeping it can be a strain.

The ideal campaign of comic-book magic plays up both sides of the convention. First let the PCs tell NPCs things like, "The world at large is not ready to know of such matters." Then, after the players finish gloating, make the PCs face bad guys from another dimension all by themselves, because they don't dare let others know about the menace!

3. Earth is important. Bad guys in countless other dimensions aren't content to stay in their own universes. They want this one too. There must be a reason they want to conquer the Earth (or the PCs' world, if that is not Earth). Perhaps the reason varies among conquerors, or a common reason can simply be assumed. The reason need not be important! The point is, the magicians' home is a prize that they must defend.



The nebulous nature of magic makes any reason convenient and plausible. For instance, in the campaign premise offered in the sourcebook section, Earth's high population density creates a resource of psychic energy that other-dimensional beings find useful. Other reasons could be that the Earth is a gate between dimensions, a focus for magical mana, or whatever.

4. Death is not necessarily final. In mystic comics as in traditional comics, death is a major trauma. But the superheroic magician can regard death as another state of being, a higher dimension not unlike the alien dimensions he routinely visits. And as he returns from those alien realms, he can return from death as well. An adventure in the scenario section lets PCs do just that.

This is one convention of the genre that should be left as a surprise to the players. They should not regard deadly danger with an attitude of, "Oh, we'll just get resurrected." As magicians in the comics learn, the return to life is fraught with danger, confrontation with one's own fears and weaknesses, and spiritual breakthrough. They never take it lightly!

RUNNING MAGICAL ADVENTURES

Conventions provide solid groundwork, but the GM still has to build a story on their foundations. This section talks about the broad types of magical adventures he can run, whether as a one-shot in a traditional campaign or as the meat of an entire magic-oriented campaign.

As often seen in the comics, all these kinds of stories share a couple of features.

First, they use magic to bring in weird scenery and special effects. In other words, magic works as a story device to create atmosphere. The writers rely on magic's potent ability to produce dazzling effects, both visual and narrative.

Second, in most (but not all) cases, comic books contrast a modern, familiar world with a bizarre magical realm. The wizards either bring 20th-century perceptions to some alien dimension, or else a strange beast appears in (say) downtown Manhattan. Magic produces bizarre effects, but they appear most bizarre through close proximity to the normal.

That said, look at the different categories of magical adventures possible in superheroic campaigns.

MAGICIANS IN TRADITIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Most traditional superhero campaigns have some elements of magic. There are usually some magical items that villains try to steal. A few characters with magical origins and powers fight crimes (or commit them) alongside the mutants and gadgeteers. Sometimes even demons and elementals lurk in the background.

Magicians can fit into a conventional campaign without any major changes in style or emphasis. But if the magicians spend most of their time fighting plain vanilla super-villains, they quickly lose their distinctive characteristics and become just another bunch of superheroes with peculiar origins.

Instead of always adapting a magical character into the existing campaign style, take the opportunity to expand that style in new directions. Magical characters offer a chance to develop a new style of adventure, one that emphasizes setting and mood as much as plot.

MAGICAL ELEMENTS

Picture a classic superhero-style kidnapping plot. Villains grab a DNPC as hostage and escape from the scene of a robbery. The heroes track them to their lair, rescue the DNPC in a major fight, and go home.

Now picture a variant: The DNPC is kidnapped by extra-dimensional demons for a horrible sacrifice. The heroes must find their way through unknown dimensions, fend off their inhabitants, defeat the demons on their home ground as they prepare to make the sacrifice, then find their way home through the trackless voids.

The point is not that the second version is better than the first — just that it has a decidedly different style. Characters find the first plot familiar, but in the second approach, strange settings and unknowable dangers contrast with the ordinary crises of a superheroic world. Magical settings expand a campaign's range without detracting from its original flavor.

What makes this work is secrecy. Those without mystical abilities must be protected, not only from the horrors that lurk beyond this dimension but from even the knowledge that those horrors exist. This explains why the existence of other dimensions and the beings that derive from them are not a part of the mainstream knowledge of the world. Keeping these things "secret" prevents them from disrupting the rest of the campaign.

Secrecy and knowledge of hidden truths distinguish magicians from their superhero companions. Characters with such knowledge bear a terrible burden they cannot share. Properly played, this lends mystery to the magician. Just be careful, if you have a mixed party, not to let this develop into either smugness or isolation.

Magicians who associate with non-magician PCs must work to maintain trust. Provide plenty of opportunities for personal interaction between magicians and non-magicians so that the mystery can be appreciated without being resented. Allow the magician to confide in others when necessary, but not casually. Do not allow the magician's superior knowledge in some areas to carry over into other aspects of the game.

The sections on the *All-Magician Campaign* and *Designing Dimensions*, below, suggest supernatural elements you can work into a superheroic world.

PROBLEMS WITH MAGICIAN-HEROES

The problem with magical heroes versus mundane villains is that, as often as not, whoever strikes first wins.

Magicians can be extremely effective against non-magical super-villains. Most magicians have a broader range of powers than their foes. Often they possess attacks that bypass the villains' major defenses. Mental powers, Drains, and Illusions can all be devastating to an unprepared group of villains.

Most of the villains in the various *Enemies* books demonstrate this point. EGOs of 10 to 12, and no Mental Defense; sometimes a x2 Vulnerability to magic (an easy 20 points!) — these guys fall over if a magician stares at them hard.



A magical hero with Flight, Invisibility, Force Field, mystic bolts (Ego Attack), and Mental Illusions — a flying mentalist energy projector, basically — would be a terror to most traditional super-villains. Unless the villain happens to have just the right combination of Enhanced Senses, Mental Defense, and mobility, the magician can easily find a combination that leaves the villain helpless, if not comatose.

Conversely, most magicians have lighter and less automatic conventional defenses. A mage who can turn aside mystic bolts on a cosmic scale can be pulverized with a good solid haymaker. Mundane attacks based on physical, chemical, or energy damage may bypass magical defenses.

Worse yet, such defenses usually require some warning to erect, making surprise attacks nasty. If the villain gets the drop on them and their Danger Sense fritzes out, most magicians have *no* defense against super-powered attacks.

Interactions between magical and non-magical opponents can become overbalanced in either direction. Unless you want to teach somebody a lesson, watch out.

TRADITIONAL HEROES IN MAGICAL ADVENTURES

You don't have to run a comic-book magic campaign to make use of its settings. Non-magical heroes from almost any genre can undertake magical adventures. See the previous section for ideas on how to introduce the supernatural into your campaign.

The problem with running non-magicians through an arcane adventure is that they don't have the knowledge to appreciate much of what goes on. It is difficult to get them involved with dark mysteries and strange dimensions without giving them information they would not normally have.

GUIDES

One solution gives the players an NPC guide. A non-magical inhabitant of the area makes a good guide. Such a character can drop (mostly) accurate hints, but doesn't know their significance. Lack of powers keeps the NPC from dominating the adventure.

Don't let the NPC become vital in either combat or decision making. Encourage the PCs to use the guide's information, but don't allow the guide to suggest too many clever ideas.

Children, particularly older ones, can make ideal guides. They have a great deal of local information, but they don't know and haven't thought about many things. A native son whose parents were threatened/imprisoned/murdered by the villain can make a perfect guide in an unknown dimension — he's highly motivated, a source of exposition, and a sympathetic victim to be rescued from assorted perils.

Another way to keep the guide in line is to make him neutral or even hostile. He may be guiding the characters as an unpleasant (magically imposed?) duty. He accompanies them in hopes of watching them fail. Of course, he may even be a servant of the enemy, sent to lead the PCs into a trap.

Chaotic spirits or elementals work well in this role. The characters summon one for the purpose, or happen across a spirit with enough curiosity to "help" them along. Give some hints if you intend to manage a betrayal; otherwise, the characters may stop trusting anybody.

Naturally, try to make the guide come across as a personality rather than a plot device. The better realized the character, the more easily you can pass along information in normal conversation, rather than pointedly dropping it onto the table.

INFORMING THE PLAYERS

A guide is generally the most useful way to give the players information, because he can answer questions directly. To make things a little more difficult for everyone, use other methods.

Learn By Doing

Self-teaching situations are tricky but fun. These are situations where most relevant actions cause an immediate, obvious response. The responses must be mild enough to let the characters learn from their mistakes without getting toasted.

One example is a dimension where the character's thoughts directly affect reality (see *Designing Dimensions*, below). Make use of the players' turns of phrase in deciding how the place transforms, so the players can catch on fairly quickly. Once they get the general idea, a few experiments should prove the point.

Written Instructions

Another viable option. Cast these as riddles or ancient scripts, only partially decipherable. In many cases the most difficult problem is figuring out that the instructions exist at all. They can be hidden or their purpose concealed.

For example, the party is trying to overcome a malefic deity in its own dimension, and they find obscure carvings on the temple walls. To anyone who pays attention, the writings tell a legend of the creature's eventual fall from power. It should be presented in obscure, symbolic terms, but the meaning should become clear if anyone works at it.

THE ALL-MAGICIAN CAMPAIGN

A campaign centered around a group of magicians can afford to focus solely on the magical. The rest of the campaign world should be fairly ordinary by contrast; or, if other superheroes have already been established, their activities should fade into the background. The closer the world is to something the players recognize as normal, the more startling the contrast will be when supernatural forces manifest themselves.

In an all-magician campaign the PCs are the only defense between the world and the powers which threaten it. Play up this point for both good and ill. When the characters succeed, they feel immense satisfaction. When they fail, they have lots of trouble finding help.

FRIENDLY FORCES

This is not to say that there should be no other powers for good. The heroes may have supporters and advisors with the power to occasionally intercede in an emergency. Just make certain that such assistance has limitations.

It may be that the greatest powers in the world are bound by oaths of non-interference, leaving them only to advise. Some, particularly elementals, are forbidden to leave particular locations. ("Though I would eagerly accompany you to the Dimension of Darkness," says the fire spirit, "I cannot leave the light at risk of death.")

Other magical servants may be bound to carry out only some very specific duties. Even so, clever PCs can use these one-note characters.

For example, say the characters are on good terms with the Guardian of the Netherworld Gates, who acts only to defend the gates. The PCs could trick their enemy into taking action against the Gates. Of course, this requires the characters to imperil themselves as bait. Work the timing down to the last minute to build tension.

THE OPPOSITION

In an all-magic campaign the opposition should almost always be magical. Avoid throwing in traditional superpowers unless there is a sound magical principle behind them. Replace conventional bricks with mythical beasts; gadgeteers turn into wizards who casually create new magical items; demons and undead serve as agents.

Though the opposition can run the full spectrum from minor nuisances to beings who threaten the destruction of the multiverse, a magical campaign generally emphasizes the high end of the spectrum. Fighting near-omnipotent beings makes a wonderful challenge.

Even so, intersperse these deities with more routine opponents. Extra-dimensional conquerors and galactic destroyers have lots of servants, champions, and cannon fodder. Use these to give the PCs straightforward fights they can win. This keeps up player morale. It also sharpens the contrast when the PCs confront a cosmic enemy and must defeat it indirectly.

THE NARROW CAMPAIGN

Most superheroic campaigns range far and wide for story ideas. One week there's a bank robbery, the next an invasion by alien flying saucers, then a visit to Asgard, then a murder mystery, then a fight against giant monsters, then a trip to the future. Anything can happen.

These "wide" campaigns embrace every kind of genre material, as most comic books do. They offer plenty of variety and the flexibility to tell any kind of story.

By a convention of the wide campaign, these assorted ingredients rarely affects each other. For example, a world-conquering super-villain doesn't give up his plots because aliens are invading. The reason all these diverse elements don't interact is that if they did, they would all turn into one big, overly complicated story.

Another convention of a wide campaign: These fantastic schemes rarely affect the world background. For instance, agents may use anti-gravity belts, but anti-gravity never replaces airplanes. If these story devices had logical real-world effects, they would change the whole campaign world beyond recognition.

These two conventions make it easier to tell varying stories in a wide campaign. But to an extent they also make the world feel less real. Also, variety means a lack of unity, and a corresponding lack of focus in the PCs' goals. In a wide campaign the heroes seldom have a goal more specific than "Do good and help people." The problem is, they can never finally achieve this goal.

Actually, this is not necessarily a problem. Nor are the story conventions, nor the lack of "reality." But there is another way to conduct a roleplaying campaign.



FEATURES OF A NARROW CAMPAIGN

The "narrow" campaign thoroughly simulates one particular sub-genre, trading wide scope for intensity of treatment. If both GM and players enjoy the genre, the narrow campaign offers a rich, fascinating experience.

Here are some of the characteristics of a well-designed narrow campaign:

A faithful recreation of one sub-genre. Everything in the campaign focuses on the sub-genre it recreates — for example, comic-book magic. The adventures revolve around the perils unique to the sub-genre, and the settings available are only those suited to that kind of story.

Unity of characters. All PCs and NPCs fit the sub-genre. In the sample *Mystic Masters* campaign, for instance, all heroes and villains are magicians or have magical origins. No gadgeteers, no psionics, no powered-armor goons or giant Japanese robots.

Unity of goals. The narrow campaign usually offers a clear goal: not "fight crime," but "wipe out the Mafia"; not "do good," but "protect Earth from Tyrannon's dimensional invaders." The goal may be extraordinarily hard, but in principle the PCs can achieve it.

Furthermore, most PCs in a narrow campaign share the goal (if there is one), and they probably share methods, resources, and backgrounds. They may all belong to the same organization or use the same devices. This point distinguishes the narrow campaign from its wide counterpart, where PCs often squabble over goals and methods.

Limited story elements. This key feature means that the GM designs the campaign with an array of specific, pre-planned elements — villains, organizations, devices, settings, basic conflicts — and relies on them exclusively for most of the campaign's principal adventures. An occasional change of pace is fine, but the narrow campaign features a central thrust and theme. Scenarios follow logically from the initial conditions.

For instance, in the sample campaign offered in the sourcebook section, all the action arises from the disappearance of one powerful mage. This brings the PCs into the action, and provides the campaign's arch-villain with a weapon to unbalance the status quo. The campaign's thrust calls for the PCs to neutralize the weapon and eventually restore or replace the absent magician.

Important secondary sources for story elements are the player characters' origins. Every PC's background story implies something about the campaign world. "I'm hunted by my coven," says a witch PC; so the coven becomes a story element. "I have a magic amulet," says another. The amulet's creator and how he feels about the PC using can become another plot.

Not all of these elements can be integrated into a unified story, but the "unity of characters" feature described above can make integration easier. The GM should work closely with all the players during character creation, trying to tie together diverse origin elements.

For instance, the GM asks a player, "Can I make your demonic Hunted a djinn instead?" (The GM does not mention it, but another player has a flying carpet and commands a djinn. The GM hopes to tie that PCs' djinn into the first PC's Hunted, unifying the elements for an eventual adventure in the djinni's City of Brass.)

The story elements influence each other. Another pivotal element. Stories have consequences; villains cooperate and betray one another by turns; a device introduced in one scenario remains to influence its successors.

Obviously this can happen in wide campaigns as well. But in the narrow campaign it occurs in the context of the campaign goal. Also, since the story elements are limited, the cross-influence is more dramatic and easier to follow.

The scenarios in this book provide an example. The initial event occurs; it produces the device that drives the second scenario, "Confluence"; there, or at some later point, one of the PCs is likely to die, creating a new scenario, "Domain of the Dead." In the Domain the PCs discover a danger that springs from the device found in the Confluence scenario. And so on.

Note that the plotline is not on railroad tracks to a predetermined conclusion — far from it. You build each new scenario on the consequences of previous ones.

For example, if the PCs have no other way to get to an alien dimension, they might make a deal with a demon, trading its freedom for transport to the destination. In later adventures, the demon starts making mischief, and the PCs must trap it again. In a narrow campaign, the demon starts out trapped; the PCs may or may not free it. The storyline proceeds based on their actions.

Does a limited number of story elements mean that, once the campaign is underway, you can't introduce some neat new villain you just saw in *Adventurers Club* magazine? Of course not. The well-designed narrow campaign offers frameworks or organizations that integrate new elements into the existing ones.

For example, the sample campaign establishes (1) a large family of sorcerers called the Vandaleurs; and (2) an infinite number of other dimensions. If you run this campaign and want to bring in a new villain, say the villain is either a Vandaleur or comes from another dimension. Impact on the established campaign history is minimal.

In this way you don't have to retrofit the campaign every time someone new shows up. ("What, you didn't know about the CIA's secret magic-research program? Been running for decades. I'm the latest result.")

The narrow campaign is nothing new in the HERO System. Previous supplements like Aaron Allston's *Super-Agents* and *Lands of Mystery* have described detailed narrow campaign genres — in these cases, for high-tech "normal" agents and lost world romances.

STRENGTHS OF THE NARROW CAMPAIGN

The chief advantages in running this kind of campaign:

Intense roleplaying. Though it's not inevitable, a solidly constructed, consistent background and clear goal can encourage players to project themselves more fully into the situation. Players don't get confused by a bewildering variety of story elements, or by villains with crazily various origins and goals. This doesn't mean that players in traditional campaigns always do get confused . . . but it happens.

In a narrow campaign the PCs can choose their abilities and direct their improvement toward the goal. The built-in motivation offered by the goal lends energy to the PCs' activities.



Thematic unity. When the characters act according to the genre's conventions, the campaign elements develop organically under their influence. This development reinforces the tone of the campaign, which in turn promotes better genre roleplaying.

For instance, the PC magicians fearlessly enter the Domain of the Dead in order to rescue a fellow PC who has died in battle. In that unknowable realm they gain greater understanding of magic and increased power. Returned to life, they are shocked to learn that their aged mentor has sacrificed himself in exchange for their lives. Stricken, the PCs renew their vow to carry on their mission as protectors of this dimension.

Greater believability. Ideally, scenario plots in the narrow campaign follow naturally from preceding events. This produces a storyline with integrity and shape, not unlike an episodic novel. And as though reading a good novel, the players can suspend their disbelief more easily as the adventures progress.

Player satisfaction in reaching a goal. Self-evident.

DANGERS IN A NARROW CAMPAIGN

No, it's not always perfect. The narrow campaign is prone to a few pitfalls that traditional campaigns can avoid. Be alert for these problems:

Plots on rails. With a clear goal and limited story elements, there is tremendous temptation to put the players through a guided tour, not an adventure. If you've designed your plot so skillfully that it proceeds to its destination no matter what the PCs do, you've gone way too far.

The narrow campaign develops organically — the plot elements evolve naturally from PC actions.

Players who don't attend regularly. In a campaign where continuity is less important, players can miss a few episodes, jump back in, and pick up smoothly. In the narrow campaign with its serial continuity, players who miss out for too long can become lost. Either their characters must drop out of the action, leaving story elements dormant; or the characters get played as NPCs, making the players' eventual return even more jarring. "What? I died? Then I came back? What happened?"

Reaching the goal. Though not really a "danger," this climactic event signals a reassessment of the whole campaign. Once the PCs reach their goal, either the campaign changes direction or it ends. This is the trade-off for the advantages listed above.

On the bright side, this turn of events implies that everyone has been having fun with the story for quite a while already.

THREE PHASES OF THE CAMPAIGN

A long-term magical campaign breaks into three conceptual levels. Characters start as novices; they gradually develop into masters; ultimately they reach supreme power as "Archmage." In the comics that final stage is usually, but not always, limited to one character per world or dimension.

Each of the three stages also represents a different phase of the campaign itself. As the PCs grow more powerful, their situation, adventures, and goals change.

Make these stages as loose or formal as you like. These descriptions (and the campaign premise offered in the sourcebook) assume that they are somewhat formal: Magicians must undertake rituals and tests to gain the higher levels of ability. This approach guarantees that the players feel that they have earned each advance.

NOVICES

Novices are newcomers to the magical world. While they may be quite powerful by normal standards, they are both less versatile and less powerful than full-fledged masters of the arcane. Yet their travails allow for excellent roleplaying.

POWER LEVEL

Limit novices in both spell selection and power level. A good starting point might allow up to 10 spells with a maximum power level of 50 active points each. Novices with great natural talent might learn more spells, but retain their limited power level.

Characters at this stage should have limited access to special resources and no items of great magical power. If they gain such items, it is difficult or impossible to use them.

EFFECTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

Novices spend a lot of time worrying about mere logistics. Perhaps not all the PCs can fly, so when quick movement becomes necessary, they have to decide who carries whom. Perhaps nobody in the group speaks a given language, and they don't have spells of comprehension. And so on.

The novices' crucial drawback is their lack of detailed information about the multiverse. Enemies consistently exploit the PCs' ignorance to gain the upper hand. The PCs become more heroic by overcoming ignorance with cleverness and bravery.

During the Novice phase of the campaign, the characters may not know the major powers of the dimensions, and vice versa. Obtaining help is difficult, but on the other hand, the PCs' enemies may underestimate them. The new magicians gain much information during this stage: layout of the dimensions, locations of places and beings of power, rituals of the magi, and so on.

This phase can be frustrating to players, yet it holds attractions that later phases can't recapture: the thrill of exploration, of new frontiers; the sense that the characters are leaving an old way of life behind and embarking on a new path; and the introduction of fundamental new ideas. These people are discovering a new way to live, and the Novice phase should play up a mood of amazement and fascination.

ADVANCEMENT

How long should you keep your players as novices? Until you have established important campaign elements. These include the following:

- Major villains — their goals, methods, and nature.
- Support structure — often weak in an all-magic campaign. Nevertheless, PCs should have a Fastness (headquarters), ready sources of information, money enough to forget about worldly concerns, and perhaps a few spear-carrier allies.
- Mobility — PCs should be able to reach important locations in a reasonable time.
- Flexibility — PCs need not worry about petty logistical problems described above, such as flight and translation.

Once you have established these criteria, how do you handle the transition?

Novices are usually apprenticed to some greater mage as students. A novice cannot progress until his master decides that he is ready. To achieve mastery the character must undertake some arduous quest or difficult ordeal.

Make this quest further the plot. It is an ideal chance to send the characters after (for instance) some powerful item they will need later, or a vital source of information. The quest can also introduce the characters to an arch-foe. They can't confront him now, but they'll be ready for a showdown, sometime ahead.

The attainment of mastery may carry mixed feelings, since it implies not only an increase in ability but a breaking of the master/student bond. The making of a new master should be a serious occasion. Mark it with a ceremony, a dramatic victory over an enemy, or just a major award of experience points.

MASTERS

There are greater and lesser degrees of mastery, but all masters have achieved high levels of both magical skill and knowledge. A master may study under another, but there is no formal master/student relationship implied. Usually one simply studies another's area of specialty.

Masters may have very broad or very narrow fields of knowledge. An expert is much more powerful within his field

than another with more general training. Since PCs tend to be generalists, putting them up against specialists allows them to be overmatched, but still gives their opponents exploitable weaknesses.

As an example, a master of illusion might be able to manipulate the characters fairly easily... until they figure out what's going on and blast him. At that point the villain's powerful illusions cannot make up for his lack of defenses.

POWER LEVEL

Masters should not be limited in spell selection, except insofar as the campaign prohibits specific powers. But a limit of 60 active points brings masters in line with the power level of most superhero campaigns. An increased selection of spells and the higher power level gives every master a decided advantage over every novice.

Masters may have access to powerful magic items and places of power. These should not overshadow the masters' own powers but should complement and extend them. Ideally the items are limited, available when they are needed but not for casual use. For instance, the item may inflict side effects on the user unless he has achieved absolute mastery.

EFFECTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

By the time a campaign reaches the Master stage, the PCs know and are known by most of the major powers in the campaign. They have established friendly or hostile relations with many of them, and they have their hands full dealing with their enemies. Being taken seriously has its benefits, but it does mean that villains invading the Earth hit the PCs first. Quite an honor, that!

Masters no longer need explore. Major surprises and discoveries are possible but don't fit the tone of their adventures. Customarily they have clairsentient devices that let them scan surrounding dimensions. Enemies cannot exploit a lack of knowledge.

Where novices feel wonder at endless novelty, masters plumb the intricacies of enchantment. They develop relationships with counterparts on other worlds and in alien dimensions. They struggle with major villains over powerful artifacts. Magicians of lesser power seek them out for aid or counsel.

The Master phase is the principal stage of the campaign. It offers flexibility of power level: A team of masters can face nearly any peril, yet they can still be limited through treachery, theft of Foci, or trickery. Also, PCs master a broad range of spells, but not so broad that all of them end up looking alike.

Once a character has attained the rank of master, he can still achieve almost any degree of further power and skill. However, there is still one higher rank to which a master can aspire — Archmage!

ADVANCEMENT

The Master phase is in most ways the quintessence of the genre. Keep your PCs at master level until you have exhausted your creativity and feel ready for a change.

This is not a problem in practice. A novice yearns to achieve mastery and sees a clear goal (leaving his master) that marks the change. By contrast, masters have no reason to feel frustrated in their status, and they need not fix on Archmage as an inevitable ambition.

Usually there is only one Archmage for any particular planet (or dimension). A new Archmage could be chosen by the previous Archmage, by a deity, by a vote of other mages, or by a contest. If your campaign must select an Archmage, consider the dramatic potentials of all of these ideas. The contest undoubtedly makes the best long-term scenario.

Keep in mind that the position does not open up except under dire circumstances. With disaster looming and succession undecided, you have great potential to design dramatic situations. Even if a character has no interest in becoming Archmage, he may be forced to compete for the position. It could be the only way to fight off whatever created the vacancy! The situation becomes even more charged if the character was a student of the previous Archmage (viz. the campaign offered in the sourcebook).

ARCHMAGE

An Archmage, the greatest mage of an entire planet or (sometimes) a dimension, possesses great wisdom and awesome power. What's more, everybody knows it.

The Archmage is also responsible for defending his planet against all magical threats. That may be more than even the greatest mage can accomplish alone. If you have an NPC Archmage, this explains why the PCs ever get to do anything.

In the first two phases of the campaign, an NPC Archmage works as a plot device. He can do anything you need him to do, knows anything you want, and can always be conveniently "off on a mission" when you want to make life tough for the PCs.

But eventually a player character may gain absurd levels of power, skill, and resources. Then you can make him Archmage and either end the campaign happily; take him out of the campaign and continue playing with a new PC; or lift the campaign into a new and final phase of play.

POWER LEVEL

In the comics, Archmagi can apparently do just about anything, if given adequate preparation time. Catch them with their talismans down, and they might fight no better than a powerful master, with 80- to 85-point spells and skills of 16- to 20-. But give them fair warning, all their scrolls and orbs and equipment, and plenty of room to gesture, and they can stop whole armies.

The Archmage position evidently raises its occupant to a new, qualitatively different plane of mastery. If the Archmage simply had powerful spells, a team of masters could take him in a fair fight. Yet in the comics, this kind of team attack never occurs. Why not?

In game terms this can work in two ways. First, the Archmage might be granted a powerful Personal Immunity to any magic cast by residents of his home dimension. The Immunity would only work against spells no more powerful than his own, and only when he has prepared his defenses.

Second, the Archmage's position as the defender of a world or dimension may let him tap its power. This works as a Variable Power Pool, which could be the ambient magic of the universe or a pool paid for by the other magicians of the universe. Probably these magicians must conduct a ceremony to bequeath the pool to a new Archmage. Of course, only the properly recognized Archmage could use it.

Third, the Archmage usually has artifacts that are vastly more powerful than anyone else's. These can raise his already high power to truly obscene levels.

Alternatively, the Archmage might draw power directly from the beings of his world (similar to a Transfer). Imagine the Archmage of Earth fighting a desperate battle against an invading demigod. As he wields the power of the Earth, each blow weakens the spirits of humanity. The decision to fight on or preserve his charges lends drama to the battle.

EFFECTS ON THE CAMPAIGN

Running a campaign with a PC Archmage presents difficulties, both in controlling the character and in keeping other players from feeling inferior and unnecessary. Also, the power level requires gigantic opposition.

Given this, there are three convenient options:

First, leave the position vacant. Tricky to justify in a campaign that resembles most comic books. Why aren't legions of invaders tromping through the streets?

Second create an NPC Archmage. This is the easiest solution. The problem with an NPC Archmage is that you have to explain why he isn't out saving the universe, instead of letting the PCs do it.

In the campaign offered in this supplement, the Archmage is an ancient man nearing the extreme end of his extended lifespan. His lack of vitality justifies the PCs' adventures.

Third, run solo adventures. The Archmage is the only player. The delights of one-on-one gaming include intense adventures, in-depth roleplaying, fast combats, and high tension. Obviously, this approach lacks social interaction.



Fourth, use multiple Archmagi. Declare that more than one PC may reach Archmage status, perhaps because of their close relationships or through an omnipotent magical device that requires all the PCs to control it.

The trouble here is that if each PC can do anything, they all look alike. Can they retain their individuality through sheer roleplaying? The issue of multiple Archmagi has never been addressed in the comics, so this is new ground for the enterprising GM.

Archmage-level adventures customarily involve very high stakes, enormous opposition, and no help whatever for the PCs. Unless they can enlist higher powers, who are usually fickle, the PCs are completely on their own. Scenarios can span huge reaches of space, and can involve the most difficult kind of magic: time travel.

Archmagi often defend not only Earth, but adjacent dimensions as well — on the principle that “nearby” dimensions offer a beachhead for invasion of the home world. This implies a detailed dimension map, probably with restricted and well-understood paths between the universes. Since Archmagi are exceptionally mobile, the GM must have ready a complete and detailed campaign setting.

PROGRESS AND PACING

Active point limitations for each phase provide players with real incentive to work their way up. Adjust experience awards to speed up or slow down changes in the characters' power levels.

Assign experience to specific powers to make the characters develop in particular ways. For instance, assign experience points solely to increase the size of a Multipower spell pool. This allows the characters more flexibility without increasing the number or power level of the spells.

How do you decide how fast to advance the characters? Decide how many parts of your long-term scenario work best during each campaign phase. Pace character growth according to how quickly you can establish each part.

Also, major climaxes should mark each change of phase. Simply piling up Experience Points does not permit a character to move from novice to master to Archmage. Each transition should be carefully plotted, involving extraordinary efforts by the characters. For example:

Novice phase: PCs begin as dependents of a patron. This phase is a long sequence of exposition about the workings of the campaign — lengthy tours of other dimensions, foreshadowings of important NPCs, and so on. Initial meetings with major villains. Adjust the characters' advancement so that they remain novices throughout.

As they near the end of their apprenticeship, a major plotline marks their quest for mastery. A strong resolution leads to a conceptual break with the past; possibly the patron dies or is transformed.

Master phase: PCs are no longer dependent. Characters face mysteries, puzzles, and confrontations with major foes. They may die and be resurrected. Master magicians eventually resolve long-standing conflicts more or less permanently.

Since this is the main stage of the campaign, restrain copious Experience Point awards. Otherwise, magicians soon grow out of hand. Eventually PCs gain so many

spells that Variable Power Pools become practical. At that point, take the campaign's NPC Archmage (if any) out of the picture. Elaborate contests and extreme circumstances mark PC attempts to reach Archmage status.

Archmage phase: This achievement can mark the end of the campaign, or the exit of an Archmage PC from everyday adventuring. If play continues, a new direction is probably in order.

CREATING THE CAMPAIGN

When you prepare the game background, keep in mind the genre conventions that began this section. But don't let conventions overwhelm normal roleplaying considerations.

For instance, despite the secretive orientation of magicians, make sure that the PCs are basically compatible and able to trust each other. If the party is made up of a half-dozen secretive loners, it will disintegrate quickly, destroying the campaign in the process.

Emphasize that the secrecy of magic applies to outsiders, not fellow students of the art. If the characters are all novices, their masters encourage them to trust one another. After a few adventures together, the characters should develop bonds of friendship and respect.

GOALS

Characters in any kind of campaign have goals, even if the goals are only to fight crime and look spiffy. Comic-book magic campaigns generally set much more strenuous objectives. Here are several kinds of goals appropriate to a mystic campaign.

OPPOSE AND VANQUISH

A campaign can be built around the characters' opposition to one tremendously powerful entity. They may sometimes fight a defensive battle and at other times take the fight to the enemy, but the situations always revolve around defeating that entity's plans and forces. The ultimate goal is to vanquish the enemy entirely.

In a narrow campaign it is possible for the characters to actually accomplish this goal, although it should be a long and arduous process. In an wide campaign the characters cannot achieve their objective without shifting the emphasis of the campaign.

The sample campaign in the sourcebook offers this goal. PC magicians must forestall and finally defeat a major deity, Tyrannonthe Conqueror. However, the premise offered also overlaps with a second goal:

DEFEND

Defending the Earth is a time-honored goal for mystical types. According to the conventions of the genre only a select few have any knowledge of the threats to Earth's safety. This puts the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the PCs. They are all that stands between the people of Earth and total destruction.

Goals of this sort provide a much wider range of adventuring possibilities than the previous. This approach permits entirely new enemies and novel threats.

It also provides the possibility of multiple and interacting threats. Defeated enemies may combine their power to defeat the heroes. Simultaneous attacks from different dimensions may face the character with invasion on one hand and destruction on the other.

MONITOR THE ART

If you prefer a less universe-shaking goal, make the characters monitors of the magical arts. They police the campaign world against magical abuse. "Abuse" need not be defined in terms of good or bad effects.

For example, postulate a dimension where certain types of magic, such as summoning spells, cause the barriers between dimensions to weaken. This increases the danger of hostile entities from nearby dimensions breaking into ours, so even benevolent use of such spells would be destructive.

This goal provides a wider range of personalities among the opposition, since they do not necessarily have to be evil or even unpleasant. While most responsible magicians would not knowingly perform acts with such destructive side-effects, there are always a few well-meaning but misguided nuts around to cause trouble.

THE POWERS THAT BE

A mystical campaign should contain beings far beyond mortal understanding. Characters with magical abilities can deal directly with beings that control (or even embody) whole dimensions. Some characters may have a special relationship with a deity. Develop some idea of what beings exist and what they are like *before* the characters run into them!

Deities vary greatly. The genre tends toward large numbers of deities organized into progressive hierarchies. Consider building a group of deities whose powers encompass the Earth. Then work on a greater group who represent our entire dimension. Eventually you may want to create beings who oversee the whole multiverse or all of eternity. These stand above all the lesser deities.

A sample hierarchy might start with elemental powers that control the Earth, neutral guardians that may care little for humanity but protect all life in their areas. Their power is great within a narrow region or special effect, but they have no power and no interest in other regions.

At the next step in this example, the entire dimension is overseen by the spirits of past Archmagi. These "monads" have ascended to the Domain of the Dead, a higher-dimensional realm that is the source of all magical energy. The monads have passed beyond Earthly concerns, but help living guardians protect this dimension from invaders.

At the upper reaches of this hierarchy, near-deities of good and evil span the dimensions with their powers, some to defend (e.g., Thanoro Azoic, first Archmage of this dimension) and some to destroy (e.g., Tyrannon the Conqueror, omnipotent ruler of the dimension of Thulkos). These entities care about mortal concerns simply because it is a convention of the genre; often they protect some abstract balance, or are motivated by elemental instincts that have no rational basis.

The benevolence or malevolence of these powers determine the overall mood of the campaign. If good predominates, the campaign will be a pleasant place, and evil the exception. If evil predominates, the situation will always be grim, as the characters fight desperately against impossible odds. A balance provides the most flexibility, since it can swing either way as the characters win or lose.

Knowledge of the local deities may be fairly common within magical circles, but even great mages may be unaware of the beings that rule the higher levels. PCs learn about such things in the course of adventuring. By rationing this information, you give the players the satisfaction of gaining useful information about the campaign, just as their characters derive satisfaction from their increasing knowledge of the arcane.

Deities may be benevolent, indifferent, hostile, or capricious. Characters may derive power or assistance from such beings or find themselves in conflict with them. Work out a personality for any being the characters might directly encounter and try to develop a consistent style. It would also be wise to impose limits on these deities' power and knowledge. In the comic books even gods exhibit human frailties.

Be careful to balance extreme tendencies among your gods. If the god of destruction is all-powerful, your campaign may not survive the first session. Build up a system of checks and balances to explain why the dimensions have existed for untold time without being either destroyed or purged of all evil. Setting up deities opposed to each other is the simplest way of explaining a balance among the powers.

VILLAINS, LOUD AND QUIET

Villains provide the conflict that drives a mystical campaign. They also make vivid personalities for the characters to interact with.

In a mystical campaign, it is especially important to think about the villain's special effects, rather than just building the mechanics. Design the visual effects associated with each power. Don't settle for common effects; go for something unusual and flashy.

The genre lends itself to one-of-a-kind powers. Think about giving villains a few specialty spells. Peculiar Transformations, Change Environment, and limited forms of Images or Telekinesis make good places to start. The spells don't have to be tremendously useful, just interesting. For example, you could build a linked Desolidification and Mind Control that enables a villain to possess people.

METHODS

Most villains fall into one of two broad categories. There are "loud" villains — those who rely on brute force; and "quiet" ones, those who prefer subtlety, cunning, and manipulation. The genre usually favors the louder sort because they provide better visuals and more constant drama. Don't let this prevent you from making use of the slow and quiet types to keep the players guessing.

Loud villains are ideally suited to straightforward confrontations. They pose a threat through sheer power or force of numbers. Use them when you want to put the characters through heavy combat or when you want to impress them with raw power (their own or the enemy's). Loud villains are best for generating stories of action and heroism.

Quiet villains work best in long-term scenarios. The players should not be aware of the villain initially. Drop hints and stage minor events to suggest what is going on while more obvious trouble hold center stage. Let the characters gradually become aware of the intelligence behind their steady stream of misfortune's. The frustration of dealing with an elusive foe increases the drama of the inevitable confrontation. Quiet villains produce complex stories involving battles of wits and logic as well as power.

For best effect, use both types of villains. Mix them together and weave them all into your plot so that the characters are presented with both physical and intellectual challenges. Too much of either becomes dull through repetition but playing them off against each other will help keep things interesting.

Know what role each villain plays in the campaign. Once you know what the villain will do, it becomes easier to pin down details such as personality, powers, power level, and methods. The following list is not exhaustive, but it covers several common types.

CHEAP THUG

Every major villain needs an army of minor thugs to do his bidding. In a mystical campaign these should not be generic street thugs. First, they are not usually human. Provide each of your villains with a different type of thug as a trademark. These can be shadowy forms with demonic origins, reptilian humanoids, zombies, or talking animals.

Thugs are usually either mindless or zealous in carrying out their orders. In some cases, such as zombies, they may be fanatical or even mindless in their devotion. Play up the impact of fighting things that have unconquerable morale. PCs who are used to heart-stopping Presence attacks may be shaken to see waves of thugs marching toward them without pause.

Mass-produced items of magical weaponry can substitute or augment natural abilities. Just don't provide them with anything too powerful — since the PCs will undoubtedly end up with whatever the thugs are carrying..



- **Power Level:** 20 to 40 active points below PCs' level.
- **Appropriate Powers:** Energy Blast (Penetrating), Killing Attack, Armor, Flight, Desolidification, Teleportation. Little or no Mental Defense. Powers often bought through Foci or with Charges or Activation Rolls. (As the agents' master usually thinks it, "Activation Roll doesn't go off? Who cares?")
- **Disadvantages:** Monitored, Subject to Orders, "Slavishly loyal," "Lives in fear of master," etc.

PETTY OBSTACLE

This is generally a throwaway villain, a jerk who has staked out his own little territory and likes to push around all intruders. A Petty Obstacle might be a ruler of a pocket dimension, a supernatural guardian, or even a "native guide" who is less help than the PCs hoped.

Another Petty Obstacle is the upstart, a minor magician who has obtained some great item of power. This gives the magician unusually high-powered abilities — perhaps far outside the campaign limits — in a few rigidly restricted areas. The heroes must figure out the item's abilities and work around them.

Petty Obstacles pose a real and credible threat to the PCs, but basically provide incidental encounters during the characters' travels. Unlike major villains, Obstacles are not heavily bound up in the scenario and generally don't reappear after the initial encounter. They need not be as fully realized as other villains. PCs can demolish them thoroughly without causing long-term damage to the plot.

Petty Obstacles often have major Vulnerabilities, Physical Limitations, or Psychological Limitations. These can be conventional or very strange. As an example, a sphinx set to guard a gateway might go Berserk when its riddle is answered incorrectly.

Power Level: -20 to +20 active points over PCs' level.

Appropriate Powers: Transformation, Power Drain, Killing Attack, Entangle, Mental Defense. Sometimes Astral Form. Though powerful, these usually have severe limitations, such as a particular area where they function.

Disadvantages: Vulnerabilities, major Physical Limitations, major Psychological Limitations, Berserks.

DIMENSIONAL CONQUEROR

This is one of the most common villains in a mystical campaign. Dimensional Conquerors are almost always powerful sorcerers who rule whole dimensions and still want more real estate. Since these are usually recurring characters, the GM should spend the effort to detail the villain's background and personality. One such, Tyrannon the Conqueror, appears in the sourcebook of this supplement.

Dimensional Conquerors are major villains with high power levels and great resources. They are often the driving force behind long-term plots that the PCs must foil. Conquerors make extensive use of thugs and obstacles to achieve their ends. Any direct confrontation should be saved for the climax of a long scenario.

Since a Conqueror is more powerful than the heroes, he is unlikely to be defeated in normal combat. Instead, the heroes must gradually find out about the villain's goals, methods, and personality. Since a Conqueror is nearly always a monomaniacal basket case, knowledgeable and clever PCs can goad him into accepting some tactical

handicap that will allow him to be defeated in the final battle. For example, this could involve playing on his sense of superiority to convince him to forego the use of his powerful magical items in combat. ("Though I could destroy you with a thought, I choose to best you by physical combat alone, so that my victory will taste all the sweeter!")

PCs could also trick the Conqueror into fighting away from his source of power, perhaps in his weaker astral form. Another tack would be to con a way into his presence and then try to grab or cut off his power source.

Power Level: The highest in the campaign — +10 to +50 active points over PCs' level. Actually, some of a Conqueror's powers are better treated as plot devices that can push PCs around at will.

Appropriate Powers: All, with powerful advantages (especially Variable Advantage and Variable Special Effect). Dimensional Conquerors may use devices that appear to be Foci, but do not function as such (i.e., PCs can't steal them). Also, they have huge numbers of Followers.

Disadvantages: Most Conquerors are egomaniacs with an unshakable belief in their own destinies. Work up a good set of Berserks and Psychological Limitations; the more powerful the villain, the more often he's a true nutbar. An enormous Reputation disadvantage is also in order.

PUPPETEER

Puppeteers are subtle opponents. Rather than assembling an army and crashing the gates, this villain seduces the ruler and subverts the government. This approach is often more effective than brute force, so the PCs may not realize the extent of their danger until they are in serious trouble.

A manipulative villain often has much the same goal as a Dimensional Conqueror. The difference is that a Puppeteer is interested in actual control and not the trappings of power. Puppeteers often appear as "advisors" to weak rulers.

A Puppeteer might even work through a Dimensional Conqueror. The players could defeat the Conqueror and still find themselves losing. If they can figure out what happened, they might even enlist the Conqueror's aid; when he finds out he's been someone's puppet, his wrath should be terrible.

Power Level: Highly variable.

Appropriate Powers: Mental Illusions, Images, Invisibility, Teleportation, Extra-Dimensional Movement, Clair-sentience. Skills such as Conversation and Persuasion are very appropriate, as is a high Presence (bought "only usable in defense," a -1 limitation). Also consider a Mind Control power — though a true Puppeteer uses this brute-force approach only as a last resort.

Disadvantages: Puppeteers are usually quite vain about their abilities. Appropriate Psychological Limitations involve extreme conceit and inability to accept their errors.

MONSTERS FROM BEYOND

Allow your imagination to run wild when designing monsters for a mystical campaign. They can be hideous and almost indescribable (but make sure you can describe them!). They should be terrifying to behold. Combine the characteristics of different animals to come up with some fearsome combinations, or make up your own from scratch.

Other-dimensional monsters may be entirely mindless or extremely intelligent, but they are not generally communicative. Do not allow the characters to reason with a monster unless they come up with an incredibly good justification. Monsters are not there to be reasoned with. What can you say to an Elder God to convince it to stop devouring human souls?

Monsters work best against innocents, especially DNPCs, rather than directly against the PCs. Make the PCs defend those being attacked instead; this can be challenging. Sending the thing against normals also graphically demonstrates the monster's danger.

Demons and other magical beings may be somewhat resistant to magical attacks. They can soak up incredible amounts of damage before they keel over. Apparent invulnerability is one of their most common characteristics.

Power Level: +0 to +40 active points over PCs' level.

Appropriate Powers: Common powers include Damage Reduction, high Strength, and Hand-to-hand Killing Attacks.

Disadvantages: Distinctive Features, of course. Monsters may be "unwilling (or unable) to communicate." They can be almost perpetually Berserk.



BASIC CONFLICTS

Conflict occurs when one party wishes to do something or own something and another party objects. In a mystical campaign the most common problem is that villains want to take over or destroy the Earth; the PCs object. This conflict underlies many long-term scenarios.

The invasion or destruction of Earth has the advantage that there is little doubt over where players stand on the issue. The situation provides its own motivation.

Another basis for conflict is a villain's desire to kidnap a DNPC or even one of the PCs. His reason for obtaining the victim almost always turns out to be grisly. He wants a sacrifice to gain additional powers, or a new body to move into, or he plans to drain the victim's mystic energy and turn him into a mindless slave.

A villain may come into conflict with the heroes by stealing some magical item in their care. Whatever the reason, the heroes are certain to insist on getting it back. The reason might well add incentive. For instance, the item might provide a Dimensional Conqueror with a direct route to dimensions distant from his own... such as Earth's.

Evil intentions, accidents, and misunderstandings can all create conflicts. However, the theme of good versus evil is central to the genre and makes for a more powerful story than chance or misunderstanding.

ENFORCING THE GENRE

Enforcing the conventions of the genre requires all of the players to be familiar with them. Simply pointing out when a player is behaving "out of genre" is usually sufficient, but more strenuous or subtle methods are available.

You can penalize non-genre behavior within the context of the game. For example, if a character insists on addressing an ancient master in modern slang, the master may simply not understand him. Worse yet, the master may take it as a sign of disrespect and strike the character dumb for a "period of meditation." Describing actions such as spellcasting in an inappropriate manner might cause the spells to fail or to generate side-effects. A little of this treatment gets the point across.

The flip side of this approach rewards good genre role-playing. Give bonuses to characters who use the proper language and intonations when casting their spells. Encourage characters to experiment with rituals and strange items by letting them produce some useful results.

USING PUBLISHED HERO PRODUCTS

Some of the existing HERO System material can work in a Mystic Masters campaign with little alteration.

For example, *Solitaire*, in the original *Champions* hardcover, makes a fine magician PC — as soon as you double the effect of her mental powers, of course. The villains Cheshire Cat and Mindlock works as a template for very high-end agents of a sorcerous cult. Other villains from the Fourth Edition can work as other-dimensional monsters or elementals, such as Ogre and Icicle.

THE CIRCLE

Organization Book 1, *The Circle and METE* by Aaron Allston, establishes the Circle, a group of mystic heroes under the leadership of a mysterious "Master." The Master can easily substitute for the Revered Elder in this book's sample campaign, or vice versa. The heroes mostly resemble traditional supers.

The Circle can aid the PC heroes as a source of exposition, teaching, additional firepower, or facilities for magical analysis. Instead, they might be the PCs' rivals, or even corrupted servants of the campaign's arch-villain.

(An enterprising GM can convert the Hero Games adventure *To Serve and Protect*, by Scott Heine, into a good vehicle for this rivalry. In the Protector's hero group, retain Doctor Wraith but replace the others with members of the Circle. Replace the Protectors' Citadel headquarters with the Circle's HQ, and so on. The magical nature of the plot suits it to a mystic campaign.)

If you have already established the Circle in a traditional superhero campaign, you can introduce new mystic PCs as part of the Circle and conduct a narrow magical campaign within the larger superheroic background.

DEMON

Organization Book 2, *Primus and DEMON* by Andrew Robinson, introduces one of the few occult villain organizations in the standard *Champions* campaign world. In the sample campaign, DEMON can become alien invaders from another dimension, or a faction of the sorcerous Vandaleur family (see "Villains" in the Sourcebook). Since the group lusts after magical artifacts, it must inevitably come up against the PC heroes.

DEMON's high-tech approach does not coincide perfectly with the tone of an all-magic campaign. Consider transforming the armored agents into summoned demons or monsters, and replace the neurotangles and tasers with, say, wands and amulets. Remove the Morbanes' vulnerability to magical attacks, and boost everyone's EGO Characteristic by 5. And so forth.

DEMON also figures prominently in the adventure *Target: Hero* by David Matalon.

ENEMIES BOOKS

The various Enemies collections from Hero Games include several characters that fit, with varying ease, into a mystic campaign.

Classic Enemies: Black Paladin, Dark Angel (especially good for an ongoing romantic subplot), Dark Seraph, and Demonfire.

Enemies: The International File: Dream Thief (especially if PCs have some way to enter the dream realms), Kabbalah, Lava (treat as a fire elemental from another dimension), Pumpkin Jack (especially as a form of the demon Chernobog, offered in this supplement's sourcebook), and Zuvembie.

Enemies: Villainy Unbound: Echo, Fenris Wolf, Lionslayer (as regional magical guardian, perhaps an elemental), Meltdown (as other-dimensional monster), and Sharps.

Note that characters from the latter two volumes must be converted to Fourth Edition Champions rules.

OTHER HERO PRODUCTS

Logically, the supplements to the *Fantasy Hero* should work well in a magical superhero campaign, right? Not necessarily. As this supplement stresses, superheroic magic is a genre all its own.

Two *FH* supplements, *Magic Items* and *The Spell Book*, point up the differences. These are imaginative and generous selections, but the spells and items come laden with many limitations. This lets "normal" magicians afford them, but superheroic wizards will probably find them more trouble than they're worth.

There are more appropriate support materials in *Adventurers Club* magazine, as far back as issue #3 (the adventure "Terror in the Treasures," by Kevin Dinapoli, features an intriguing magical item as the target for a museum heist) and probably as recent as the latest issue.

And don't overlook the possibilities of adapting traditional super-villains from offbeat sources. For instance, the supplement *Scourge From the Deep* offers underwater-style

villains. Change their origins and appearances, boost their EGOs a bit, and they can easily become monstrous guardians of the Confluence dimension described in the scenario section of this book.

USING THESE PRODUCTS

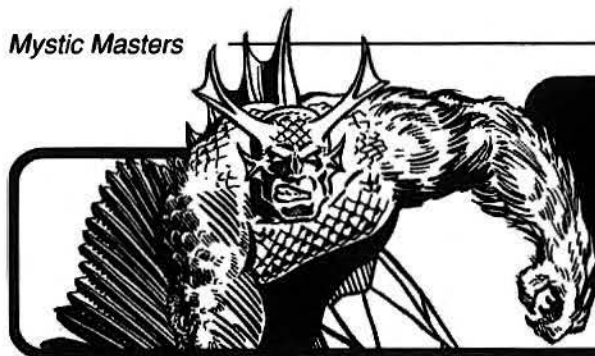
A narrow campaign follows through on the implications of its story elements. If one PC has a flying carpet and commands a djinn, for example, then a race of djinni should somehow figure in the storyline. After all, they had to come from somewhere, and must be serving your PC for a reason.

In the same way, the materials mentioned above all carry a freight of implications. If you introduce the villainess Demonfire, who conjures fires from Hell, you've just established that Hell (or some substitute) exists. The origin of Dark Seraph implies that there are powerful covens of witches in England. Each villain, as written, establishes some fact that you must reconcile with the campaign.

This may not be a problem. But it is if you don't want to establish English witch covens or fires from Hell.

The solution is to adapt the villains into an existing campaign framework. See the discussion of the narrow campaign, above. And to learn more about the sample campaign's frameworks, see the sourcebook section.





DESIGNING DIMENSIONS

Adventures of comic-book magic often take place in other dimensions. Sometimes these are just colorful backdrops for an adventure, but often the dimensions and the beings who inhabit them play a central role. This section offers suggestions for designing and using magical dimensions in your campaign.

STORY FUNCTIONS

Although dimensions theoretically encompass entire universes, they are rarely treated that way in the comic books. Most dimensions are functionally very small and serve one purpose in telling the story.

Think of them as rooms. The characters usually enter, deal with whatever they find there, and leave. While you can build dimensions with a sense of enormity and complexity, you don't usually need that much detail.

Each dimension serves one or more purposes. The better you know those purposes, the better your design can accommodate them. In the comics and in adventures, dimensions can serve any of these purposes:

INTERESTING SCENERY

You can make almost any situation more interesting just by putting it in a strange and exotic setting. This can be a great way to dress up otherwise ordinary plot sequences. No matter how many times the characters have had to rescue their kidnapped butler, they react differently when the rescue must take place in a sea of orange goo.

One of the hallmarks of alien dimensions is a wide range of visual effects. Spend some time thinking about how you want things to look and how to describe them. Strange colors, bizarre smells, irregular sounds — all these have their place. Or perhaps everything *looks* normal, but isn't — not really.

HOME OF NPC(S)

All manner of NPCs may make their homes in other dimensions and may be encountered there. Extra-dimensional villains are the most common in the comic books, but there are many other possibilities.

Deities, patrons, mentors, advisors, and oracles can all be important resources to the characters — too important, if you're not careful. What better way to limit their usefulness than to put them at the far end of a risky journey over an extra-dimensional yellow brick road?

A dimension designed around an NPC should serve as an appropriate backdrop, accentuating the character's background, abilities, and unique role in the campaign. In the case of a deity, the dimension may be intimately tied up with the being's powers and personality. If he is killed, the entire structure might fall apart.

STOPPING POINTS

Comic-book magicians often have to travel through many intervening dimensions to get where they are going. Each of those dimensions can provide a minor adventure of its own, all leading up to the grand climax at the final destination.

Concentrate on making the intervening dimensions distinctive. If the place serves primarily as a transfer point between other dimensions, work out something interesting about the mechanism of the transfer. Perhaps the PCs must reach a gate at the core of an ocean-sized sphere of water, or in the jaws of an ancient sleeping dragon as large as a mountain range.

These, then, are some of the roles dimensions fulfill. But before a dimension can serve its function, the PCs have to get there.

GETTING THERE

Even aside from any powers the characters have, there are many ways to move between universes.

GATE TRAVEL

The most common connection between dimensions is a gate. Sometimes these are permanent fixtures. More often, they only open at certain times or when some appropriate ritual is performed. Gates are almost never easily accessible. If they were easy to get to, interdimensional movement would be common.

Gates can be simple holes in the air, but there are more elaborate ways to represent them. Try using bodies of water, ritual fires, groups of stone monoliths, or caves. Gates can also drift or appear randomly. Chaos storms sweep across an area and disappear; strange mists and fogs conceal other places. These gates give the GM much greater control over the PCs' access to other dimensions, but the GM's whim becomes more brutally obvious to the players.

The rules section discusses the game mechanics of building gates. Under most circumstances, don't bother working out point costs for the gates built into the campaign, but the other details should be useful. For that matter, the characters could decide to establish gates in places that you didn't put them. As long as this doesn't unbalance the campaign, it makes for interesting subplots.

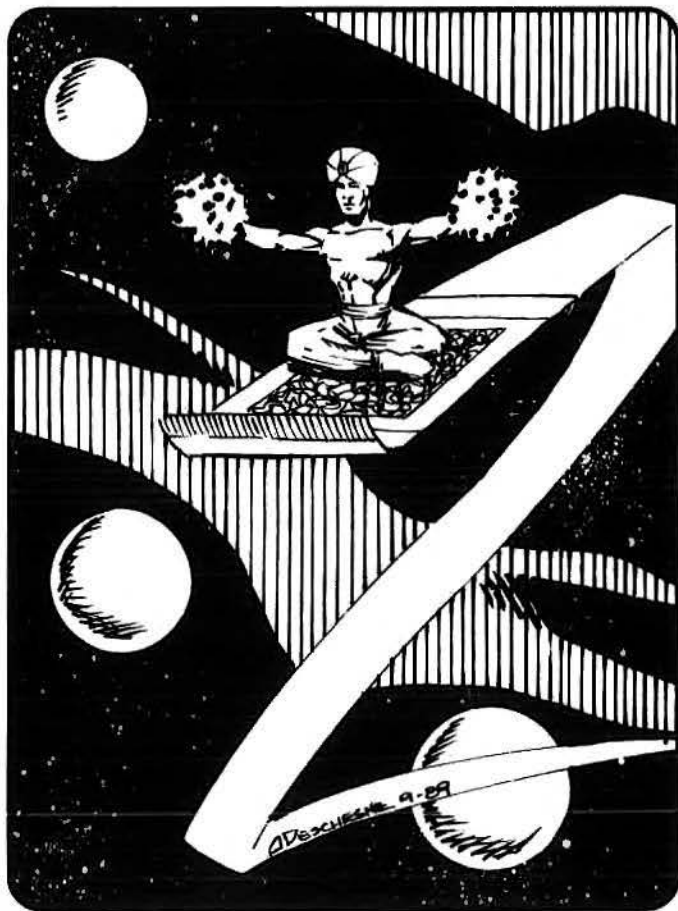
VEHICLES

Another good motif is the interdimensional vehicle. Characters might command a vehicle of their own, but you can control their travels by letting them ship under an NPC.

Some kinds of vehicles, such as ships or chariots, lend the adventure a mythological or fairy-tale flavor. Others have a technological feel, like spacecraft or police call-boxes that are bigger inside than outside.

Both kinds appear in the comic books — the latter especially when the magicians coexist with traditional superheroes. The magician who needs to husband his strength drops by the hero headquarters, borrows a handy dimension ship, and travels to his destination without expending his own power.

This provides a nice hook for a crossover scenario. Players in a magical campaign can meet another campaign's traditional heroes, or an NPC magician can pull traditional heroes into an offbeat magical adventure.



If the players have control over the vehicle, construct it using the rules for Extra-Dimensional Movement. Buy the ability through a vehicle or even an ordinary Focus. Work out the limitations in advance and stick to them, or you may get into a lot of trouble.

Most vehicles have less freedom of movement than a character. Dimension-travelling vehicles in literature are often limited to a specific group of dimensions, or even to a fixed sequence of locations that are always visited in the same order. Ships sailing transdimensional "oceans" are a classic example.

Limitations on route or speed can provide great opportunities for chase scenes or ambushes. Even if problems don't materialize, you can give the players reason to worry about the dangers and milk them for dramatic tension.

ACCESSIBILITY

Be careful when you link dimensions together. Most worthwhile journeys should be complicated and dangerous. A few complications and dangers:

Location. You usually can't just step into the dimension you want to visit. Even if the PCs do have the power to move between realities at will, not all dimensions are adjacent to all others. They can be nearby or distant.

What's more, their positions can vary from time to time, as they "drift" through higher-dimensional space. Between the PCs and their target may lie a few or a dozen intervening dimensions.

Travel time. The PCs can't just pop through all these dimensions instantly, either. Sometimes they must traverse a marathon route in one dimension to get to the jumping-off point for the next.

Whenever possible, travel time should be plot-driven, not rule-driven. That is, if the GM needs to give the distant arch-villain time to put together his master scheme, that is excuse enough to delay the PCs with a few intervening dimensional adventures before they reach him.

But if no particular plot reason for delays presents itself, the GM can key travel time to how well the PCs made their Extra-Dimensional Movement skill roll, EGO roll, or other pertinent roll.

Assume the ideal trip to another dimension takes one phase; for each 1 by which they miss the roll, move one step down the Time Chart. So if the PCs missed their roll by 4, travel time would take 1 hour. The practical maximum for this time extension should be one day, or at most a few days.

Barriers. Extremely powerful entities or natural forces can create magical force barriers that prevent easy entry. PCs have to penetrate it with great powers; via a magical item (the maguffin for a side-trip scenario, perhaps); by asking a favor of the controlling entity; by travelling through it in astral form; or through cleverness.

Perhaps the barrier lies along only one travel route. By making a side trip through other nearby dimensions, the PCs can get in through the back door, so to speak. This lets you work in incidental encounters as you wish.

Guardians. In intervening dimensions the PCs may have to circumvent miscellaneous natives, demons, ruling thugs, natural traps, and warding spells. They may get transformed into something and have to change back (see later in this section).

These minor encounters let the PCs blow off steam by fighting agents; solve a tricky problem; play tourist at a few more of the wonders of the multiverse; and pick up a few Experience Points before they confront the main villain of the adventure. Also, the delays give the overworked GM breathing space if he hasn't yet designed that villain!

All of these dangers should relate to the main storyline, at least incidentally. Wandering the dimensions and fighting anything that moves can be fun, but it lacks focus as an adventure. Without a clear goal in the distance, the scenario lacks the appeal of the genre.

So much for getting to the dimensions. What do the characters find once they arrive?

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Designing a dimension is in many ways very simple. After all, when you are dealing with a completely different physical reality you can make it any way you want.

That same flexibility means that you have a lot of choices to make. You can build a dimension that is almost indistinguishable from our own, or one where concepts like distance and position are meaningless.

Here are some factors to consider:

What are the dimension's physical laws? How well or poorly does magic work there?

What does the dimension look like? How easy is it to get to, and where can you go once you're there?

What kinds of creatures live there? Are any of the inhabitants intelligent? What sorts of cultures do they have? Are any of them superbeings?

Now let's explore some answers.

PHYSICAL LAWS

Working out the physical laws of a dimension is often unnecessary. The dimension need not work by any predictable laws at all! However, you can have fun by establishing laws that vary a little (or a lot) from the norm.

HERO System powers can express the unusual qualities of a dimension. Treat such powers as Area Effects covering the whole dimension, Persistent 0 END, and often with the advantages Invisible Power Effects and Difficult to Dispel. Don't worry about the point costs; just note the effects.

For instance, in many dimensions that lack gravity, the characters can fly via a simple act of will. If you decide that this corresponds to 5" of Flight, you can handle anything about the matter using the existing game rules for Flight.

AID AND DANGER

Some dimensions have inherent properties that make them beneficial or harmful. You might want to create a dimension which promotes healing, such as the Arthurian Avalon. Simulate this with Regeneration or a small but constant Aid effect.

(Note: If you want to control the effects these powers can have on a campaign, make such a place dangerous or inaccessible, or keep its location a secret from the player characters. Otherwise the players will plan trips to Avalon after every battle. They may grow casual about danger and injury, just as if one of the PCs could heal them.)

Likewise, if your characters storm the very fires of Hell, build a dimension with a continual flame attack. An environment with a Continuous 4d6 to 6d6 normal attack, or even a 1d6 Killing Attack, certainly keeps most characters on their toes! Of course, the inhabitants (if any) need high defenses to avoid damage from it.

Build a damaging dimension very carefully, because even a slight misjudgment could destroy a character or an entire party. For example, if the attack is Continuous, use (at most) the slowest PC's Speed to determine how often it strikes. Otherwise, faster attacks could knock out slow PCs before they even have a chance to protect themselves.

One interesting variation on the dangerous dimension, is a place that causes mental deterioration with prolonged exposure. This represents realms with alien physical properties or powerful evil deities.

Build this as an INT or EGO Drain at a very low level, with Invisible Power Effects. Build a Mental Illusions power for even greater effect; the illusions can follow a theme, or they can affect everyone differently. For the nastiest effect, combine an EGO Drain and Mental Illusions. This produces lasting effects, and the situation becomes progressively worse as the characters become more susceptible to the illusions.

In cases where a character becomes seriously scarred by the experience, the PC might take a new Psychological Limitation or Berserk. Allow this only in extreme cases, when the character shows changed behavior even after returning home.

OTHER EFFECTS

When powers represent different environments, it tells you precisely how to run them using existing game mechanics. However, you need not work up a power for every effect. Gravity, for instance, can work in whatever direction(s) you like without being constructed as some strange Telekinesis.

Similarly, if you want the characters to breathe in strange environments, don't worry about how many points of Life Support the dimension should have. Virtually all comic-book dimensions allow normal breathing, simply because the story can proceed more easily when the magician doesn't sweat the small details.

It's easiest just to say "everybody can breathe normally here." If that bothers you, assign the characters an experience point to buy 3 points Life Support (Safe Environment), usable only in other dimensions (+1 1/2), and call it "a trivial enchantment."

MANA LEVEL

One of the most important characteristics of any dimension is its potential for magic. Some dimensions are very strong sources of magical energy, sometimes called "mana," while others have much less than our own.

STRONG MAGIC

In a strong magic dimension increase the effectiveness of the characters' abilities by a certain number of points, or by doubling all spell effects. The first time the PCs cast their spells, they may be in for a surprise!

Players may love this additional power, but their characters should have trouble controlling it. Consider assigning Side Effects to represent the unusual power level. Increase the visibility of effects that normally are not obvious. Advantages that represent fine control, such as Armor Piercing, might fail to work or work intermittently (Activation Roll).

In the most extreme approach, spells go out of control. The characters find it difficult to direct spells, control their areas of effect, or even to turn them off once started. Imagine an Energy Blast spell, cast in the heat of battle, that refuses to go out and begins running wild. It might become more of a threat than whatever it was used against!

A simple Mind Link might suddenly link everyone in the area together. Worse yet, it could stay on despite the caster's attempts to drop it. Characters could gain some unexpected information, but so would their enemies. Imagine a delicate diplomatic mission when everyone suddenly finds it impossible to lie.

Give the characters a chance to keep or regain control of their spells. Try basing this on an EGO roll with a -1 penalty for each 5 points of power above the normal spell level. Once the characters figure out what's going on, they should be cautious about using much of their newfound power unless they really need it.

WEAK MAGIC

In a dimension with little mana, treat the shortage as a Suppress, or halve the effectiveness of all spells. Long-term effects could erode under a gradual Dispel or cumulative Transformation.

A weak-magic dimension played for more dramatic effect could inflict a constant Drain versus all magical powers. This requires the characters to get in and out quickly, before their powers go away entirely.

Don't assign this effect to a dimension if the characters may have to spend large amounts of time there — for instance, the home of a major enemy. A Drain effect is more useful for increasing the dangers from what would otherwise be light or moderate opposition in a one-shot encounter.

SELECTIVE INCREASES

Some dimensions are strong sources of magic of one particular type, especially dimensions belonging to deities. A magician visiting the dimension of his patron could become considerably more powerful than his fellows.

For example, if a seer following the Norse style of magic journeys to Mimir's well, increase his divination powers while he is there. A Hopi shaman visiting the Dance Hall of the

Dead might have vast powers there. Alternatively, the shaman might be able to call upon the kachinas to aid him directly.

This makes a good opportunity to spotlight a particular character and his or her abilities. It works best in a situation that calls for extraordinary power.

Do not allow the other characters to feel useless. Try to balance the situation so that everyone can be productive. For example, in some cases the strengthened character grows insane or detached from human concerns; the other PCs must show their fellow mage the dangers of his increased power, so that he will gladly surrender it upon the return home.

SPACE AND TIME

Dimensions can have different shapes. Our dimension looks fairly linear. Objects travel in what appear to be straight lines. The space in other dimensions may be very distorted, causing things moving in a "straight line" to follow wildly curving paths.

This can make ranged combat dangerous for anyone who is not familiar with the dimension's distortions. It can also make it difficult not to get lost. Just because you can see a place doesn't mean you know how to get there!

Combat and Perception rolls in such a place take serious penalties. One interesting way to simulate the irregularities is to assign variable penalties — for example, -1d6. Those familiar with the area would take smaller penalties, and natives would take none. (However, they are liable for equal penalties if they ever visit Earth!)

TIME PASSAGE

Consider the rate at which time passes relative to other dimensions, especially the heroes' own. Local time may go faster or slower.

Time differentials not only add to the sense of magic in the campaign, they can set up useful game situations. A dimension where time moves more quickly than on Earth could be used to organize and launch an invasion very quickly. Faster time flow could also be useful to an injured character, who would have more time to heal relative to events back on Earth. Of course, the time flow would also mean that the natives aged faster, and could be dead in a matter of months (or hours).

Slower time flow lets you keep campaign time in line with actual time. Suppose the characters spend only a few hours of game time in another dimension, but it takes almost a year of real time to play it all out. Upon returning to Earth, the characters discover that while only hours passed in the other universe, it's a year later on Earth! This brings the game time back into accord with real time in one neat (though drastic) step.

You can even create dimensions where the time flow varies throughout. Just don't make the differences so radical that character Speeds vary significantly in combat — unless you have the speed chart memorized. It makes an interesting novelty but can be very hard on the GM who has to keep everything straight.

A FEW KINDS OF DIMENSIONS

With that as background, let's look at a few useful types of dimensions that show up in comicbooks and literature. This is not an exhaustive list, but it provides ideas to start from.

"STAIRWAY" DIMENSIONS

In the comic books dimensions often consist primarily of black empty space spanned by stairways or bridges. Asteroid-like rocks float past. There are rarely any large surfaces, so visitors have a very limited number of paths, some of them obviously dangerous to follow. The visitors know that they aren't in Kansas any more.

Also, these dimensions offer a visible, obvious goal. "You see a shining light at the end of the rainbow." "This river floats in empty space. It has a strong current that flows toward a tangle of other rivers in the distance." "Gee, that planet in the distance looks more inviting than the anti-matter belts surrounding you." This goal becomes the "top" of the staircase.

Despite the striking visual differences between stairway dimensions and our own, the physical laws are usually very similar. There is no difficulty breathing, of course. Gravity often works normally, although it may vary in direction with the terrain. Space may be violently distorted at the borders of the panels, but along the stairway it behaves itself.



Remember that a staircase dimension doesn't have to look like a staircase. For example, the Confluence, described in the *Scenarios* section, is a good example of how to vary on a stairway dimension. In basic structure and properties it works as a staircase, but it looks very different.

Stairway dimensions make particularly good locations for chases or stalking scenes, because they provide only a few paths. Taking the wrong path might result in a dead end, the mind-wrenching perils of distorted space, or wanderings far from the goal. Make use of these side-paths as intermediate steps along the way to the top of the staircase.

Note that characters who can move outside the paths have a major advantage over those who must follow them. To even the odds in lopsided conflicts, make sure the weaker party has some way of taking shortcuts.

For example, in a fight between the PCs and a group of under-powered local monsters, limit the PCs to the top of the stairway, but allow the monsters to move under it or fly around it. Their mobility advantage would allow them to perform surprise attacks or gang up on single targets, offsetting some of the heroes' natural advantage in firepower.

CHAOS ZONES

If a uniform medium seems too static, build a dimension that is extremely mutable and chaotic. This can be primarily a visual effect, with new objects and energies randomly appearing and destroying themselves all around. Objects and empty space constantly transform into other things. In picking a path through the chaos, the characters run a spectacular gauntlet.

A more thorough approach changes physical laws as well as appearance. Gravity shifts crazily, the temperature varies through wild swings, in occasional spots the characters can't breathe, and so on. Construct attacks corresponding to local energies, and generally force the characters to use their powers and skills to win through the disorder.

A dimension of natural obstacles, placed on a path the characters must travel, can work well as a contrast to the more personally motivated threats they face elsewhere.

CHAOS STORMS

A more controlled use of chaos (if that isn't a contradiction) introduces chaotic effects to an otherwise stable dimension. There might be particular areas of chaos or certain conditions under which chaotic effects occur.

You can use chaos effects as travelling hazards. "Storms of chaos" may travel across a dimension, affecting everything in their paths. Such a storm could be anything from a nuisance to a life-threatening danger. If the chaos directly affects the characters' forms or powers, this makes a chaos storm much more frightening.

Consider giving chaos storms the ability to transform characters into other things, including inanimate objects. You could demonstrate the danger by transforming an important NPC. Then the characters must undertake a quest or trial to restore the victim.

A further wrinkle: Chaos storms could breach dimensional boundaries. This makes a great plot device for getting characters from one dimension to another. You decide where the storm deposits them. The added danger of entering a storm ensures that the characters will not take the matter casually. And if the characters can travel between dimensions through the storms, so can other things...

ALTERING CHARACTERS

How about changing the characters as well as their surroundings? Those entering comic-book dimensions sometimes transform in the process. For example, some dimensions only permit the existence of disembodied astral forms or beings of light. A chaos dimension gives you license to turn PCs into anything at all.

Transformations and distortions challenge the characters' senses of who and what they are. This is a great opportunity for roleplaying. If you set the mood properly, just changing the characters' forms without altering their powers can have a powerful psychological effect. One effective way to drive this home is to transform them into a species hostile to humanity — invading aliens, say, or cockroaches — then have a foe question them about what, in their current state, justifies their attempts to save mankind.

The changes may be purely visual or functional as well. If you turn the characters into, say, grotesque monstrosities that match the local fauna, this doesn't mean you have to alter anyone's abilities.

Still, sometimes alteration makes sense for the story, especially if you have some puzzle you want the players to solve without magic. To leave the characters relatively helpless, remove some or all of their powers. But to retain their interest, make them into creatures that have useful abilities in their own right. This leads to experimentation and clever play.

CONSISTENT BUT STRANGE

At the more familiar end of the spectrum are the dimensions which resemble aspects of our own. Anywhere the characters have a large surface to walk on is relatively comprehensible, in comparison to the loony realms of the previous section.

Still, these places can look just as bizarre. The "land" does not have to be part of a planet. It may be a flat surface under a solid and impenetrable "sky," which rests a fixed distance away. It may even have edges; fall off, and you hurtle into oblivion. (Or into another dimension!)

Any terrain feature can provide the inspiration for a design. Take a particular aspect of our normal space and extend or exaggerate it. Dimensions of endless water, or desert, or mountains, or forests can all be interesting. Scale can be easily adapted to the characters' abilities. A barren plain can stretch for miles, or for light-years.

ENCLOSED DIMENSIONS

A dimension does not have to be infinite in size, or even particularly large. Enclosed dimensions are similar in many ways to stairway dimensions, except that there is usually no obvious way to cut across between the passages.

A complex of caves naturally implies an underworld adventure, complete with earth elementals, tunnel cave-ins, and fungus gardens. There may not be any exits from such a cave system, or the exits may lead to other dimensions.

In an enclosed universe, play up claustrophobia. As the characters flee their enemies, for instance, the knowledge that they may trap themselves in a dead end can lend tension.

REALLY BIG BUILDINGS

You can also design dimensions as buildings of various sorts. Great halls make good home dimensions for certain deities. Large and complex medieval-style structures can provide atmosphere... especially as the characters gradually realize that there aren't any windows or doors leading outside. And endless office buildings, filled with faceless, scurrying bureaucrats can give quite a change of pace.

Enclosed dimensions should have some sort of trick exit or gate. It may be that the only way out is with the help of the place's builder. Even after the characters have figured that out, they still have to find and negotiate with that being.

Netherworld dimensions, domains of the dead, sometimes appear as enclosed dimensions in comic books. The lack of an obvious exit makes sense if you don't want the inhabitants to leave. Endless tunnels and caves, or corridors and halls, make an effective, downbeat setting for such places.

To make the dimension more obviously alien, twist physical laws and create Escher-style interiors with impossible layouts and relative gravity. Aside from adding to the descriptive impact, this also works as a maze or trap. Finding a safe route through this place could become a tense process, particularly with something following close behind. Force the characters to tread cautiously through a three-dimensional maze of changing gravity and impossible geometry; this builds suspense for a climactic fight or escape.

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

One common kind of enclosed dimension merits special mention. Objects in our world can contain other "pocket" dimensions within them.

For example, the characters might enter a magical gem, then find themselves in a bright crystalline dimension that corresponds to the shape and appearance of the gem.

The similarity often extends to more than appearance. Applying light or heat to the gem in our world may produce similar effects within the pocket dimension. These are most often used as traps, but they can also provide escape mechanisms or places to hide powerful magic items.

To build a pocket dimension, buy Extra-Dimensional Movement only to one particular place through a Focus, (and usually the Independent limitation as well). Add other advantages and limitations, such as Gate and Invisible Power Effects, as appropriate.

Creating such an object should be difficult in game terms, aside from the cost in character points. Look carefully at pocket dimensions to insure that they don't provide instant escape routes from deathtraps, trans-dimensional communication or teleportation, and so on. Restricting access to a pocket dimension is usually easy; have a bad guy steal it!

DIMENSIONS OF THE MIND

A dimension does not have to have fixed form. Often, in both comic books and fantasy literature, dimensions take on different characteristics based on the actions or thoughts of the characters. Characters can indulge in some wish-fulfillment. But they may also confront their worst nightmares.

Dimensions of the mind are not encountered in normal dimensional travels. Commonly, circumstances force the characters into such a place. If the characters sleep in an unprotected place, they may become trapped in a dimension of dreams. If they probe a possessed target's mind, they may have to fight a duel with the possessor, in the subjective world of the victim's mind. If a character is killed, his friends may enter the domain of the dead to attempt a rescue.

Here is a wonderful opportunity to explore the insides of the characters' heads and to play out impossible situations. The characters can enter situations out of their pasts, relive their origins, or correct past mistakes. Play out dialogues between characters and their friends or enemies who have died. Anything dramatically appropriate is fair game.

However, be careful to take into account the styles and preferences of your players. Players rightly become upset or angry if you push the wrong emotional buttons or overplay things. For instance, if you have tricked a character into betraying a friend or killing a normal, do not confront him with his betrayal just to reinforce his guilt. Instead, use such a confrontation to help him resolve his feelings. Played well, this can appear as an enemy's attempt to break the character; the hero turns it to his advantage, a classic motif.

Adventures in "mental" dimensions occur in two overall contexts. In one, the characters control their surroundings; in the other, they are pawns of some other controlling force.

PCS AS PAWNS

This usually occurs when the characters face a much more powerful enemy. Instead of structuring the encounter as a direct combat, where the characters cannot hope to win, set it in a context where the enemy makes the rules.

In many cases dimensions of the mind are controlled by a malicious being of great power. Entities that live off dreams or strong emotions are perfect for this role. Use them to set up a nightmare sequence, or even a trip through Hell. Journeys through Dante's *Inferno* occur in virtually every magical comic book at some point.

These dramatic situations should advance the storyline. Characters may learn things about their pasts, their abilities, or even external events through dream episodes. A hero subjected to a personality crisis can emerge with a greater sense of self and correspondingly enhanced powers. Since strength of magic is often tied to self-awareness, this can explain major power purchases, such as increased Multipower pools.

Figure out the initial situation well in advance, using your knowledge of the characters' personalities, objectives, and Psychological Limitations to come up with an appropriate psychodrama. Then either force them to face the situation, or make it clear they can't face it and must escape instead.

Escaping from the situation may be as simple as realizing that things are not real. In a trip into someone's mind the characters might enlist the aid of that person to turn things against their enemy. In the *Inferno* the characters might call for divine aid.

Possibly the most satisfying method of escape is to let the characters develop some mastery over their own reality.

REALITY UNDER PCS' CONTROL

In some cases the characters can exercise conscious control over their surroundings. This is often true of dream sequences. Or the characters end up in a dimension with extremely strong magic; or they gain the power to shape reality as part of a test by some deity.

If you let the characters exercise control, use EGO rolls to indicate how much control a character can achieve. Characters might exercise their powers only with a successful EGO roll; or they might be able to use any power, as per a Cosmic Power Pool, up to a point total equal to their EGOs (or, in a really high-power dimension, EGO x 5). The approach depends on how much power and flexibility you want the characters to have.

A failed EGO roll can mean the character loses control of his thoughts, and some personal nightmare appears to bedevil him. Treat this as a Summon, equal in value to the effect the character tried to achieve. A failed roll could also cause the character's powers to fail or become unreliable, or allow an enemy to shape the character's reality as described in the previous section.

Another approach treats the dimension's effects as a Mental Illusion used against the characters. This causes characters with different levels of EGO and Mental Defense to react differently. Either method allows the characters to take defensive measures such as pushing their EGOs, once they figure out that it helps.

When the heroes have control of their surroundings, pit them against opponents with equal or greater control. The heroes must learn to fight with greater than normal powers, with the powers of their teammates, or with different powers altogether. The whole environment can be used as a weapon in the hands of whomever wields it more capably.

In this situation, let the characters figure out what they can do gradually. The ability to transform reality makes a foe seem unbeatable... until the characters realize that, if they try hard enough, they can turn the tables.

In direct conflicts over control of reality, decide who has control by using an EGO versus EGO roll; determine the quality of the results by rule of thumb. For more detailed guidelines refer to the Mental Illusions effects table, and give the winner one level of effect for every point he comes out ahead in the EGO versus EGO contest. Just remember that the effects in this case are not illusions!

If only one level of effect is achieved, the winner can produce all sorts of disturbing and disorienting effects but cannot attempt anything which would cause the opponent damage. Higher levels of effect can produce genuine injury. Adjust the reality shift so that it is suitable to the level of "illusion" achieved.

A classic contest of this sort gets both sides personally involved. In the comic books you often see battles like this resolved as personal combats, with weapons forged from the environment by will alone. Even if the effects are physical, this is a contest of wills. The heroes (and villains!) prove that their determination matches their powers.

NATIVES OF OTHER DIMENSIONS

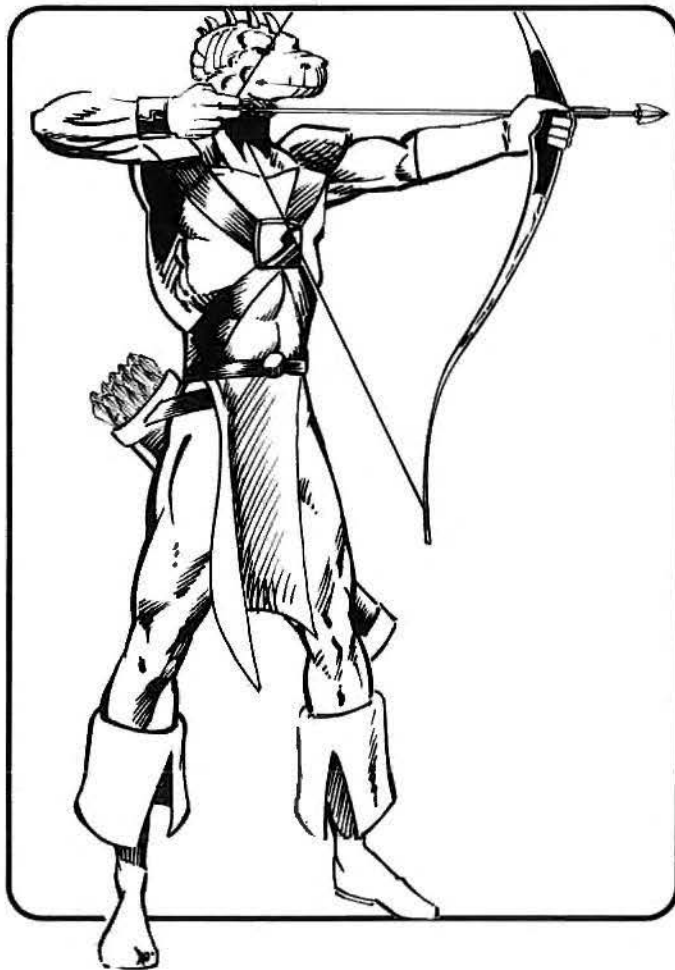
So far we have dealt with the inherent qualities of dimensions, but in many cases the interest lies in its inhabitants. A dimension can host any life forms you can imagine.

Rather than trying to set up a carefully balanced ecosystem, just work up the creatures that are most likely to be of interest to the characters. No matter how many forms of life are clearly visible, the characters concentrate on those that appear helpful or hostile. Anything else can be handled as scenery without much further detail.

FLORA AND FAUNA

When creating wildlife, you have a great deal of material to draw on. Take almost any real plant or animal and enlarge it, shrink it, distort it, or combine it with others to produce a new and interesting life form. ("Suddenly you're attacked by a 15-foot-long cross between a lion, a lamprey, and a slug!")

While this may not seem original or scientific, bear in mind that you must describe these things to the players in terms of things they know about. If you create a genuinely original life form, the players may have trouble visualizing it, unless you can draw its picture. Starting from known forms saves time and hassle.



To create creatures that do not resemble anything known, look to inanimate objects. Living terrain features, such as mountains or lakes, show up regularly in comic books. Also consider forms of pure spirit or the ever-popular glowing balls of light. Remember to concentrate on what the characters are most likely to notice or interact with, and remember too that these creatures must be able to survive in the local environment.

NATIVE CULTURES

Designing intelligent creatures — i.e., native NPCs — presents additional problems. Once you figure out what they look like, decide how they communicate and think.

If these NPCs are intelligent animals, don't worry so much about culture; concentrate on personality. If they are demigods or actual deities, you can take a similar approach, since any cultural style is secondary to the personality.

For everything in between, think about the local culture. You can design a culture that is alien and incomprehensible, but the genre usually assumes cultures similar to the feudal systems of medieval times. Monarchy or dictatorship are the most common options for governments, although sometimes an elected council rules.

In almost all cases the societies are organized into well-defined classes. At the top are nobles, at the bottom peasants. You can construct an oppressive situation and let the characters decide whether they want to help change it; or you can assume a more benevolent government and happy natives.

Once you know the local situation, you can work out quite a bit about NPC natives by determining their places in the society. Carrying stereotypes to extremes is not usually a good idea, but stereotypes can help tremendously when you need to work out a character in a hurry. For instance, members of the ruling class probably have mannerisms very different from those of the lower classes.

Naturally, all the same rules for running NPCs apply even when the NPC lives in another universe. Whether or not an NPC is closely associated with a culture, try to find some quirk of personality or mannerism unique to that character. A little thought in advance makes the NPC much more interesting and believable.

DIMENSIONAL RULERS

Many dimensions have rulers. These can be highly advanced forms of life, or they can be cosmic deities as old as time, whose existences are tied up with that of their dimensions. In comic books such entities, even if they are radically alien in appearance, generally have human goals and ways of thinking. This gives PCs the chance to play upon the rulers' ambitions, vanities, and fears to achieve their goals; combat is generally a lost cause from the start.

However, deities directly tied to a dimension need not surpass the PCs' power level to be dangerous. Fighting such a being is possible, but it has immediate effects on the environment. If the deity is injured, disasters occur around the characters. You might even consider some direct system of damage, such as doing 10d6 of damage to everything in a 10-km radius for each point of BODY inflicted on the deity. Destroying the deity generally causes the dimension to fall apart as well, which calls for a dramatic escape from the collapsing fabric of spacetime.



A deity's survival may depend on worshippers in its dimension. The devout (or terrified) followers funnel their psychic energy to power the deity's spells. Though it may temporarily exhaust its power and be defeated, this deity can never be truly destroyed, so long as anyone believes in its strength.

Attempts to convert the devout might successfully subvert the deity's strength over time, but this missionary work is dangerous during the early stages. The deity won't take such efforts kindly, and it still has the power to do something about it. The characters have to organize, at great risk, an underground movement to depose the deity.

CONCLUSION

When creating an alternate dimension, think about what purpose it serves in your story. Try to focus each dimension toward a particular purpose, and design its visual effects, physical laws, access points, and inhabitants to meet that purpose.

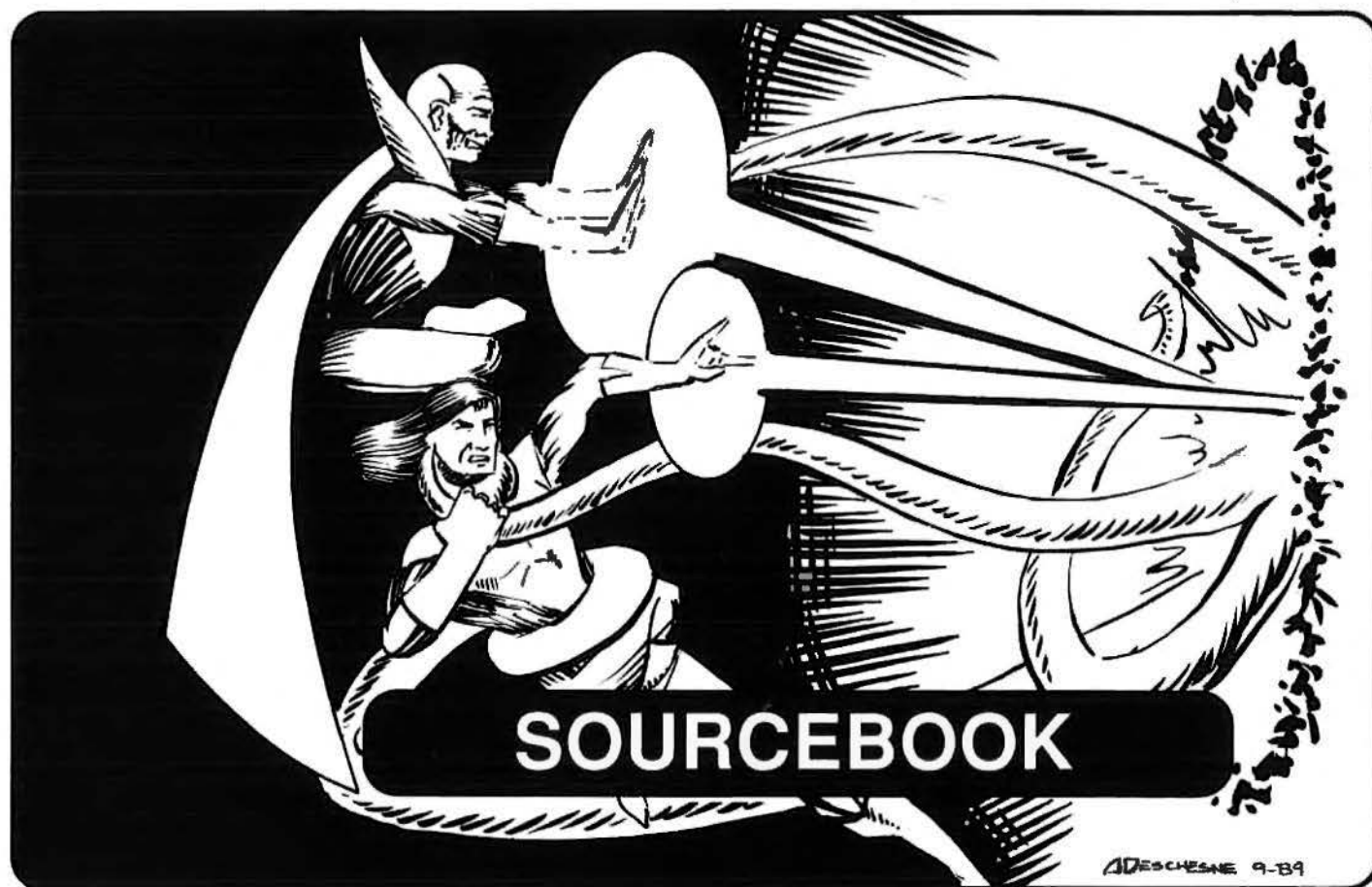
Remember that in the superhero-magic genre, the primary purpose of dimensional travel is always to produce wonder in the reader. Make this a main purpose in the game as well, and you can't go far wrong.

The hazy ring of the dimensional gate evaporates away. As its mist clears, you suddenly feel hot, and at once you begin to sweat. You look up into a white sky, where hundreds of tiny suns glow brightly in all colors of the spectrum. They cluster in fractal whirls of amazing beauty.

You're standing on what looks like a tree limb. It has rough, gray-brown bark like an oak, and tiny saucer-shaped leaves. But the limb is 80 feet wide! And it stretches away in the distance until it finally joins a huge trunk that fills an eighth of the horizon.

Speaking of the horizon, you look for one but don't see it. You step to the edge of the limb and look down. All you see is that trunk stretching away, down, down, for miles. Hundreds of miles. Below it, billowing white clouds...





This chapter outlines a complete superhero-magic campaign. It works best for three to six beginning magician PCs. Only the GM should read this section! Players should **not** read further!

This superheroic campaign assumes the following point standards: Player Characters are built on a 100-point base, with up to 150 points in Disadvantages. They usually receive an additional 75 points, only to purchase astral form. Typical DEX and EGO center on 23. Attacks average 50 points, with 60 points maximum; defenses are 25-35 points; skills 8- to 14- on average, maximum 18-.

Powers available are left to the GM. Every character should have 10-20 points of Mental Defense. Mental Awareness can be assumed, rather than purchased.

The following Disadvantages are strongly recommended: two 25-point Hunteds (the supervillains Tyrannon and Jarth, detailed in the "Villains" section — each more powerful than the PCs, extensive NCI, 11-) and Secret Identity. The latter

may not necessarily imply a mask or other superhero trappings, but indicates the PCs' desire to prevent the public from discovering their use of magic.

Villains are generally more powerful than the PCs. Typical DEX and EGO center on 24. Attacks average 60 points, with 75 points maximum; defenses are 30-40 points; skills as for PCs, but no maximum level. Mental Awareness is assumed, not listed.

For all characters, mental powers cost half as much as listed in *Champions*. (For a fuller explanation and the reasoning behind this, see *Adjusting the Game* in the Optional Rules section.) This campaign also uses the other new rules described in that chapter, such as Astral Form and teleportation gates.

Issues of hit locations, knockdown, long-term endurance, and pushing are left to the GM's discretion. Generally, the superheroic standard should prevail.



THE CAMPAIGN PREMISE

This premise can fit into most existing *Champions* campaign worlds with minor reworking. It assumes that the PCs are the only competent, good-hearted magicians in the world. If your existing campaign says otherwise, devise reasons that the other magicians are unavailable. See the *Campaigning* section for suggestions.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Magic is real. When trained and disciplined, the forces of mind and will can shape the forces of nature. There appears to be no limit to what can be achieved, given sufficient mastery. Sometimes native talent can produce significant magic. However, the greatest achievements of sorcery come only from years of study.

We are not alone in the cosmos. Many dimensions coexist with ours, separated by the thinnest of vibrational barriers. The number of dimensions is infinite, but some are more accessible than others. Each universe is connected to a few others, and those to a few beyond that.

From any given dimension, there are some others that a traveller can reach easily, the so-called "nearby" dimensions. The others, the "further" dimensions, are also theoretically accessible, but only with skill and exertion.

Earth's dimension is a strategic nexus, connected to more alternate universes than any other known plane of existence. The psychic potential of its billions of inhabitants have made Earth a gateway point, easing dimensional travel.

Because of this, tyrannical sorcerers of a hundred realities crave dominion over the Earth. The world at large knows nothing of this. Only a small band of mystic masters, working in secrecy, defends the planet from forces that could drive ordinary men to madness. Only a few wizards have achieved both the power and the commitment necessary to fend off attack. Only the PCs.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR SITUATION

In this campaign the heroes become disciples of this dimension's most powerful magician, the Revered Elder — the Archmage.

For three centuries the Elder has guarded our universe from those who would enslave it. There could be no better protector. His mastery, like his goodness, seems limitless.

Now, though, the Revered Elder is reaching the end of his extended life. His endurance, once legendary, grows short. Weakness assails him. So he has chosen all of the PCs as his disciples, hoping to find in one of them a new Archmage.

It is unheard of that a master should take on more than one apprentice at a time. But the Elder's previous plans for the welfare of our dimension were wrecked — by treachery.

DIMITRIOS AND JARTH

For the last hundred years or more, the Elder's chosen successor was Vincent Dimitrios, a powerful magician. Dimitrios was born in New York City shortly after the Civil War, the youngest son of Greek immigrant parents. The Elder sensed, from half a world away, his immense gifts and noble nature. When both parents were killed in a coach accident, the Elder adopted Dimitrios as his disciple.

Dimitrios proved an able student, with an immense capacity for self-discipline. In studying his work over the last century, the PCs should be impressed by his rigor and insight. One of the most common sets of defensive spells, his invention, bears his name — the "Shields of Dimitrios." Still young after a century, and if anything more compassionate and responsible than before, Dimitrios would have made a fitting Archmage.

His crucial flaw was naive trust in others. On one of his routine sweeps of other inhabited worlds of the Galaxy, Dimitrios met an alien being, Jarth, who was naturally talented in the ways of magic. Dimitrios invited him to Earth to become his own disciple.

Jarth made slow but steady progress in sorcery. His natural ability was undermined by impulsiveness and suspicion. Yet Dimitrios continued to teach him, hoping his instruction in morality would eventually work a change upon the alien as his instruction in magic already had.

But Dimitrios was wrong. Jarth never changed, except to grow more ambitious and cunning. After six decades, having achieved significant mastery of mysticism, Jarth laid a trap for his unsuspecting master and destroyed him. Now Jarth plots to destroy the Revered Elder as well, and become Archmage in his own right. If this happens, the Earth, and possibly the universe, will fall prey to a tyrant, as so many other dimensions already have.

The Elder now had no successor, and was waning in power. Yet training a new Archmage is the work of a century. In desperation the Elder has taken on all the PCs as his apprentices, hoping they will delay Jarth's rise and defend Earth's dimension through their sheer numbers.

Thus, he has constantly stressed one point over and over: Each magician's survival depends on the survival of his teammates! The PCs must pool their strength against foes of immense power. Divisiveness, feuding, or ideological conflict are the wedges an enemy may exploit to drive them apart and defeat them in detail.

The welfare of Earth depends on each of them, and on all of them together.

THE PCS' SITUATION

The general populace of Earth is not yet ready to know of the forces that assault it. Panic and chaos would result. PCs must keep their activities and their status as magicians secret.

In skeptical Western societies, of course, posing as a "magician" is often enough to foil suspicion. They can make sure the public dismisses them as "crazy occultists" without difficulty. ("Aww, it's all done with camera tricks and special effects.") But the magicians must take care not to keep too high a profile, or those with true magical knowledge can locate them.

Money need no longer be important to them. The Revered Elder has rescued many innocents from perils in times past, and they have gratefully left bequests of money, property, and other holdings to the Elder. One victim tormented by evil magic was a successful Manhattan investment counselor named Chalmers Hornbeck. When the Elder saved him, Hornbeck volunteered to manage the Archmage's finances. In fact, he has even set up a corporation, Bhutanese Souvenir Importers, to administer the Elder's American holdings. Though no great financial engine, BSI provides for your ordinary comforts.

(Note to the GM: Chalmers Hornbeck makes a good DNPC for one of the magicians or their headquarters. Extremely tall, thin, mild-mannered, with thinning blonde hair, Hornbeck is a normal, except for PS: Financial Investment on 16-. He is determined to learn nothing at all about magic if he can help it.)

THE HEADQUARTERS

Most magicians have a base of operations, where they go to rest between ordeals. Some few magi elect to wander rootlessly, but these have never attained Archmage status. The Revered Elder advises the PCs to construct their own sanctuary, traditionally known as a "Mystic Refuge," "Fastness," "Safe Haven," or by any of several other names.

Forces from other dimensions may invade anywhere. Therefore, the location of the sanctuary is not of crucial importance. Generally, the PCs should select a major urban area, so as to be "close to the action." These tend to be trouble spots, because their psychic potential offers invaders a more attractive target. Above all, they should stay together for mutual protection.

So the magicians may prefer a large and comfortable headquarters. Of course, large areas carry correspondingly large expenses in urban areas. There is good reason then, as well as ample precedent, for building a base that is larger inside than outside.

The PCs may have no idea how to build such a headquarters. But the Revered Elder has mentioned someone, or something, called "the Verminax," that can take care of construction. The magicians need only decide what to build.

Mystic defenses are vital. In game terms, consider Mental Defense, Darkness Only Vs. Clairvoyance, and Concealment. (In mystic adventures Concealment generally works as a Suppress effect against Detect Magic spells, not as physical camouflage for the base. But you can have it work either or both ways as you prefer.)

Nearly every magician has one or more faithful servants who attend to the routine details of life. A Buddhist sect in the Himalayas trains several of its members in each new generation as servants of the current Archmage. The magicians can select one or more of these, or make a mystic search for the ideal servant themselves, or just put a want ad in the paper. The Revered Elder can test the loyalty and ability of any candidate.

Later sections describe a sample headquarters and the extra-dimensional aliens who can build it: the Verminax.



CHAMPIONS CAMPAIGN GROUND RULES SHEET

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

IMPORTANCE OF THE PC's

CAMPAIGN TONE

Morality: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

- (1) Good vs. Bad is black & white; (2) Good vs. Bad is mostly clear-cut; (3) Some cross over between Good vs. Bad; (4) There is little distinction between good and bad; (5) Morality is always in shades of gray

Realism: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

- (1) Very romantic; (2) Romantic; (3) Neutral; (4) Realistic; (5) Extremely Realistic

Outlook: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

- (1) Everything works out — Very Optimistic; (2) Almost everything works out; (3) Successes balanced by failures; (4) Successes are rare; (5) Almost nothing works out — Very Pessimistic

Seriousness: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

- (1) Very light-hearted — campaign plays for laughs; (2) Mostly light-hearted; (3) Seriousness balanced by light-hearted; (4) More serious than light-hearted; (5) Almost entirely serious

Continuity: 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5

- (1) Episodic — No effort is made to tie the adventures together; (2) Mostly episodic, with some continuing stories; (3) Some long stories and some episodic ones; (4) Mostly serial, some enforcement of campaign continuity; (5) Entirely serial — everything must fit into the storyline

PHYSICAL WORLD (DESCRIPTION)

CHARACTER BUILDING GUIDELINES

- (1) Starting Points for PC's: _____

Max points from one Disadvantage Category: _____

- (2) Maximum Disadvantage Points for PC's: _____

- (3) Characters automatically have Characteristic Maxima disadvantage at no point value: YES/NO

- (4) Character can carry normal technology (weapons, etc) at no point cost: YES/NO

Power Levels	Beginning Range	Maximum
Attack Powers	_____	_____
Defense Powers	_____	_____
Skill Rolls	_____	_____

CAMPAIGN RULES

- (5) Combat Uses Hit Locations Chart YES/NO

- (6) Knockdown Rules Used YES/NO

- (7) Long-Term Endurance Rules Used YES/NO

- (8) Limited Push YES/NO

HOUSE RULES

SUPPORTING CAST

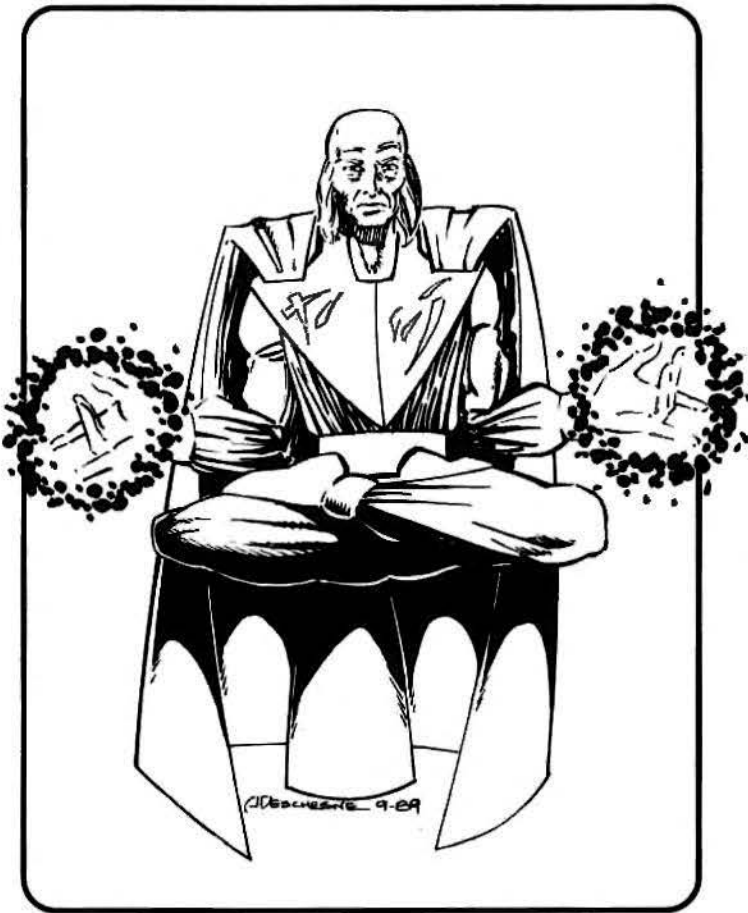


Many of these magicians have "packages" of spells that are well established among students of the arcane — for instance, the Eleven Lights of Luathon and the Shields of Dimitrios. To save space, the power listings give each package's total cost on a single line; the packages and all their powers are listed in full in the section "Spells and Items," below.

All of these characters are assumed to have Mental Awareness at no cost.

THE REVERED ELDER ARCHMAGE OF EARTH'S DIMENSION			
Val	Char	Cost	
8	STR	-2	
28	DEX	54	
15	CON	10	
10	BODY	0	
30	INT	20	
50	EGO	80	
25	PRE	15	
12	COM	1	
6	PD	4	
6	ED	3	
3	SPD	0	
5	REC	0	
10	END	-10	
30	STUN	8	
Cost	Powers		END
150	Magic Power Pool		
43	Magic Power Pool Control (All powers must be bought to 0 END, -1/4; not usable in other dimensions, -1/2; no Aid, Regeneration, or Characteristics)		
30	Shape Shift, humans only, 0 END		
	Attack Powers		
100	Mental Magic Multipower		
10 u	Ego Attack, 10d6		10
10 u	Mental Illusions, 20d6		10
10 u	Mind Control, 20d6		10
10 u	Mind Scan, 20d6		10
10 u	Telepathy, 20d6		10
	Defense Powers		
56	Reflections of the Runyan (Missile Reflection, +3 to roll, all missiles)		
20	+40 PRE (only defends against PRE attacks, -1)		
40	Mental Defense (46 pts)		
	Movement Powers		
75	Movement Multipower		
7 u	Teleport 10", x2 mass, x1024 distance (c. 2 miles)		2
7 u	Flight, 15", x8 non-combat multiple, 0 END		0
7 u	Swimming, 15", x8 non-combat multiple		
75	Astral Form		

Cost	Powers	END			
	Skills and Talents				
53	Magic Skill, 40-				
70	+7 overall Skill Levels				
41	Danger Sense, 14-, mystical, danger to Earth's dimension				
3	Simulate Death				
5	Disguise, 18-				
10	2d6 Luck				
3	Scholar				
18	KS: Earth Magicians, Earth Occult Experts, Extra-Dimensional Magicians, Extra-Dimensional Cultures, Occult Knowledge, Magic Spells, all 16-				
6	KS: Demonology, Mystic Artifacts, Earth Religions, all 15-				
2	KS: Prehistoric Civilizations, 13-				
6	PS: Archmage, 18-				
2	PS: Farmer, 11-				
3	Linguist				
21	Languages: Dzongka (language of Bhutan, native), Hindi, Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian, English, French, Spanish				
20	Aikido				
	Maneuver	OCV DCV Damage			
	Throw	0 +1 1 1/2d6 +v/5			
	Strike	+1 +3 1 1/2d6			
	Escape	0 0 23 STR vs. Grabs			
	Hold	-1 -1 grab 18 STR to hold			
	Dodge	0 +5			
100 +	Disadvantages				
10	Vulnerability: 1 1/2x effect from Adjustment Powers				
20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN vs. age or disease Powers				
30	Vulnerability: 2x STUN vs. Physical Killing Attacks				
10	Distinctive Features: Aged Oriental, noticed and recognized (conc w/ disguise)				
30	Hunted: Tyrannon (more pow, NCI), 14-				
10	Hunted: Jarth, 11- (less pow)				
10	Hunted: Other extra-dimensional villains, 11- (less pow)				
10	Hunted: Earth dimension sorcerers, 11- (less pow)				
15	Phys Lim: Old, frail, and weary (com, greatly)				
20	Psych Lim: Treats strangers as DNPCs (v com, irr)				
20	Psych Lim: Code of honor (com, total)				
15	Psych Lim: Will not Drain or Transfer without target's consent (uncom, irr)				
10	Psych Lim: Code vs. Killing (com, irr)				
10	Public ID: Dimensional bad guys know where to find him				
15	Reputation: Self-sacrificing, honorable Archmage, 14-				
886	NPC Bonus				
OCV: 9+; DCV: 9+; ECV: 17+; Phases: 4, 8, 12					
COSTS:	Char.	Powers	Total	Disadv.	Base
	183	+ 1116	= 1299	= 1199	+ 100



Background: The Elder is the Archmage (greatest sorcerer) of this dimension, and its good-hearted protector. Three centuries old, frail, exhausted, but still mentally vigorous, he lives in a monastery in the Himalayan nation of Bhutan.

The Elder was enlisted into magic in the same way as Vincent Dimitrios after him, and Jarth after Dimitrios. About 250 years ago the Undying Tulku, then sane and powerful, noticed a young farmer's unusual magical potential and recruited him as a disciple. The disciple, Ugyen, proved himself an able student. When the Tulku fell into senility, Ugyen achieved Archmage status by successfully passing a test set by the Council of Magi: the elimination of a large evil sect of Oriental magicians called the Tong. For the last hundred years no one has known Ugyen by any other name than "the Revered Elder."

Personality: Compassionate, wise, and almost too good-hearted to be true. The Elder maintains inner peace in the face of all danger, but he understands more than anyone the disasters that will befall this dimension if he is weak.

Often showing strategies borrowed from aikido, the Elder constantly uses his enemies' strengths against them. He tries to impart this outlook to his disciples. Another important doctrine he teaches is lateral thinking, the ability to solve problems by attacking them in unexpected directions.

The Elder sometimes displays a dry wit, in the manner of the classic Zen masters.

Identifying Quote: "It enriches my life to see you battle so proudly in our cause. I could ask for no better students."

Powers/ Tactics: The Elder's power pool is the fund of power entrusted to a dimension's Archmage (and, occasionally, to a powerful disciple). He is much weaker now than in the past, for he cannot afford to tax his physical reserves for long.

Appearance: An aged Oriental man, thin to the point of emaciation, but with a gleam in his black eyes. The Elder sometimes wears decorative robes, at other times a simple cloth around his waist.

VINCENT DIMITRIOS FORMER DISCIPLE OF THE REVERED ELDER				
Val	Char	Cost		
15	STR	5		
24	DEX	42		
30	CON	40		
10	BODY	0		
30	INT	20		
35	EGO	50		
20	PRE	10		
16	COM	3		
10	PD	7		
15	ED	9		
6	SPD	26		
10	REC	2		
60	END	0		
30	STUN	-3		
Cost		Powers/ Skills		END
100	Magic Power Pool			
50	Power Pool Control Cost (no more than 75 active pts in a power; no Aid, Regeneration, or Characteristics)			
80	Defense Powers			
	The Shields of Dimitrios		5	
30	Mental Defense (36 pts)			
8	Power Defense (8 total)			
24	The Ring of Rastia (IIF): 15 ED Force Field, Invisible, 0 END			
	Movement Powers			
60	Movement Multipower			
6 u	Flight, 25", x8 non-combat		5	
6 u	Teleport, 10", x2 mass, x128 distance		2	
6 u	Teleport Gate, 10", x 16 distance		2	
75	Astral Form			
	Skills and Talents			
25	Magic Skill, 26-			
40	+5 w/ Magic Powers			
15	+3 w/ Shields of Dimitrios			
37	Danger Sense, 12-, Earth's dimension, non-combat			
20	Aikido			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Damage
	Throw	0	+1	3d6 +v/5
	strike	+1	+3	3d6
	Escape	0	0	30 STR vs. Grabs
	Hold	-1	-1	grab25 STR to hold
	Dodge	0	+5	

Cost	Powers	END		
21	Dirty Infighting			
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV	Damage
	Punch	0	+2	7d6
	Roundhouse	-2	+1	9d6
	Low Blow	-1	+1	3d6 NND
	Disarm	-1	+1	35 STR to Disarm
	Kidney Blow	-2	0	1d6 K
8	+2DC for Dirty Infighting (already added)			
3	Scholar			
3	KS: Earth Dimension Magicians, 16-			
14	KS: Earth Occult Experts, Extra-Dimensional Magicians, Occult Knowledge, Demonology, Earth Religions, Magic Spells, Mystic Artifacts, all 15-			
4	PS: Sailor, 15- (DEX-based)			
5	PS: Future Archmage, 14-			
3	Linguist			
12	English (native), Spanish, Greek, Dzhongka (Bhutanese), Ancient Assyrian			
100 + Disadvantages				
5	Distinctive Features: Handsome Greek (easily concealable)			
10	Watched: The Revered Elder, 8-			
30	Hunted: Tyrannon the Conqueror, 11-			
20	Hunted: The Undying Ultor, 8-			
5	Hunted: Prohibition against taking a human life, on pain of losing his position as The Revered Elder's Apprentice and next Archmage (occasionally restrictive, mildly)			
20	Psych Lim: Trusts others (com, total)			
20	Psych Lim: Self-sacrificing to a fault (com, total)			
15	Secret ID			
20	Reputation: Apprentice to Revered Elder, future Archmage			
10	Rivalry: Jarth			
20	4d6 Unluck			
10	Vulnerability: 2x STUN vs. non-EGO-based EBs			
517	NPC Bonus			
OCV: 8+; DCV: 8+; ECV: 12+; Phases: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12				
COSTS:	Char.	Powers	Total	Disadv.
	211	+ 591	= 802	= 702
				+ 100

Background: Dimitrios's early background is given in the campaign premise section, above. What is not mentioned there is that Jarth, after he betrayed Dimitrios, turned the human mage over to Tyrannon the Conqueror. Tyrannon has turned Dimitrios into the template for a dimension-annihilating weapon called the "Thanatic Rod." Only an amazingly powerful magician can be used in this way. For more information, see "The Thanatic Rod" in the Spellbook section.

Personality: Basically an incredibly powerful, vigorous, profoundly intelligent and good magician. But Dimitrios was incurably gullible, or rather, naively trusting of humankind's innate good nature.



Now trapped within the Thanatic Rod, Dimitrios has no personality left to speak of. Tyrannon's enchantment has sapped his sense of identity. Should a powerful or lucky magician journey into the Rod's pocket dimension and awaken Dimitrios's self-awareness, he could throw off Tyrannon's enchantment — or, embittered, Dimitrios might decide to sacrifice himself by destroying Tyrannon's own dimension.

Identifying Quote: Dimitrios always referred to himself as a disciple, even long after he had achieved tremendous mastery of the mystic arts. "If I cannot aid those who need help, though they would see me dead, then I lack the breadth of spirit a disciple needs."

Powers/ Tactics: Dimitrios was astoundingly powerful; even the most experienced magicians of this and nearby dimensions remarked on his tremendous facility with magic. The secret of his strength appears to have been intense discipline and, perhaps, his faith that humanity was worth defending — that anybody, no matter how villainous, could be redeemed. Appearance: 6'2", 165 lbs, apparent age around 35. Tall, handsome, well-built. Greek-looking, with prominent nose and eyebrows, piercing eyes, curly black hair cut short, long chin, clean-shaven.

THE UNDYING TULKU AND MASTER JOMO

These two former masters have become unwitting onlookers from the sidelines. But clever players might be able to use them as information sources, should the Elder be unavailable.

THE UNDYING TULKU

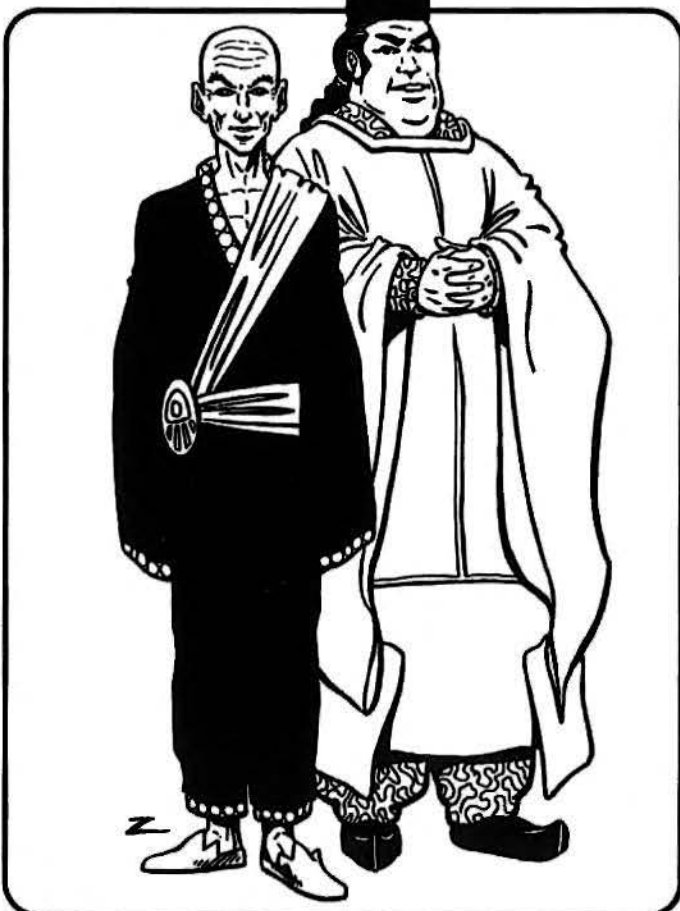
Tibetan. Nobody knows how long he has lived, but he's *really* old. However, he looks about 80 and fairly healthy, though thin and bald. He is being nursed in a hidden temple in the Himalayas, because he's completely senile.

The Tulku is the Revered Elder's predecessor as Archmage of this dimension. Though still immensely capable in the mystic arts, he is a babbling child-mind. He has no awareness whatever of good or evil, and gives no help in a crisis. But he occasionally creates odd magical effects for unknowable purpose, or for no purpose.

Use the statistics for the Revered Elder, but reduce the Tulku's INT to 5.

MASTER JOMO

Japanese, corpulent, bald; wears the orange robes of an Oriental monk. Though a couple of centuries old, Master Jomo looks about 45.



He lives in a modest home hidden behind a cherry tree on the slopes of Mount Fuji (Fujiyama) in Japan. Those who receive Jomo's permission (by addressing the tree politely) can circle the tree and emerge in his tiny domain.

Jomo, like the Tulku, is another former master. He aided the Elder tremendously in many past battles. But like all the really great mages on Earth (except the Elder and a couple of villains), long life has driven Master Jomo crazy. He has spent the last twenty years obsessively playing the Japanese game of Go.

You can hold a (superficially) reasonable conversation with Master Jomo, and he realizes the need to protect Earth from invasion. But he is totally convinced that his own bizarre studies of Go are the key to doing this. He will not help the Elder or anyone, and regards requests as pestering distractions from "his duty."

For Jomo's statistics, use the sheet for Vincent Dimitrios, but drop the Power Pool, the Ring of Rastia, Dirty Infighting, and the Greek and Spanish languages. Reduce INT to 20, EGO to 30, and add PS: Go, 19-.

THE VERMINAX

Remember all those magical headquarters that are bigger inside than outside? When you want to build one of these amazing HQs, who do you call? The Verminax! These inter- (and extra-) dimensional beasts are half insect and half salamander, and all nasty. But they construct mystic Fastnesses in nothing flat.

The price? An egg, stolen in aeons past from their hive Queen by Thanoro Azoic, first Archmage of this dimension. He (or it) ransomed the eggs back to the Verminax by forcing them into a pact to serve this dimension's mages. Give an egg back, and the Verminax will build what you ask, with the maximum of argument and backtalk. Thus do they replenish the population in their obnoxious dimension.

Every major sorcerer is entrusted with an egg or two, to be used specifically to build a magical sanctum. When it comes time for your PCs to build theirs, give them an egg and bring in the Verminax, to make the HQ construction entertaining, fast, and rife with future plot options.

DESCRIPTION

The Verminax vary widely in appearance and abilities, according to their "caste" (subspecies). In general they are monstrous, insectile yet alien. Think scales, pincers, chitin, tentacles, slime, and compound (or human!) eyes.

Negotiators: These control the construction process, argue with the PCs, and rule on what the builders will and will not construct. They speak all languages. They are argumentative, nasty, rude, and cunning.

Recorders: Atrophied sensory blobs with eidetic memory and enhanced senses, these keep track of deals. They can move, after a slug-like fashion, but have no manipulatory limbs.

Builders: Giant alien beetles, tremendously strong but slow, bulky, and mindless.

Crossers: Lamprey-like "living Foci" that maintain teleport gates. No other abilities.

These are the only castes the PCs are likely to encounter. In the home dimension are many other castes, including warriors, multi-tentacled flyers, and some that cast illusions. The Queen — now there's a horror!

SUMMONING AND APPEARANCE

PCs can call up the Verminax with the aid of a powerful magician or dimensional communication device. For example, the Revered Elder can lend the PCs a magical brazier. When they light it, the Verminax appear.

In this example, the brazier embodies a Summon power: 47 pts. (an 85-pt. creature), +15 pts. for eight of them — four crossers, three negotiators, and a recorder. The brazier is a Universal Unbreakable OAF (-1), Independent (-2), one charge (-2), and requires a spoken magic spell (one turn Extra Time, -1; Incantation throughout, -1/2). Real cost: 8 points. Verminax that construct the HQ are brought over by the negotiators at no cost.



(Friendly tip: Limit the PCs' access! Make the device of summoning a one-charge Focus, or a rarely-available gadget. Otherwise they'll just phone up these creatures every time they want to fix a problem in the HQ.)

The arrival is an eerie scene. Describe a glowing point of light at the limit of vision; wherever a PC is facing, he/she sees it floating right in front of him.

The point grows to a disk that enlarges quickly, as though rushing toward the heroes. A nauseating stench rises, like burning bones mixed with rotting meat and garbage. Then the disk resolves into a hoop-like circle, ringed with the gray of the void between dimensions.

The circle is composed of four crossers, long tubular creatures like lampreys, each biting into the body of the one before it. They throb repellently. Their energies sustain the interdimensional gate. Beyond that gate sit the negotiators, and beyond them nothing but murky red.

"They're heeere..."

WHAT THE VERMINAX WILL (AND WON'T) DO

The summoner(s) must make an EGO vs. EGO roll (like strength vs. strength) against the negotiators' EGO of 20. You can allow the heroes to "pool their EGOs" for complementary rolls.

If the Verminax win the EGO contest, the summoners lose control of the situation, probably unknowingly. The negotiators vanish, or (more likely) go on as if nothing happened. As soon as they get the egg, they vanish, boom!

Assuming the heroes win: The Verminax negotiators ask for the egg first. They do nothing until they get the egg. After they get it, they will, believe it or not, go through with their end of the deal. Not doing so creates a bad reputation, jeopardizing future egg supplies.

Negotiators, who speak all human languages, talk with the PCs to find what they want built. They argue constantly in harsh, high-pitched, whiny voices. Typical dialogue: "No! Cannot do thaaat! Too hard! Naaaaasty! Not in contraaact!"

After intense debate on what is permitted by the "contract," all specs are recorded using the recorder castes. Then the negotiators widen the gate and call in the builders. The Verminax will build on any site, but they insist that PCs be present at the site.

WHAT THEY CAN DO

The Verminax have been at this for millions of years. They know how to build in any style your PCs can imagine. They can endow a base with any power, if you approve. They can create any amount of internal space, independent of external size. They can set up teleportation gates from the HQ to other areas, or even to vehicles. See "Fixed Gates" in the optional rules section.

WHAT THEY WON'T DO

The Verminax won't do anything helpful that isn't building a structure or directly related to building a structure. Also, certain features are "not in contraaact" . . . specifically, whatever you don't want the PCs to have in their base.



If you wish, the Verminax won't build an HQ worth more points than the characters can afford. Typically, they cite no reason for this stricture; but if this really annoys your players, say that the Verminax contract specifies that a mage should receive no greater Fastness than his power entitles him to. The clause was engineered by Thanoro, who wanted to ensure that no upstart could overpower him.

Negotiators also give information only rarely, and never tell the PCs exactly what is in the "contraaact."

THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS (YUCCH!)

As indicated above, the Verminax really build what they promise to build, with no boobytraps. But they act in the most suspicious manner. And they're rude. Your players may well act paranoid.

Especially when you describe the construction. The Verminax use "magico-organic" procedures designed for maximum repulsiveness. Builders spew forth a whitish fluid, that dries into wallboard. Wormy tendrils writhe across the floor, turning into carpet. Be disgusting.

They build machinery and technological equipment using weird, doughy blocks. Builders stack these enormous blocks atop one another, then breathe forth a foul vapor. In the vapor, the blocks transform magically into shiny new ovens, furnaces, laboratories, and danger rooms. Everything carries the brand name "VERMINAX."

All of this takes place in hours — overnight, say. Next morning the neighbors may wonder what happened!

DEPARTURE AND/OR CONSEQUENCES

Having grossed out all the PCs and done what they promised, the Verminax retreat through the gate and, with a parting insult, vanish. They leave behind a wonderful headquarters ... that may have problems.

For example, the floor layout may change from day to day. Rooms shift. The attic may open into the Verminax dimension or some other horrible place. (All this is an HQ disadvantage, worth 10 points.)

If the PCs were rude, the Verminax have no compunction about reporting details of their HQ to any Hunted who expresses interest. And there may be a stray negotiator or recorder, left behind when its brothers departed, scurrying around the upper floors.

VERMINAX STATISTICS

Negotiators, recorders, and builders are 75- to 100-point creatures. Each caste has unique abilities, given below.

NEGOTIATORS									
STR: 5	DEX: 14	CON: 5	BODY: 5	INT: 13					
EGO: 20	PRE: 5	COM: 0	PD: 1	ED: 1					
SPD: 3	REC: 2	END: 10	STUN: 10	Cost: 5					
Cost	Powers / Skills			END					
13	10 pts Shrinking, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2)								
17	Mental Defense (20 pts)								
3	Armor (1 PD/1 ED)								
12	+6" Running (12" total)								
20	Universal Translator								
7	Stealth, 14-								
8	PS: Negotiation 17-								
25 +	Disadvantages								
20	Psych Lim: "Bound by contraaact" (common for the Verminax, total)								
15	Psych Lim: Rude, suspicious to a fault (very common, moderate)								
25	Distinctive Features: Disgusting alien thing (not conc, extreme)								
OCV: 5; DCV: 5; ECV: 7; Phases: 4, 8, 12									
COSTS: Char.		Powers	Total	Disadv.	Base				
5		+	80	=	85	=	60	+	25

RECORDERS

STR: 3 DEX: 4 CON: 3 BODY: 4 INT: 9
 EGO: 13 PRE: 5 COM: 0 PD: 1 ED: 1
 SPD: 2 REC: 2 END: 6 STUN: 8 **Cost: -50**

Cost	Powers / Skills	END
27	20 pts Shrinking, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2)	
10	Eidetic Memory	
21	+7 to PER Rolls	
18	+6 Telescopic Sight and Hearing	
3	Ultrasonic Hearing	
6	x100 Microscopic Vision	
5	Ultraviolet Vision	
5	Discriminatory Smell	
30	Detect Verminax Egg (sense, range, targeting), +1 to roll	
25 + Disadvantages		
25	No arms (all the time, fully)	
25	Distinctive Features: Even more disgusting alien thing (not conc, extreme)	
OCV: 1; DCV: 1; ECV: 4; Phases: 6, 12		
COSTS: Char.	Powers	Total Disadv. Base
-50	+ 125	= 75 = 50 + 25

BUILDERS

STR: 35* DEX: 8 CON: 28 BODY: 19* INT: 8
 EGO: 10 PRE: 20 COM: 0 PD: 8 ED: 6
 SPD: 2 REC: 10 END: 56 STUN: 43* **Cost: 55**

*Growth increases already added

Cost	Powers / Skills	END
20	15 pts Growth, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2)	0
17	0 END cost on strength (+1/2)	
2	PS: Building headquarters, 11-	
50	+ Disadvantages	
25	Psych Lim: Does anything a negotiator tells it (vc, total)	
25	Distinctive Features: Unbelievably disgusting and frightening alien thing (not conc, extreme)	
OCV: 3; DCV: 3; ECV: 3; Phases: 6, 12		
COSTS: Char.	Powers	Total Disadv. Base
61	+ 39	= 90 = 50 + 50

CROSSERS

Though these are creatures brought by the summoning spell, they are best handled as Foci: Extra-Dimensional Movement (any dimension, 50 pts), Gate (+1 1/2), 0 END (+1), Personal Fragile
 OAF (-1 1/4), Gate limitations (-1). Total real cost = 54 pts.





MOBIUS (HEADQUARTERS)

This is a typical Verminax-constructed headquarters/Fastness/Sanctum, presented as an example of the possibilities of a magical headquarters. This sample HQ is located in Chicago, in the upscale Lagrange Park neighborhood.

Mobius is so christened because the third (top) floor has a staircase leading up to the — uh — basement? Never mind that the hallways are longer than the house, and the upper story's layouts change around from day to day, and there were only supposed to be two stories to begin with ... this place is weird! It's like living inside a Moebius strip.

This luxuriously furnished headquarters offers many surprises. French doors on two different floors open on the same balcony; one room is 75 yards long and includes an indoor swimming pool. All the brand names on the appliances read "VERMINAX," at least until the heroes fix them.



HISTORY OF THE HOUSE

The building, originally known as the Claymore mansion, was constructed in 1878 on the site of an old fur-trapper's cabin. The cabin's owner, Abner Claymore, had lived there since the 1830s, when Chicago was nothing but a swampy trading post.

Abner did well as a fur-trapper, maintaining close and friendly relations with the Fox Indians. He even married a Fox squaw and became an honorary member of her tribe, the first (and virtually the last) white so honored. He chose to build his cabin on one of their ancient ceremonial grounds, to preserve it from the white man's exploitation after the Indians had been chased away from the area.

Abner died in 1870, during Chicago's "boomtown" days, aged and sickened by the white man's oppression of Indians. His rich half-brother Silas Claymore inherited his cabin, moved out to it from Boston, and within eight years made a fortune in real estate. Silas built a great Victorian mansion on the cabin's site.

Then Silas's troubles began. Many misfortunes befell his family — mysterious accidents, insanity, murders. Silas fell into alcoholism, lost most of his fortune, and was committed to an asylum for what remained of his life. He died babbling of "Injun spirits."

The subsequent generations of Claymores clung to the house through Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, but many ensuing tragedies drained the family of vitality. The last of the line died in World War I. The house went through a succession of owners until World War II. All complained of strange noises and weird happenings (curiously undocumented and inconsistent), and the house acquired a reputation of being haunted.

After the second World War it lay deserted, growing more and more rundown. It became a stop on the Chicago Supernatural Tour, "America's only coach bus guided tour to haunted and legendary places." And then came the heroes. They made their peace with the house's haunts (play this out in the campaign) and moved in. The magical nature of the grounds, combined with the magicians' own enchantments and a few little fillips from the Verminax, produce its many magical traits.

DESCRIPTION

Mobius is a distinguished red brick house, something under a century old. Many-paned windows with white frames and dark green shutters share its walls with heavy growths of poison oak and ivy. The only area entirely free of vines is a small grape lattice against the east wall.

The grounds are heavily shaded by towering elm and oak trees. Bushes run along the front and west sides of the house, and are scattered along the curving front sidewalk. An eight-foot stone wall (5 DEF, 7 BODY) completely surrounds the property; it has three stout wooden gates (4 DEF, 5 BODY).

PECULIARITIES

From the outside Mobius appears to be a spacious two-story house. Inside, it follows the traditional pattern: an unfinished basement, first story family areas, and second story bedrooms.

However, the second story stairway leads to a third story, although none is evident from outside. On the exterior, the third-story windows appear between the second-floor windows. There appears to be a sloping attic space under the roof, but in fact it does not exist, and there is no entry onto the roof. Fortunately, the roof repairs itself.



Many of the fixtures show eccentric taste. Washbasin handles look like clawed reptilian feet; doorstops resemble scorpion tails, or something similar that isn't quite. One crystal door handle contains a tiny crustacean. Another sometimes glitters with light. The posts of the living room bannister look like wood, but if you strike them, they sound like chimes.

The entire house is protected by a permanent Images spell. To onlookers outside the house, this enchantment makes supernatural activities appear as normal equivalents. So a levitating character might appear to be standing on a chair. A mystical combat looks like a fist fight. If someone swears "By Thanoro Azoic!" or "Baleful Bonds of Balthus!" the enchantment converts this to "Gosh!" or "Heavens to Betsy!" A handy spell for prying neighbors.

FIRST FLOOR

The first floor is conventional, and its layout remains constant. Visitors notice nothing magical about the house on this floor. The PCs seldom allow strangers onto the other floors.

All ceilings are 10 feet (1.5") high. Walls and ceilings are painted off-white. The living room, dining room, and library are carpeted in green. The kitchen, bathroom, and hall floors are tiled.

Living room: Comfortably furnished. Bannister railing along the stairway up to the ceiling. Baby grand piano (250 kg, 2 DEF, 6 BODY) in one corner. Sofa, love seat, three recliners, and several wooden chairs.

Large brick fireplace with a heavy oak mantel: This mantel is the Focus for the Images enchantment that conceals magical activity from outside observers.

Dining room: Large oak table (150 kg, 4 DEF, 5 BODY). Matching chairs and a heavy looking buffet.

Kitchen: Modern and complete. Large butcher block (100 kg, 4 DEF, 4 BODY) in center of kitchen. Knives kept in this room always stay sharp. It isn't clear whether this is good or bad.

Hall: Laundry chute with one-foot-square door in the east wall outside the bathroom. Chute leads to basement.

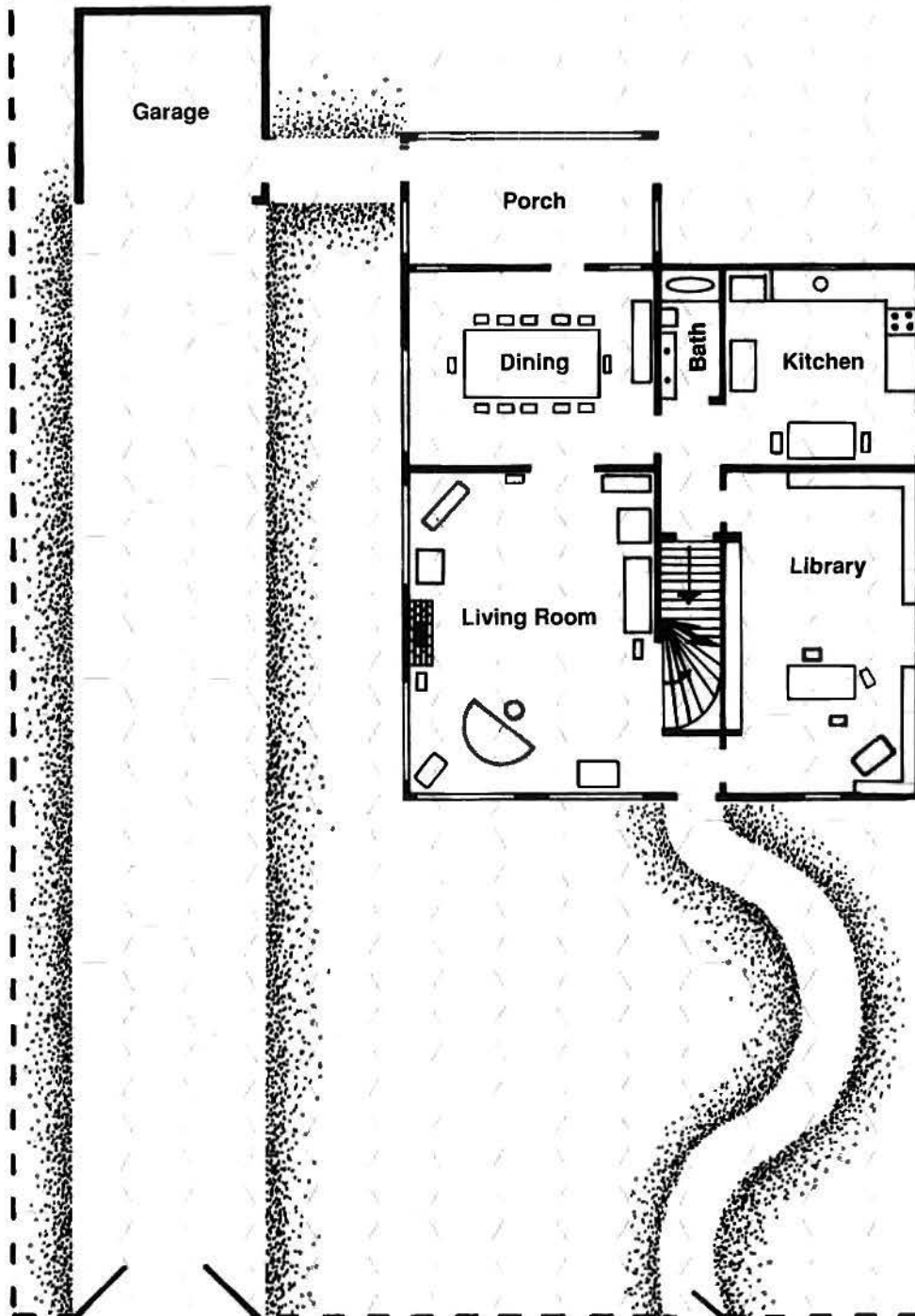
Library: Bookshelves with glass panels cover all walls from floor to ceiling. Table and several chairs in the center of the room, overstuffed recliner under a floor lamp in the outside corner.

Some of the books in this room are invisible to non-adepts. These books are the ones that mumble to themselves.

Bathroom: Full bath with double sink and shower. Self-cleaning, but not obviously so.

Porch: Fully enclosed with walls of louvered glass panes. Rolled mats drop to cover the windows. West door leads to garage and back yard.

East door: This is a fixed gate to some interesting place. To make life easy on the players, the gate can connect to the Archmage's Fastness in Bhutan. If you feel less helpful, it could come out in an Airflow RV in a Houston parking lot. If you're downright hostile, it leads to a cave in the Andes.

**MOBIUS (HEADQUARTERS)
FIRST FLOOR AND GROUNDS**

SECOND FLOOR

The second story looks ordinary, except that it's larger inside than outside. This is not casually apparent. The layout changes every couple of days or so. The map shows a typical layout.

All of the ceilings are 10 feet (1.5") high. The walls and ceilings are painted off-white. The hall has green carpeting.

Bedrooms: Rooms 1, 3, and 5 have gold carpeting. The other rooms have hardwood floors. All contain queen-size beds, dressers, small tables, and several wooden chairs. Four bedrooms have free-standing wardrobes. Inside, each is as big as a walk-in closet.

Bedroom 3 has a small stone fireplace. Anything flammable placed on the grate immediately catches fire.

Bedroom 4 is lit by gas wall lamps. The lamps have never yet run out of fluid. There are no electric lights or outlets.

In Bedroom 6 hangs an elaborate chandelier with candle holders. Four carriage lamps on the walls provide light.

Bathrooms: Full baths with showers. The one off the hall has an electric space heater in the corner.

Balcony: This is the roof of the first-floor porch. Iron railing around the edge. Note that a window and door also open onto this same balcony from the third floor!

THIRD FLOOR

The third story is not only huge, it's weird. No visitors are allowed here. The layout changes once or twice daily, but never when anyone is observing. (As they say, a watched house never boils.)

Hall: The hall is unreasonably large and the ceiling is 18 feet (3") high. Four comfortable chairs and a coffee table make it look less empty. Note that the stairs leading upward emerge in the basement.

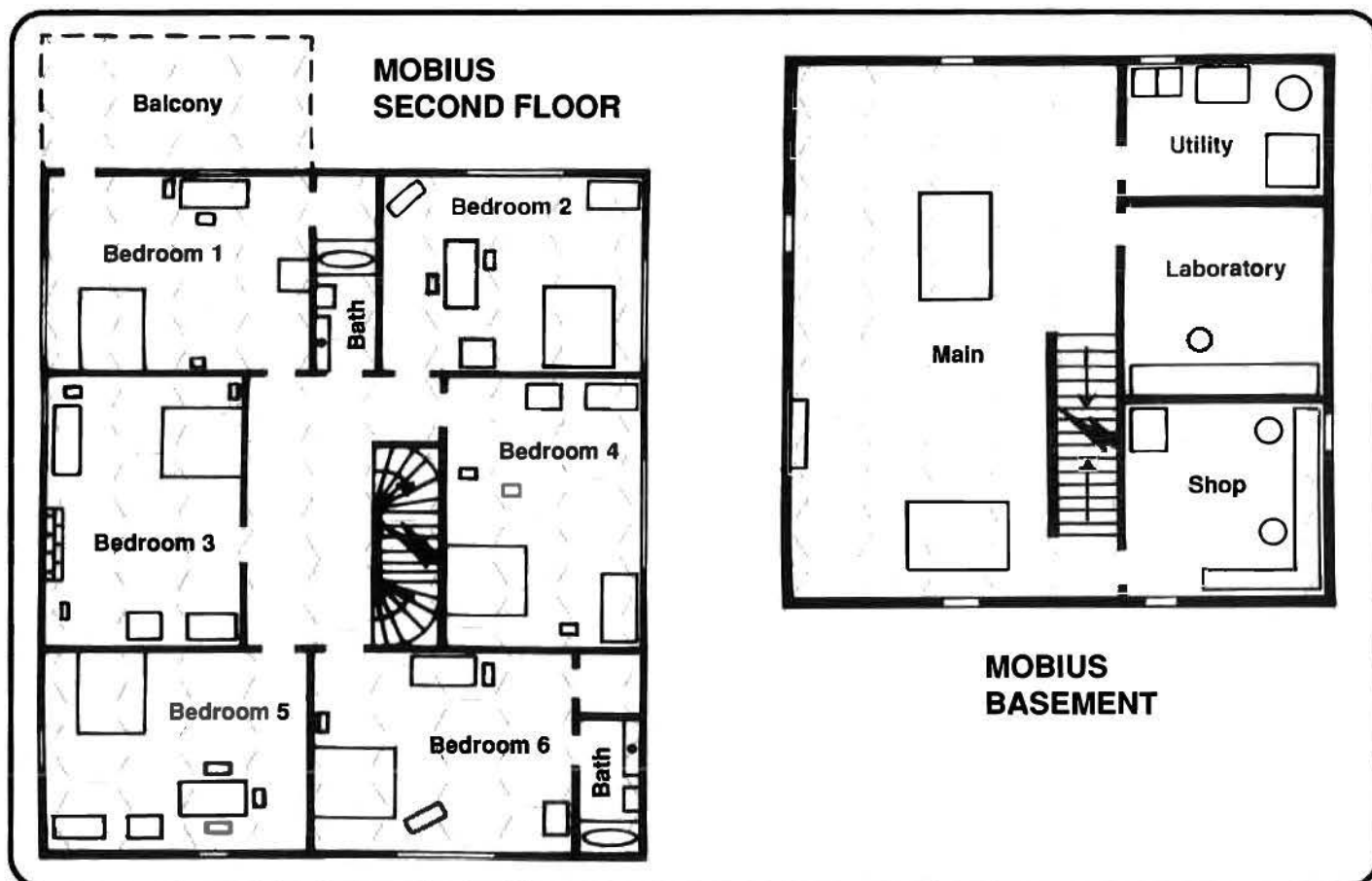
Woods: Apparently filled with living trees. Breezes rustle through the branches, a hidden sun shines down through the leaves during the day, and a tiny brook winds its way through the place. Occasionally it rains, but not according to the outside weather.

The walls are invisible from more than a meter away. Close examination shows that they are covered with a realistic forest pattern of wallpaper.

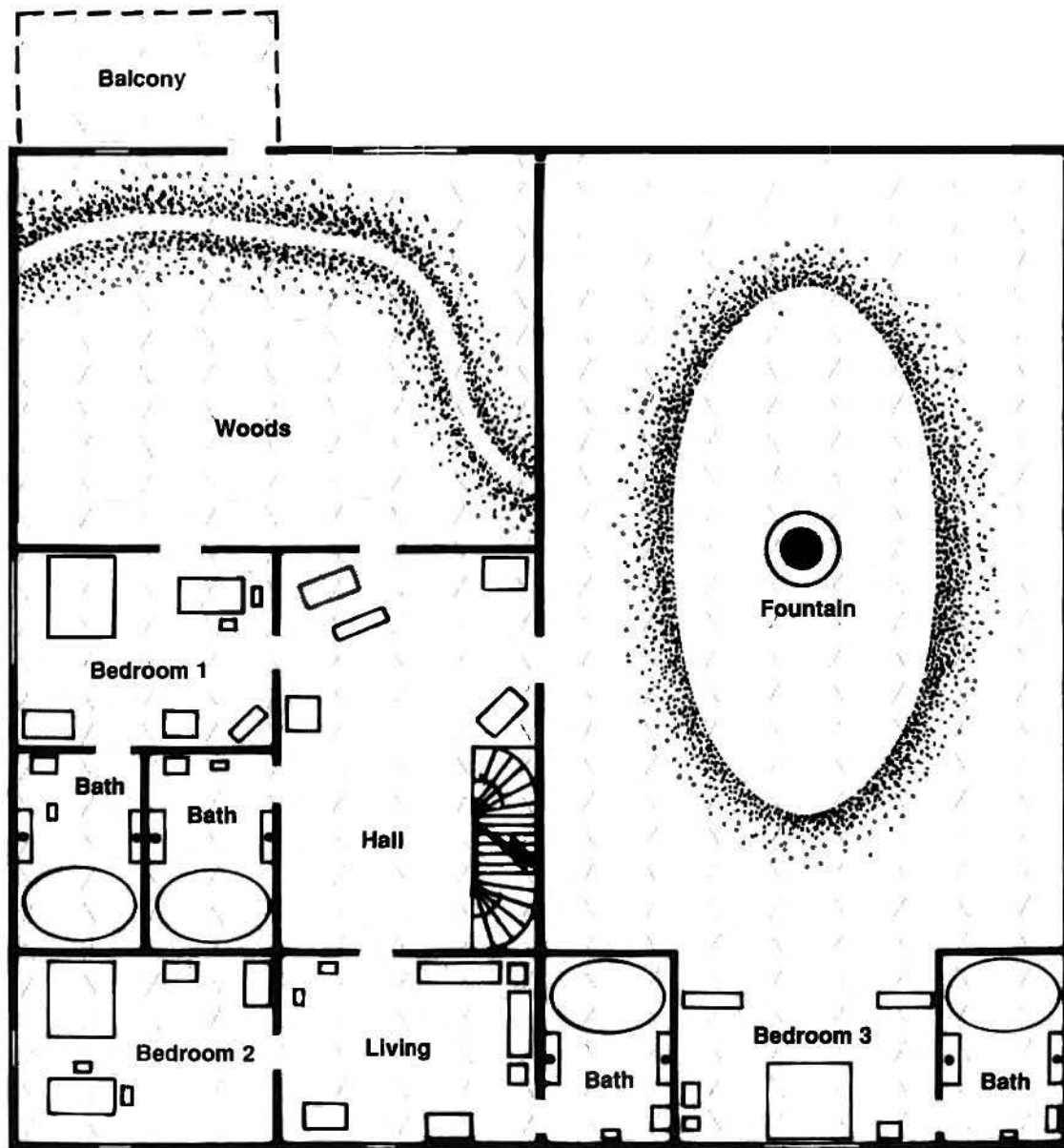
Bedrooms 1 and 2: Queen-size bed, dresser, small table, several wooden chairs, and wardrobes.

Living Room: Part of a suite, along with bedroom 2. Two-meter square window in the middle of the east wall; behind it swim exotic tropical fish under subdued blue lighting.

The "tank" does not have boundaries, but there is no sign of it from the bathroom on the other side of the wall. This is actually a viewing portal of Australia's Great Barrier Reef. It cannot be used for travel.



MOBIUS THIRD FLOOR



Fountain Room: This room is overdecorated in full Arabian Nights style. Lavish tapestries decorate the walls. Hanging curtains mark off alcoves and conceal the door. A huge swimming pool takes up most of the room. A two-tiered fountain in the middle sprays water. The ceiling is 25 feet (4") high — plenty of room for the fountain.

Lavishly reclining couches, chairs, cushions, and heavy Persian rugs. At the south end, several steps lead up to...

Bedroom 3: Decorated like the fountain room. Beaded, multi-layered curtains across the entry. Huge canopied waterbed in the center, draped with silks and cushions. Two sculpted marble horses (250 kg, 7 DEF, 8 BODY). Several ornately carved and gold-banded wooden chests (50 kg apiece) for storage space.

Bathrooms: All contain deep sunken baths. Tub faucets are strange brass fish fixtures. Fish has separate mouths for hot and cold water. Water temperature always exactly right.

BASEMENT

This really is an ordinary basement with a concrete floor and unfinished walls. Ceilings are somewhat less than 1.5" high because of support beams, pipes, and air ducts. Small basement windows set high in the walls. The layout never changes, so visitors can look around safely.

Main room: Occasionally functions as a game room. Old ping-pong table at one end, pool table at the other. Small fireplace of dull reddish-black bricks, covered by removable wire guard. Note that the stairway down emerges on the third floor.

Utility room: Furnace, blower, water heater, breaker boxes, etc. Washer, dryer, and folding table (yes, even masters of magic have to do laundry). A laundry chute emerges from an opening in the hall on the first floor. Other floors may have chutes too, not necessarily traceable or connected with the first.

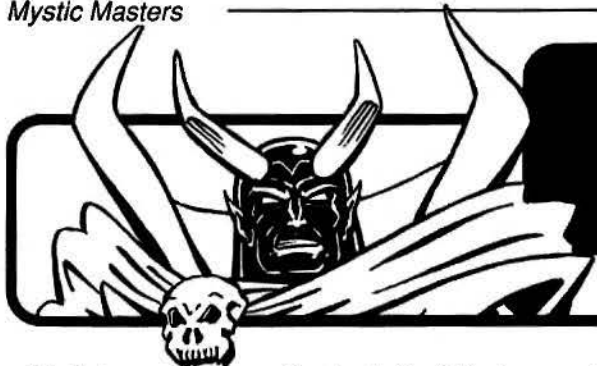
Shop: Woodworking tools, workbenches, and stools. One bench supports a large wooden organizer with over 100 drawers filled with screws, nuts, bolts, nails, washers, and other fasteners.

Laboratory: Equipped for certain magical experiments. Door has a heavy drop-bar lock on both sides. Floor very smooth; colored chalk available to mark on it. Tables along the south wall.

MOBIUS: THE MYSTIC MASTERS BASE

Cost	Base Characteristics
18	Building Size: 491 square hexes Grounds Size: 439 square hexes
9	Building Wall DEF 2 + 5 = 7
2	Building Wall BODY 2 + 4 = 6
5	Suburban location
5	Regeneration, 1 BODY/5 hours (-1)
11	Mental Defense, 11 points
24	Images (see writeup above), affects sight and hearing (15 pts.), -6 PER (18 pts), fully invisible (+1), x8 radius (+3/4), 0 END (+1/2), no range (-1/2), Immobile IIF (fireplace mantel, -1 1/4), adepts are immune (-1/4)
3	Disguise, 9-
3	KS: Magical Research Lab 11-
80	Total Cost
30 +	Disadvantages (Cost 30/5 = 6 points)
15	Dependent NPC (Chalmers Hornbeck, financial advisor and occasional cook), normal, 11-
10	Mystery Disadvantage (unknown haunting; treat as a Hunted, as pow, 8-)
5	Unluck, 1d6
10	Watched by evil magicians, more powerful, 11-
10	Variable layout





THE VILLAINS

Earth's magicians could retire to their Fastnesses to study, embark on a grand tour of the dimensions, or even go on the road with a travelling stage show... if it weren't for the villains. These are the rival magicians whose study of magic has corrupted them, or who started out corrupt and then learned magic — or who are, themselves, the embodiment of corrupting magic.

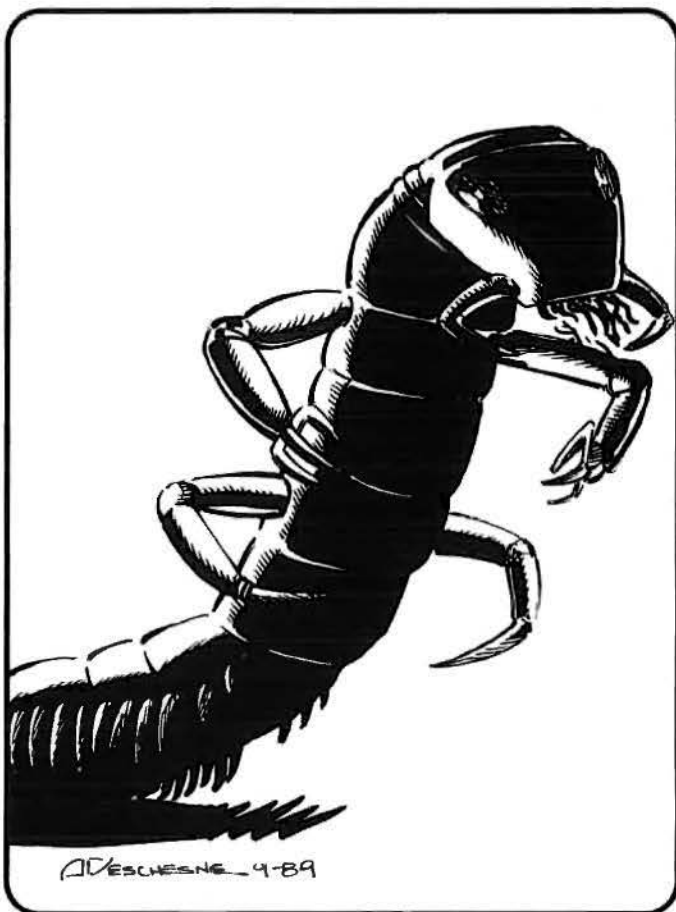
This section presents a few representative magical villains, drawn from each of these types. Almost all should be far more powerful than the PCs. But all carry within them the seeds of defeat, if the heroes are courageous and clever enough to exploit them. Few of these villains are suitable, as written, for a traditional superheroic campaign, but all can be easily adapted.

A narrow magical campaign may need no more villains than these; their interactions drive the campaign's scenarios. In a wide campaign, use these bad guys for starters, then incorporate your own new villains, or draw them from published HERO products (see the Campaigning section for suggestions).

JARTH (ALIEN DISCIPLE OF VINCENT DIMITRIOS)

Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages
35*	STR	5	20	Berserk: When stunned, 14-/11-
24	DEX	42	25	Distinctive Features: Hideously ugly and foul-smelling
40	CON	60		quivery-eyed monster
28*	BODY	30		Hunted: The PCs, 8-
20	INT	10	10	Hunted: The Revered Elder, 11-
25	EGO	30	15	Hunted: Prohibition against returning to Revered Elder or his Fastness on pain of being stripped of his powers
20	PRE	10	10	(occasionally restrictive, harsh)
0	COM	-5		
20	PD	16		
10	ED	1		
8	SPD	46		
15	REC	0		
80	END	0		
55*	STUN	-1		
* Growth and Density Increase added in				
100+	Disadvantages			
10	Watched: Tyrannon the Conqueror, 11-			
10	Phys Lim: No sense of smell or taste (inf, great)			
20	Psych Lim: Untrusting (v com, irr)			
20	Psych Lim: Overconfident (v com, irr)			
20	Psych Lim: Lusts for power (com, total)			
15	Psych Lim: Doesn't understand Earthlings (com, irr)			
10	Public ID			
20	Reputation: The guy who did in Vincent Dimitrios, 14-			
10	Rivalry: The PCs			
25	Susceptibility: Pure water, 2d6/phase			
10	2d6 Unluck			
10	Vulnerability: 2x vs. Flash			
15	Vulnerability: 1 1/2x STUN vs. Energy KAs			
468	Villain Bonus			

Cost	Powers/ Skills	END
20	Growth, 15 pts, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2) (x8 mass, +15 STR, -3" KB, +3 BODY, +3 STUN, -2 DCV, +2 PER, 4m height) *	
7	Density Increase, 5 pts, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2)	
	(x2 mass, +5 STR, -1" KB, +1PD,+1ED) *	
10	Poisonous Appendages: 1d6 HKA, vs. PD, no STR adds, dependent on Grab, not when Shape Shifted (-1/2)	
10	Discriminatory IR Vision	
45	Shape Shift, any form, 0 END (+1/2)	
10	Shrinking, one level, 0 END (+1/2), linked to Shape Shift (-1/2)	
	Attack Powers	
70	Magic Power Pool	
35	Power Pool Control Cost	
	(no Aid, Regeneration, or Characteristics)	
125	The Spectral Snares of the Sinister Sooi Kahn: 5d6 Entangle, +1/2 Variable Advantage (+1 1/2)	7
	Defense Powers	
80	The Shields of Dimitrios	4
30	Mental Defense (34 points)	
8	Power Defense (8 total)	
5	Lack of Weakness	
8	Damage Resistance: 10PD, 6ED	
11	Life Support: Safe environments (terrestrial atmosphere, high radiation); doesn't need to eat, excrete, or sleep	
	Movement Powers	
60	Movement Multipower	
12m	Flight, 25", x8 noncombat	5
12m	Teleport, 10", x2 mass, x128 distance	2
75	Astral Form	
	Skills and Talents	
19	Magic Skill, 21-	
20	+2 overall skill levels	
9	Disguise, 14-	
	Unique Jarth-People Martial Art (built around devious sneakiness)	
	Maneuver OCV DCV Damage	
5	Choke Hold	-2 0 Grab 2d6 NND
3	Martial Grab	-1 -1 Grab 45 STR to hold
3	Martial Throw	0 +1 7d6 +v/5
5	Defensive Strike	+1 +3 7d6
4	Martial Escape	0 0 50 STR vs. Grabs
20	Universal Translator	
3	Scholar	
15	KS: Earth Dimension Magicians, Extra-Dimensional Magicians, Mystic Artifacts, Magic Spells, Occult Knowledge, all 12-	
OCV: 8+; DCV: 8+; ECV: 8+; Phases: 2,3,5,6,8,9,11,12		
COSTS: Char. Powers Total Disadv. Base		
244 + 727 = 971 = 871 + 100		



Background: The former disciple of the Revered Elder's own disciple (Vincent Dimitrios), Jarth is an alien from another planet somewhere in the Milky Way Galaxy. Now that he has betrayed and disposed of Dimitrios, Jarth has become, so far as is known, the most powerful sorcerer in our dimension after the Elder. With Dimitrios gone, no one survives who knows anything about Jarth's homeworld.

Personality: Jarth is a sneaky, skulking, treacherous fiend who lusts for power in this dimension — on Earth for starters, but mainly on his homeworld and throughout the galaxy. He schemes endlessly to overthrow the Archmage, through trickery or by commanding flunkies from a safe distance.

He often tries to place opponents in unpleasant dilemmas. "Follow me if you will, heroes, but perhaps you'll want to take time first" (ZAP!) "to turn that innocent bystander back into his human form. Farewell."

Identifying Quote: "Now you will feel the power that comes with true mastery of magic!"

Powers/Tactics: Since he does not yet have enough skill to improvise powerful spells on the spur of the moment (i.e., shift all his power pool points at will), Jarth relies on established enchantments like the Eleven Lights of Luathon. (See the Spellbook section later in this chapter.)

The "Spectral Snares" suite of Entangles allows the caster to entrap the target in a ghostly web of ectoplasm. The whitish substance is believed to be a tangle in the fabric of spacetime, and is said to originate in a dimension of trapped spirits. The Snares emit a continuous wail, apparently from some unseen chorus of tormented screamers.

Tactically, Jarth shows unexpected cowardice for one so powerful. He avoids direct contact, preferring to work through henchmen. Jarth often conceals his identity through disguise and shapeshifting magic (Obscured with his power pool); he hides his identity even from his own followers, since he usually has no idea how humans would react.

Note that the "2x mass" on Jarth's teleport means an additional 100 kilograms, the weight of an ordinary human, not twice his own tremendous weight.

Appearance: Jarth is a huge black insectile thing with a segmented centipede-like shell of obsidian black chitin. His beetle-like head connects directly to his body, without a neck; beneath his snout dangle many sensory fibers that function as his ears. His eyes are huge elliptical bowls of black gelatinous material that shimmer in the air. Though these appear vulnerable, Jarth routinely protects them with a force shield.

Jarth moves on dozens of insectile legs. The alien usually rears upright, standing on the legs of his lower body. Many of the upper body's legs terminate in finger-like manipulators. He gestures with these to cast his spells.

THE VANDALEURS

Greatest sorcerers of the Western world, the Vandaleurs are a powerful, long-lived, generally ruthless, and extremely fertile family. Like the Rothschilds and Rockefellers in finance, the Kennedys in politics, and the Huxleys in the arts, the Vandaleurs have achieved greatness as a family in their chosen pursuit: magic. (One Vandaleur, in medieval Germany, is said to have inspired the Faust legend.)

Dozens of Vandaleurs are alive today, and many have significant magical ability. Almost all live in Europe or America, as they have since the clan was founded a millennium ago. Not all are evil, and not all powerful. Their incessant squabbling is probably all that has kept them from taking over the world. Or maybe they already have, and nobody noticed.

COMMON FEATURES OF VANDALEURS

Because of dominant genes, frequently reinforced by the founder (see below), the Vandaleurs bear a pronounced family resemblance. Other magicians throughout this dimension instantly recognize "the Vandaleur face": generally handsome, with a broad forehead, heavy eyebrows, pronounced Roman nose, thin lips, and a wide jaw.

Generally, the degree of resemblance to this archetype also indicates the degree of magical power: The more pronounced the Vandaleur face, the greater the power.

Another common feature among the family is factionalism. The Vandaleurs, for all their lack of interest in world politics, are intensely political in their family relationships. They band together in close pairs and trios, allied in common hatred of the rest of the family.

Finally, all Vandaleurs share a strained respect for the powerful family founder, Adrian Vandaleur, who is still alive and vigorous. Adrian, greatest sorcerer of the family, periodically grows infatuated with one or another of his great-great-great (etc.) granddaughters, and the resulting offspring often inherit great magical power.

Other than this, Adrian usually shows little interest in his numerous offspring, and that's the way they like it. With a couple of notable exceptions, the Vandaleurs do anything to avoid attracting their forefather's notice.

MAJOR VANDELEUR FACTIONS

The actual number of Vandaleurs should be left unspecified in the campaign. A figure around a hundred is a safe estimate, but only a few dozen are magically talented.

About half of the family actually bears the surname "Vandaleur" or its regional variants; the others belong to many collateral branches of the family. For convenience, this description refers to all of them as Vandaleurs.

Most of the Vandaleurs live in western Europe and North America. One small but powerful group dwells in the European Soviet Union. A few less-powerful family members are scattered throughout South America, coastal north Africa, and South Africa.

No Vandaleurs live in the Orient, and apparently none ever have. The reason for this remains unclear, but it definitely involves some ancient conflict with a band of villainous Oriental wizards called The Tong. As part of his test to become Archmage, the Revered Elder wiped out The Tong about two centuries ago. But though the Elder's health is failing, the Vandaleurs have not moved into the Orient's power vacuum... yet.

With this exception, Vandaleur distribution through history generally follows the power centers of society. Today the principal Vandaleur sorcerers generally known in the community of magicians include these:

America: In Chicago, the strong but somewhat dull twins Claude and Roderick Vandaleur maintain an argumentative rivalry for the affections of their distant cousin, New York City's Patricia Torrance. This beautiful socialite is less skilled than the oafish brothers, but can bring more raw power to bear in battle. She shows cunning in manipulating both Claude and Rod to serve her ambitions for material wealth.

Europe: In a mansion outside Nice live the half-siblings (and lovers) Edward and Anais Vandaleur. It is unfortunate that Edward and Anais are the two strongest members of the family (besides Adrian), for they are both insane. The only true "super-villain" Vandaleurs, they seek domination of the clan and the world. See their description below.

Scotland: Among many family members in the British Isles, the most powerful are a reclusive brother and sister, Theodore and Virginia, who have grown old together and who together remain steadfastly Victorian in attitudes.

Thus it surprised the whole clan when Virginia introduced to them young Angus Burke, a chubby and cowlicked Scottish teenager, as her illegitimate son by an unknown father. Theodore confirmed the announcement; he said he had helped raise the boy (his nephew) in secret, "to avoid scandal."

There are few prudes among the Vandaleurs; scandal is almost trivial when one's great-great-great-(etc.)-grandfather intermittently breeds with his offspring. But the clan knew how Virginia dreaded "scandal," so the story seemed plausible. At the mother's request, the rest of the family accepted Angus as a true Vandaleur, even if he did lack much of the family resemblance.

Theodore and Virginia, with Angus, have remained virtual hermits. They live in the Scottish highlands, without ambitions, without family strife — without telephones or plumbing, either. They could hardly be considered a major faction among the Vandaleurs, except for their close secret: "Angus Burke" is, in truth, the amazing Adrian Vandaleur himself.

ADRIAN VANDELEUR (PATRIARCH OF THE VANDELEUR CLAN)

Val	Char	Cost	
10	STR	0	
23	DEX	39	
50	CON	80	
20	BODY	20	
30	INT	20	
30	EGO	40	
15	PRE	5	
15	COM	5	
15	PD	13	
15	ED	5	
5	SPD	10	
15	REC	6	
100	END	0	
50	STUN	0	
Cost	Powers/ Skills		END
67	"The Vandaleur Terror": Magic Adjustment Multipower (80 pts), Personal Immunity (+1/4), only on other Vandaleurs (-1/2)		
7 u	4d6 Drain, returns 5 pts/hour (any single magic power)		
7 u	4d6 Drain at range, returns 5 pts/minute (any single magic power)		
7 u	2d6 Drain, returns 5 pts/decade (any single magic power)		
7 u	20d6 Suppress (any single magic power)		
7 u	26 1/2d6 Dispel (any single magic power)		
7 u	20d6 Aid (any single magic power)		
154	The Eleven Lights of Luathon, Personal Immunity (+1/4)		
80	The Shields of Dimitrios		
50	"Winds of Eternity": Teleportation Multipower		
5u	25" Teleport		
5u	Extra-Dimensional Mvt, any dimension, 4x mass		
5u	15" Teleport, 0 END		
5u	10" Teleport, x2 mass, x32 distance		
4u	10" Teleport, usable against others at range, only on Vandaleurs (-1/4)		
12	Personal Immunity for last Teleport slot (+1/4)		
20	Mental Defense (26 pts)		
30	Shapechange, 0 END (human only)		
21	Life Support: Immune to aging and disease; need not eat, sleep, or breathe		
9	Regeneration (2 BODY/day) (-1 1/4)		
	Skills and Talents:		
30	+3 overall levels		
20	Comic-Book Martial Arts		
	Maneuver	OCV	DCV
	Throw	0	+1
	Strike	+1	+3
	Roundhouse	-2	+1
	Block	+2	+2
	Dodge	0	+5
24	Acting, Bribery, Conversation, High Society, Persuasion, Seduction, Streetwise, Trading, all 12-		
12	Animal Handler, Disguise, Forgery, Gambling, all 11-		
6	Combat Driving, Combat Pilot, both 14-		
9	Jack of All Trades, Scholar, Well-Connected		
15	PS: 15 occupations, 11-		
15	KS: 15 Knowledge Skills, 11-		
15	15 Contacts, 11-		

Cost	Powers/Skills	END
12	Transport Familiarities: Riding Animals; Ground, Air, and Water Vehicles; Flying Carpets; Scuba, Skiing, Parachuting	
10	Wealthy	
26	Danger Sense, out of combat, 14-, self only, mystical	
3	Lightsleep	
3	Linguist	
37	Idiomatic languages w/dialects: Latin (native language), English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Swedish, Dutch, Finnish	
30	Fluent languages: Hungarian, Swahili, Arabic, Hindustani, Hebrew, Afrikaans, Danish, Zulu, Cherokee, Navajo	
3	Traveler	
20	AK: Western European Countries, Hungary, North America, South America, North and Central Africa, Arab regions	
9	Culture Knowledges: Arab, European, Indian, Zulu, North and Central African, South American, American Indian	
100 + Disadvantages		
5	DNPCs: Family (slightly less pow, 8-)	
5	Watched: Misc. family members, 8-	
8	Watched: Revered Elder, 8-	
20	Psych Lim: Enchanted with beautiful women (v com, strong)	
20	Psych Lim: Noncompetitive (v com, strong)	
15	Psych Lim: Distrusts other Vandaleurs (v com)	
20	Psych Lim: Thrill seeker (v com, strong)	
10	Psych Lim: Distrust of the Orient (uncom, strong)	
15	Reputation: 14-, head of Vandaleur clan	
10	Rivalry: Edward and Anais Vandaleur	
15	Secret ID: Angus Burke Vandaleur	
10	Susceptibility: 2d6 STUN vs. non-Vandaleur CHA or PRE drains (psychological effect)	
20	Vulnerability: 2x to non-Vandaleur Mind Scan	
667	NPC Bonus	
OCV: 8+; DCV: 8+; ECV: 10+; Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12		
COSTS: Char Powers Total Disadv. Base		
243 + 797 = 1040 = 940 + 100		

Background: In recent history a few people have lived far beyond normal lifespans, apparently ageless and immortal. Unlike the Revered Elder and other Archmages, they have not extended their lives through discipline and magic; they're just born that way.

These people, with one exception, have either gone insane or senile, or instead grow forgetful. The latter remember no more than their last 30 or 40 years, and earlier memories take on a dreamlike quality. They are plagued with feelings of *deja vu*, but have no clear recollections of their past.

Adrian Vandaleur, progenitor of the sorcerous Vandaleur family, was born in Constantinople in 990 AD. He is a "natural" immortal, the only one who has avoided amnesia, senility, and insanity.

Adrian has done everything. He has advised kings, watched popes, and seen empires rise and fall. If rumors are to be believed, he was present at the battles of Hastings, Gettysburg, and the Marne — while still having time to discuss philosophy with Descartes. Adrian has at least observed, and usually met, every significant historical figure of the last millenium. And his exploits with women have been, to say the least, legendary.

Personality: Adrian is a true neutral, with few values left after centuries of historical change. He has no interest in conquest or power. He only heads the Vandaleur clan because he is seen as impartial arbiter by his descendants, many of whom fear Edward and Anais.



Adrian's driving interests are, and have always been, thrills and women. He constantly pits himself against nature, or against his own perceived failings, but never against other people. He seeks excitement, not conflict, and is actually a quite solitary person. He used to go to warzones just to watch the fun, but the bloody (and unexciting) battles of World War I cured him of that. His current quest is to gain mastery over computers. He has not been so challenged in years.

Adrian maintains numerous identities throughout the world. These range from the trusted advisor to the ruler of Iraq, all the way to a curio merchant in Sydney Australia. The identities share nothing but a propensity to "disappear" for long periods of time (when Adrian assumes other identities). Adrian's current favorite is that of Angus Burke Vandaleur (see above).

The secret of Adrian's youth? Perhaps he's a mutant. Or perhaps he retains an unusually high interest in living for the moment — doing what he wants to, when he wants to do it — and making love to every beautiful woman he can.

Identifying Quote: Following his usual practice, Adrian has taken on the accent of his surroundings so completely that he uses it unconsciously. Currently this is a thick Scottish burr (comic-book style): "Och, is there a problem here? I dinna see why you must fight. Stop it at once, d'ye hear?"

Powers/ Tactics: Adrian's Personal Immunity renders him immune to all Vandaleur magic. No one in his family can hurt him with magic. But he can strip them of their magical powers, temporarily or permanently. The combination of these effects has made Adrian the undisputed leader of his clan (so far as he cares to be). Note, however, that non-Vandaleur magicians can hurt him normally.

Because the Vandaleurs all fear Adrian's wrath, and many other sorcerers fear the Vandaleurs, Adrian is generally assumed to be much more powerful than he actually is.

Appearance: As Angus Burke, Adrian is only slightly shapeshifted, mainly to remove his archetypical "Vandaleur face." He looks 18 years old, a little paunchy, with curly brown hair, and clearly unable to grow a beard or moustache. He retains his usual sly, flirtatious manner, and acts unpatriarchal, except when he wants to.

EDWARD AND ANAIS VANDALEUR

Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages					
18	STR	8	20	Berserk 14-/11- if self/lover hurt					
24	DEX	42	10	Enraged 11-/11- when taunted					
23	CON	26	10	Distinctive Features: Obnoxiously arrogant (conc, major)					
13	BODY	6		Hunted: The Revered Elder, 8-					
25	INT	15	10	Psych Lim: Arrogant and condescending (com, strong)					
26	EGO	32	15	Psych Lim: Protective of lover (v com, strong)					
28	PRE	18		Psych Lim: Desires to rule (Edward) / Manipulative (Anais) (v com, strong)					
18	COM	4	20	Psych Lim: Insane, easily goaded (com, strong)					
10+	PD	6							
10+	ED	5	20						
6+	SPD	26							
16	REC	14							
46	END	0	15						
34	STUN	0							
100+ Disadvantages									
15	Reputation: Powerful magicians, would-be heads of Vandaleur clan and rulers of the world, 14-								
10,10	Rivalry: Adrian Vandaleur, Rivalry: One Particular PC								
15	Secret ID								
5	1d6 Unluck								
10	Vulnerability: 1 1/2x STUN, punches								
20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN, bullets								
477	NPC Bonus								
Cost	Powers/ Skills			END					
123	Eleven Lights of Luathon								
80	Shields of Dimitrios								
130	Magic Multipower								
7 u	*5 1/2d6Ego Attack w/KB			7					
7 u	*1 1/2d6 RKA, based on EGO, vs. MD, 1/2 END (+1/4)			3					
7 u	23d6 Dispel Magic Power (any single)			7					
6 u	*9d6 Mental Illusions, 1/2 END (+1/4)			2					
6 u	Clairsentience, sight/hearing, 16,000" range (approx 18 1/2 miles)			6					
0/6 u	*(Anais) 16d6 Mind Control, 0 END (+1/2)			0					
0/6 u	(Edward) Drain, 2d6 Character Points of EGO, 1d6 Character Points of COM, returns 1 pt/hour (+1)			6					
6 u	*12d6 Mind Control			6					
14 m	Teleport 10", 2x mass, 64x distance, 1 floating loc			2					
75	Astral Form								
30	Mental Defense (35 pts)								
30	Shapechange, human only, 0 END (+1/2)								
60	Multiform (tentacled blob, 300 points; see below)								
7	+1 SPD, IIF (pendant, -1/4), 3 charges, 1 min/chg								
Skills and Talents									
16	+2 combat skill levels								
3	Combat Sense								
18	Acting, Bribery, Conversation, High Society, Persuasion, Seduction, all 15-								
7	Disguise, 17-								
5	Wealthy								
6	Fluent languages: French (native for Anais), English (native for Edward), Spanish								
3	Traveler								
6	AK: France, UK, Spain, 3 nearby dimensions, all 11-								
* Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks									
OCV: 8; DCV: 8; ECV: 9; Phases: 2,4,6,7,9,11,12									
COSTS:	Char	Powers	Total	Disadv	Base				
	202	+	658	=	860	=	760	+	100

Background / Personalities: Adrian Vandaleur fathered many, many children, none of whom proved as long-lived as he. But many of them had magical ability, and shaped much history behind the scenes. His two youngest children are the most powerful of living Vandaleurs, aside from Adrian himself: the psychotic Edward and Anais.

Edward Vandaleur is (along with his half-sister) one of the most impressive recent members of the clan. Born and raised in upper-class London, he has an aristocratic (condescending) manner and a brittle, pointed wit. He wants more than anything to push people around on a worldwide scale.

Anais is one of the youngest Vandaleurs, from the French branch. Sleek, beautiful, manipulative, arrogant beyond belief, she has cultivated a perverse romantic relationship with her half-brother Edward. They hope to combine their genes in even more powerful offspring.

Identifying Quote (Edward): (with ice) "So. Is *that* the best you can do?"

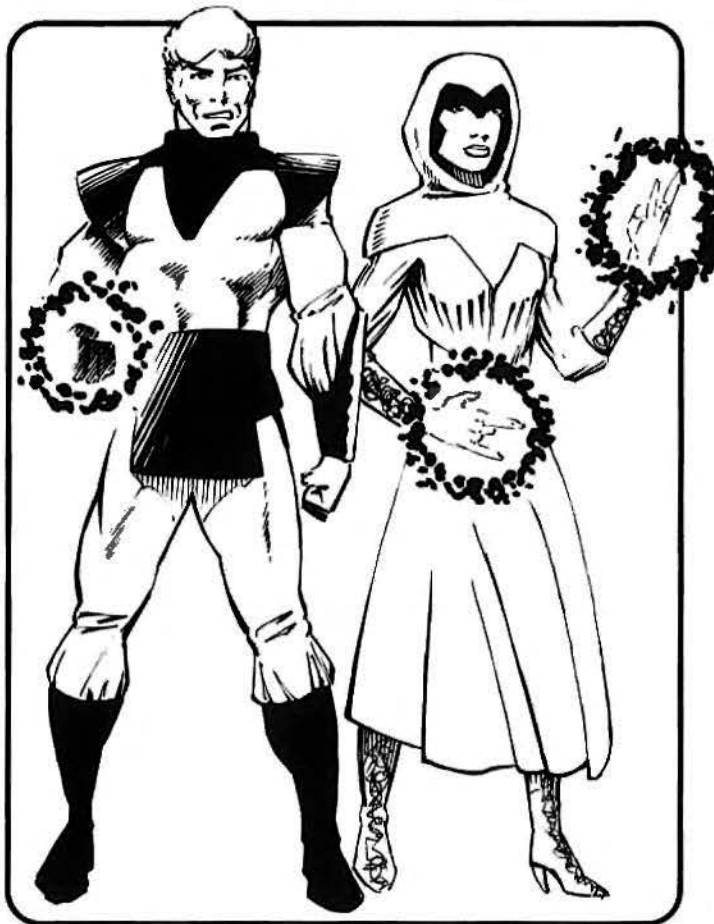
(Anais) "No no no no no! You don't want to do that, do you?"

Powers / Tactics: Pretty much totally amoral, these two try most anything to topple the Archmage and take over this dimension. They are vicious fighters, very much prone to disfiguring and crippling attacks against a hated rival.

Proof of their dedication appears in their Multiform power. The magicians actually meld their spirits with demons from an unspecified but horrible dimension, merging their intellects with these inhuman blobs. This is regarded as a tremendous breach of sorcerous ethics. (For the blobs' statistics, see below.)

Note that Edward and Anais can usually power two slots simultaneously in their Multipowers.

Appearance: These two cleave closely to the Vandaleur family look. Edward wears fine but formal clothes, and usually seems stiff and uncomfortable. Anais is much more trendy, and will usually sport the latest Paris fashions. Both are stunningly attractive.



EDWARD AND ANAIS VANDALEUR (MUTIFORM: TENTACLED BLOB)				
Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages
30	STR	20	20	Vulnerability: Edged Weapons, 1 1/2x STUN, 1 1/2x BODY
24	DEX	42	20	Vulnerability: Energy KAs, 2x STUN
20	CON	20		
8	BODY	-2		
25	INT	15	20	Berserk 14-/11- when self/lover hurt
26	EGO	32		
20	PRE	10	25	Berserk 14-/11- when moved by others
0	COM	-5		
15	PD	9	10	Hunted: Revered Elder, 8-Psych Lims: as human forms
27	ED	23	50	Secret ID
4	SPD	6	15	3d6 Unluck
10	REC	0	30	Distinctive Features: Disgusting multi-tentacled blob (not conc, extreme)
40	END	0	25	
33	STUN	0		
Cost		Powers/ Skills		END
70		Teleport, 25", 8x distance, 1 floating loc		5
30		2d6 HKA (acid tentacles, 4d6 w/ STR)		0
10		+5 Skill Levels w/ HKA		
15		Mental Defense (20 total)		
5		Extra Limbs		
OCV: 8+; DCV: 8; ECV: 9; Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12				
COSTS: Char		Powers	Total	Disadv
170		+ 130	= 300	= 200 + 100

Background/ Personality: These are demonic symbionts that Edward and Anais allow to possess them. The humans are only partially in control. The blobs hate to be controlled by others.

Identifying Quote: "I will feeeeee-dddd on huuuuman blood toooonight. Sssssssss. . ."

Powers/ Tactics: Each blob is quite weak compared to a standard magician, let alone a whole team. The Vandaleurs' standard tactic is to lure one opponent away from his friends, then to teleport behind him and strike by surprise with the blobs' acidic tentacles. They prefer to attack together. After the attack, they abort to teleport away, hoping to stage another surprise attack later.

Appearance: Hideous, pale grey, multi-sharp-tentacled, huge-mouthed blobs that look like they might be distantly related to the *Vermilmax*.

OTHER VANDALEURS

There are many other Vandaleurs, though only half actually bear that surname. The women change their names through marriage. Their offspring lack the Vandaleur name, but sometimes inherit their magical gifts. And, now and then, a Vandaleur changes his or her name to avoid being associated with the family.

A few of this last category include Max Miracle, a teleporting escape artist and stage magician; Arthur van Dale, a talented, kind-hearted concert pianist with no magical abilities; and Julie Rainbow, a born-again preacher. Julie is convinced that her magical healing powers are a gift from God, that the rest of the family is going to Hell, and that Tyrannon is the Devil.

Then there are the ones who don't change their name. Jack "the Cracker" Vandaleur is a master thief specializing in rare objets d'art, particularly Renaissance French and Italian pieces. At Anais's request (but not Edward's; he hates Edward), Jack may broaden his range to steal valuable magical Foci from the PCs.

THE TOAD

The Toad is not a faction, just a single man. He lives a hermit's life in the midst of the campaign city. He never ventures outside, and he never sees anyone except his cherubic Chinese manservant, Li Han.

His solitary, sedentary habits earned him this nickname among Vandaleur children over a century ago in England, and it stuck. His original name, Tobias Vandaleur, has generally been forgotten. Despite his peculiar habits, he is universally respected among sorcerous scholars as an expert on demonology and demonic cults, where he has no peer. Not even the Revered Elder knows as much about demons as the Toad.

Li Han politely informs visitors that "the master" does not see anyone. However, he can relay messages to the Toad. If the heroes' request is properly obsequious (Tobias is tremendously vain about his knowledge), the Toad consents to see them.

The Toad meets visitors in a dark, misty room filled with medieval gargoyles and primitive statuary. Stiff, high-backed, chairs arranged in a semi-circle face a black curtain. The curtain is a magical field of total Darkness (bought with Personal Immunity so the Toad can see out).

The Toad takes this precaution because, long ago, he offended Adrian Vandaleur. For the offense, Adrian turned him into a human toad. The Toad desperately conceals his condition, and is willing to do almost anything to keep his secret. If the heroes find out, he becomes enraged, curses them and commands them to leave.

Later he reconsiders and tries to strike some kind of deal with the heroes to keep his secret. If he cannot deal with the heroes, or if they have a reputation for untrustworthiness, he tries to have them silenced, probably through his distant cousin, the Alcedama (see below).

Sympathetic magicians find the Toad's transformation extraordinarily hard to dispel. Treat the spell that transformed him as a 180-point spell, 4x Difficult to Dispel. There is, however, a way to turn the Toad back to normal: the heroes must find Adrian and defeat him. No sweat, right?

THE ALCEDEMA

The Alcedema (Judas Ahronovitch, from a collateral branch of the Russian Vandaleurs) is a magic-wielding assassin who specializes in "impossible" killings. Naturally, he works mainly for criminal groups, though he sometimes does political work in Eastern Europe and South Africa.

His biggest challenges, and his favorite jobs, are magicians. Family members occasionally hire him to settle disputes. This has made him outcast among the Vandaleurs.

The Alcedama knows the Eleventh (and only the Eleventh) Light of Luathon, the Flames of Tyrannon, the Baleful Bonds of Balthus, and has a Teleport Multipower (like Adrian), as well as conventional ninjitsu, Stealth, Security Systems, and Tactics skills. He may use conventional weapons against magical opponents, since they are prepared for magical attacks.

This character makes a nasty surprise for the PCs. They think they're being shadowed by a normal hired gun, and then find he can use magic as well!

CHERNOBOG DEMON

Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages
40	STR	30	15	Accidental change from shape-shifted form into true demon form, 14-, when any part of true name is called out (uncom)
27	DEX	51		
28	CON	36		
15	BODY	10		
10	INT	0	25	Berserk when soul is threatened (uncom), 14-/8-
30	EGO	40		
25+	PRE	15	0	Dependence: Intense fear, 3d6/month
0	COM	-5		
15+	PD	7	15	Conditional Distinctive Features: Detectable, 14-
10+	ED	4		
8	SPD	46	20	Distinctive Features (conc, extreme)
14	REC	0		
56	END	0	20	Hunted: Revered Elder, 8-
49	STUN	0		

100+ Disadvantages

5	Phys Lim: Must give part of its name, if asked, when bargaining (uncom)
5	Phys Lim: Must store its soul in accessible place
20	Psych Lim: Hates all magicians (v com, strong)
15	Psych Lim: Loves to toy with victims (v com)
15	Psych Lim: Obeys orders of those who speak its name (uncom, total)
5	Reputation: Gen. lore of demons and their souls, 8-
15	Secret ID (location of soul)
25	Susceptibility: 3d6/phase when soul handled (uncom)
10	2d6 Unluck
20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN, BODY vs Affects Desolid attacks
20	Vulnerability: 2x effect from Mind Scan (com)
328	Demon Bonus

Cost	Powers/ Skills	END
50	Power Pool	
20	Pool Control Cost, no skill roll (+1), usable only to take advantage of victim's fears (-1), dependent on successful Telepathy (-1/2), changing powers takes a full phase	
30	Elemental Control — Demon Powers	
a-30	2d6 Armor-Piercing HKA, 0 END (claws)	0
b-27	Regeneration, 18 BODY/turn, only at -15 BODY or below (-1), 1 day extra time (-3 1/2)	0

Cost	Powers/Skills	END
c-30	+45 BODY, only to stave off death (1/2), no figured Characteristics (-1/2)	
d-30	Extra-Dimensional Movement (all hell-like dimensions), Gate (+1/2), 0 END (+1/2)	
e-33	Armor, 22PD, 20ED	
f-30	Shape Shift, any shape, 0 END Persistent (+1)	
g-30	*12d6 Telepathy, 0 END (+1/2), usable only to find victim's darkest fears (requires +30 effect, -1)	
25	+50 PRE, only to frighten (-1), linked to Shape Shift (-1/2)	
30	Missile Deflection, all, +5 to roll (see notes)	
20	Mental Defense (26 pts)	
5	Extra Limb (prehensile tail)	
10	+10" Running (16" total)	
20	Universal Translator	

**Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks*

OCV: 8+; DCV: 8+; ECV: 10; Phases: 2,4,6,7,9,11,12

COSTS: Char. 238 + Powers 420 = Total 658 = Disadv. 558 + Base 100



Background: This ancient demon's forte is pulling violent archetypes from the folklore or collective memory of a culture, then shapeshifting to become those figures and kill the populace.

The demon was last active a century ago in the Whitechapel district of London; the Elder and his disciple, Vincent Dimitrios, together barely managed to defeat it. They trapped it in a book or artifact in the Elder's Fastness. Now the Elder is decrepit, Dimitrios is gone, and — through whatever campaign mechanism you choose — Chernobog is free to roam again.

How should you free Chernobog? Perhaps while the Elder is away or imperilled, the unwitting heroes stumble on Chernobog in its prison. It agrees to perform a service for them (perhaps transport them to another dimension?) in return for his life. The PC magicians, having no reason to suspect great danger, agree. Chernobog goes through with its bargain, but then is free.

The soul: The demon's fatal weakness is its soul. By the laws of magic, a demon must hide its life force in some fragile, easily accessible place. If an enemy can locate that place and destroy the soul, the demon perishes utterly. Until then, the demon can be "killed"; at -15 BODY, it seems to die. But it will eventually regenerate, as powerful as ever.

In past times demons have stored their souls in the foam of the sea, the sunlight over a lemon orchard, or (in the Orient) in fragile cricket cages. Chernobog exerts utmost craft and guile in hiding the soul, and the location is never obvious.

The name: One way to locate the soul: Command Chernobog, using its true name, to reveal it. No one knows the demon's whole name. But as part of "contracts" to achieve its goals, the demon must confide parts of its name to others.

A century ago, the Elder and Dimitrios found all the pieces of the demon's previous name, and thereby coerced it into revealing its soul's hiding place: in the moss growing on the piers of Tower Bridge.

However, with neither of these men available, the PCs will have to piece the name together themselves. Various parts of the name are known by certain individuals, like members of the Vandaleur clan. Other parts of the name are buried in books that have been lost in libraries for centuries, or in the memory of senile wizards.

The location of Chernobog's soul is up to the GM; it could be a subtle fragrance from a virgin forest, or a the tinkling of a wind chime.

Identifying Quote: "What, you do not like my look, pretty human? Please open your eyes wider, so you can see me. Here... let me help."

Powers/Tactics: Chernobog has the abilities of a powerful demon. Parts of its body are actually desolid, allowing missiles to fly through without causing damage (this is the Missile Deflection). Chernobog can also use his pool to turn itself *into* his opponent's greatest fear.

Appearance: Chernobog, like many demons, is essentially humanoid. It has thin, pipe-cleaner-like limbs covered with short grey fur. The fur shows patches of black, for parts of its body are desolid. Chernobog's head is a flattened oval with sinister irisless eyes, and a big slit of a mouth with sharp teeth and serpent tongue.

Note: Before running Chernobog against your heroes, take time to decidewhat each hero's deepest fear might be. If possible, discuss it with your players in oblique terms. That ought to make them nervous.

Chernobog can also double as a generic demon, since these often crop up in adventures of superheroic magic.





TYRANNON THE CONQUEROR

Tyrannon (pronounced Tur-RAN-un) is known as the Conqueror, Sunmaker, Tyrant of a Thousand Forms, and by many other names throughout the dimensions. As old as time itself in one sense, in another he has been around hardly ten thousand years.

Tyrannon's home dimension, Thulkos, was created at the same time as all others, billions of years ago. It resembled Earth's dimension, except that heavy elements concentrated not in spheres but in threads. Ribbons of stone and metal, a thousand miles wide and a hundred thousand long, spiralled into infinity. On the "upper" side of each band, natural law created Earthlike environments.

But though laws of nature in Thulkos worked much like our own, its laws of magic differed. The dimension's magical energy naturally concentrated and grew organized. Over the eons, this energy evolved into a thousand or so disembodied magical beings, some more powerful than others. These "gods" infused themselves into living beings or elemental constructs, taking on their aspects and powers.

The natives of one of Thulkos's worlds evolved and achieved rudimentary intelligence. The gods instinctively bestowed magical powers on those natives who sensed their magic. However, the gods were not self-aware in the human sense and played no part in the evolution of life.

The natives, mostly unaware of magic, eventually developed high technology. The race spread across space and settled other bands. But concurrently, a few isolated researchers made breakthroughs in magic, developing a "technology of magic." They learned how to make contact with and study the gods. And some few went even further.

THE ORIGIN

About ten thousand years ago, a thousand powerful magicians finally tried to control the gods. In the bloody ceremony they succeeded beyond reckoning; each native mage actually merged his awareness with one of the gods, taking on that god's aspect.

Tyrannon, the leader of the magi and most skilled of them all, proved the most ruthless as well. He mastered the powerful flame aspect he had merged with, then quickly subjugated hundreds of others while they still grappled with their new powers. Tyrannon subsumed their minds, aspects, and forms into his own. So Tyrannon the Conqueror was born, or born again.

A few wizards mastered their powers before Tyrannon could conquer them. These "free gods" resisted merging with him, though none could defeat him. Likewise, Tyrannon could not kill them. So he exiled some to other dimensions, and confined others in mystic prisons in Thulkos.

For eight of the free gods, called the Kae Linn, Tyrannon prepared a vicious fate. These eight held the aspect of sunlight, and (unique among the gods) commanded powers of healing. Tyrannon confined the Kae Linn in eight new suns, which he placed around his home world-band. In this way he illuminated his home with their light, and he kept their healing powers convenient.

Once he disposed of his rival gods, Tyrannon embarked on the speedy conquest of Thulkos. With his power to change the very laws of nature, he rendered technology useless. With his 888 duplicates, all mentally linked, he could supervise vast territories himself. He compelled the natives of Thulkos to worship him as a god, for their psychic energy increased his strength.



DIMENSIONAL CONQUEROR

Even this did not satisfy Tyrannon. Overwhelmed with so much power, his original personality almost perished. He became an elemental embodiment of ambition and tyranny.

Once Tyrannon learned how to warp space at will, disaster followed for the nearby dimensions. By gathering his legion of duplicates into one form of incredible power, he could break down the natural barriers between realities. As he engulfed his neighboring realms, Thulkos's huge ribbons of land grew outward into the conquered space. Over the course of years, the laws of Thulkos overwhelmed the others, making them copies of Tyrannon's original.

Having merged all nearby dimensions into Thulkos, Tyrannon looked further afield. He sought universes with high magical energy and lots of space (i.e., territory for expansion). And he looked for high population, since worshippers had become the primary source of his power.

Soon he found his ideal target: Earth's dimension. But over the millennia, the Archmagi of this universe foiled his takeover attempts. Most recently, the Revered Elder and Vincent Dimitrios, through unknown means, extorted a promise from Tyrannon. The Conqueror vowed never to invade this dimension while the Elder or Dimitrios lived.

So matters have stood for over a century. But with the Elder decrepit and Dimitrios gone, the time limit of that promise rapidly approaches...

TYRANNON'S MANY FORMS

A GM may well hesitate to pit his players against a villain built on almost 50,000 active points, but 47,000 just pay Duplication costs. The Conqueror is an organization unto himself. His awareness is shared among 888 forms.

Each form is unique, but they fall into three power levels.

THRONES

The eight Thrones rule Thulkos through pure might. Built on about 1100 points apiece, each should overwhelm a team of magicians or superheroes with minimal effort. Like an army garrison, each Throne guards a strategic area in Thulkos, such as vital dimensional gates, high-mana areas, likely sites of native unrest, and so forth.

Each Throne looks completely different. There are three elemental beings of minerals, flame, and fluid; reptilian, avian, octopoid, and humanoid monsters; and the form that, as much as anything, is the "real" Tyrannon: a huge, nasty Yggdrasil-like "tree," the home base for the rest.

The Thrones look generic; for instance, the reptile is a conglomeration of various lizard traits. In fact, the Thrones (except the tree) gradually change appearance, over the course of days or months — more often in times of stress, such as battles with heroes. The Thrones' shifting forms always remain within their broad categories, but they never look the same twice.

However, each Throne except the tree can Shape Shift to look like anything. Through concentration, a Throne can retain a single form indefinitely, should it suit the purpose.

The forms differ slightly in power level, with the tree uppermost, then the humanoid, the elementals, and at bottom the animal forms. All the Thrones's powers vary in special effects; see the notes following their statistics, below.

AVATARS

Each of the eight Thrones controls ten Avatars, making 80 total. Each Avatar is a specific variety of the Throne's general category. For instance, the reptilian Throne controls Avatars of various dragons, lizards, a lizard-man, a snake, etc.

Unlike the Thrones, Tyrannon's Avatars have fixed forms — unless they Shape Shift, of course. Some Thrones, like the flame being, don't have distinctly different Avatars. (Note: The immobile Tree Throne's Avatars, which look like monstrous plant creatures, can move.)

Each Avatar is built on 800 points. Whereas Tyrannon's Thrones have the power of whole armies, the Avatars work as shock troops, one-being assault teams that "pacify" unsettled areas. An Avatar can face off against a whole super-team, but the team can probably beat it.

EMISSARIES

Emissaries, Tyrannon's weakest forms, function as administrators, scouts, envoys, and police forces. They are essentially travelling Foci for Tyrannon's awareness. Emissaries patrol Thulkos and subordinate dimensions, looking for trouble. When they find it, an Avatar or Throne shows up to dispose of it. Each of the 80 Avatars has ten Emissaries, making 800 total.

Each Emissary looks like its controlling Avatar, except that the Emissaries are human-sized. Also, each Emissary form appears in one of ten colors: the seven of the spectrum (red, orange, etc.) plus black, white, and grey. In general the grey ones are most powerful, but the point totals need not vary except at GM discretion.

Each Emissary is built on about 200 points. An Emissary might give one hero some trouble, but a team wipes him out easily. However, killing an Emissary is like killing a cop; not hard, but always a bad idea.

This arrangement offers a tantalizing scenario. The PCs, having heard of Tyrannon's awesome power throughout the campaign, finally journey to his dimension, expecting the battle of their lives. They run into an Emissary; they wipe it out easily. "This was the big-shot Tyrannon?" they say, as the Avatars and Thrones teleport in...

TYRANNON'S ABILITIES

Tyrannon can do almost anything; all the Thrones have Cosmic Power Pools. These derive from the psychic energy he extorts from his worshippers. The points in his power pool are usually tied up somehow, often in some scheme to conquer Earth's dimension. If PC heroes can force Tyrannon to use the points in his power pool, they can defeat his scheme, though he may fry them with his freed-up magic.

However, the pool's points are not always spoken for. If the heroes simply invade Thulkos without scouting around first, or waiting for Tyrannon to embark on a major project, then he'll simply defeat them without trouble.

Tyrannon has another power not listed in the statistics: Plot Device, a free ability to do impossible things needed for the story (such as creating the Thanatic Rod or merging dimensions). The GM can say the Revered Elder trapped and imprisoned one or two of Tyrannon's lesser forms on Earth in the distant past. Tyrannon, weakened because of those forms' absence, tries all kinds of schemes to get them back. Until then he must administer conquered dimensions by travelling to them, rather than merging them into Thulkos.

All of Tyrannon's forms are mentally linked through a "chain of command." Throne to Avatar to Emissary, even across dimensional boundaries. So if, for example, anyone harms an Emissary, the controlling Avatar is instantly aware of it. Conversely, if the PCs manage to bump off an Avatar, that form's Emissaries are thrown into "radio silence" and can't coordinate.

TYRANNON'S WEAKNESSES

PRIDE

Tyrannon can do almost anything, true. But Tyrannon usually refuses to use his power pool, unless it makes the difference between defeat and victory.

Why not? Because above all, Tyrannon is proud. He prefers to subdue worthy opponents through strength alone. Failing that, he uses the "inborn" spells that derive from his magical origin, not from his worshippers. By relying on these, Tyrannon convinces himself that he would still be invincible even without his followers — that their worship is only his due as a ruler.

Similarly, Tyrannon knows of other beings' spells, such as the Lights of Luathon. But he never uses them, since he feels superior to them. Tyrannon also has no skills. "Skill? Skill is for lesser beings. The terrible Tyrannon rules by power alone!"

CODE OF HONOR

This indicates Tyrannon's principal weakness: his psychology. Clever heroes can manipulate him into swearing an oath to abandon a given scheme, should he fail in (for instance) non-magical single combat with the strongest PC. Once Tyrannon swears an oath, he always keeps it...at least the letter of it, if not the spirit.

Because of this code of honor, Tyrannon never swears a blanket oath like "I'll never invade Earth again." The best deal the heroes can get is the same one the Elder got: Tyrannon won't invade in their lifetimes. He's immortal, if not patient, and can easily outlive the PCs. Tyrannon is not a being so much as a force of nature, the sum total of the energies of his worshippers. As such he can never actually be destroyed.

PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

But because of his close relationship with the magical energy of Thulkos, his Thrones and Avatars have a Physical Limitation: "Magic works at half strength outside home dimension." Also, all of Tyrannon's forms have a Dependence on remaining in a conquered dimension. If a form ventures far from the home of Tyrannon's worshippers, his power wanes rapidly. The less powerful the form, the more acute its Dependence.

The need to remain in Thulkos is a limiting plot device. It lets Tyrannon make limited excursions to other dimensions, but he must conquer them quickly or leave. Once he conquers a new dimension and enlists some worshippers, the place is his, and he can stay there as long as he wants.

Finally, Tyrannon's power is so great that in concentration it literally warps the fabric of Thulkos's space. Too much power strains space so much that it begins to crackle and glow. Unchecked, this would form a "pocket dimension," engulfing and trapping all within it.

Therefore, Tyrannon can't allow too many powerful forms in one local area (i.e., in one scene of an adventure). No more than about 1600 real points are allowed in any one place; that's two Avatars, a Throne and a couple of Emissaries, or eight Emissaries. Any more, and the excess duplicates automatically merge into the more powerful form.



THE LIGHT OF THE KAE LINN

One of Tyrannon's crucial weaknesses lies in his origin. When he subsumed the other demigods of his dimension, ten thousand years ago, a few resisted. Eight of these, the Kae Linn — incarnations of sunlight — he imprisoned within sun-like globes of great size.

These "healing suns" surround the central Throne in Thulkos, equally spaced around its continent-sized strip of land, at distances of ten to one hundred thousand miles. The further away the globe, the more powerful is its light, and the more powerful the Kae Linn goddess trapped within it.

Despite his hatred for them, Tyrannon cannot simply destroy the Kae Linn. Their healing power is important to the land of Thulkos; without it nothing would grow, and the people would sicken and die. Since these worshippers are what provide him with power, Tyrannon will not allow the Kae Linn to be harmed. Additionally, the healing light of the Kae Linn is what enables Tyrannon to maintain himself, even though his various forms are scattered throughout the dimensions. Without them he would thus lose both powers, and most of his other forms.

The Lights of Kae Linn are full of plot potential. Tyrannon could banish troublesome PCs to one of the globes, or the PCs could threaten to free or kidnap the Kae Linn.

TYRANNON: THE TREE THRONE

Val	Char	Cost
85*	STR	0
27	DEX	51
80	CON	140
80*	BODY	110
25	INT	15
30	EGO	40
50	PRE	40
0	COM	-5
30	PD	28
30	ED	14
10	SPD	63
18	REC	0
160	END	0
125*	STUN	0

*Growth increases added in

Cost	Powers/ Skills	END
6654	Duplication, 887 forms (7x 1112-pt forms = 1776 pts; 80x 800-pt forms = 12,800 pts; 800x 200-pt forms = 32,000 pts; total 46,576 active pts), only during alignment of lights of the Kae Linn (-2), requires 5 minutes (-2), no more than 1600 pts of forms in one area (-2)	
100	Growth, 75 pts, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2) (+75 STR, +15 BODY, +15 STUN, -10 DCV, -15" KB, +10 vs. PER, +16" reach, 64m tall, 3.2 kton mass)	
24	+15 pts Growth, 0 END Persistent (+1), not usable when duplicated (-1/4); this Growth is not added into stats above)	
	Attack Powers	
75	Magic Power Pool	
111	Pool Control Cost, Cosmic (+2), no movement powers, Regeneration, or Characteristics	
25	+25 pts in Power Pool	
30	Control Cost as above (+2), not usable when duplicated (-1/4)	
206	15" Stretching, 0 END (+1/2), Affects Desolid (+1/2), Indirect (any direction, +3/4; see notes)	
42	Affects Desolid advantage for STR	
	Defense Powers	
40	The Shield of Tyrannon (Force Field, 20PD, 20ED)	
35	Mental Defense (41 pts)	
30	Damage Resistance: 30 PD, 30 ED	
20	Power Defense	
10	Lack of Weakness	
5	Flash Defense	
120	6d6 Aid to magical powers, transdimensional (+20), all powers (+2), not to Characteristics (-1/4)	
	Communication/Perception Powers	
20	Mind Link with other Thrones and own Avatars, 32x targets (+25), any distance (+5), transdimensional (+5), only with others who have Mind Link (-1), only when duplicated (-1/4)	
20	Universal Translator	
16	The Eye of Tyrannon (40 pt Multipower, Immobile Breakable OIF, -1 1/2)	
2u	Clairsentience, sight/hearing, transdimensional (+20)	
2u	Clairsentience, sight/hearing, range 39,375" (approx 45 1/2 miles)	
2u	+12 Telescopic N-ray, stopped by magical	
	Obscure	

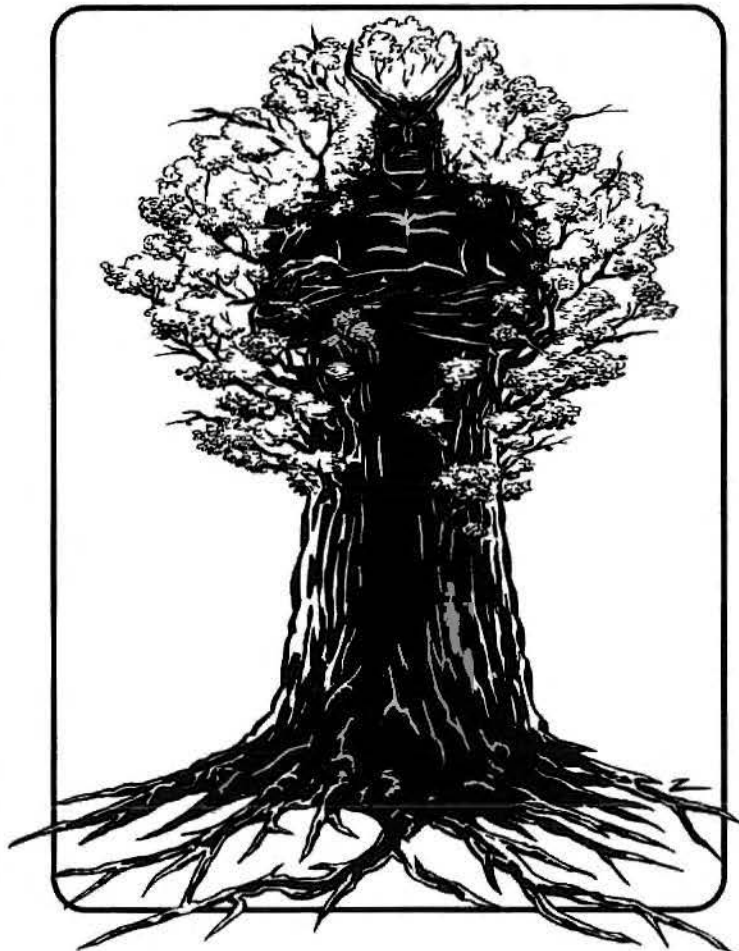
100 + Disadvantages

13	Enraged: When betrayed (unc), 14-/8-
10	Dependence: Lights of the Kae Linn, 3d6/5 minutes
5	DNPCs: The Kae Linn, 8-
25	Distinctive Features: Monstrous giant demonic conquerer (not conc, extreme)
5	Hunted: The PCs, 8-
5	Watched: The Revered Elder
10	Phys Lim: All non-Focus powers half strength when not in lights of Kae Linn (inf, great)
30	Phys Lim: Immobile (always, great)
15	Psych Lim: Keeps his promises (unc, total)
15	Psych Lim: Will not conquer Earth's dimension as long as the Revered Elder lives (unc, total)
20	Psych Lim: Feels superior to everything and everyone, even not using his powers (v com, strong)
10	Public ID: Magicians everywhere know who he is and where he lives
20	Reputation: Ruthless conquerer of dimensions, 14-
15	3d6 Unluck
20	Vulnerability: Energy KAs (unc), 2x STUN, 2x BODY
7765	Villain Bonus

OCV:9; DCV:-1; ECV:10; Phases:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

COSTS:	Char	Powers	Total	Disadv	Base
	496	+ 7589	= 8085	= 7985	+ 100

[Note: Without the Duplication, the form is built on 1451 pts]



Identifying Quote: Tyrannon tends to speak of himself in third person. "Understand, mortals: Tyrannon is no creature, in the way you are creatures. Tyrannon is a force of nature, a statement by the universe. The suns that burn in your sky — they are nothing beside me. Now, witness my power... and tremble."

Powers/Tactics: Nearly all of Tyrannon's forms use Foci of some kind (see the next Throne listing). This Throne's Focus is the Eye of Tyrannon, a huge crystal sphere embedded in the "trunk" of the tree. Through this many-colored sphere Tyrannon can observe most of his home dimension (he can augment its range with his power pool).

The Stretching power reflects a network of "roots" throughout the ground around the Throne's area. These roots can erupt out of the ground and grab those above, even astral forms. Once he captures a victim, Tyrannon can pass him from root to root, bucket-brigade fashion, in any direction. (Thus the Indirect advantage on the Stretching.)

Appearance: The tree throne has the form of a huge tree, with roots stretching off in all directions. These roots break up from the ground and run along the surface, then plunge back below the ground. The immense trunk holds the fiery Eye of Tyrannon.

TYRANNON: THE SEVEN LESSER THRONES			
Val	Char	Cost	
60*	STR	20	
27	DEX	51	
80	CON	140	
60*	BODY	88	
25	INT	15	
30	EGO	40	
50	PRE	40	
0	COM	-5	
30	PD	24	
30	ED	14	
10	SPD	63	
22	REC	0	
99	END	0	
156*	STUN	0	
* Growth increases added in			
Cost	Powers/ Skills	END	
40	Growth, 30 pts, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2) (+30 STR, +6 BODY, +6 STUN, -6" KB, -4 DCV, +4 vs. PER, +2" reach, 8m tall, 6400 kg)		
75	Attack Powers		
	Magic Power Pool		
	(no Aid, Regeneration, or Characteristics)		
111	Pool Control Cost, Cosmic (+2)		
43	Attack Multipower, 75 pts (OIF, -1/2; 4 clips of 6 charges, -1/4)		
3 u	*The Frightful Flames of Tyrannon: 1d6 RKA, continues extra phase (+1/4), based on ECV, no KB (-1/2)		
4 u	The Wrath of Tyrannon: 7 1/2d6 Energy Blast, ECV vs. DCV		
4 u	The Suffocating Grip of Tyrannon: 5d6 Entangle, stops sight/hearing (+20)		
4 u	Tyrannon's Mighty Grasp: 7d6 Entangle		
4 u	The Clinging Hand of Tyrannon: 5d6 Sticky Entangle		
4 u	6d6 Energy Blast, AVL vs. Power Defense (+1 1/2)		
	Defense Powers		
40	Shield of Tyrannon: Force Field, 20PD, 20ED		
35	Mental Defense (41 pts)		
30	Damage Resistance: 30 PD, 30 ED		

Cost	Powers/Skills	END			
20	Power Defense				
10	Lack of Weakness				
9	Flash Defense (sight)				
	Communication/Perception Powers				
22	Mind Link with other Thrones and own Avatars, 32x targets (+25), any distance (+5), transdimensional (+5), only with others who have Mind Link (-1)				
27	Clairsentience Multipower (OIF, -1/2)				
3u	Clairsentience, sight/hearing, transdimensional (+20).4				
3u	Clairsentience, sight/hearing, range 39,375" (approx 45 1/2 miles)				
3u	+12 Telescopic N-ray, stopped by magical Obscure				
	Other Powers				
53	Shape Shift, any form, 0 END Persistent (+1), Always On (-1/2)				
75	Astral Form				
<i>*Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks</i>					
100 +	Disadvantages				
12	Enraged: When betrayed, 14-/8-				
10	Dependence: as Tree Throne				
5	DNPCs: The Kae Linn, 8-				
25	Distinctive Features: as Tree Throne				
5	Hunted: The PCs, 8-				
5	Watched: The Revered Elder				
10	Phys Lim: All non-Focus powers half strength outside home dimension (inf, great)				
50	Psych Lim: as Tree Throne				
10	Public ID: as Tree Throne				
20	Reputation: Ruthless conqueror of dimensions, 14-				
15	3d6 Unluck				
20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN, 2x BODY, varies by Throne form: Water attacks for fire Throne, Fire/heat attacks for fluid Throne, Cold attacks for reptilian Throne, Air attacks for mineral Throne, Phys normal attacks for avian Throne, Phys KAs for octopoid Throne, Adjustment powers for humanoid Throne				
825	Villain Bonus				
OCV: 9; DCV: 9; ECV: 10; Phases: 2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12					
COSTS:	Char.	Powers	Total	Disadv.	Base
	490	+ 622	= 1112	= 1012	+ 100

Powers / Tactics: Each throne has the power of a demi-god, and versatility to match. The various thrones use excellent tactics, modifying their tactics to fit the situation. Sometimes a throne will fly in totally invisible, entangle as many enemies as possible, and then turn visible and gloat for a while. Other times, a throne will shrink and shapeshift to spy on would-be attackers. Alternately, a throne might just assume its true aspect, and kick the enemy from one end of the dimension to the other. This last course is especially likely if the battle is occurring in the throne's home plane.

Each throne has a focus related to its form, and the focus' attacks also mirror the theme. For example, for the mineral throne, the focus is a collection of gems that emerge from its molten, lava-like form, and the attacks can be various molten or solid-rock attacks. For the avian throne, the foci is a ring of beautiful feathers, etc.

Appearances: The thrones of Tyrannon are monstrous beings of constantly changing appearance. Each throne exhibits the attributes of its aspect, but the attributes will be mixed and echanging. For example, the reptile throne might look first like a combination of alligator and lizard, but would evolve into a tortoise or serpent.



TYRANNON: AVATARS

Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages
50	STR	40	12	Enraged: When betrayed, 14-/8-
24	DEX	42	15	Dependence: On being in home
50	CON	80		dimension, 3d6/minute
50	BODY	80	5	DNPCs: The Kae Linn, 8-
15	INT	5	25	Distinctive Features: as Thrones
24	EGO	40	5	Hunted: The PCs, 8-
35	PRE	40	5	Watched: The Revered Elder, 8-
-10	COM	5	10	Phys Lim: All powers half
25	PD	15		strength outside home
25	ED	15		dimension (inf., greatly)
8	SPD	46	50	Psych Lims: as Thrones
16	REC	-8	10	Public ID: as Thrones
100	END	0	20	Reputation: Ruthless conqueror
100	STUN	0		of dimensions, 14-
			20	4d6 Unluck
			20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN, 2x
				BODY, varies as Throne forms
			513	Villain Bonus
Cost	Powers/ Skills		END	
30	Growth, 15 pts, 0 END Persistent (+1), (+15 STR, +3 BODY, +3 STUN, -3" KB, -2 DCV, +2 vs. PER, x8 mass)			
25	Shapeshift, any similar form, 1/2 END			

Cost	Powers/Skills	END
75	Attack Powers	
5 u	Attack Multipower,	
	*The Frightful Flames of Tyrannon: 1d6 RKA, Uncontrolled (+1/2) Continuous (+1), based on ECV, no KB (-1/2)	7
7 u	*The Wrath of Tyrannon, 5d6 Energy Blast, based on ECV, no range mod (+1/2)	7
7 u	*The Claws of Tyrannon: 25 STR TK, based on ECV	7
7u	Tyrannon's Mighty Grasp: 7d6 Entangle	7
7u	The Long Hand of Tyrannon: 5d6 Entangle, no range penalty (+1/2)	7
7u	6d6 Energy Blast, AVLD vs. Power Defense (+1 1/2)	7
7u	20d6 Dispel (any single magic effect, +1/4)	7
7u	75-pt attack related to Avatar's form (see notes)	
7u	5d6 Ego Attack with KB (+1/2), 1/2 END (+1/4)	3
3u	Summon two Emissaries (takes 1 turn, -1)	7
	Defense Powers	
75	Defense Multipower	
4u	The Shield of Tyrannon (Force Field, 15PD 15ED 15MD)	4
4u	6d6 Suppress (any single magic effect, +1/4)	4
4u	40-pt defense related to Avatar's form (see notes)	
23	Mental Defense (28 pts)	
15	Power Defense	
21	Damage Resistance: 21 PD, 21 ED	
7	Lack of Weakness	
	Communication/Perception Powers	
20	Mind Link with his own Throne and Emissaries, 16x targets (+20), any distance (+5), transdimensional (+5), with others who have Mind Link (-1)	
27	Clairensience Multipower (OIF, -1/2)	
3u	Clairensience, sight and sound, range 39,375" (approx 45 1/2 miles)	4
3u	+12 Telescopic N-ray, stopped by magical Obscure	
*Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks		
OCV: 9; DCV: 9; ECV: 10; Phases: 2,3,5,6,8,9,11,12		
COSTS: Char. Powers Total Disadv. Base		
400 + 400 = 800 = 700 + 100		

Powers / Tactics: Each Avatar is an immensely powerful being, second only in power to the Thrones themselves. The Avatars' Shapeshift allows the Avatar to assume any form of its aspect; an Avatar of the Avian Throne can shapeshift to any bird, a tree Avatar can look like any chosen tree, etc.

The Avatars' Foci are similar to the controlling Throne's.

Each Avatar has an attack and defense appropriate to its type. For instance, the mineral Avatar of uranium has an NND attack (radiation) and Density Increase for defense.

Appearances: A smaller version of its Throne, each Avatar has a fixed form, one variety of the Throne's "generic" type. For example, the ten avatars of the mineral Throne are misshapen, steaming blobs of a given mineral: gold, silver, iron, granite, mercury, diamond, ruby, emerald, phosphorus (flaming!), and uranium.

TYRANNON: EMISSARIES

Val	Char	Cost	100 +	Disadvantages
35	STR	25	20	Dependence: On being in home dimension, 3d6/turn
20	DEX	30		
15	CON	10	20	Distinctive Features: as Thrones
5	BODY	-10	15	Psych Lim: Feels superior to everyone (v com)
0	INT	-10		
20	EGO	20	25	5d6 Unluck
20	PRE	10	20	Vulnerability: 2x STUN, varies as Throne forms
0	COM	0		
8	PD	3		
8	ED	5		
3	SPD	0		
5	REC	-10		
30	END	0		
40	STUN	0		

Cost	Powers/ Skills	END
Attack Powers		
45	Attack Multipower	
2 u	*The Frightful Flames of Tyrannon: 1d6 RKA, Continuous (+1), based on ECV, no KB (-1/2), x2 END	3
4 u	The Wrath of Tyrannon: 5d6 Energy Blast, no range penalty	3
4 u	*The Claws of Tyrannon: 14 STR TK, based on ECV	3
4 u	Tyrannon's Mighty Grasp: 4d6 Entangle	3
4 u	*3d6 Ego Attack with KB, 1/2 END	1
Defense Powers		
25	Defense Multipower	
2 u	The Shield of Tyrannon (Force Wall, 10 MD)	2
2 u	2d6 Dispel (any magic effect) (+1/4)	2
9	Mental Defense (13 pts)	
Communications Powers		
7	Mind Link with his own Avatar, any distance (+5), transdimensional (+5), only with others who have Mind Link (-1)	
10	The Eye of Tyrannon: +10 Telescopic vision (OIF, -1/2)	

**Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks*

OCV: 7; DCV: 7; ECV: 7; Phases: 4, 8, 12									
COSTS:	Char.	Powers	Total	Disadv.	Base				
	83	+	117	=	200	=	100	+	100

Powers/Tactics: Lacking true intelligence in themselves, the Emissaries simply function as mobile "lookout posts" for their controlling Avatars. The Emissaries pry into anything and everything, checking out anything that looks suspicious. If trouble begins, they flee and an Avatar teleports in.

Appearance: As small versions of the controlling Avatars, but each Emissary is one of ten colors. In ascending order of power these are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, black, white, and grey. If you don't want to change point levels from the standard Emissary above, all the Emissaries obviously have the same power level regardless of color.

RUNNING TYRANNON

Tyrannon does not conquer just to gain new territory, or to spread an ideology, or to throw his weight around. He conquers because he lives for it, in the same way animals live to eat and propagate. He is a force of nature, beyond reason. One could no more persuade Tyrannon to give up conquest than persuade a salmon not to swim upriver to spawn.

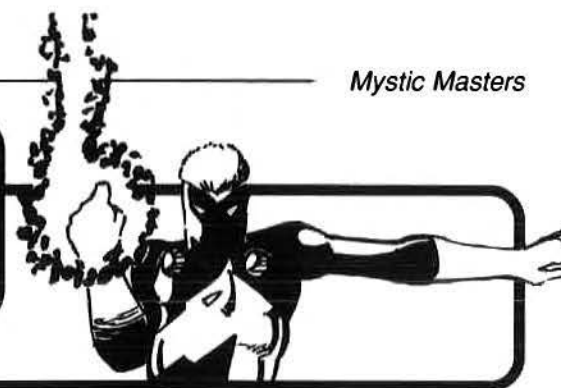
However, Tyrannon retains many vestiges of personality, notably a host of insane Psychological Limitations. Like most incredibly powerful villains, Tyrannon is a real loon. His psychoses give enterprising heroes several keys to his defeat, as shown below.

DEFEATING TYRANNON

This is the big-time behind-the-scenes master villain — the heavy that the PCs must defeat to make Earth safe. The problem is, PC magicians cannot beat him on physical terms; Tyrannon is the very definition of power. This does not mean he is unbeatable — far from it. The various ways that the PCs might defeat Tyrannon are:

1. Get Tyrannon to owe them a favor — a favor they could then parlay into saving the earth. They could do this by playing upon his arrogance (by challenging him to single combat, or chess), or his sense of honor (getting him to swear an oath). Clever players could try to fool him, perhaps by making an agreement where Tyrannon doesn't get what he wants.
2. Find and free Kae Linn. Although he has defeated and imprisoned the Kae Linn, Tyrannon needs their power to create new forms, ensure the growth of crops in his dimension, etc. Perhaps if they contact the Kae Linn and convince them to help, the PCs can extort some agreement from Tyrannon.
3. Persuade inhabitants to stop worshipping him. Tyrannon gains most of his power from his worshippers in his dimension. If the PCs could break up the worship, or infiltrate it and turn it away from Tyrannon, they might be able to sap his power and weaken his abilities.
4. Use the ruined technological gadgets that are lying around. A hero could conceivably repair one. Tyrannon's defenses wouldn't be so hot against high-tech weapons. This is an especially good option if the PCs are non-magical heroes.
5. In the longest term, the PCs can blow up Tyrannon's dimension with the Thanatic Rod. Though he might be able to escape, he'll be much weakened. This is the ultimate resolution of the plot, and shouldn't happen until the GM has milked Tyrannon for all he's worth as a master villain.

SPELLBOOK



Comic-book magicians often cast spells with strange names and versatile effects. This section describes several spells and spell "packages." Each spell package is a Multipower organized with a theme, such as the Bountiful Bindings of Blyyat the Beneficent (a suite of Entangles).

This list serves several purposes. The pre-packaged spell lists allow quick generation of NPCs or handout PC magicians. The spell descriptions give background on the campaign world. And the colorful names give magicians something to swear by while they gesture and incant.

Following the spells are two magical items important to the sample campaign: the Orb of the Archmage and the Thematic Rod.

BUYING SPELLS

Of course, since these spells cost just as much as any other Power, many characters will be loathe to buy them without some type of discount. If the GM wants to encourage PCs to take the spells, he should consider giving them a higher starting base; these points can only be used to buy the listed spells. Similarly, once a campaign has been running, the GM can give out a **large** number of assigned Experience Points, specifically so that the characters can learn a certain spell.

Example: *Since all the PCs are disciples of Vincent Dimitrios, the GM would like them all to have his spell, "The Shields of Dimitrios". After one adventure, the GM awards them 80 Experience Points that can only be used to buy this particular spell. The disciples of Dimitrios are not quite as vulnerable as they used to be.*

This offers advantages and disadvantages, depending on your campaign style. If the GM gives out many such spells, he can more easily control the PCs' power level and abilities. On the other hand, the essentially "free" spells shouldn't overshadow the campaign or make it unbalanced. Otherwise, all the characters will look pretty much alike, and it certain conceptions (such as Wild Talents) will become quickly outclassed.

This is not necessarily bad, particularly if your campaign premise casts the PCs as a team of disciples under one master. Then they would logically have learned the same curriculum. As the campaign develops, be sure to award plenty of Experience Points to let the characters diversify and achieve their own identities.

LEARNING A SPELL

A character must buy all the spells in the package, plus their accompanying Multipower pool, at the listed power level and at the listed cost. No changes are allowed. If the character wants a "customized" set of spells, this is obviously legal, but the spells must be purchased with normal Experience Points.

One exception: In some conceptions, the character gradually learns the spells in the package during the campaign. In this case, the character can purchase the entire Multipower pool and a limited number of slots.

THE ELEVEN LIGHTS OF LUATHON

Cost	Spell / Effect	
60	Multipower pool	
8 m	1. Change Environment (light), 8" radius, 0 END (40)	0
6 u	2. 6d6 Flash (60)	6
6 u	3. Images, Normal Sight Only, 16" radius, -6 PER roll, 1/2 END (60)	2
2 u	4. N-ray Vision (stopped by magical Darkness) (20)	0
3 u	5. Detect Invisibility, range, targeting, +1 PER (30)	
12 m	6. 12d6 Suppress Invisibility (60)	6
5 u	7. 4d6 Energy Blast, vs. Flash Defense (+1 1/2) (50)	5
5 u	8. 6d6 Energy Blast, 1 hex (+1/2), 1/2END (+1/4) (52)	2
6 u	9. 20d6 Dispel Darkness (60)	6
4 u	10. 6d6 Mind Control, 3" Cone, takes full phase action (-1/2) (60)	6
6 u	11. 3d6 RKA, Penetrating (+1/2) (60)	6
123	= Total Cost for the Eleven Lights of Luathon	

Luathon is a higher-dimensional entity, a great force for good who is known in most dimensions. Ancient legend has it that Luathon taught these spells to Thanoro Azoic, first Archmage of Earth's dimension. "Azoic" indicates that Thanoro served before life arose on Earth. The Eleven Lights are incalculably ancient, so it is impossible to dismiss the legend.

The eleven enchantments, though linked by common magical gestures and mental states, bear little resemblance in special effects. All of them use light, but each caster must produce the illumination from his own enlightened spirit. Hence the Lights' special effects (color, intensity, etc.) are unique to each caster, and each spell marks its caster's identity as surely as a fingerprint.

The effects of the Eleven Lights of Luathon are ranked in the order in which they are most often taught. The theory is that by the time one learns each succeeding Light, the discipline of using the previous Light has prepared the spellcaster for the next.

The spells are ranked in the order of their danger and their acceptability. One might use the First Light as a practical joke on another mage, and the Second in order to prevent a fight; but the other Lights are all serious spells, not to be thrown (so to speak) lightly.

In particular, the Eleventh Light of Luathon is considered an unforgivable affront among mages. A failed use can start a life-long rivalry, while a successful use may begin a blood-feud. This spell, in fact, is largely responsible for the friction among the Vandaleurs.

THE SHIELDS OF DIMITRIOS	
Cost	Spell / Effect
40	Multipower pool (each slot costs 4 END unless noted)
4 u	1. Force Field, 10 PD 10 ED 10 MD 5 Power Def 5 Flash Def (40)
4 u	2. Force Field, 8 PD 8 ED 4 MD, 4" radius (+1) (40)
4 u	3. Force Field, 7 PD 7 ED 4 MD 1 Power Def 1 Flash Def, usable on others (+1/2) at 8" range (+1/2) (40)
4 u	4. Force Field, 10 PD 10 ED 6 MD, 0 END (+1/2) (39)
4 u	5. Force Field, 5 PD 5 ED 10 MD 1 Flash Def, invisible to normal sight (+1/2) (39)
4 u	6. Force Wall, 5 PD 5 ED 3 MD 2 Power Def 1 Flash Def (40)
4 u	7. Force Wall, 3 PD 3 ED 3 MD 1 Flash Def, transparent to PD (37)
4 u	8. Force Wall, 3 PD 3 ED 3 MD 1 Flash Def, Transparent to ED (+1/2) (37)
4 u	9. Force Wall, 3 PD 3 ED 3 MD 1 Flash Def, 0 END (+1/2) (37)
4 u	10. Force Wall, 3 PD 3 ED 4 MD, invisible to sight (+1/2) (37)
80 = Total Cost for the Shields of Dimitrios	

Named for its creator, Vincent Dimitrios, this set of defensive spells gave the first indication of the young disciple's immense gifts for magic. Before Dimitrios discovered these, late in the last century, most magicians of Earth's dimension had to make do with limited and fairly thin defensive shields. Since then, use of the Shields has spread to other dimensions.

All these spells (except the fifth and tenth) create bright disks or globes of light in primary colors. Shields defined as Force Fields float in front of the caster, magnetically drawing magical attacks from all sides.

THE VAPORS OF VATA	
Cost	Spell / Effect
40	Multipower pool
4 u	1. Extra-Dimensional Movement, One Dimension, Variable Trigger (+1/2), Difficult to Dispel (x4) (+1/2)
4 u	2. Extra-Dimensional Movement, Any Dimension
4 u	3. Extra-Dimensional Movement, One Dimension, usable by four others
52 = Total Cost for the Vapors of Vata	

The Vapors of Vata are often used by sorcerers to set traps (slot 1), to travel into other dimensions (slot 2), or to return others to the sorcerer's home dimension. Note that for slots 1 and 3, dimension and location must be specified at the time the character learns the spell. Most often, this is the home dimension of the character, inside his mystic Fastness.

Vata is not a being or a place, but a status in the distant group of dimension called the Storlian Realms. The Vata, or senators of the Realms, travel between their elective territories and their seat of government in the dimension of Corravanta. The government is a magocracy (rule by magicians); the Vata are not born or appointed to their status, but achieve it when they can successfully cast the Vapors spell.

THE BOUNTIFUL BINDINGS OF BLYAT THE BENEFICENT	
Cost	Spell / Effect
60	Multipower pool
6 u	6d6 Entangle
6 u	4d6 Entangle, autofire (+1/2)
6 u	2 1/2d6 Entangle, area effect radius, selective target (+1 1/4)
6 u	3d6 Entangle, completely invisible (+1)
6 u	5d6 Entangle, affects desolid (+1/2)
90 = Total Cost for the Bountiful Bindings	

The Bountiful Bindings of Blyat the Beneficent (Archmage of Earth's dimension, c. 2200 BC) entangle and delay the caster's opponent. They are designed primarily for use against multiple or desolidified opponents. Frequently this includes summoned demons and spectres, as well as astral forms.

The Bindings appear, very suddenly, as thin black snares that encircle and adhere to the target. When the bonds are broken, or if the attack fails, the Bindings disappear instantly. Some ancient accounts say evil magicians once developed cruel Bindings that constrict, cutting into the victim's flesh, or that slither down the target's throat and bind his heart. These spells are evidently lost.

THE UNSPEAKABLE ENCHANTMENTS OF THE UNDYING ULTOR	
Cost	Spell / Effect
30	Multipower pool, requires EGO Roll (-1/2), 3d6 INT Drain as Side Effect (-1/2)
3 u	Shape Shift (any form), 0 END, Persistent
3 u	2 1/2d6 Transform (major effect, cumulative)
3 u	4d6 Transform (minor effect, cumulative)
3 u	4 1/2 d6 Transform (any cosmetic effect, cumulative)
42 = Total Cost for the Unspeakable Enchantments	

The Unspeakable Enchantments of the Undying Ultor transform the caster, opponents, or friends in minor or major ways. All of the enchantments are cumulative, and the caster must remain absolutely silent while casting them. Otherwise the talkative caster is stricken with temporary idiocy. Some devotees of the Undying One have discovered more powerful versions of this spell, without its undignified side effects.

The Undying Ultor, evil Archmage of a nearby dimension, is a devious would-be rival to Tyrannon. However, Ultor is no more powerful than Earth's Archmage (use the Vincent Dimitrios statistics), so despite his grandiose ambitions, he typically functions as a Petty Obstacle.

Ultor chose the appellation "Undying" himself; he hasn't lived long enough yet to indicate an unusual lifespan. That about sums up Ultor.

THE BLACK BONDS OF THE BALEFUL BALTHUS

Cost	Spell / Effect
27	4d6 Entangle, stops sight and hearing sense groups (+20 pts), 1 BODY (-1/2), destroyed by the Lights of Luathon (-1/2), reduced by range (-1/4)

This fairly simple spell is often used by amateur magicians, dabblers in the mystic arts, and minor demons. It creates a horde of black, rather oily, sluglike creatures, each a foot or two long. The creatures appear over the target's sensory organs and manipulatory appendages. Though sticky, they are fragile things and quickly dissolve into foul-smelling vapor once removed.

Because this spell is ineffective against the Lights of Luathon (any of the Eleven Lights instantly destroys the slugs), experienced magicians rarely use it.

Balthus is a minor demon with extensive influence on other planets in Earth's galaxy (including Jarth's homeworld). It has not been seen on Earth for many centuries. It uses small-scale but versatile Darkness spells to create fear and terror, on which it feeds.

THE MESMERIZING MISTS OF MODOR

Cost	Spell / Effect
24	*6d6 Mind Control, Area Effect 10" Cone, only to make people forget (-1), not usable on adepts (-1/2)

**Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks*

This widely-taught spell lets sorcerers keep their actions and existence secret from the rest of humanity. Though some question the morality of "brainwashing," most magicians decide that normal beings would prefer not to know magical dangers exist.

A pale blue mist appears at the caster's fingertips, then swirls outward in a wide cone, unaffected by physical wind currents. The mist seeps into the minds of witnesses and clouds their recollection. Not only do they fail to remember the magical events they witnessed, they usually are unaware of gaps in their memory.

The spell opens a tiny portal to the dimension of Modor, a misty realm that is evidently empty and uninhabited. No mage has yet found any sign of life there, and no one can explain why its mists have their effect on living beings.

THE FRIGHTFUL FLAMES OF TYRANNON THE CONQUEROR

Cost	Spell / Effect
22	*1d6 RKA, Continuous (+1), based on ECV (+1), Concentration, 1/2 DCV (-1/4), x2 END Cost (-1/2), does not work vs. Tyrannon or his agents (-1/4)

**Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks*

This spell summons a living flame from Tyrannon that attacks continually until it burns its victim to a crisp, at which point it devours them. It is easy to learn and terrifyingly effective, but it turns the caster into a living vessel for the power of Tyrannon (thus the Extra Time, Concentration and high END cost).

Repeated use of this powerful spell almost always corrupts the user, turning him into a follower of Tyrannon or of dark magic. (Simulate this as a 1/2d6 cumulative Transformation each time the spell is cast.)



MAGICAL ITEMS

Here are a couple of items important to the campaign:

THE ORB OF THE ARCHMAGE

Cost	Spell / Effect
42	Multipower, 200 pts (-3 1/4)*
8 m	*16d6 Mind Scan, +40 to roll, 0 END (+1/2)
8 m	*20d6 Telepathy, Invisible (+1/2), 0 END (+1/2)
8 m	Teleportation, 16x mass (+20 pts), usable by eight others (+1 1/4), 0 END (+1/2)
8 m	Clairsentience, 5.33 billion miles (normal sight and hearing, Detect Magic, +10 pts), nearby dimensions (+20 pts), 34x doubled range (+120 pts)
201	Teleport 13,023 miles (120 pts) + Extra-Dimensional Movement (any dimension, 40 pts) to Archmage's Fastness (fixed location, 1 pt), Trigger: When unauthorized person touches it, outside presence of authorized person (+1/4)
275	= Total Cost for Orb of the Archmage
#	Bulky, Breakable (40 DEF) OAF (-1 1/2); user can only use (EGO x 5) active pts of Orb's Multipower (-1/4); requires EGO or Magic Skill roll (-1/2); one turn extra time (-1; see below); Concentrate, 0 DCV (-1/2)
* Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks	

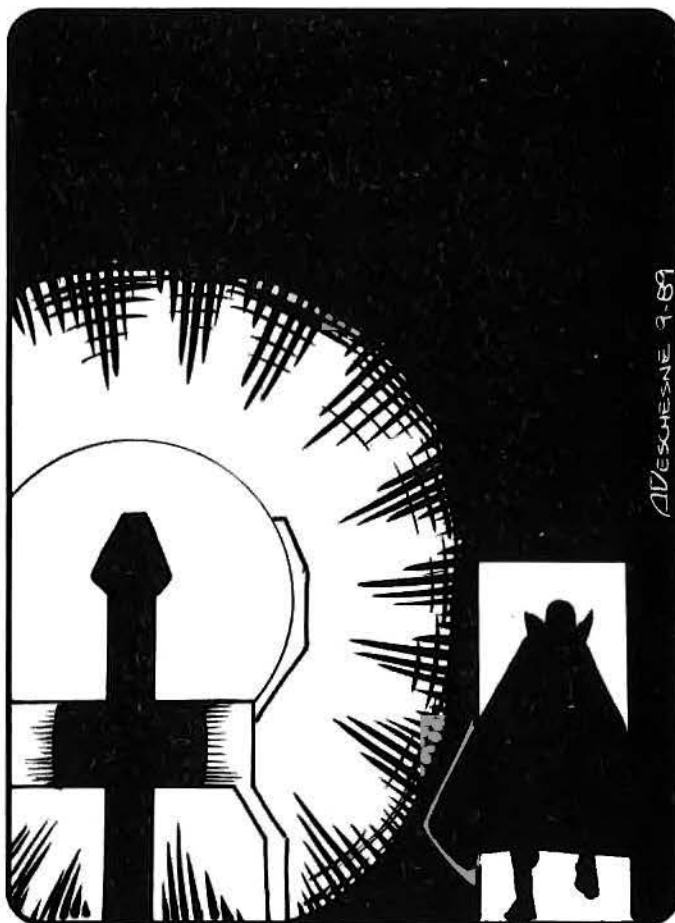
This tremendously powerful sorcerous artifact is entrusted to the Archmage of Earth's dimension. Its origin is lost, though many legends offer dubious backgrounds. No known artifact in Earth's dimension can rival the Orb's power.

The Orb is a pearl-white sphere 18 inches in diameter. It rests in a covered bronze housing elaborately decorated with rubies and Oriental dragons. When the Orb is activated, the hemispherical cover slides back, the Orb floats up to the user's eye level, and it glows faintly. It turns transparent to reveal the user's desired target for Clairsentience.

Technically a Personal Focus, the Orb can also be used by the Archmage's disciples or by anyone that the Archmage has approved. However, these others cannot necessarily access the device's full power. No magician can harness more than 5x his own EGO Characteristic in active points from the Orb's 200-point pool. (This is a useful limitation for many powerful magical items.)

The Revered Elder, the Undying Tulkus, Master Jomo, Vincent Dimitrios, and Jarth can all use the Orb. (Jarth was granted permission before he betrayed Dimitrios, and the permission cannot be revoked.) The Elder should allow the PCs to use the Orb as well, though novices probably can't make it do much.

For anyone besides the Archmage, using the Orb takes time. The one turn limitation above is a minimum, assuming a 100-pt spell; more powerful enchantments take longer. Regardless of the spell's point level, the archmage should never need more than 5 minutes to harness the orb's power.



A user with a Magic Power Pool, such as the Archmage, can augment the Orb's power with his own. The Revered Elder can scan just about any point in the universe, with enough effort, or teleport virtually any large mass. This ability allows the Orb to function as a plot device when certain effects are necessary. ("We've got to get everyone on this luxury liner out of here before the elementals attack! Can the Orb do it?")

THE THANATIC ROD

Cost	Spell / Effect
264	10d6 Transfer* (150 pts) vs. EGO and all magic powers (+2), 0 END (+1), 430,080" (534.5 mile) Radius (+4), Affects Desolidified (+1/2), Armor Piercing (+1/2), Continuous (+1), Uncontrolled (+1/2), 2x Difficult to Dispel (+1/2), one minute extra time (-1) Unbreakable Universal OAF (expendable, can't recover) (-2), Independent (-2), won't work in neutralizing holder or under neutralizer spell (-1/4). 150 pts base power cost x (1+10) = 1650 active pts / (1+5 1/4) = 264 pts Real Cost

* The Continuous Transfer "attacks" at SPD 10, the Speed of its creator, Tyrannon the Conqueror. Half the transferred points increase the base Transfer (105 points adds 1d6), and the other half increase the Area Effect Radius (262 points doubles the range).

In the course of the standard Mystic Masters campaign, one maguffin drives much of the conflict between the PCs and Tyrannon. The origin of this device, the Thanatic Rod, is closely tied to the original premise of the campaign: the betrayal of Vincent Dimitrios. This section describes the background of the Rod, and outlines its use as the campaign develops.

This featureless black rod, the terror of all inhabited dimensions, measures a couple of inches thick and three feet long. Its black is so deep that the Rod hardly seems to exist. A dim purple aura, barely visible, clings to the Rod, making it intensely cold to the touch.

The Rod rests in a plain bone-white rack something like a flashlight holder (DEF 10, BODY 10). The Rod sticks out a few inches at each end. It can be pulled out of the holder easily from any direction or angle. Once pulled, it activates one minute later (unless returned to the holder).

History: The Rod has been created only a few times in the history of the dimensions, always by a madman or evil race. In the beautiful fractal layout of universes stretching through the four-dimensional Stream of Eternity, the few blighted grey irregularities indicate the Rod's work. It has reduced whole universes to nothingness.

Always a product of total evil or insanity, the Rod marks the final indication that its creator has passed beyond civilized standards of behavior. Creating the Rod amounts to a death warrant from the Archmagi of all dimensions. The problem is that anyone who can create a Rod is already powerful enough to face down every other mage in the multiverse.

The Most Recent Creation: The Elder and most other sorcerers know how Jarth betrayed Vincent Dimitrios. Jarth played on his master's trusting nature, using a shapeshifted demon to lure Dimitrios into a fatal trap.

What few know is that, though Dimitrios died, his death was not permanent. The master sorcerer fought his way out of the Domain of the Dead, an almost unprecedented feat. However, the escape left him weak, and in that moment of weakness Jarth recaptured Dimitrios.

Since even death could not hold the great magician, Jarth disposed of him more completely. Jarth turned Dimitrios over to Tyrannon the Conqueror.

Though oathbound not to attack Earth, Tyrannon made no promise not to attack Dimitrios. The Conqueror had not seen such a powerful wizard in centuries, at least. Tyrannon saw in Dimitrios the key to an ambitious new plan: the creation of a Thanatic Rod.

The Rod, most fearsome of artifacts has the power to destroy an entire dimension. Though this would seem to make it intensely desirable to mad magicians everywhere, few besides Tyrannon know how to construct the rod and no one in living memory has seen it.

Why not? The creation of this doomsday weapon requires a template, a titanic spirit to harness its energies. For many centuries no creature was powerful enough to serve, save for Tyrannon himself. But Vincent Dimitrios had the power.

Through horrible rituals Tyrannon tucked the unconscious sorcerer away in a pocket dimension within the Rod. There, his will and intelligence sapped by Tyrannon's enchantments, Dimitrios' indomitable will powers Tyrannon's ultimate weapon.

Function: As constructed, the Rod presents no threat if it explodes in, say, deep space, far from anyone it can Transfer new energy from. In play the Rod should not be so easily thwarted. Dimensions themselves have an ambient magical energy as part of the fabric of space; the Rod feeds on this as well as on characters. Practically speaking, once the Rod activates, it grows in power and range at a geometric rate.

The Rod's explosion saps magical energy from a dimension's inhabitants and from its very substance. This energy in turn fuels still more draining over a wider area. Once the mana is entirely drained, the dimension collapses.

To turn off the Rod once it activates, use Suppress, Dispel, or Adjustment Powers like Drain or Transfer, or remove the Rod from this dimension. This is not easy in practice (note the Difficult to Dispel advantage), but it's a "reasonably common way" to turn off the power.

To unmake this Unbreakable Focus, carry it to Tyrannon and coerce him to neutralize it; or go inside it and revive Vincent Dimitrios, the Rod's "template." Again, this is easier said than done.

Note that this Uncontrollable Continuous attack has been bought to 0 END, a dangerous combination of advantages.

For more information, see the entry for Vincent Dimitrios.





SCENARIOS

READ NO FURTHER...

...if you are planning to play in the following adventures for Mystic Masters. This section, which is for the GM only, provides three complete scenarios and some suggestions for additional adventures. These scenarios may be used as the foundation of a brand new campaign or may, with a few alterations, be incorporated into an existing *Champions* setting.

In an ongoing campaign the second and third scenarios do not necessarily follow immediately after those which precede them — several unrelated adventures of the GM's devising can take place between them.

PLOT SUMMARY

The journey into the world of magic begins with a mystic summons to the tiny Himalayan country of Bhutan. Requested by a disembodied voice to find their way to that far-off land, the PCs use various means of transportation, limited only by their imaginations, to answer the plea. Once they arrive, and make their way to an isolated monastery, the PCs go through a Test of Self-Knowledge and finally meet their summoner, the Revered Elder. He informs them of the demise of his former disciple, Vincent Dimitrios, and sensing his time is near its end, asks the PCs to become his new disciples in the defense of Earth. While considering the Revered Elder's offer, the PCs are attacked through an inter-dimensional gate by an Emissary of Tyrannon, who claims to be Tyrannon himself.

Some time later the PCs will be swept into a rather convoluted plot involving Tyrannon's efforts to gain vast power, Jarth's efforts to become Archmage of Earth's dimension, and the Elder's efforts to stop them both. Tyrannon is channelling energy through the crossroads dimension called the Confluence to achieve the construction of the awesomely powerful Thanatic Rod. To further this goal, and acquire the added magical might of the Revered Elder, Tyrannon teams up with the alien mage Jarth. The PCs will have to go to the Confluence to stop Tyrannon's magical experimentation from destroying the Universe. Only at the last moment will they understand the chain of magical deception, and discover who is really behind the mess.

Finally, either as an extended sequel to the adventure in the Confluence, or because of a totally unrelated tragedy, the PCs try to rescue a lost soul from the Domain of the Dead. Thanks to the mystic knowledge of the Revered Elder, the PCs are given one chance to save a comrade from death. They must journey to the otherworldly plane where departed spirits linger before "passing on" to a greater reward, to

oblivion, or to some other unknown fate. There they must petition for the aid of supremely powerful beings known as the Monads — the psychic remains of great magicians. A faction among the Monads, however, is plotting to destroy the Earth in a nuclear conflagration. Using the magical energy spawned by billions of souls entering the Domain at once, the renegade Monads hope to save Earth's dimension from Tyrannon's ambitious "dimension grabbing." They want to greatly increase their own power while depriving him of the concentrated psychic energy currently centered on the planet. The PCs will have to prove not only that they are worthy of regaining their lost friend, but that Earth is strong enough to strive for its own defense.

ANSWERING THE CALL — THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Several novice magicians (the PCs) are preparing to embark upon their mystic careers. Their goals are still somewhat vague; they haven't defined the roles they'll play in a secretly magic-infested world. This is about to change.

One by one, as they go about their still relatively normal lives, the PCs are "visited." An unearthly yet somehow kindly voice speaks to them out of thin air. As if that were not strange enough, no one else can hear it, and each of the Player Characters realizes that the message is for him (or her) alone. The voice says:

"I am one called the Revered Elder. I come to warn you. Great danger from Without faces the world. If you would learn more, if you wish to use your abilities to stave off the calamity, come to the kingdom of Bhutan, 'Land of the Thunder Dragon.' Time is of the essence." The voice will say no more, but an image appears (again, only to the PC's perception), of a forbidding mountainside upon which is perched a small monastic retreat. A few tiny buildings are barely visible in the valley below.

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS BHUTAN?

The PCs' curiosity should be sufficient to get them to respond to this summons (if not, they aren't typical PCs), but they may want to do a little preliminary research, such as finding out just where they have to go. Any sincere effort should be rewarded. Modest investigative attempts at a library or even a travel agency will reveal that Bhutan is a tiny kingdom nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas between India and China. Although fully independent for only 40 years, Bhutan, as a state, has been around since at least the 1500s, when it came under Tibetan "protection."

Still a mostly primitive society — virtually the entire population is engaged in subsistence agriculture — Bhutan's main "industry" is handicrafts. Sales of these local items is handled chiefly through Bhutan Souvenir Imports. Further investigation reveals this company just happens to have an outlet in the campaign city.

If they researching the name "The Revered Elder" in Bhutan, the PCs will learn that this is a title for the most respected member of a small Bhutanese Buddhist sect. Little is known of the sect, except that it is centered in the mountains in the northern part of Bhutan.

If the GM wants the players to meet before they get to Bhutan, these investigations present a perfect opportunity. It is a simple matter to have a PC overhear another PC ask for information about Bhutan. It's equally simple to have a librarian/travel agent say, "well, that's funny; you're the second person today to ask about Bhutan," and then point to a nearby PC. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a group of foreigners, as most PCs would be, arriving in Bhutan all at once, and asking for directions to "the monastery" would fail to notice one another. If the PCs are actively searching for others who've "heard the call," the GM should introduce them to their fellows as soon as possible.

PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES

With this minimal information in hand, the PCs will be encouraged to answer the Revered Elder's call. Certainly, any international airline that provides flights to India will also be able to arrange for shorter flights to Bhutan's capital — Thimphu.

However, there is an easier solution to the problem of transportation. If a PC researches Bhutan enough to learn about Bhutanese Souvenir Imports, he may try contacting the business for more information. If he telephones the company or goes to the business in person, the receptionist will refer to the PC by name, even before the PC bothers to identify himself, and tell him airline transportation has been provided if he chooses to use it. This will make it possible for a PC with moderate resources to get to Bhutan without destroying himself financially. (Any later investigation will reveal the receptionist has absolutely no recollection of such a conversation or of special transportation arrangements.)

As with research on Bhutan, any reasonable effort should succeed. After all, the GM wants the PCs to show up, too.

WHO'S THERE?

While the PCs are making their travel preparations, and during the first part of their pilgrimage to the Revered Elder's sanctum, one or two of them may notice something strange (as if the situation were not already strange enough). With the proper Perception Rolls, initially at a -3 penalty, the PCs will note that they are being stalked by darkly silhouetted figures, invisible to everyone else. (Each successful sighting of these "shadows" reduces the Perception penalty by 1, until the PCs have a normal chance of spotting them.)

The figures are minions of Tyrannon. They have been ordered to keep an eye on all those the Revered Elder has called but under no circumstances contact (and certainly not fight) those summoned. Tyrannon wants to find out just what the Elder has in mind, now that his chosen successor is no

longer available. Not wanting to take direct action until he's had time to thoroughly scout the situation and gauge the Elder's current power, Tyrannon is only willing to risk magical cannon fodder. The shadowy figures vanish completely if approached, only to reappear as images vaguely seen out of the corner of the PCs' eyes.

ARRIVAL

Eventually, all the PCs will show up in Bhutan. The GM should try to arrange it so the characters arrive on the scene at approximately the same time, even if they have not "teamed up" before now. The search for the monastery should not be allowed to delay them for long, but several ways of finding their destination can be offered. Those PCs with Flight or Astral Form abilities may elect to try a visual search of the northern, mountainous part of the country, searching for a familiar mountaintop. This may take a while, since Bhutan is several thousand square miles in area.

If the PCs try to contact the corporate headquarters of Bhutanese Souvenir Imports, they will be greeted in a manner similar to the reception prepared for them in the campaign city company offices. An employee will refer to them by name and send them to a waiting vehicle (some sort of four-wheel drive contraption that appears to have far outlived its usefulness, but is in fact quite durable). The driver will start the vehicle as soon as the PCs get in and will proceed without comment to the monastery.

The PCs may decide to try the direct approach. Maybe they will ask for directions to "the Revered Elder" or "the monastery." Since players tend to overcomplicate the solution to any problem, such a simple approach should be rewarded with success, at least once. The PCs using this method to track down the Elder's retreat will find out exactly how to get to the monastery and should be given the opportunity to hire a guide and suitable transportation.

Possibly, none of these options will occur to the PCs. If they seem completely at a loss once they arrive in Bhutan, they may be rescued by the Revered Elder's devoted follower, Hua. This man is exceptional only in his unswerving loyalty to the Elder. He is mute and will only be able to gesture in response to the PCs' questions. (If a PC uses Telepathy to try to read Hua's mind, he will encounter the 50 points of Ego Defense placed by the Revered Elder to protect Hua from prying outsiders.)

After wandering aimlessly for a while, the PCs should be allowed to encounter Hua, silently waiting for them. Once they notice the manservant, he will gesture for them to follow and walk to a waiting vehicle. If they hesitate, Hua will try again, but if they still do not follow, Hua will hand them a note saying he has been sent by the Revered Elder. When the PCs follow him and get in the car, Hua will drive them north to the mountains.

THE MONASTERY

The PCs arrive first in a farming village just below the monastery they saw in their summons. Any guide and/or driver who brought the PCs here (depending on the method used to track down the monastery) will drop them off in the middle of the village and point toward a beaten earth track leading uphill. Then the driver will head back to Thimphu. If Hua is with the PCs, he proceeds to the sanctum.

The buildings in the village look like ramshackle structures. They are apparently dry and sturdy enough, with sharply sloping roofs to deal with mountain snows and small windows for protection from high winds. Each house has a small adjoining garden, but most of the agricultural effort takes place in the fields above and below the tiny town. That is where the PCs will find most of the village population, too. The men and older children work in the fields from late spring to early autumn. The women and very young children tend to household chores. The villagers are polite, but very busy from dawn to dusk, so any PCs who try to question a native will not get much response during "working hours."

Even if the PCs pick a willing villager and the proper time to ask questions — early morning or just after dark — they will not get much in the way of useful information. The village does not have access to the latest news from the outside world, and local gossip is hardly pertinent. All the villagers are respectful of the Elder as a wise man, learned in Eastern knowledge, but are not aware of his status as Archmage.

Looming protectively over the village is the PCs' destination, at last. As the PCs approach, they see the monastery is somewhat run-down and smaller than it appeared in the Revered Elder's message. The exterior walls are cracked and discolored, several sections of roof tiles have fallen off, and the iron bell hanging on a wooden post just outside the arched entryway is crusted with rust. When the PCs are within 20 feet of the entryway, blocked by iron-banded hardwood doors, the bell will ring once. It has an unexpectedly clear, melodious tone.

The double doors open soundlessly and Hua will usher the PCs inside. (Hua either appears in the doorway, or if he has had to guide the PCs here, bows and gestures for the PCs to precede him.) Immediately obvious is the difference in upkeep and size between the interior and exterior of the monastery. The inside walls are even, unbroken, and a uniform cream color. The floor is well polished stone. More amazingly, the entry hall alone seems almost as large as the whole monastery appears from the outside. And the hall is lined with doorways leading to other rooms, some even larger. After giving the PCs a short while to be impressed, Hua will bow (again) and lead each PC to a private bedroom/drawing room/bathing chamber. Food, each PC's favorite meal, has been kept freshly prepared in each room.

As the last PC is shown to his room, the Revered Elder's voice will once again be heard by each PC. The voice says "Welcome. Be comfortable. Dine and rest as you wish. Tomorrow you must take the 'Trial of the Chamber.' Sleep well." Before any PC can ask what the "Trial" involves, they realize Hua has vanished.

While the PCs have easy access to the entry hall and each other's rooms during the night, they cannot pass through any of the other doorways leading off of the hall. Attempts at exploring the compound in the night will be fruitless.

THE CHAMBER OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The PCs, once awake the next day, will find Hua waiting for them in the hall outside their rooms. He will lead them through one of the doors that had been impassable during the night. The large room beyond the door is at first empty except for a glowing Orb on the far side. When the PCs are all safely within the Chamber, the grandfatherly voice of the Revered Elder says, "Cross to the Orb and answer as it asks." Hua vanishes, as does the only visible exit.

The PCs, once they cross the floor, will hear the resonating voice of the Orb (not the voice of the Revered Elder) ask: "Are you worthy of great power?" The Orb will respond depending upon each PC's answer. This is more a test of the PCs' character than it is a question of getting the "right" answer. The important aspect of the Orb's question is adding insight into the PCs' further character development and setting a mood of ancient calm, and even more ancient wisdom.

(When handling this part of the scenario, the GM should try to keep the PC from hearing the other PCs' answers until all are complete. This can be accomplished by having each player write down his character's answer and letting no one but the GM see it until everyone has answered.)

Responses to the question of worthiness for great power can range far and wide, but can usually be rendered, "yes," "no," "maybe," and "I don't know." The Orb will respond accordingly:

For a "yes" answer, the Orb will respond, "You would be arrogant in your power and therefore are *not* as yet worthy of it. As do all, you have much to learn."

For a "no" answer, the Orb will respond, "You are too insecure as yet to wield power wisely. As do all, you have much to learn."

For a "maybe" or "I don't know" answer, the Orb will respond, "That is good. The first step to enlightenment is knowing one's limitations without assuming they rule one. As do all, you have much to learn, but you are already on the Path."

THE ELDER SPEAKS

As the last PC answers the question posed by the Orb (and receives an answer in turn), the PCs find themselves in yet another room. Sitting on a bench against one wall is a wrinkled, rather tired-looking old man — The Revered Elder.

He greets the PCs warmly (they immediately recognize his voice) and tells them why he's asked them to come to Bhutan. He has recently lost the disciple he had recruited to succeed him as defender of Earth's dimension (see *Sourcebook*). The betrayal of Vincent Dimitrios by his own disciple Jarth could not have come at a worse time. Not only is the Revered Elder's power waning, though he remains the single most able magician alive, he has had prophetic visions of terrible danger to Earth. In fact, he has sensed multiple dangers facing this planet and all the connected worlds of magic. Unfortunately, the precise nature and source of those threats remains unclear. Nevertheless, few entities or forces are powerful enough to endanger such a vast area; in this dimension only Jarth and the Vandaleur family would seem to have such magical force at their disposal. The Elder suspects someone from "outside" will play a part in the dark days ahead.

The Revered Elder has decided he no longer has the strength to face the upcoming danger alone. Yet it is too late to fully train a new disciple. The Elder has opted for a desperate plan to recruit several new students, none of whom can singly match an Archmage's prowess. He hopes that collectively such a group of student magicians can help turn the tide before his time on Earth is done. Someone, however new to the Art, must agree to become a defender of Good before it is too late. Will the PCs accept the challenge and become the Revered Elder's students?

"TYRANNON" ATTACKS

While the PCs mull over this proposal (and it is assumed they will accept, for the campaign's sake), Tyrannon prepares a foray against the Elder. He has observed this meeting from his home dimension, having been told by his Earth-bound minions of the PCs' arrival in Bhutan. The Revered Elder's briefing to the PCs is viewed by Tyrannon as a confession of the Archmage's weakness. He decides to test this weakness by sending one of his Emissaries to attack the Elder. At the very least, Tyrannon's attack will provide an opportunity to test the strength of the Elder and the PCs. At best, Tyrannon's Emissary may succeed in harming, perhaps killing, the Archmage, severely weakening the Earth and making it ripe for conquest.

Unless the PCs are quick to answer the Revered Elder, they will be interrupted by the sudden cross-dimensional arrival of an Emissary. (The GM may choose any of the offshoots of the Avatars as the particular Emissary. One of the flame beings would be most impressive for this first appearance, since its sheer power is hardly formidable.) Through the Gate behind the Emissary, the PCs can see furtive, shadowy forms, like the ones that trailed them to Bhutan.

"I am Tyrannon," the Emissary will begin, following its master's orders. "Learn at your cost what it means to ignore my power!"

Then the being will launch an all-out attack on the Revered Elder. The Elder is taken completely by surprise, and the first part of Tyrannon's plan is a total success. He knows that the Archmage is weak indeed to allow an outsider to use a Gate to penetrate his inner sanctum.

Even if the added damage done to the Elder from the surprise attack is not enough to stun him, the Emissary will next test the power of the PCs, basically by becoming a walking target. Since the PCs will probably attack whether or not the Emissary has one-punched the Elder, gauging their abilities will be the easiest part of Tyrannon's plan to fulfill. The Emissary will not pass up a chance to harm a PC (or the Elder), but the creature is no match for the whole group. With each successful attack by the PCs, the Emissary will allow itself to be pushed backward into the Gate (though it will try to remain in this dimension until each PC has had at least one chance to use his powers). If the PCs come up with a plan to push "Tyrannon" back through the Gate, they should succeed. If the PCs actually knock out the Emissary, it will rise from the floor and fly through the Gate.

Assuming it is able to speak as it hurtles through the Gate, the Emissary will shout, "This was but a skirmish! We will meet again!"

This encounter has served several purposes: the PCs have a victory under their belts, to start the campaign on a positive note; Tyrannon has a better idea of the PCs' abilities; and the PCs are set up for an unpleasant surprise in any future encounter with Tyrannon, if they believe he will always be the pushover he just appeared to be.

The "rescue" of the Revered Elder complete, he will again ask if the PCs will become his new students. After coming this far, they should accept the offer. The Elder will be pleased. He will teleport the PCs to their various homes so they can "tidy up" their personal affairs before beginning training.

IF IT'S NOT MYSTIC MASTERS

In a regular superhero campaign, the GM may wish to view this opening scenario as optional, since the PCs will obviously not become the Elder's students of magic. The GM could, though, use the summons to Bhutan simply to set the scene for the magical disasters about to threaten the world. Assume the Elder, lacking his former student, is using any means he can to protect the dimension entrusted to his care, even the aid of non-Adepts. The laws of magic prevent him from directly warning these non-Adepts about the coming onslaught of the "forces of chaos." So the PCs must first undertake a simple test — journeying to Bhutan and passing through the Chamber of Self-Knowledge — before they can be warned.

THE CONFLUENCE WAR

Several weeks of campaign time pass after the first meeting with the Revered Elder. The GM may wish to fill this time with several adventures of his own, but that isn't absolutely necessary. It is strongly recommended to include such adventures, however, if the GM is using these scenarios with a *Champions* campaign. Superheroes should not be subjected to continual magic encounters.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Though the PCs will not find out all the details, if ever, until considerably after the fact, they are about to face a crisis of worlds-shattering impact. For the PCs, the first signs of this come with a strange sequence of unexplained phenomena, chiefly random shifts in the rate of time's passage and fleeting glimpses of unearthly creatures wandering the campaign city's streets. As the PCs will eventually discover, these time shifts and spectral appearances are caused by a disruption, in the proper functioning of an inter-dimensional crossroads called the Confluence and a connected dimension, the Stream of Eternity. Tyrannon, the magical despot who the PCs think they met in the introductory scene, is at the root of the problem, which has been brewing since before Vincent Dimitrios' untimely "demise."

Tyrannon is always looking for ways to vastly increase his inhumanly formidable power. He already has the ability to increase his domain by grafting entire dimensions onto it, but some realms remain obstinately independent. He has decided to create a monstrous weapon to help him subjugate new worlds: a device spoken about only in whispers by knowledgeable magicians, the fearsome Thanatic Rod, which can obliterate anyplace, given time. The Rod could become a strong force in Tyrannon's "diplomatic" policies. If he can't otherwise convince a new dimension to come under his control, he'll threaten its residents with annihilation. Anything that can so substantially improve Tyrannon's potential for destruction can't be bad, as he sees it.

The Rod, however, needs a tremendous amount of energy to create, more than Tyrannon has at his casual disposal. The power needed to form the Rod is comparatively small, considering the device's ability to destroy entire dimensions at a time, but it has to be gleaned from all the dimensions of magic where the Rod can be effective. The quickest method

of gathering the energy involves siphoning it from one dimension that has access to all other dimensions, and the only realm that fits that bill is the Stream of Eternity, the dimension of Time. Also, to become fully operational, the Rod must be constructed in a realm where magic is especially concentrated, such as the Confluence, which not incidentally has a close link with the Stream. Lastly, to give the Rod its final, physical form, the Spell of Creation requires the inclusion of the functioning life force of a powerful magician as a mystic template.

COLLECTING ALLIES

These limitations prevent Tyrannon from achieving the construction of the Rod by himself. Acquiring and pacifying a powerful magician is within his abilities, and he would not find it too trying to cast a siphoning spell to draw mystic energy from the Stream of Eternity, but Tyrannon cannot leave his own dimension long enough to perform the Spell of Creation. For the first time in his career, Tyrannon needs allies to fulfill his plans. His two chief aides, though neither one has a clue to the real identity of their powerful partner, are Jarth, maneuvering for magical control of Earth's dimension, and a high-level Adept named Highwater, a resident of the Confluence skilled enough to cast the Spell of Creation.

Each of these three wants basically the same thing — dominion — and with this particular plan, only by working together can they all get what they want. Tyrannon wants the Rod. Jarth wants to become Archmage of our dimension, but he has been unable to rid himself of the only real obstacle in his way, the Revered Elder. Highwater also wants to achieve Archmage status, in the Confluence, but his problem is more personally annoying than Jarth's, because he is held back by the limitations of his own magical potential — he's just not powerful enough.

Recently, after disguising himself and taking the name Masric, Tyrannon approached the other two with offers of mutual aid. If Jarth would deliver a strong, functioning magician and oversee the draining of a modest amount of energy from Earth's cosmic vicinity, Tyrannon/Masric would help him eliminate the Revered Elder. (Eliminating the Elder is also part of Tyrannon's long-term plans for Earth, but of course he hasn't told Jarth that). If Highwater would cast the Spell of Creation, according to Tyrannon/Masric's detailed instructions, Tyrannon would divert a small measure of his vast personal power to the Confluence magician, elevating him to previously undreamed of levels of magical might. Both Jarth and Highwater liked the sound of the deal. Neither one of them were deterred by the possibility that "Masric" may not be the most trustworthy ally.

JARTH TAKES THE PLUNGE

Although Jarth did not know exactly what "Masric" wanted with a captured magician, he was willing to take the opportunity to do away with his do-gooder teacher, Vincent Dimitrios, and get one step closer to his vision of ultimate power. Soon after he accepted Tyrannon/Masric's offer, Jarth took the too-trusting Dimitrios by surprise. He overwhelmed the Earthborn magician with a blast of magical force, encapsulated him in a mystic stasis globe (provided in advance by his "silent partner"), and Gated the helpless Dimitrios to the Confluence for storage until needed for the Spell of Creation.

According to the terms of his agreement with Tyrannon, Jarth would also use a Gate to get rid of the Elder, assuming his full powers weren't enough to outright kill the aging magician. Tyrannon assured Jarth that he would find some use for the Elder, who was unfortunately a bit too far past his prime to be a candidate for the Thanatic Rod template.

Next, deciding that even with "Masric's" help, he might need more assistance in dealing with the Elder, Jarth decided to get some assistants of his own. Unwittingly mimicking Tyrannon's strategy, Jarth disguised himself as a normal appearing human being and contacted two members of the sorcerous Vandaleur family, Edward and Anais, convincing them that he was a distant cousin of theirs — "Jarret Vandaleur." (No one by that name existed, but the Vandaleurs have never been a close-knit familial unit. Edward and Anais, seeing a minor demonstration of "Jarret's" magical abilities, believed his claims of family ties.) Working as a team, he told them, they could eliminate the Revered Elder, take control of the special prerogatives and resources of the Archmage, and together rule the entire magical community of Earth's dimension. Vandaleurs have always been impressed with bold plans and sheer power; Edward and Anais accepted. Yet again unknowingly copying Tyrannon's strategy, Jarth had no intention of keeping his end of the bargain, once his aims were achieved and he no longer needed the Vandaleurs.

HIGHWATER JOINS THE TEAM

Not nearly as duplicitous as Jarth, Highwater nonetheless was lured into Tyrannon's plans just as easily. In the Confluence, a dimension dominated by magic, the best magicians become local rulers. The Archmage, the magician who demonstrates the firmest control and the widest range of power, becomes ruler of the whole tiny cosmos. Highwater has always heard the siren call of politics, but until he met "Masric," his ambitions have been held in check by his own weakness.

Highwater has spent most of a magician's greatly extended lifetime striving for greater control of magical power, an ever-expanding breadth of magical knowledge. But no matter how good he has become, or how many sleepless hours he has spent honing his skills, some other Mystic Master has always been better, or stronger, or had a clearer grasp of some magical intricacy. Highwater had become a stylistically correct, infinitely precise practitioner of the arcane arts, with abilities far beyond those most people can even imagine, but he just wasn't in the highest magical ranks.

It has always been especially infuriating to the Confluence mage that whoever his "obvious superior" turned out to be this time, he or she seemed free of the sort of benevolent obsession that drove Highwater. These dilettantes floated through their magical training and spell research as if they were not the most important things in the world after all. They wasted valuable time socializing with non-Adepts, indulging in mindless humor and mild intoxicants. They frivolously spent free hours enjoying society's unnecessary frills (like art and music and children). They never seemed to realize the seriousness of existence. And yet, Highwater knew, dabblers like this almost always bested him, a truly dedicated magician, when it came to tests of magical proficiency. These slackers had some unknown advantage over him, a scholar who wasted little time with "recreation," who tried never to relax his hard-won discipline. It was inexplicable.

Highwater agreed to join Tyrannon/Masric because he sensed "Masric" was in many ways a kindred spirit, avidly pursuing the acquisition of magical knowledge and reveling in the display of that knowledge. He also sensed that Masric had power dwarfing even the abilities of the best of Highwater's adversaries. With a share of that power as payment for casting one spell, Highwater could finally demonstrate to his so-called peers that his methods were truly superior, that his rigid observance of training and study had finally paid off. He would make up for his modest shortcomings in technique and flair with dazzling, irresistible, overwhelmingly majestic masterpieces of magic.

TYRANNON'S VIEW OF AGREEMENTS

What neither Jarth nor Highwater have acknowledged, is the possibility that once "Masric" has acquired the Thanatic Rod, Tyrannon will not have the slightest need for the two of them. He lives up to the letter of any agreement he makes, but this leaves considerable latitude. For instance, while Tyrannon promised to do his part to help Jarth eliminate the Revered Elder, he said nothing about leaving Jarth unimpeded in his efforts to become the new Archmage of Earth's dimension. Tyrannon wants Earth for himself.

Similarly, the influx of mystic power in the Confluence, and its control by Tyrannon's servants, has primed the crossroads dimension for "grafting" onto Tyrannon's home domain. Though a relatively small reality, the Confluence's access to further dimensions, through its naturally occurring trans-dimensional Gates, would increase Tyrannon's influence almost as much as the Rod itself. Of course, the grafting process always entails some risk. The dimension to be added does not always merge uneventfully with Tyrannon's; sometimes the bonds of reality are stretched too far, and the new territory just "implodes" out of existence. The fact that the Confluence is already somewhat unstable due to the flood of choral energy from the Stream and is therefore unlikely to accept a whole lot of additional stress will not even slow down Tyrannon. What's life without a little risk? If the Confluence doesn't stand the strain of grafting and simply vanishes, Tyrannon will get by without the new territory. If its residents, especially residents like Highwater, are unwilling to become Tyrannon's subjects for good, they'll just have to learn to adjust.

CLEANING HOUSE

He had the services of the two operatives whose loyalties he had deemed necessary to win rather than coerce (at least until the Thanatic Rod was created). Now Tyrannon began making a few changes in the crossroads dimension. Casting the spells to channel energy from the Stream of Eternity to Highwater during the creation of the Rod required a substantial amount of local power. The focal point of magical energy in the Confluence, not to mention its physical center, a gigantic crystalline sphere called the Heartstone, was under direct control of the ruler of the Confluence. To gain access to this central power source, and use it to open a way to the Stream of Eternity, Tyrannon would have to take over the dimension. First, and quite casually, he used a portion of his force to kill the current ruler of the Confluence. As Masric, though he never actually left his home dimension, Tyrannon wrested power from all the major contenders for control of the Confluence. He made himself master. (Tyrannon assured Highwater this was only a temporary state of affairs.)

Instead of trying to directly rule the Confluence from a separate dimension, for however short a time, Tyrannon installed a (literally) puppet ruler, in the image of Masric, who never really existed anyway. With the support of several hundred of Tyrannon's Agents and magical equipment in the form of humanoid artifacts (in effect, magical automatons under Masric's, ultimately Tyrannon's, control), the figure-head Masric has successfully cemented his power base.

This Masric, who now governs on Tyrannon's behalf, is "himself" one of the automatons sent to the Confluence as completely loyal shock troops. Unlike his fellow devices, though, Masric is not a low powered soldier/robot. Each of the artifact/ soldiers, in unaltered form, resembles an empty suit of medieval armor and gets the energy it needs to function from a small mystic battery attached to the back. For the Masric suit, Tyrannon provided an illusion spell, to make it look like the Masric known to Jarth and Highwater, and a singularly disgusting battery. Since Masric must demonstrate Archmage-level power, "he" does not bother using the meager energy sufficient for the other armor suits. He draws his power from the living bodies of thousands of minor and not so minor Confluence magicians, thoroughly defeated when Tyrannon took control. These unfortunate souls, along with a few outer-dimensional magicians who were already captives in Tyrannon's prisons, have been merged into a single, gigantic, horrific entity enveloping the Heartstone. The only function of the mage-battery, which appears to be a huge grayish mass of intertwined limbs, torsos, and heads, is to channel energy from the magical Heartstone to Masric, which he can then use to keep himself functioning and to power his spells.

Finally, Tyrannon had all the elements at hand needed to build the Thanatic Rod — the life force of a powerful mystic, a willing spellcaster positioned in a magic-intensive dimension, and access, through Masric's well positioned base, to the pan-dimensional energy of the Stream of Eternity. He instructed Masric to open a conduit from the Stream and relay that power to Highwater, as the native magician used it for the preliminary stages of the Spell of Creation. Gradually, Masric began to increase the drain on the Stream, as Highwater needed more and more power. Now, as the Spell nears its culmination, the energy drain is substantial. All the dimensions adjacent to the Stream of Eternity are beginning to feel the effects of Masric's interference in the natural order.

SIDE EFFECTS

An unanticipated risk in the creation of the Thanatic Rod has sprung up. The strain of drawing energy from so many dimensions at once is upsetting the balance in the Universe's various planes of existence, weakening the barriers that separate the various dimensions. The leaching of choral energy is contributing to the increasing instability, by randomly making time pass faster or slower in isolated patches of each dimension. Although Tyrannon expects to be finished with this plan well before the risk becomes too great, the longer someone tampers with the Stream of Eternity, the more chance there is of permanently harming all reality. And the longer the energy tap remains open, the harder it will be to close. If the rift in the Stream is not closed soon, the situation will become desperate. With the flow of time itself turning erratic, "time" is running out. It may already be too late to stop chaos from collapsing the universe like a house of cards.

HINTS AND PORTENTS

So far in Earth's dimension the Archmage's predictions of disaster have shown no signs of becoming reality. Gradually, the PCs will become aware that strange events are beginning to take place, symptoms of Tyrannon's machinations. One factor most of the atypical happenings have in common is a distortion of time; subjective and objective perception of the passage of time is beginning to diverge.

A rash of statistically unexplained accidents begins affecting the campaign city (indeed, the whole world, but that won't be apparent right away). Vehicle drivers seem to be having trouble judging their rates of speed, often travelling much faster or slower than they think they are, prompting an unusual number of collisions and traffic citations. Every driver cited for causing one of these accidents is honestly sure of his innocence.

Metal fatigue sets in at an alarming rate on the city's bridges and construction sites, causing the unexpected collapse of a number of older structures, so far with a great many injuries but little loss of life.

Electronic devices — from toasters to traffic signals, penlights to super-computers — begin operating erratically, too. Unexpected brownouts, followed by untraceable power surges, cause widespread damage; but this has been blamed on increased sunspot activity.

As strange happenings continue, a new syndrome called Interrupted Catatonia will be diagnosed as afflicting surprising numbers of otherwise healthy people — for no discernible reason they stop moving and remain perfectly still for several-minute periods, completely oblivious to the world around them. When the victims snap out of the "catatonic state," they have no recollection of the passage of time. (In fact, they have just been moving extremely slowly with respect to the rest of the world.)

When the PCs first start suspecting all these relatively minor changes are connected, the problem is still in its early stages. The "time shifts," whether they affect people or objects by speeding or slowing their natural functions only seem to last for a short while at a time right now, never more than a few minutes. However, the conditions will become gradually more extreme and last for greater periods the longer the PCs (and the GM) allow the situation to continue. At any rate, soon the PCs should be experiencing time shifts for themselves.

In addition to the time shifts, mystic "sensitives," either magicians or just people with abnormally high EGOs, start "seeing things." Out of the corners of their eyes, these people will spot all sorts of weird creatures hovering in the air, or walking along the street with their feet seemingly a foot below the pavement. When they try to get a better look, they'll see nothing out of the ordinary. The apparitions, which range from bipedal canines to giant snails to normal-looking humanoids who happen to be all green, are travellers from other dimensions. When the PCs start noticing them, they are still just images seen through the randomly-appearing, increasingly unreliable Gates that make the Confluence a trans-dimensional Grand Central Station. As "Masric's" plans continue, though, one or two of the travellers will accidentally be propelled Earthward through one of the Gates (perhaps this could begin a short adventure in which the PCs must track down the confused alien, possibly subdue it, and herd it back to the Gate from which it popped).

IN A CHAMPIONS SETTING

Things can be allowed to become a lot worse before superhero PCs take action. The time shifts will be more pronounced earlier, and everyone will be able to observe the effects of at least one episode of "Interrupted Catatonia" when the anchorman on one of the major networks' nightly news briefly suffers from the ailment during a live broadcast. To home viewers it will appear as if the journalist just stops speaking in mid-word, mouth hanging open, and does nothing for five full seconds of air time, then finishes the word and continues with the broadcast as if nothing unusual had happened. To the anchorman, it seems like nothing did happen except for an unexpected misjudgment of the carefully calculated time left for delivery of the news.

In a *Champions* campaign, the trans-dimensional travellers will not just appear obliquely as shifting images, hard to pin down, seen only by PCs and other "sensitives." Dozens of travellers will arrive on the city streets, confused (and probably angry) about where they have shown up. Earth looks nothing like their planned destinations. The PCs must herd the travellers back to the general areas where they appeared in hopes that either the "tourists" will still be able to return through the Gates that brought them to Earth or devise some alternate means to teleport home.

COPING IN A WORLD GONE MAD

While the PCs are getting the idea that all is not right with the world, the Revered Elder is doing some investigations of his own. He has noted similarities between his prophetic visions of disaster and events now occurring in the world — the times of troubles are just beginning.

Unfortunately, the Elder still cannot pin down exactly what is happening, and his search for more information extra-dimensionally has not gone very well so far. His usual method for journeying to other planes — passing through the Gates of the Confluence — is not working. (The massive amounts of energy now coursing through the Confluence are playing havoc with the normal operation of the Gates. Only exceptionally stable dimensional passageways or Gates used from within the Confluence are functioning properly at the moment.) The Elder has had to take more roundabout, and dangerous, routes to get where he needs to go to see if weird events are happening everywhere and to determine how severe the chaotic influences are becoming. The obstacles to normal travelling, though, are a clue to the source of the problem. The Elder plans to make one more attempt to journey to the Confluence to try to pinpoint the calamities' origin. Before he goes, he will make a quick stop, in Astral Form, to warn the PCs.

As the heroic novice magicians are taking a closer look at the scene of a recent time shift, perhaps having been subjected to a speed-up or slow-down themselves, they will hear the Elder's familiar, gentle voice:

"It is as I feared, my friends. These are the warning signs of the troubled times I have foreseen. The danger is close. I go in search of the beginnings of this chaos. Be wary. Be strong. When I return I will have need of your skills." Then the PCs sense the Elder has gone.



JARTH UPDATE

Jarth has not been idle since delivering Vincent Dimitrios to "Masric" and gaining the services of the two real Vandaleurs. He has been looking for any opportunity to make a move against the Revered Elder. He has tested the defenses at the Archmage's sanctum, but to no avail. After the attack by Tyrannon's Emissary, the Elder beefed up his shields, and Jarth has found it difficult to even see into the confines of the the Elder's hideaway, much less enter it. Since the Elder is aware that Jarth betrayed Dimitrios, but not the real reason he did so (he believes Jarth simply killed his naive teacher out of a twisted lust for power), he certainly won't be inviting the alien magician for a visit.

At last, though, Jarth has gotten a good look into the monastery, only to be frustrated again. The Elder is not there. He is frantically searching for the answers to the plague of magical illogic and has just left to follow his hunch to the Confluence. Jarth decides that if he can't go to the Revered Elder, he will get the Elder to come to him. Knowing that the Elder is overprotective of those he considers to be in his care and deeply sorrowful over his failure to save his first disciple, Jarth decides to attack the Elder's new students (allies, in a superhero campaign), while letting the Elder know it's happening. This, Jarth presumes, will draw the Revered Elder to him like a moth to a flame.

SKIRMISH WITH THE VANDALEURS

The PCs may think they are braced for anything, just after the Elder has spoken to them, but they will (probably) be surprised even so to see a globe of sparking black energy appear before them. It begins as a spot, no bigger than a dime, but quickly grows to several feet in diameter. After the globe stabilizes at the larger size, three elegantly clad forms emerge — they introduce themselves as Jarret, Edward and Anais Vandaleur.

Looking angrily at the PCs, "Jarret" will accuse them of being "dupes of that old fool" and somehow causing the mess afflicting the world. The Vandaleurs smirk. Jarret curses the ineptitude of "interfering amateurs" and says they should know better than to use spells that "unknit the barriers between worlds." None of this has any bearing on reality, but Jarth believes in using all of his skills, including verbal ones, to throw his opponents off guard.

While the heroes try to calm down "Jarret" (and if they are heroic, they should not be the type to shoot first and ask questions later), he will let them think they are succeeding, sounding increasingly more reasonable and grudgingly admitting it's possible they don't know the harm their powers have been causing. The instant the PCs begin to accept Jarret and drop their defensive postures, or when it becomes apparent they will never do so, the Vandaleurs will attack the PC they judge to be the strongest (at surprise bonuses if the PCs have started to pay serious attention to the accusatory Jarret). The PCs, no doubt in the mood now to retaliate, will probably counter-attack, and a fierce battle will follow, in which Jarret will participate alongside the Vandaleurs.

Edward and Anais are quite vicious when they attack, but Jarret is cool under pressure. In fact, about half the time during the early stages of the fight, he simply remains still, protected by magic Wards, and concentrates as if spell casting. None of the PCs, or anyone else they can see, seems affected by any attack directed by him. This will remain unexplained unless one of the PCs has Telepathy and has it turned on. If that is the case, the PC will receive a telepathic overflow from Jarret, who is sending an omnidirectional telepathic message, showing the battle in progress, and painting as gloomy a picture as possible of the PCs' current standing. (If the PCs are somehow holding their own against the three highly powerful magicians, the message will still be showing the PCs as bloody and bowing under pressure.) Jarret's "sending" will continue as long as his side is in no danger of losing. If the tide begins to turn against him, not very likely but players get lucky sometimes, Jarth will finally devote his full attention to the fight.

Regardless of the battle's progress, before it is concluded the Revered Elder, from across the dimensional gap between Earth and the Confluence, will "hear" Jarret's call. About to return to his home dimension anyway, the Elder transports himself to the vicinity of the fight to render what aid he can to the PCs.

Trying to quiet the melee and pass on the information he has learned, the Elder shouts, "You must stop this foolishness! We are all in graver peril than even I realized. Everything is endangered! The source is in but not of the Confluence —" But the Elder can proceed no further before he is ruthlessly attacked, either by Jarth and the Vandaleurs or by a new threat from the Confluence.

If Jarth and the Vandaleurs are all still ambulatory, the three of them will ignore their current foes and coordinate their attacks on the Elder. They will be relentless in their assault, but the Elder's defenses will hold, barely.

If by some fluke the PCs have actually done harm to one or more of Jarth's team, Jarth will still attack the old magician, but he will simultaneously call out **"I need your help!"**

(If the PCs have had the incredible good fortune of Stunning or knocking out Jarth himself before the Revered Elder arrives, Jarret Vandaleur will vanish, to be replaced by an insectoid monster — Jarth's true form. Assuming the Vandaleurs are conscious to witness this transformation, they will be furious and about to take their revenge out on Jarth for daring to claim to be one of them. Then the Elder shows up.)

THE AMETHYST GATE

Either breaking a combat stalemate, or just interrupting the Elder's warning, a glowing amethyst portal (a Gate from the Confluence), opens immediately behind the Elder. Suddenly, tremendous winds begin pulling the Archmage back toward the opening. A multi-tentacled "thing" composed of painfully writhing humanoid body parts lurches partway through the Gate and wraps itself around the Revered Elder. The PCs see the Elder's skin turn gray, and his flesh will begin to meld into the flexing mass of tissue as the thing begins to lumber back the way it came.

The Vandaleurs, if conscious, apparently recognize the style of Gate and remember what the Revered Elder had started to tell the PCs. They look at each other and say, simultaneously, "The Confluence?" and begin struggling away from the fierce pull of the winds.

Jarth, assuming he's still up and functioning, will comment, "Impressive."

Wasting no more time for commentary than this, the Vandaleurs (with Jarth, if his disguise is in place) take their leave. If Jarret's disguise has been revealed, before Edward and Anais make a hasty departure, they vow to destroy him. If not, the three will remain a team to plague the PCs in a future encounter.

SAVE THE ELDER

This is the PCs' chance to take the figurative bull by the horns and get to the bottom of all the confusion which has been facing them lately. No longer engaged in battle, the PCs may be able to think quickly and clearly once they realize the Elder has been snatched. Their first instinct will likely be an urge to try to rescue him. Attempting to hold the Gate open won't work. Leaping through the Gate will; at least this will get the PCs to the general location — the Confluence — from which it will be possible to save the Revered Elder. If the PCs are too surprised by recent events to make a last ditch rescue attempt, the GM should prompt them with a weak mental call from the rapidly submerging mind of their friend and advisor, the Archmage. (A plaintive "please help me..." does wonders in such situations.) The GM might try subtly "hinting" that the amethyst Gate, which is just beginning to fade, and the creature disappearing through it, are the only ties the PCs have to wherever the Elder is being taken. If the PCs remain stubbornly insistent on staying away from the Gate, the GM should take the choice out of their hands. They will be swept in by the tornadic winds just as the Gate snaps shut.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

As the PCs travel through the Gate to the Confluence, which was fading even as they entered it, the amethyst portal completely closes. However, it does so before the PCs reach the Confluence side. More than halfway to the crossroads dimension as the Gate seals, they make it through anyway, but show up nowhere near the Elder or the grasping entity that seemed to absorb him. Feeling a terrible ripping sensation, the characters lose consciousness for a short while.

When they awaken they have no way to tell precisely how long they've been "out," but none of them feel any hungrier or thirstier than when they left Earth. The PCs find themselves tumbling in mid-air, but with no sensation of falling out of control. The area seems well lighted, about the level of radiance one would expect from an overcast day on Earth, but the characters cannot see a source for the gentle light. There is no feeling of gravity, yet they aren't afflicted with the vertigo one would expect, and somehow they do have a sense of "up" and "down."

The PCs seem to be high "above" a twisting combination of what look like gigantic blood vessels, red arteries and blue veins. These vessels, actually huge river systems floating in the weightless environment of the Confluence, stretch as far as the eye can see. Instead of water, the floating rivers are filled with a sort of liquified magic, distilled to a pure concentration. Whether or not they analyze the liquid in the river systems as "condensed magic," the PCs will eventually discover that the stuff is perfectly breathable.

MOVEMENT IN THE CONFLUENCE

After tumbling helplessly for a few seconds, just long enough to see a little of their new surroundings, the PCs will gradually right themselves. Without realizing it, they have tapped into some of the ambient magical energy of this dimension, as most everyone does, and have all gained minimal powers of Flight while here.

All PCs gain at least 5" of Flight in the gaseous medium surrounding the rivers, so normal movement in the Confluence is still about as fast as walking in a gravity-bound world. Characters with high EGO stats can move even faster; they get an additional 1" to their Flight speed for every 5 points of EGO above 10. Characters who already have Flight capability will have their maximum Flight speed increased by at least 5" (more with high EGO scores), but only if their Flight is based on willpower — Telekinesis, command of the winds, a flying carpet that responds to the owner's instructions, and so on. Flight based on a physical ability — wings, for instance — will not get the movement bonus. This is because using the natural Flight ability provided by the ever-present magical energy is purely an act of will, while Flight based on a physical attribute requires the active use of muscles. The two sorts of concentration do not combine well. (If a character who uses Flight based on wings or the equivalent is Entangled or otherwise prevented from using his normal power, he can still use the base Confluence movement rate of 5" plus EGO bonus to get around.)

Once the PCs enter one of the river systems, their magical movement speed will be reduced to 3", with +1" of movement for each 5 points of EGO above 10. The PCs will still be using a form of Flight, but the liquid in the rivers is thick enough to impede their travel.

PCs may want to use their normal Swimming movement rate while submerged in the rivers. For instance, a magician with the ability to change his shape into that of a "water"-adapted creature may have a much faster Swimming speed than the 3" of riverborne Flight and might wish to take advantage of his greater speed in, say, dolphin form. This is fine, but true Swimming resembles Flight based on a physical, not mental, attribute. The PC will not get the additional 3" to maximum movement.

WALKING BETWEEN WORLDS

From their vantage point overlooking the Red and Blue river systems the PCs can see shining flecks of light where various branches and tributaries of the rivers meet. These glowing nodes hanging in the network junctures are the source of the Confluence's appeal for so many travellers, each node a connection to another dimension. All of the nodes are circular Gates of shimmering light, colored in various shades depending on the river systems of which they are a part. Gates in red systems range from pink to scarlet; Gates in blue systems range in shade from baby blue to indigo. None of the Gates visible in this part of the Confluence are colored amethyst.

In better times, the Confluence was a busy place because of the heavy traffic passing through from dimension to dimension. The river systems usually teemed with commerce, information, and tourists. Travelling through a Confluence Gate, unlike many uses of magic, was easy. Although usually controlled from the Confluence side, by residents of the river systems, each Gate could be activated almost any time with a communications spell cast from another dimension by a prospective traveller. Unless that traveller had a history of behavior unacceptable to the Gate Custodians — extreme and unpredictable violence, for instance — the request for access would be granted. After the Custodian used the short "key" incantation attuned to the Gate, it would become a two-way conduit, and the traveller could enter from the other side. Then he could take care of whatever business that brought him to the Confluence: trade, a social call, research, or travel to yet another Gate for transportation to a third dimension. Leaving the Confluence by Gate was as simple as walking (or flying, or swimming) through one of the glowing portals. This automatically activated the access to the destination, without a necessary "key" spell.

(Powerful magicians could bypass the Custodians entirely if they chose. They could use their independent skills at trans-dimensional travel to enter or leave the Confluence. If they knew the correct key and had a way to make themselves "heard" by a Gate across the dimensional gap — even a telepathic call would do — they could open it from the "outside.")

The Confluence side of a Gate was always open, giving observers in the Confluence a representative view of the destination dimension (and letting them take a good look at whoever was waiting on the other side). But until fully activated, i.e., when someone passed through from the Confluence or received permission to enter from another plane, the exit point of a Gate remained invisible.

The multiple views offered by this trait became another attraction to travel into the Confluence... sight-seeing. Beings interested in viewing foreign dimensions without actually having to take the risks such travel occasionally entailed could exercise their curiosity by taking a Gate Tour, under the direction of a specially trained Guide. Guides, respected throughout the river systems, had to have unusually sharp minds. They had to remember significant details about hundreds (the best Guides were qualified to speak about thousands) of dimensions to keep their clients interested during tours. This range of knowledge also made the Guides sought after by scholars and others in search of information.

The ease of inter-dimensional movement and fascinating vistas provided by the Gates, and the valuable knowledge of the Guides, would make the Confluence a welcome place to explore, if the PCs were so inclined, and if this place were still functioning as it used to. Unfortunately, such dimensional wanderings will have to wait for another time, and a future adventure. The PCs don't have a moment to spare, the natural operation of the Confluence has been seriously impaired, and the few dimensions accessible through the unaffected Gates are also beginning to fall prey to effects of "Masric's" spells.

TIME IS OUT OF JOINT

Tyrannon's efforts to create the Thanatic Rod have flooded the Confluence with energy from the Stream of Eternity. Though most of the energy has been directed toward Highwater and his Spell of Creation, not even magic works perfectly. There is a continual "overflow," contaminating the magical balance in this dimension. Since the nodes in the river systems are magical focal points, the extra magic is drawn there, and it's been playing havoc with the normal functioning of the Gates.

For the first time in memory, the Gates no longer work in the ordered, entirely predictable fashion Custodians have come to expect. Random energy fields block passage through many of the Gates. Some of them have spontaneously begun switching to new destinations, sometimes not even in the same dimensions as their former endpoints. Through the few Gates left that still allow normal observation of their regular endpoint dimensions, Custodians have watched dangerous time shifts, like the ones starting to affect the Earth, but usually much more extreme. They can see events transpiring at blinding speeds in some dimensions, while in others movement seems to be at a virtual stop.

Just a handful of dimensions seem to be in sync with the passage of time here. Even these dimensions no longer have two-way access to the Confluence. As if the problems besetting the rest of the Gates weren't bad enough, using the few portals that work seems to take more energy than before. Instead of drawing that energy from the Confluence rivers, the Gates that are even quasi-functional are drawing energy directly from the travellers who try to use them. Beings attempting to make the crossing through a Gate report feeling increasingly weak the closer they get to the Gate, intending to pass through. It is a struggle just to keep moving. They can barely manage the effort needed to leave the Confluence, but no amount of inner strength seems sufficient to re-enter the crossroads dimension once outside.

THE HEARTSTONE AND THE MASTER GATE

Invisible to the PCs from their current vantage point, but crucial to the survival of the Confluence, one place has the potential to halt the chaos. The Heartstone, at the center of all the river systems in this dimension, is the power that keeps those rivers flowing. All the magical energy in the Confluence has its origin here, with this gigantic faceted jewel. Normally, the half mile-wide multi-colored gem glows with a warm and reassuring light, pulsing in time with the river currents; it almost seems to breathe (and has shown signs of self-awareness, perhaps even intelligence, in the past).

More than just a celestial pump for the Confluence's "waterways," the gem is also known for its life-mending properties. The Heartstone has long been an object of pilgrimages, an ultra-dimensional Lourdes, because it grants the Curing gift. The gem can heal any supplicant who touches it of diseases, wounds, deformities, missing limbs, but only once in each supplicant's lifetime.

Many worship the Heartstone as a deity and travel unbelievable distances just to be near it. A select few are privileged to forego long journeying. Respectful, and respected, Archmages, are sometimes granted the boon of travelling directly from their retreats into the Heartstone's presence through the use of the Master Gate. This magical doorway looks similar to the lesser Gates found in the Confluence, except for the delicate amethyst shade of its surrounding nimbus of light. The Confluence's Archmage acts as Custodian of the Master Gate, which generally floats a few hundred feet above the top of the Heartstone and is rumored to be able to Teleport to and from any dimension reachable by any of the lesser Gates in the Confluence. (The amethyst Gate is the only one left in the Confluence still operating normally.)

MASRIC HARNESSSES THE HEARTSTONE

Thanks to the efforts of Tyrannon's artifact/flunky in the Confluence, the Heartstone has fallen on hard times. Masric has been grievously misusing the venerated jewel.

Masric's very first action after being placed in the position of Archmage of this dimension was to force the Heartstone to serve his needs. Masric was constructed to be Tyrannon's proxy in the Confluence and as such had to cast tremendously powerful spells, including the one to open a hole in the Stream of Eternity. The Heartstone was easily capable of powering such spells, but the gem's magical energy was almost too intense, the gem too much a living entity. As an unliving device, Masric was not equipped to handle that kind of force and needed an organic intermediary to, in effect, "pre-digest" the Heartstone's magical output and convert it for Masric's use.

Tyrannon had built well, though, and Masric was prepared with an option to deal with the problem. Around the gem Masric began positioning the bodies of Tyrannon's fallen, but not slain, magician foes in the recent battle for control of the Confluence, victims of the despot's headlong dash for ultimate destructive power. Once in place, the bodies were subjected to a massive Transformation spell, using just about the last of Masric's stored power. In a gruesome chain

reaction, the unconscious magicians began to move toward one another, flesh turning lifeless gray and liquifying, limbs twitching and groping for anything near enough to touch. Whenever the transmuting tissue oozed close enough to another magician to make contact, the bodies would begin to bond together, slowly and painfully merging, until finally all the magicians had formed a pulsating, dripping mass, completely surrounding the Heartstone.

Immediately, the newly formed mage-battery began absorbing energy from the Heartstone, converting it for Masric's use, and transmitting it to him via the small mystic battery still invisibly attached to his back. Masric was now fully functional. The Heartstone began to lose some of the vitality that made it so valuable to him.

LOSING GROUND AGAINST CHAOS

If Masric's spellcasting needs had been restricted to keeping up appearances, the Heartstone would have had no trouble regenerating its "borrowed" power. Maintaining the illusion spells that made Masric look like a living magician and the hideous mage-battery look like a horde of the Heartstone's daily visitors cost practically nothing in terms of power. Showing from time to time that the Archmage had what it took to face down any possible challengers to his power used only the slightest bit more energy.

But the most significant part of Masric's function was opening the portal between the Confluence and the Stream of Eternity, and casting that spell took a staggering toll. One casting to rip open a barrier never meant to be breached was challenge enough. For Highwater's Spell of Creation to work, for the Thanatic Rod to be able to attune itself to all the dimensions touching the dimension of Time, the barrier had to remain open. Until the portal stabilized, the spell to keep it open had to be regularly renewed. Now that the rift leading to the Stream is operating as planned, the strain on the Heartstone is getting worse, not better. Almost all of Masric's stolen power must be used, constantly, not to keep the rift open, but to make sure it doesn't widen too fast and let too much energy from the Stream enter the Confluence at once.

The Heartstone, and therefore the Confluence as a whole, is teetering on the brink of collapse. If the constant, almost total drain of energy from the gem does not end soon, the Heartstone may crack like an egg, spelling certain doom for the Confluence and everyone in it.

Actually, this too is part of Tyrannon's greater plan. In its weakened state, inundated with choral energy, the Confluence will be an ideal target for the grafting procedure that Tyrannon uses to expand his domain. The possibility that the final strain of grafting will be too much, enough to dissolve the Confluence entirely, does not concern Tyrannon. There are always other dimensions to conquer.

On the other hand, the Heartstone is amazingly resilient. If anyone can free the huge jewel from its ties to Masric, it will still recover. It will regain its strength. It will be able to re-energize the whole declining dimension. If properly used, the Heartstone will even be able to turn back the danger of the open portal to the Stream of Eternity. The PCs will get their chance to do just that, in due time.

GETTING A CLOSER LOOK

After hovering for a while in the air far above the red and blue river systems, the PCs will decide, one hopes, to move closer to one of the rivers for a better view. As soon as a PC mentions moving toward one of the rivers, his Confluence-spawned power of Flight (5"+) will activate and send him zooming downward. If the PC is unaware of the controlled nature of his speedy descent, he will discover he can stop, painlessly, when he chooses, or proceed at his own pace.

Approaching a river, made up of either red or blue translucent fluid, the PCs will see that most of the "waterways" (fluidways?) are for all practical purposes deserted. Natives and other-dimensional travellers alike, upset by the mysterious troubles afflicting the Confluence, have begun seeking refuge wherever they can, deciding to stay in hiding until the crisis is past and the Gates resume their normal function. The rivers themselves seem sluggish.

Even the limited flora and fauna here are subdued. The lifeforms are pretty much limited to globs of a kelp-like plant, with strands ranging in size from a few inches to several hundred yards long, and several varieties of fishlike animals, small and harmless in appearance. In a red system, the "kelp" is generally larger and more robust than the plant-life from a blue river; red system kelp tends to clump together in large, island-like bunches. The animals in the blue systems look bigger and more aggressive than their red cousins.

Though there doesn't seem to be a physical barrier restricting inter-system travel, PCs may note that both plant and animal life sticks pretty much to its own river-type.

RED VS. BLUE — THE RIVER SYSTEMS

If the PCs try entering one of the rivers, they will feel a strange tingling, which quickly fades. The sensation is noticeably different for red and blue streams. After the tingling passes, the PCs will encounter some unanticipated changes in their abilities, changes which last only as long as the PCs remain in the fluid. Since the rivers are composed of "distilled magic," rather than water, they have a profound effect on anything travelling through them:

Red system rivers tend to energize magical powers. For every 10 Active Points in a power, add 5 Active Points of effect. A 10d6 magical Energy Blast will produce 15d6 of effect, with no increase in Endurance cost to the PC; 20" of magical Flight becomes 30" of Flight. (For Flight, do not count the base Confluence river movement rate of 3" when calculating the Active Points for the bonus effect; in the example just mentioned, the PC's total maximum Flight speed will be 33", 5" of which will have no Endurance cost.)

If a PC has powers derived from a non-magical origin, as will most standard superheroes, the Active Points bonus will be a bit less (5 Active Points per 20 Active Points normally in the power).

The fluid in the blue streams also changes PCs' abilities, but in a more selective way, and with some penalties. Overall, contact with blue fluid can add to the PCs' effectiveness, but it does so, in part, by redistributing mystic energy from rough, "natural" powers to more ordered abilities. Some characters may end up losing on the power transaction. Submersion in blue rivers subtracts from the effectiveness of most "natural" magical powers, i.e., drawn from the PC rather than from a focus (at a rate of -5 Active Points per 20 points in the power). On the other hand, powers that do work through a focus will be very much more effective in a blue river (+5 Points per 10 Active Points in the Power).

Technologically-based heroes will have a slight advantage, for once, travelling through a blue river. Non-magical heroes have very little magic energy to shift. Their personally-derived powers will not be subject to the usual decreases, but they do get a bonus in effectiveness for their foci-derived powers (+5 points/10 Active Points).

Powers which have a single standard cost, such as Astral Form, will not change, regardless of which rivers the PCs travel.

RED VS. BLUE — THE PEOPLE

Just as lower forms of Confluence life seem to have a natural aversion to plants or creatures from a different river system, the "human" natives inhabiting the Confluence don't get along well with each other. Reds stay with Reds; Blues stay with Blues.

Natives of the red river systems are friendly, red-skinned, not-quite-human people. They have adapted to their liquid environment over the centuries and are naturally streamlined for swimming, with swept-down noses and semicircular flaps of tissue on their forearms. Reds use harpoons for defense, but they don't really like carrying possessions with them; they can always use their Magic Pools to create whatever they need out of the river's "liquid magic." While they appear to be barely past the hunter-gatherer stage, Reds are actually quite sophisticated, having a rich oral tradition and a great deal of historical knowledge about a great many dimensions, Earth included. Red natives will be happy to see any helpful extra-dimensional travellers.

Physically, natives of blue river networks are almost identical to their red-skinned adversaries, except Blues have, naturally, blue skin. Blues are also slightly smaller, but they compensate for that by making more use of objects for defense and attacks, and depending on domesticated animals (trained attack "sharks") for combat support. Personal conduct is thoroughly regimented among the Blues. A person is judged on the basis of the strength of his armory and not the strength of his mind.

HIT AND RUN

There has always been friction between the two societies, but outright combat was rare until lately. Without apparent provocation, the Blues have begun raiding Red settlements and kidnapping community "mayors," with no pattern except that the victims were all Adept-level magicians.

The success of these raids can be attributed to the Blues' mysterious new reinforcements, which come in two varieties: short, pasty-faced aliens dressed in black suits, and armor-clad behemoths that are incredibly strong and resistant to many magical attacks. Both types of troops have been provided by Tyrannon, through Masric, to secure new "cells" for the the mage-battery around the Heartstone and to get a military force loyal to Tyrannon entrenched in Blue society. The short, homely humanoids are Agents of Tyrannon, obeying Blue orders (for the time being) delivered through magical talismans provided by Masric to each Blue commander. The armor wearing "giants," really no more than 7 feet tall, are simple artifacts, much like Masric himself, hollow suits powered by the small mystic batteries on their backplates. They have no will of their own, being magical automatons, but obey orders given through the same talismans the Blue commanders use to command the Agents.

It is vital that in the coming encounter the PCs have a chance to see the artifacts in action. Whenever the lumbering suits of pseudo-medieval armor exert themselves beyond minimal movement (using their Flight or high Strength), the plate-sized plaques on their backs pulse with energy. An attack aimed directly at one of the "batteries" (which will have a size bonus of +4 to DCV) and surpassing the artifact's Armor protection will destroy the small device. A combined strength (physical and/or telekinetic) of 30+, and a successful Grab maneuver, can remove one of these small batteries. If its battery is broken or removed, the artifact is deactivated, easy prey for investigating characters. Opening the suit to see who's inside reveals the surprising answer — no one.

DEFENSE OF THE KELP ISLAND

As the PCs are trying to get their bearings, one of them spots some activity downcurrent along a blue river, where it nears a congruent red river. (The GM should make Perception Rolls secretly for each PC; the character who gets the best Roll sees the movement.) If the PCs investigate stealthily, using Astral Form or Invisibility to work their way closer to the action, they will see a group of 20 Blue soldiers (with 10 attack sharks, 20 Agents, and 5 armored artifacts as reinforcements) preparing to make a foray across the short gap between rivers. The warrior squad is directly opposite a large, stationary clump of kelp, about 500 yards long by 200 yards wide. The island-sized patch of aquatic growth is home to a small community of red-skinned natives — some 75 men, women and children. The Reds seem oblivious to their danger, even though they have guards posted and facing the Blue raiding party, because the Blues are using a magical device to cast an Image (Sight & Sound) masking their presence. Since the image is keyed to the Reds, the PCs can see the Blues normally.

Hidden PCs may overhear a whispered discussion between a couple of the Blue troops. The Blues speculate about the origins of the literally outlandish Agents and the "Iron Boxes," wondering aloud how "the new Archmage" found them. The soldiers bemoan the fact that this will probably be one of their last raids for a while; most of the truly powerful magician/leaders of the red river system have already been taken to Masric. Soon there won't be anyone valuable enough to bother capturing (the Blues don't know about the mage-battery, but they are sure the captured Red magicians aren't being taken in for questioning). Why, even this Island's leader, Mayor Parallus, is strictly a second-stringer in the magical rankings.

If the PCs approach the Blue contingent openly, or if they take some action while hidden that makes them easy to spot, the Blue commander assumes they are trying to make a sneak attack. He instantly gives the order to charge the PCs. The commander depends on the camouflage spell to keep the dwellers on the Kelp Island in the dark for the few seconds he believes it will take to deal with a mere half dozen or so interlopers. The Blues are not expecting anything like the kind of resistance the PCs can deliver, though — more than likely, they will be routed. The camouflage spell will fall, and the Red natives, curious about the carnage they can suddenly see, will come to the very edge of the Blue river and try to talk to the PCs. Hearing what has happened, the Reds will invite the characters to a short celebratory meal.

If the PCs remain discrete, they can warn the residents of the Island about the Blue raiding party just in time. The decision to warn them should be an easy one when the PCs realize the Reds are family units in their homes, not a war party on the prowl. The Blue party will attack, and as in the earlier option, will be taken aback by the PCs' high power. With the PCs at their sides, the Red natives should be able to drive the Blue troops away. The Blue commander will order a withdrawal if it looks like he or more than half of his troops may be capture.

AFTERMATH

This encounter allows the PCs to experience aggressive Blue behavior and earn the gratitude of the Kelp Island's Mayor Parallus. Like most Reds, he is friendly in the extreme, but at a loss to explain the recent hostilities. Overheard comments by Blue soldiers, and an examination of a deactivated artifact, provide more questions than answers.

In the spirit of cooperation, Parallus will tell the PCs about "current events" in the Confluence: the sudden death a few hundred sleeps ago of the Confluence's ruler; the arrival on the scene of a previously unheard of magician, Masric, who quickly overwhelmed all contenders for the position of dimensional Archmage; the raids on Red communities; and the unprecedented failure of some of the local Gates (even Parallus doesn't know the Confluence-wide extent of the trouble). He will listen attentively to anything the PCs tell him and will be especially interested if they refer to the one-of-a-kind amethyst Gate, which only the Archmage has authority to use.

THE CODE OF THE CONFLUENCE

It should be clear by this point that the new Archmage has special knowledge, to say the least, of whatever is really going on, so Parallus recommends to the PCs that they go to the Heartstone to confront Masric there. Once facing the Confluence's ruler, the PCs will be able to use a ritualistic custom of this dimension — the Code of the Confluence — to require Masric to answer their questions, and if he is somehow responsible for the problems that brought them here, to put matters to right.

The Code allows anyone in the dimension to bargain with the ruler for some service or boon, in exchange for which the person(s) must perform a service or accept some challenge. The Code has three traditional modes.

In the Way of the Servant, the petitioner agrees to become a personal aide of the Archmage for a specified length of time, usually as payment for an answered question.

The Way of the Citizen is used when the petitioner has a question of a more difficult nature or wants the Archmage to actually do him a favor (for example, allowing the petitioner to use the Master Gate for an urgent personal journey). The petitioner must then accept responsibility for accomplishing a task the Archmage wants done.

The first two Ways are entirely voluntary, up until the moment the deal is struck. Once both sides say "I agree to these terms," however, they are committed to action.

The Way of the Warrior does not allow the Archmage or the petitioner any refusal rights. This is simply a modified trial by combat, obviously not intended to be a fight to the death, in most cases. The petitioner challenges the Archmage to

battle, free to ask for any service which the Archmage is capable of performing, if only the petitioner wins. If the Archmage wins, the more likely outcome, he can require the loser to do anything he wants. This usually includes both a period of service and going on a mission/quest on the Archmage's behalf.

JOURNEY TO THE HEARTSTONE

The PCs, not having much in the way of alternatives, should plan to take Parallus' advice. Even if they doubt their ability to take the Archmage in combat, they can hope he will negotiate some quest in return for answers. Wanting answers of his own, and offering to act as a guide, Parallus will join the PCs and bring along a small squad of 10 of his community's warriors.

If the PCs have somehow avoided making friends with Parallus, they will have to proceed on their own. This may not be overly difficult, since there are really only two important directions in a river network — upstream and downstream. If the PCs continue to see the parallel between the red and blue rivers and the biological systems they resemble, they will realize that the center of events in the Confluence should be upstream (in the more energetic red networks; downstream in the more relaxed Blue rivers). They may be a bit slower, but they will eventually get to the Heartstone.

The trip from the Kelp Island to the center of the Confluence would usually take several "sleeps," but the nearly deserted rivers make rapid travel possible. Also, the PCs' company is much less hindered than they would expect by the current from upstream, i.e., toward the Heartstone. The total travelling time from Kelp Island to the Heartstone will only be about 15 hours. During this time, Parallus will describe the Heartstone in loving detail, telling of its wondrous powers of healing and the sense of well-being any Confluence dweller gets just by being near it. He is worried that the river's slowing current is a symptom of something wrong with the Heartstone itself.

Along the way the travellers can get a closer look at the Gates they've only seen as points of light. At every river joining the now dimly glowing circles of light hang motionless within the fluid. The PCs, if they try to get a closer look, will be met by teams of sadly confused Custodians and Guides, commiserating in groups of two and three. Shaking their heads apologetically, the Custodians will say, usually, "Sorry, this gate is closed. Too dangerous now." The Gate approached may be one of the portals leading to a sped up or snail's pace dimension. It may be one of the Gates that now switch exit points every few minutes, showing the PCs a bewildering display of worlds: worlds where tiny people live in gargantuan trees in a Robin Hood-esque fantasy of forest life, worlds of medieval warfare where elves and dwarves clash on bloody fields, worlds that look just like Earth, with billboards and skyscrapers and hordes of cars, except all the people are bipedal waterfowl instead of human beings. The PCs can't go to any of these worlds, at least not now, since they have no way back and they must rescue the Elder first anyway, but the GM may use the images the PCs see as foreshadowing for future adventures.

The PCs will have only a few other encounters journeying to the Heartstone. Disgruntled tourists, stranded in the Confluence, will approach the PCs as they travel purposefully upriver and demand help. The GM should play the

tourists to the hilt, giving the PCs a taste of the "ugly American" traits travellers often display. The tourists complain unreasonably, speak loudly and slowly so as to make the "natives" better understand them (even though everyone in the Confluence can comprehend everyone else), and wear eye-smarting colors and ludicrous flowered clothes.

The party may come across a few isolated Blue patrols, about half the size of the group that attacked Kelp Island, hovering just outside the red river. Engaging the Blues in combat will give the characters a chance to discover the nature of the armor-clad artifacts, if they didn't do so at the Island.

Schools of unsupervised Blue sharks (no more than 1d6 worth at a time), may have to be dealt with as well, crossing into the Red river looking for tasty PCs.

MEETING HIGHWATER

As they get within two miles or so of the Heartstone, the PCs will hear loud chanting ahead, chanting that makes every magically sensitive person strangely uneasy. Without knowing exactly how, they recognize that the powerful voice, Highwater's, is casting a dangerous spell.

Just as the last syllable of the Spell of Creation is recited, the PCs round a bend in the river and spot the purple-skinned Highwater, tall and still muscular, despite the white beard that shows his advanced age. He looks incredibly fatigued, swaying in the weak river current, eyes smudged of black, almost unable to stand up. Highwater is in the center of a crystal platform, floating beneath what first appears to be one of the Confluence Gates, actually an energy transmitter created by Masric, surrounded by hundreds of interested magic students.

The nearby Gate looks unlike the other, malfunctioning portals. It glows with a glaring white light. All that can be seen through the circular opening is an endlessly stretching, perfectly flat plain (shaded in light grays), the monotony broken by a "river" of sparkling white energy, flooding toward the viewers. Some of the energy river is still spilling into the red network, but the flow through the opening is diminishing. As the PCs watch, the Gate shudders and blinks out of existence.

Highwater lowers a slender black wand, which radiates menace and from which sparks occasionally fly with an angry popping sound. His attention is not on the newly formed Thanatic Rod. He is looking around, obviously puzzled, almost sniffing for magical clues. Now that the Spell is complete, now that the energy conduit he's just finished using is closed, the drain of energy from the Stream of Eternity should have ceased. It has not.

Highwater looks toward the PCs, but will not go out of his way to greet them. He takes great care packing the Thanatic Rod in a protective satchel and sets out for the Heartstone, followed by the crowd of onlookers. Appearing confused and heart-crushingly weary (he's been casting spells continuously for quite some time now), Highwater takes frequent stops to look around. He uses his Detect Magic to try to analyze the strange energy patterns he's perceiving.

If the PCs try to interfere with his progress, by restraining him or blocking his way until they can have a word with him, Highwater will muster the last of his energy to try to escape. He knows he is in no condition to fight trained magicians (or even superheroes).

If the PCs try to catch up to him and initiate a conversation, Highwater will accept their company but will not let them slow him down. They may try to get him to answer questions about his recent activities. ("Research, into the nature of the Thanatic Rod" is all he'll say.) To divert their questions, he will instead ask about them: who they are, where they came from, why they're here. If the PCs answer his questions with anything approaching honesty, Highwater will grow increasingly agitated. If they're unwilling to do so even after sufficient prompting by Highwater, Parallus will tell what he knows of Confluence conditions.

Highwater will be visibly shocked by the PCs' stories. Hearing of chaotic time shifts, Highwater will protest, "But surely that is just an aberration, an isolated incident!" Assured otherwise, he will turn thoughtful.

When told about kidnappings of an Archmage and innumerable lesser magicians, he will be shocked at the impropriety. Highwater sees nothing improper in killing a magician, since trials by combat are part of life in an adversarial Universe, but kidnapping is undignified, and besides, what purpose could it serve?

As the PCs, backed up by Parallus, tell of the almost complete breakdown of operations in the Confluence Gates, Highwater will mutter, less than convincingly, "That cannot last much longer."

If the PCs say they plan to confront Masric and ask for explanations, Highwater will look just a little bit guilty, then recover his usual dignity. He will not try to dissuade the PCs. He's beginning to want a few answers of his own.

Highwater will pay more attention to his surroundings as the party gets closer to the Heartstone. The river, except for the travelling party and the few hundred magic aficionados following him, is deserted. The few Gates they pass do seem to be malfunctioning. The normally strong current this close to the Heartstone, which keeps the central river systems scoured of impurities, has almost entirely stopped. Consequently, the usually translucent red fluid is turning darker, almost burgundy, as debris begins to collect in the river. If the PCs travel through a blue river system, which Parallus and the other red-skinned Confluence dwellers would refuse to do, they will note a similar darkening effect.

Worse, Highwater senses the Rift to the Stream of Eternity is growing larger. Highwater suspects Masric was not being truthful when he said the Rod was all he wanted from the Confluence.

The PCs, even those without special magical senses, will begin to hear a faint hum, at the lower extreme of their hearing, rising and falling in intensity.

LEARNING THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Approaching the huge open area around the Heartstone, two changes will come to the PCs' notice. First, despite the liquid congealing around them and the increasing gloom, they feel very "pepped up," eager for action, powerful, just plain good. They also seem to be getting better at "reading" the surrounding magic fields (even technological PCs will get glimmers of this magical awareness). The highly energized state of the area, thanks to the saturation of energy from the Stream, is making everyone more magically sensitive. In terms of game mechanics, assume that anyone using powers with 30 Active Points or more has temporarily taken the "Detectable" Limitation, at 14-.

As the PCs start adjusting to their new sensitivity, they will become aware of a second change. They'll begin hearing an accompaniment to that strange hum... screams of pain. As the buzzing in their ears gets alternately softer and louder, so do the screams.

FULL SPEED AHEAD OR FINESSE?

If they rush forward blindly to investigate the horrid sounds, the PCs will more than likely warn Masric of their approach. Unless they all have some method to muffle sound, the simple noise of their passage through the river fluid (not to mention any noisy Special Effects their movement powers entail) will be sufficient to let him know someone is travelling in his direction.

PCs who are extraordinarily quiet to normal hearing will probably still warn Masric when trying a headlong approach. Using full power will make them Detectable. Warning Masric of their presence will not necessarily alter the flow of events in the finale, but it will delay their realization of his allegiance and true nature, probably to the last minute. The Confluence Archmage will be facing them when they arrive, placidly awaiting further developments.

Moving slowly or using Astral Form will allow the PCs to gather a bit of revealing information before plunging on.

WHAT THEY SEE

If the PCs try a subtle, scouting approach, they see a reassuringly normal scene. They enter a vast open area, at least a mile across, filled with violet fluid (for effects on magic for being within the fluid, assume the characters are still within the red network). The fluid, usually the same light color as the amethyst Gate, is a bit darker now. The Heartstone appears to be in full glowing health, facets sparkling, pulsing with energy, displaying all its multi-colored splendor. Thousands of blissful appearing red- and blue-robed people are floating in the fluid, facing the gem, holding hands and swaying back and forth. They seem to be chanting, but the PCs can't quite make out what they're saying. (PCs who make a Perception Roll, at +1, will see that the chanting and swaying is in time with the ebb and flow of humming/screams, which all the PCs can still hear.)

This happy scene is thanks to a massive illusion spell. Any PCs who concentrate on the tableau of worshippers, thanks to the "Detectable Effect," will get a Perception/Detect Magic Roll to realize it is an illusion. The power of the spell (130 Active Points) is such that anyone using a Detect Magic Roll to determine its nature will get a +26 modifier, which handily overcompensates for the -12 distance modifier they get if they try to analyze the illusion from the edge of the open area.

This does not let the PCs see the truth behind the illusion. Using Clairvoyance, they will be able to see the gray, undulating mass that really encloses the Heartstone. They should recognize the hideously merged bodies as the "thing" that indirectly brought them to the Confluence. If their Clairvoyant sense gives them a close-up view of the mage-battery, they may even (with a GM-donated "Luck Roll") recognize the now misshapen features of the Revered Elder floating in the mass of gooey tissue.

Dispelling or Suppressing the illusion will also let the PCs see reality (though most PCs would surely not have enough power to get rid of the whole illusion spell), but it will also inform Masric of their presence. If the GM is kind-hearted, he may allow a Suppress to work on a small section of the Area

of Effect Image spell (assume 25 Active Points per hex to overcome — the base illusion). The PCs will still get a glimpse of the horror behind the facade, but they'll have less chance of making themselves too obvious, and they probably won't be able to even glimpse the Revered Elder.

Just above the encapsulated Heartstone, invisible to normal senses but easily "seen" as a Detectable source of powerful magic, the Rift between the Stream of Eternity and the Confluence allows a torrent of power to pour through. PCs who direct their attention to this unseen opening will realize this is the source of the humming in their ears. Magical senses reveal that the tear in the Confluence has widened to 300 meters (150") across; this "appears" (again, only to magical senses) to be the narrow end of a monstrous funnel, leading back into the Stream. The gap is getting even larger.

Floating a few feet to the side of the Rift, Masric is in conference with a shrouded entity seen through the Master Gate. PCs who stay at the rim of the open area, without some form of enhanced senses (or Clairaudience), will not be able to hear what is said — they're a half mile away. Sneaking closer for a better vantage point, PCs can overhear part of a conversation between Masric and Tyrannon.

EAVESDROPPING

Masric informs his master that Highwater has finished creating the Thanatic Rod (this should raise a few PC eyebrows) and is presumably even now bringing it to the Heartstone. The second phase of the operation is well in hand, Masric continues, with all of the "lesser artifacts" and Agents in place and the Confluence pretty much energy-full. In a matter of a few minutes, the Master can complete the grafting procedure to bring the whole new dimension into his realm. Masric seems a little uneasy when he suggests that Tyrannon, not mentioned by name, might want to expedite matters; the increasing instability from the energy conduit may rupture the Confluence.

"It is worth the risk to wait just a little longer," Tyrannon will say. "The more chaotic the Confluence's energy, the weaker the resistance to my efforts once the grafting begins. Assimilation of this dimension into a new reality will be childishly simple. Adding the Confluence to my domain will let me move into any other dimension at will; I will soon rule Everything! It is proper that I wait for the optimum moment for this first step. Besides, as the encroaching chaos makes it harder for simple survival in these last few moments, many possible rebels in the Confluence will die, leaving more of my Agents positioned to take control." (Conventionally rational beings would probably not waste such an informative speech on a tool, not even an almost sentient one. Dimensional rulers, especially the ones in search of Universal domination, have a tendency to do so, however. They seem compelled to recite their plans, either to captured heroes or attentive lackeys; perhaps they like the sound of their own voices.)

DECIDING WHAT TO DO

After overhearing the conversation between Masric and Tyrannon, the PCs will probably want some time to discuss what they've learned. But they shouldn't delay too long.

Highwater will be incensed that anyone would use his efforts as part of a plan to invade the Confluence, but probably more incensed that he let himself be duped into accepting a devious plan at surface value. He will become an

ardent foe of Masric at this point. He comments that the Rift is obviously having a more wide-ranging effect that the villains know about. If it is not closed very soon, regardless of the effect on the Confluence, all the dimensions affected by Time may "rupture" as well.

Highwater finally tells the PCs more about the Thanatic Rod. He will not tell them the precise nature of its construction (a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and all that...), but he will tell about its power. He thinks the only way to save the Universe may be to sacrifice the dimension containing the Rift, sealing it by forcing it out of existence. He is willing to use the Rod to destroy the Confluence, saving all other dimensions (and telling Masric, in effect, "if I can't have it, no one can").

Of course, he says, the Code still provides a way out. If the PCs defeat Masric, one of the foundational magic laws of the Confluence *requires* him to do their bidding. They may still be able to force him to close the Rift. In this case, using the Rod can be seen as a last resort.

CONFRONTATIONS

Either charging full tilt into a confrontation with Masric, or after a brief scouting mission, the PCs will probably challenge Masric to the Way of the Warrior. He seems amused by this and naturally assumes they don't stand a chance (they wouldn't, if he could bring his full power to bear, but he must use most of his Heartstone energy to keep the Rift from going out of control).

Masric accepts the challenge and engages the PCs in combat, planning to dispose of them within a couple of Phases with an immensely powerful destructive spell. At his first opportunity in combat Masric plans to Entangle the PCs in a virtually unbreakable bond (this will not effect PCs in Astral Form, but killing their bodies will take care of that). Then he will switch all his variable magic energy into an Area of Effect multi-dice Penetrating Killing Attack.

The PCs may be powerful, and lucky, enough to defeat Masric in all-out combat, but a more subtle option exists. While rearranging his power use, Masric allows his personal illusion spell to lapse. The PCs can see that beneath his "normal" appearance of Archmage splendor, he looks exactly like a magical automaton, presumably with the same weakness. (The PCs may already have seen this, if they tried to use Clairvoyance to peer through the Heartstone illusion, and made plans accordingly.)

With this realization, the PCs should try to come up with a ploy to cut Masric off from his power source. This won't be as easy as removing a mystic battery from a standard artifact — he no longer uses one — but attentive PCs can note a faint energy trail, always the straightest course between Masric and the mage-battery. They can then try any of several means to cut that link, including: using an Entangle on his back to block Masric's energy input; using a Ward spell around Masric or an interposed PC's "unattuned" body, to block the energy trail itself; establishing mental contact with the mage-battery to awaken some of the mages' individual minds and ask for their help (either resisting the flow of energy to Masric or physically restraining him while the PCs take other steps to finish him off); or another creative measure approved by the GM.

In a greatly weakened state "Masric" should be easy prey to a few well-placed mystic bolts. However, the drain on the Stream of Eternity continues, regardless of whether the PCs vanquish Masric. If the PCs have been successful in awakening some of the individual personas buried in the mage-battery, these magicians will begin freeing themselves, but that only seems to make the problem worse. Without the mage-battery's full power to restrict its expansion, the Rift will grow even larger.

HIGHWATER'S FOLLY

If it looks like the PCs will not figure out a way to stop Masric in his tracks, or after they do stop him, when it becomes apparent that the unnatural portal to the Stream of Eternity remains open, Highwater decides the situation is hopeless. He activates the Thanatic Rod.

The Detectable effect now in play will warn all PCs the moment the Rod is turned on, but they can only watch in horror as Highwater screams defiance ("I take take the prize from your grasp!") and hurls the Rod at the Heartstone.

Just as the Rod is about to hit the huge crystal, the amethyst Gate opens, from the other side, and a huge, gnarled hand reaches through to grab the Rod.

"No, you utter, utter fool! This Rod is mine to use, and mine alone! You could have been my servant, with skills beyond your darkest hopes! Now Tyrannon will ever be your enemy! And when the Confluence is mine at last, you shall pay!"

The "fist" shudders, as the Rod begins to eat into it, but retains its grip long enough to drag the deadly wand back through the Gate. The PCs sense Tyrannon is trying to Suppress the Rod's power, but cannot tell if he is succeeding. A blinding flash of white hot fire blasts through the Gate, which then closes. Even if Tyrannon did subdue the Rod, it seems he's out of the picture for a while.

If Masric has not been defeated before this point, he will cease functioning now. But the Rift is still open.

CLOSING THE PORTAL

As the grand finale to the adventure, the PCs must try to close the remaining dimensional breach. As with the possible plans for defeating Masric, the options are many, and the following examples are not all-inclusive. Any measure that greatly tasks the PCs' power should probably succeed (but the GM should not make it too easy).

Remembering, or being reminded of, the stories about the Heartstone's miraculous Healing power, the PCs can try to use that power through a human host to seal the gap. Since the Healing requires that someone ask for aid, a mortal volunteer must be willing to channel the full force of the Heartstone's energy back into the Stream, to accomplish the dimensional cure. This provides a particularly good chance for a noble magician to risk his life for the sake of humanity. The mage-battery, rapidly disintegrating into its component parts, will be able to assist in channeling the Healing energy.

The PCs may think of using the Master Gate (assuming they heard Tyrannon use the "key" spell to activate it), or their own Gate powers, probably enhanced by Highwater's Magic

Pool or help from the mage-battery, to close the Rift. Placed directly in front of the Rift, and leading back into the Stream of Eternity, a Gate will cause the Rift to feed itself out of existence.

The PCs could try a more blunt method, simultaneously directing all of their attacks at the Rift, with weak but sincere reinforcement from the mage-battery magicians just now coming to their senses. This is less dramatic, but if no other alternative presents itself, it may work. A "passive" use of offensive powers (for example, using enhanced strength or Telekinesis to block the Rift) will not do a lot, though. The PCs should at least make an appearance of expending major amounts of energy. (To make this option more meaningful, the GM might say their efforts are not quite enough, but if they all try to Push their powers... Then while they frantically comply, the GM can look concerned, make dice rolls of his own, add up nonexistent numbers on scrap paper, and triumphantly announce victory.)

Possibilities are not quite endless, but any non-silly option the PCs choose should be given a chance of success. Once the Rift is closed, the mage-battery dismantled, and the Heartstone once more pumping, weakly but regularly, the PCs can go home.

TIME IN THE CONFLUENCE

A GM running a gaming campaign set in an alternate version of our Earth usually tries to keep the background of the campaign's adventures pretty close in time to that of the real world. But sometimes delays interfere with gaming sessions, or PCs take much more or less time than expected to complete adventures, and campaign time can become wholly separated from real time.

The GM might want to take the opportunity presented by the callous treatment of the Stream of Eternity to rebalance a campaign gone temporally out of phase. The PCs probably have been in the Confluence less than two days, by their perceptions. That does not mean that only two days have passed back home.

The GM could inform the PCs that, when they return to Earth, they have really been gone for whatever length of time the campaign is behind real-world time. Two months, two years, whatever is appropriate. If the gap is so long that it would severely hamper the PCs' private lives, however, some explanation should be made for the PCs' miraculous return.

The PCs could make their own excuses. One PC could claim to have been lost at sea in a boating accident, another's been hitch-hiking around the country trying to "find himself," a third may claim to have gone on a religious retreat. And so on.

The GM might declare that no one is surprised at seeing the PCs "back" because no one realizes they've been gone. Perhaps imposters have been taking their place on Earth. This could lead to an adventure in which the PCs try to find out who the frauds are and why they're impersonating the PCs.

AVERAGE REDS AND BLUES

Val	Char	Cost	50+	Disadvantages					
13	STR	3	10	Loyal to Community					
14	DEX	12	15	Watched by Blues/Reds (more					
13	CON	6		power, NCI, harassment, 8-)					
10	BODY	0							
13	INT	3							
11	EGO	2							
13	PRE	3							
10	COM	0							
5	PD	2							
4	ED	1							
3	SPD	6							
6	REC	0							
26	END	0							
25	STUN	1							
Cost	Powers/Skills			END					
15	Magic Pool								
5	MP Control Cost, Only in Confluence river network (-1/2)								
4	+2" Swimming (4" total)								
3	Magic Skill 12-								
3	PS: Hunter/Tactics 12-								
2	KS: Storytelling 11-								
3	KS: Confluence 11-								
1	Familiarity w/Harpoon								
	Normally carries 2d6 RKA, Penetrating Harpoon								
OCV: 5; DCV: 5; ECV: 4; Phases: 4, 8, 12									
COSTS:	Char	Powers	Total	Disadv	Base				
	39	+	36	=	75	=	25	+	50

These typical residents of the Confluence river systems, either Red or Blue, are derived from the Competent Normal character example in *Champions*.

Reds use their Magic Pools as needed to provide for their basic (and not so basic) comforts, and to provide special defenses (5 PD/ED Armor, for example) if they have time to prepare for battle.

Blues use their Magic Pools almost exclusively for combat, not only for defenses, but also modifying their weapons (magically adding Power Advantages, like Takes No Range Penalties, to their Harpoons, is a favorite play). Blues also wear 3 PD/ED Armor just about all the time, which slows their Swimming movement by 1".

Exceptional natives still in the category of "Competent Normals"—like Parallus—use the same statistics, but have larger Magic Pools and/or Magic Skills, whose cost is offset by experience. Parallus, a very experienced campaigner, for a "normal" fellow, has a 25-point Pool (8-point Control Cost) and a 17- Skill Roll.

HIGHWATER

Val	Char	Cost	100+	Disadvantages
20	STR	10	30	2xSTUN from Phys.Attacks
21	DEX	33	10	2xSTUN from non-magical attacks
18	CON	16		
10	BODY	0	20	Arrogant/Pompous
25	INT	15	15	Always Serious
28	EGO	36	15	Hates Being Out Thought
15	PRE	5	10	Watched by Tyrannon 11-
14	COM	2	175	Experience
5	PD	1		
5	ED	1		
5	SPD	19		
8	REC	0		
36	END	0		
29	STUN	0		

Cost	Powers	END
62	Multipower: 62 pts	
6 u	*6d6 Ego Attack	6
6 u	*10d6 Telepathy, x 1/2 END	2
6 u	*6d6 Mind Control, 0 END	
4 u	*6d6 Mind Scan, +10 to rolls	4
6 u	Extra-D Travel, any- where, 1600 kg	6
4 u	Clairvoyant (Sight & Hearing), Trans-Dimensional, 600", x 1/2 END	2
50	Magic Pool	
25	Control Cost	
23	Magic Skill 24-	
25	Detect Magic 25-	
3	KS: Inter-D. Travel 14-	
3	KS: Confluence 14-	
9	KS: Magical Theory 9-	

**Most targets in a Mystic Masters campaign will take 2x Effect from mentally targeted attacks*

OCV: 7; DCV: 7; ECV: 9; Phases: 3, 5, 8, 10, 12					
COSTS:	Char	Powers	Total	Disadv	Base
	143	+	232	=	375
				=	275
				+	100

BLUE "SHARKS"				
Val	Char	Cost	50+	Disadvantages
40*	STR		15	No Manipulation
18	DEX	24	15	Obeys Blue Partner
30	CON	40	143	Animal Bonus
20*	BODY	8		
5	INT	- 5		
10	EGO	0		
20	PRE	10		
6	COM	- 2		
12	PD	4		
12	ED	0		
4	SPD	12		
8	REC	0		
60	END	0		
40*	STUN	0		
*Growth already added in				
Cost	Powers			END
40	2 Lvl's Growth (Pers., Always on) Stats already added			0
30	2d6 HKA (4d6 w/STR)			3
12	4 PD/ 4 ED Armor			
20	+10" Swimming			
10	Tracking Scent			
5	Mind Link w/Blue Partner			
OCV: 6; DCV: 2; ECV: 3; Phases: 3,6,9,12				
COSTS:	Char	Powers	Total	Disadv Base
	106	+	117	= 223 = 173 + 50

These huge aggressive fish are not quite sharks, but they're close enough. Most of the ones encountered by the PCs will be under the control of Blue warriors, and will be used as combat animals and riding beasts. Unattended sharks will be looking for tasty characters to eat.

TYRANNON'S ARMORED FRIEND					
Val	Char	Cost	100+	Disadvantages	
40	STR	30	10	2x BODY from non-magic weapons	
15	DEX	15	25	Turns off w/o Mystic Battery	
10	CON	0	15	3d6 Susceptible to Drains/Transfers	
25	BODY	30	76	Automaton Bonus	
10	INT	0			
—	EGO	—			
15	PRE	5			
8	COM	-1			
3	PD	1			
3	ED	7			
3	SPD	5			
10	REC	0			
0	END	-10			
Cost			Powers		END
37	13" Flight, 0 END				0
60	Takes no STUN				
20	0 END for STR				0
27	+3 PD/ED Armor				
OCV: 5; DCV: 5; ECV: n/a; Phases: 4,8,12					
COSTS:		Char	Powers	Total	Disadv Base
		82	+	144 = 226 = 126	+ 50

One of several hundred automatons sent by Tyrannon to further his plan in the Confluence, the artifact is a magician's nightmare. Most magicians' powers, even the powers that do physical damage, are based on EGO — they are totally ineffective against this artifact. (An exception to this is any Drain or Transfer power which, even if Based on Ego, will tend to disrupt the flow of energy from the automaton's mystic battery, causing damage to its whole body.)

The artifact's only weaknesses, besides its susceptibility to Drains, are its vulnerability to non-magical weaponry (one of the reasons Tyrannon only uses the devices in heavily magical dimensions) and its reliance on its back-mounted mystic battery.

Little attempt has been made to balance the artifact's abilities with disadvantages, since it has no mind of its own to cause trouble for either GM or PCs. It follows orders given by anyone carrying the control talisman built by Tyrannon.

Beneath his illusion spell, Masric is one of these, but his use of power from the mage-battery has made Masric temporarily life-like. He still has his high Strength, BODY, and natural Flight. But otherwise, for the sake of convenience in combat, he should be run as if he had the Revered Elder's powers and characteristics.

DOMAIN OF THE DEAD

Heroes don't always win. Sometimes the forces of evil can cripple or kill the champions of justice. The survivors mourn their loss, then recruit more heroes to the cause or continue with what they already have, grimmer and a little more determined.

In a Hero System context, no character (PC or NPC) should be assumed to have really died unless a corpse is found and authoritatively identified as the victim. When a character is proven dead, he is gone for good. Until now.

With magic, anything is possible. This scenario for Mystic Masters helps the PCs find a solution, in the short run at least, to the only no-win situation we all face, Death.

DEATH TAKES A PLAYER CHARACTER

During a superheroic campaign (Mystic Masters or *Champions*), the PCs encounter death-dealing attacks with alarming regularity. Unless the PCs are very lucky, or the GM is soft-hearted, eventually a lethal attack is likely to succeed in doing enough damage to end a PC's life. The GM should take this chance, very shortly after the shock begins to set in, to hint to the PCs that there may be one hope...

WHEN A MAGICIAN DIES

When one of the magician PCs dies, their mentor, the Revered Elder, senses the loss and transports himself to the site of the character's death. He allows nothing except mortal danger to distract him from the dead PC. If the rest of the PCs are in desperate need, fighting for their own lives, the Elder will take a hand in combat, but as soon as the immediate threat is past, he returns to the side of his precious friend. Cradling the fallen student in his arms, tears streaming down his grief-marred face, the Archmage mourns.

"Ah, fair spirit," he says. "To have died in a noble cause does you great credit. If I were younger and not forbidden...no, only others could make that dread journey now, to death and back."

One of the PCs should overhear this comment and ask the Elder what he is talking about. The Elder answers:

"When someone dies, he (or she) does not end with the body. The spirit ascends to the Domain of the Dead, where all whose mortal flame flickers out must travel to their final reward. There, in that shadowed mirror of our own world, the magic of life is separated from the souls and used to add power to the Domain.

"Most souls then dissipate. Dead masters of the mystic arts, and people who all unknowing have the potential for magic, can hold on to their identities. They 'live on' in the Domain.

"Such an existence has its attractions. The Domain offers unlimited opportunities for study of magic and contemplation of one's true nature. But it is a... forbidding place. The light of life is so dim there, all seems distant and dark. Most of the sensations we take for granted, taste and smell, the riot of life's colors, more... all this is lost in the Domain of the Dead. Only the strongest can call upon the memories they cherish to sustain them; even among those, many do not choose to continue. The sameness there can loosen their grip on their memories, their old drive to exist.

"This is where our departed friend now resides, but perhaps not irretrievably — even the Fates sometimes reverse their decrees. A handful of times, a departed soul has fought its way or been brought back to take up the mantle of life

again. It may be possible for pilgrims from among the living to sojourn to the Domain of the Dead and find the spirit of our lost friend, petition the dark rulers of that realm for its release, and rekindle this too early snuffed flame.

"I tried, centuries past, to return a lost friend to life. I was allowed to succeed once but was barred entry into the Domain, until the time for me to make my own final journey. Will you go? I can open the way, but you must decide. Even the living risk never returning when they enter the Domain."

The Elder raises his reddened eyes to the PCs, imploring them to help save their dead friend. How can they resist?

WHEN A SUPERHERO DIES

In a *Champions* campaign, the Revered Elder's connection to the PCs is more nebulous than if they are to his students. He will be saddened to discover a PC has died, but not overcome with grief, and he will probably not teleport to the site of the PC's demise. The GM must devise a way to get the PCs, with their dead friend, to go to the Elder.

If the PCs have met the Revered Elder in a previous adventure, they may think of going to him without prompting. They may suppose that as a supremely powerful sorcerer, he possesses abilities at revival quantum leaps beyond anything they can perform.

The attack that killed the PC may have been magical in origin; as already noted, when magic is involved, anything is possible. The PCs might realize that a magical cause could have a magical cure — who better to provide a straw of hope to grasp than the most adept magician in the dimension?

One of the PCs, preferably a close friend of the dead character, can receive an obviously magical vision of his friend's spectral form rising from the lifeless body and passing through the entrance to a shadowed cave. The spirit-form looks back and whispers, "It's not my time... I want to come back..." This, besides being rather spooky, might suggest to the PCs that the dead character isn't completely dead, and some remedy might be found.

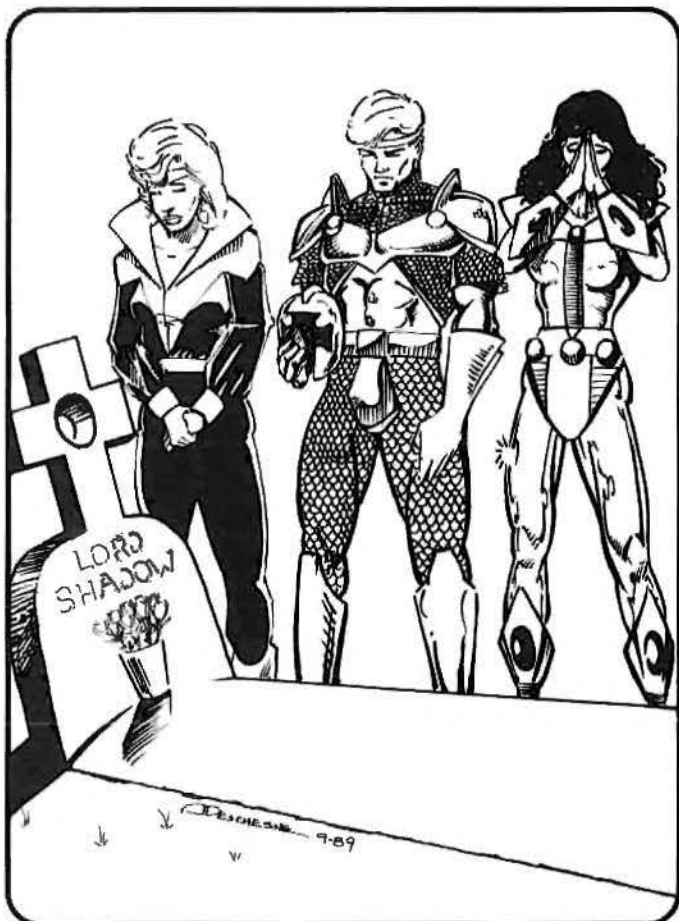
If the PCs have not encountered the Archmage before, one of them (the character with the most applicable knowledge skill) remembers a story about a far-off Tibetan kingdom where once a man was brought back from the dead. The story, popularized by a small Buddhist sect in northern Bhutan, was substantiated by independent medieval sources, but most people dismiss the claim as a folk tale. Perhaps the PCs should check it out.

PCs who show dedication enough to track down the Elder on the one in a billion chance that he can help return their comrade will have no trouble convincing him to make the attempt. Their arrival alone will do that.

ALTERNATIVES TO PC "MURDER"

The GM may be reluctant to let a PC die and its player suffer unnecessary depression at the loss, even if it may only be temporary.

The GM may substitute an NPC, well-liked by all the PCs, for the dead player character. This has the advantage of using a universally popular character for the hook into the Domain. Though GMs try to promote a spirit of camaraderie among their players, PCs often let little frictions come between them anyway. Some PCs might even refuse to try to help another player character who has been, in their eyes, particularly obnoxious. If the GM picks a friend or ally of the whole team as the one who dies, it's possible more of the PCs will be inclined to want to bring him back.



The PCs may all be willing to expend any sort of heroic effort to save a dead PC. In this case, though, the GM probably won't want to completely ruin a player's evening by starting it with his favorite character shuffling off this mortal coil. The GM can bring a player deeper into the adventure by deciding in advance which character will be the "lucky" focus of the scenario. Then the GM can make a deal with the player to go along with his own character's demise, rewarding him with an extra Experience Point if he plays the role of aggrieved player to the hilt. ("Pssst. Hey, Champion, wanna come back from the dead?")

This gives the player a greater sense of involvement in the session. It also removes the randomness of waiting until a PC is killed in the normal course of events to implement the Domain of the Dead adventure. GM and player can plan the exact nature of the PC's death, days in advance if they like, in some remarkably selfless way designed to get everyone's sympathy.

ENTERING THE DOMAIN

Once the PCs agree to journey to the Domain, the Revered Elder wastes no time. He teleports the PCs and the body to a small chamber in his sanctum and prepares a special Gate. If the PCs have some special preparations they would like to make, now is the time. The Revered instructs the PCs to gather in a semi-circle around the body, facing West.

"On the Other Side, you must ask for a Sent One to guide you," he says. "Then you must find those who rule the Dead. I cannot remember where they dwell, but it is to the rest of the Domain as the Domain is to us — remote, alien, inhospitable. Ask the rulers to release the soul from their care. Even if the do not grant your request, they shall let you return. I will keep the Road open until that time."

The Archmage gestures ahead of them, and the PCs will see a dark portal fade into existence just past the dead body. It looks like the entrance to a bat-infested cave or the maw of some hellish beast. On the floor a silver thread of light begins to shine, leading into the shadows.

When the PCs follow the marked path, their bodies stay behind. The effect is much like Astral Form, but their separated forms feel just as solid as the ones they've left.

ONE SMALL STEP...

It first seems that they are deep inside a mountain, walking along a tunnel, roughly hacked out of stone. They hear echoing footsteps and the strangely hollow sound of their own breathing. Although the silver line continues to guide them, it brightens nothing, and the passage remains black as pitch. Enhanced senses, even Clairvoyance, will have no luck penetrating the ebon murk.

After a trek that seems last an hour, regardless of whatever movement powers the PCs use to speed their travel, they see a splash of gray light ahead. The exit. Passing through the opening, they are high atop the mountain where the Revered Elder's monastery stands.

Whatever time of day they left the world of the living, it's now night. The sky is full of brightly shining stars, which both illuminate and obscure the surroundings; it is much brighter to the PCs' perceptions than starlight would normally allow,

yet edges are ill-defined, shadows impenetrable. The valleys below are filled with a pearl-gray mist, which limits visibility within it to about 50 feet. Curious PCs travelling into the mist will find everything within it — houses, living people, fields — looks extremely bright, even in the dark of night.

If the PCs look through the tunnel behind them, they'll see the Revered Elder, calmly chanting beside their dead friend, no more than 10 feet away.

The silver line stretches out ahead of them in the air over the valley. Similar trails in the dark sky interweave and connect, until the whole world seems connected by a web of faint lines.

CHANGES IN THE CHARACTERS

The PCs have lost all the color in their features and clothes. Everything about them, except foci for their powers, is shaded in a continuum of gray. Any magic item or technological focus glows with the same silvery light as the guiding lines; when PCs use magical spells or special powers, they glow silver as well. If the spell/power is highly specialized, only the affected part of the PC will glow (a force field around the PC makes his whole person shine in silver; energy blasts cast from the hands cause only the PCs' hands to glow).

Since everything here is based on magical energy, everyone can use magic, even superheroes, and living travellers can use it better than the usual inhabitants. (Technological superheroes will find that their high tech equipment has been altered to focus magic.) Give every live PC a "bonus power" of approximately 25 Active points — special senses, boosts to their Magic Pools or other existing powers, brand new abilities (such as low-powered TK) for some characters. Everyone has Flight, sufficient to keep aloft, and can move over long distances at Astral Form speed. For combat, or short distances, the PCs can move at their maximum "normal" combat movement rate. (Swimming, Running, Flight, Gliding — all are equal in the Domain.)

WELCOMING COMMITTEE OF ONE

The PCs should remember the Elder's instructions after they've had a chance to look around. When they call out for a "Sent One" to act as their guide, or just wonder what they have to do to summon one, they hear a faint thump, as if a distant door had opened and closed. In a few seconds they see a human form descending toward them on one of the silver lines.

The guide may look like anyone the GM decides, but he will always remain calm, with an air of regret or melancholy. The Sent Ones are penitents, paying of their own will for crimes or sins they committed while alive. The PCs' guide can be a notorious historical figure — a would be world conqueror, a brutal killer, a traitor who cost many of his countrymen their freedom or lives — who may make the PCs uncomfortable if they recognize him. (If one of the PCs' adversaries has died before this adventure, he may be the Sent One but will show no signs of hostility toward the PCs.)

When the Sent One is standing before the PCs, he asks their purpose (his words are telepathic, and he is not breathing). As soon as he hears they are searching for their comrade, the Sent One will tell them to follow him. He rises into the night; the PCs can follow with ease.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

As they travel with numbing speed, PCs realize they can perceive more of the passing surroundings than normal astral travel allows. The Sent One seems to be moving slightly slower than full speed.

The whole world beneath them is covered in the same ethereal fog that hid the Himalayan valleys from view. Flashing northward across the continent, the PCs can see breaks in the fog below, beacons of bright light shining upward. The glaring beams remain the same width and intensity as the stretch endlessly into the heavens. As the group approaches its destination, apparently in the Arctic, they see that most of the columns of light are coming from central Asia and North America. The Sent One will not understand the PCs' references to the beams; he and the rest of the truly dead do not perceive them.

If the PCs try to make a side trip to investigate the beams, the Sent One will not follow. In fact, he will tell the PCs that if they wish to find their friend, they must do so *now*.

CHASM OF THE SOULS

At the top of the world, the Sent One stops before a stony outcrop, which overlooks a vast gap in the ice — a huge canyon, miles wide and apparently bottomless. Neither promontory nor canyon exists in the living world.

The PCs hear a multitude of somber voices, crying for understanding, moaning their sadness. Ghostly forms rise from the depths. An army of the dead is flying past, coalescing into a spirit cloud a thousand feet above the surface.

"All who die with magic in their souls," the Sent One says, come here. Those with great light pass through the cloud above, strong enough to stay in the Domain. The others, dark in magic, are drained of the little power they possess. They do not emerge. Whether they truly end or travel to some place beyond the Domain, I do not know. Your friend must be here."

One or two of the rising spirits do turn toward the PCs, a hungry look in their eyes. If the PCs pay them any attention, they reach toward the living characters, and beg to be saved. ("We don't belong here! There's been some horrible mistake!") The Sent One tells the PCs to ignore the specters, since they have no claim on the PCs' aid.

After a few more minutes of this, or if the PCs start calling, Mind Scanning, or otherwise trying to detect the dead PC, one of the spirits flies close to the rocky platform. It becomes more substantial as they watch and finally reveals itself to be their lost friend. The dead PC is confused about where he is and has only the vaguest memory of dying. The more the PCs tell him about his early demise and their efforts to bring him back, the more solid he becomes. Except for being dead, soon he will be his old self.

BACK TO LIFE

Now the PCs must try to return to the Revered Elder's sanctuary with their saved friend, but the rescue is not quite complete. If the PCs rush back to Bhutan, their regained friend will not even see the entrance of the mystic "tunnel" to the world of the living, much less be able to use it. They still need permission from whoever reigns in the Domain to take a dead soul from it.



If asked about the sovereigns of the realm, The Sent One will tell the PCs that beings called Monads do not actively rule the Dead, but their wishes and thoughts control all that "is." Each Monad, once a magician's spirit new to the Domain, was elevated to an exalted level of power after eons of study and experience in the land of the dead. Perhaps they are the ones the PCs seek. The guide does not know exactly how to reach the Monads, but he has heard them referred to as "the Light Ones, who dwell within dawn's power, beyond all else."

This may prompt the PCs to explore any number of options, made accessible by their fast as thought travel abilities, including: the Monads exist in the sun; the Monads can be reached by travelling toward the dawn, i.e., eastward; the Monads live beyond the farthest reaches of the Universe — only the possibly infinite speed the PCs now possess could get them to the edge of Creation to check this out; or the Monads literally exist in light. The last possibility is closest to the truth, and the PCs eventually think of (or the GM may hint about) the pillars of light they've seen.

PILLARS OF WISDOM?

When the PCs explore the columns of light piercing the Domain's night sky, they will see that the columns are shining from (or onto, depending upon one's perspective) sections of highly concentrated population centers — Moscow, Beijing, Washington, etc. — and obvious military installations. The few beams that do not appear to illuminate cities and bases, the PCs may discover, are directly over hidden or buried command centers. Regardless of how far they explore along the beams, however, the PCs can find no upper limit.

Getting close to the pillars, the PCs receive telepathic "interference" from a multitude of mental voices. Occasionally, the voices will be clear enough to understand. A few brief phrases ("...have Def-Con 3...", "Full Alert!" "...scramble..." "orders from the Premier...") tell them that some sort of emergency is being played out on Earth. If they try to get a better look at events, they can discover that all the super-powers are gearing up for massive nuclear strikes. PCs who try to make contact with one of the people in the beams will be sternly warned by the Sent One that they, as living spirits, can affect the world of the living, but doing so means they can never leave the Domain.

When the PCs experimentally enter one of the beams of light, they will feel uneasy and suddenly irritable, but before they can leave the beam, they are transfixed by an overwhelming sense of power. They cannot speak or otherwise act on their own.

A bland voice, full of curiosity, says to each PC, "What brings you here, little one? You have arrived early to witness the New Day."

If the PCs do not all enter the same beam or do not enter as a group, nothing further will happen to the immobile PCs until everyone who journeyed to the Domain to retrieve their ally has entered a beam. The Sent One chosen to guide them and the dead PC can follow the PCs into the beam of light even though neither one sees it. Everyone entering the beam will get the same greeting.

Once all the PCs have arrived, they are transported to another part of the Domain of the Dead.

IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE MONADS

The PCs appear on a darkened plain of black volcanic rock. They can see quite a distance, but they can see very little except for ill-defined lumps and walls scattered around without discernible pattern. The sky is uniformly charcoal gray. The PCs sense that none of this is how the Monads' realm truly looks, but nothing they can do will show them its real appearance.

Nearby, the PCs see a pit, which glows with the same intensity as the pillars of light on Earth. Closer observation shows the "pit" is really an amphitheater, hollowed out of the shiny, black stone. The glow comes from the beings occupying the slanted rows.

The Monads are building-sized entities, seemingly just coherent light with no physical nature at all. They are far removed from humanity, but the PCs perceive them as gigantic human faces, disembodied, emotionless, smooth. Every species sees the Monads as they see themselves, so alien or magical PCs of the non-human variety will see Monads as larger, simplified versions of their "people."

In the center of the open area, seven Monads are gathered around a small three-dimensional image of Earth, pierced by pins of light. One of the seven speaks to the PCs when they appear at the rim of the meeting place.

"Come closer." The entity seems to beckon. Once the PCs arrive on the floor of the amphitheater, the Monad will continue. "Why have you sought us?"

The PCs' tale of loyalty and the quest for a lost comrade will not prompt any reaction they could reasonably expect. Instead, the PCs will be the brunt of icy amusement.

THE END OF EVERYTHING

"Existence is irony incarnate," the being intones. "That you should risk so much to return someone to that world when soon all who live there will be joining us in the Domain...is ample proof of that."

The Monad informs the PCs that the Earth is about to be incinerated in nuclear fire due to the efforts of the Monads. The voice calmly describes how the vast amounts of mystic energy stored in billions of spirits will fortify the Domain and its rulers, if that energy is harvested at one time. The Monads have been subtly modifying the emotions of the Earth's leaders and military commanders for months now, putting them on edge, increasing their hostility.

This effort is not lust for power, the Monad claims, but an attempt to protect the whole by sacrificing the part, a perfectly acceptable method of solving problems. The problem Earth's dimension must face is conquest by the supremely powerful Tyrannon.

"All of us, together, have barely managed to hold off Tyrannon thus far. Our dimension is weak. The Archmage is decrepit; Dimitrios is gone! The people of that small world are too powerless as individuals to be anything more than pawns, but together they can save us all. Many of them will not cease in the Domain, they will only cease living.

"We need the power, and gaining it this way has the added benefit of depriving the despot of the psychic energy of all those billions. He cannot use Earth as a base for expansion, if it cannot support his worshippers."

The PCs will probably dispute the Monad's analysis of Earth's relative worth and the abilities of its people. They may protest that the Monads' plan is unfair, that it doesn't give humanity a say in its fate, that the billions of people who live there have as much right to continue to exist as anyone else, that humanity isn't being given the chance to fight on its own behalf. The Monads will turn to them with evident interest. If the PCs don't raise at least one of these points, or some equally defiant one, the Sent One argues on their behalf.

"You claim humankind has a chance against foes like Tyrannon?" the Monad says. "Prove it. Show us your worth and become Earth's champions yourselves. Win, and your world wins; lose, and we take what we must have."

THE TEST

The center of the amphitheater will suddenly clear, and the PCs will find themselves facing some of the evil beings they've had to fight in the past. Depending on the length of the campaign so far, that could be quite a roster, but the GM should be satisfied testing each of the PCs with no more than one villain. If the PCs try to refuse to go along with the Monad's test, the being will inform them refusal is acceptable as a sign of surrender. This should convince them.

The contest they are about to face is not a simple measure of brute force, though that has its place. The Monads are looking for three qualities: perspective under attack, strength against strength, and the drive to fight against all odds. They do not believe these qualities are among humanity's assets; the Monads are so far removed from life, they have forgotten about the will to live and the wisdom to live well. If the PCs demonstrate even a hint of success in any of these categories, the Monads will acknowledge that Earth should get a second chance and will stop their manipulations.

Note: The Monads will **not** tell the PCs about the traits for which they are testing. They will lead the PCs to believe this is an old-fashioned trial by combat, winner takes all, until the contest is over.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

The PCs have only a few seconds to prepare for combat. They may try to develop some strategies for attack, or take a close look at their opponents. Though all the enemies the Monads have selected seem to be the PCs' foes, they are just duplicates, drawn from the characters' memories. (When selecting the opponents, the GM should make them formidable, but not too crushing. No more than one of them should be an epic villain, like Jarth.)

As the villains approach, they may look confused at their surroundings, but when they spot the PCs, an eager spring enters their step. If the PCs don't strike the first blow, the villains will not begin combat either, right away. They will try to goad the PCs into attacking them using taunts and slurs. If the PCs recognize the tactics, and resist the temptation to strike, or if the PCs realize their enemies must be imposters to use such atypical strategies, they will have met the first challenge — perspective. (If even one of the PCs passes this hurdle, the group will be considered to have passed.)

After the PCs have resisted or succumbed to the temptation to strike the first blow, the villains will attack anyway. This round of combat will be the "slugfest" so often displayed when heroes and their foes clash. If the PCs subdue all of their opponents, and if they won the first part of the contest, the trial will end here. The Monads will concede Earth's right to chart its own course in the defense against Tyrannon.

The final test is reached one of two ways:

- 1) If the PCs were brutal, i.e., attacked first, in the contest and thoroughly beat the villains, they will see their foes rising from the ground, completely refreshed and ready to begin the fight anew.
- 2) If the PCs, despite their best efforts, do not do well in the second part of the contest (if they are pounded to within an inch of their lives), the villains will stand over them, gloating as only servants of evil can.

In either case, the most powerful duplicate will sneer and say, "See? You can't beat us. We have all the power we need. Care to give up?"

The PCs have only two ways to respond, "Never!" and "I surrender." If the PCs vow to fight to their last breath, the contest will end. The Monads concede to the PCs, explaining the real nature of the challenges, and say they will not harm the people of Earth. If the PCs give up, they have probably won a respite for Earth anyway.

IF THEY LOSE

It is barely conceivable that the PCs will be unable to show they are capable of perspective, power, or persistence. This is unlikely, since the PCs are all heroes, but players tend to do the unexpected. If the PCs somehow manage to fail every challenge, or remain adamant in their refusal to go along with a trial by combat, they may still scrape by. The Monads have never been defied before. That act alone will earn a reprieve for humanity. If living humans are capable of doing the unexpected, the Monads reason, they may have more than one trick up their collective sleeve.

As the PCs lie in bloodied heaps, beaten and humiliated, assuming the worst (pretty picture, eh?), the Monad spokesperson will tell them that though they have lost, their spirit in confronting the Monads has moved the Light Ones to mercy. They will delay the plan to assimilate the Earth's magic for one year. If the PCs have not put an end to Tyrannon's designs on this dimension by then or found a sufficiently strong way to defend against him, the Monads will do as they please.

This may be the springboard for a number of new adventures, as the GM sends the PCs on a quest for power, or assistance, in the coming months.

GOING HOME

After the Monads render their verdict, the PCs will appear on the mystic road just above the mountains of Bhutan. The spirit of their colleague is with them, able now to return to the living world. The Sent One is nowhere to be found.

Once they pass through the "tunnel" back to the Elder's sanctuary, a trip which takes only a few seconds from this side, their memories of the Domain will begin to fade. If they failed the Test, they will know the world has just one year to find the power to defend itself, but they won't be sure just how they know.

Sometimes, in their dreams, they may unearth vague recollections, but the experience was too overwhelming for the mortal mind to grasp.

SCENARIO IDEAS

The previous scenarios, all based on a "limited campaign," by no means exhaust that campaign. Between and after the adventures already described, the GM can take the players through all sorts of magical encounters, with plenty of opportunities to show they are Mystic Masters. Here are some brief suggestions for possible future adventures. The first two suggestions are short but complete adventure sketches, while the last gives an introductory hook for a scenario and leaves the rest of the storyline to the GM's imagination.

MURDER IN THE MOUNTAINS

An old, but not quite forgotten, custom in the remote Appalachians is a special ceremony designed as a sort of sacrament to cleanse people of their sins. The theory is that the religiously motivated and/or the recently departed, no matter how good in spirit, always have some sins, unnoticed and therefore unwittingly unrepentant, that stain their souls. Recreating the self-sacrifice that is the foundation of their beliefs, a volunteer among the people in these small communities agrees to take their sins upon himself (or herself), and suffer whatever punishment will be meted out in the afterlife. After a religious meeting, or a wake, or some emotionally trying event, a special meal is prepared and left in an easily accessible location. The food is seen as the symbolic receptacle for the sins to be passed on. The volunteer, who despite his self-sacrifice is usually shunned by the community once he accepts his role, takes and eats the food, consuming the sins and bringing them into himself.

In once such rural community, a new force has none too subtly changed this time-honored custom. Chernobog the Demon is using his usual method of warping an image taken from the collective unconscious to wreak havoc (and shed blood). He has granted the local "sin-eater," already mentally unstable due to his position in the community, real magical power to supplement the symbolic ritual he regularly performs. Now, whenever he consumes the sins left for him, he also consumes the souls of the sinners, shredding their physical bodies along with their spiritual ones. This taste of power over those who've treated him poorly has driven the unfortunate fellow completely around the bend. He enjoys combining physical revenge with his spiritual mission.

Among the sin-eater's new abilities are Astral Form and Killing Attack (Affects Solid), which will make it impossible for normal investigators to solve the recent series of horribly brutal "slasher killings." He leaves nothing in the way of physical evidence that he has been present, other than the mangled bodies themselves and perhaps some crumbs of food somewhere near the murder sites. And some of the killings are literally "locked room mysteries." Only people with superhuman (or supernatural) powers have any real chance of stopping the carnage. The PCs can stumble upon the problem when passing through the town on their way somewhere or when visiting a friend or relative in the town. They may receive a mystic premonition that evil is afoot in the small community. They may see a news report about the baffling series of murders. However they become involved, the PCs have their work cut out for them: finding the culprit, curing him of his newfound abilities or at least putting a stop to him, and dealing with the true menace — Chernobog.

RESCUE

A museum-sponsored archaeological expedition stumbles across a meditative retreat in a very remote part of the world — Tibet, the Andes, the Siberian tundra, or some such place. The explorers don't realize it's a retreat and mistake it for a tomb because the sole occupant, an ancient magician of indeterminate background, is found within the inner chamber, apparently dead and mummified. Actually she has just been contemplating the workings of the Universe for a few centuries and has neglected to keep her body operating normally; her body is still alive, but its metabolism works very slowly. (Any magical protection to prevent intruders from bothering the retreat will have long since faded away due to similar disinterest on the magician's part.) While the scientists are investigating the retreat, the magician is taking an Astral look at some interesting extra-solar phenomenon. She will be at a loss when she tries to return to her body and finds it is gone.

Packing up the "remains" and the various artifacts and magical tomes in the chamber, the archaeologists return to the major American or European museum that has paid for this find. There the expedition director will prepare further research, testing the composition of the remains, examining the workmanship of the items found in the "tomb," and trying to translate the writings found near the body. At this point the archaeologist will make an astounding discovery of his own magical potential. Though untrained, he seems to have an instinctive understanding of the material — both magical items and tomes — as he devotes his full attention to study. He begins accidentally casting spells and operating magical foci left and right.

The PCs may find out about the "kidnapping" through mystical means (perhaps the magician will appear to them astrally and ask for help finding the body she seems to have misplaced) and feel duty-bound to help, or just curious about what's going on. They may see or hear reports of "strange lights" flaring out of the closed museum and rush to investigate; once there, they might sense the magician trying to restore her body to full activity but not being able to concentrate on the process because of the distracting number and variety of other spells being cast nearby.

Once the PCs are involved, they must try to subdue the archaeologist or convince him to cease his experimentation for the time being. The scholar, whose control over his newfound magical skill is shaky at best, will not make this an easy task. Not only will he fire mystic bolts and raise telekinetic shields almost at random, he may be suspicious of PCs bursting into a museum. Thinking of them as possible thieves or vandals, the archaeologist may try to defend "his" historical treasures with every bit of his new power. Eventually, however, the PCs should get the situation in hand and return the magician to her body.

If the scientist is played as an evil fellow, interested in making discoveries for the fame they garner, rather than the knowledge they bring, the PCs and magician friend can simply leave and take her magic items and spellbooks with them. It is more interesting to play the archaeologist as a basically good person, who was trying to do the right thing. In this case he can become a new NPC mage, perhaps a disciple of the fully revived "mummy." (The GM might also work with a player to make the archaeologist a new PC in the campaign.) The old magician will still remove her possessions from the museum in the latter case, but she can be convinced to leave harmless duplicates to avoid embarrassing questions about "art thieves."

LITTLE BOY LOST

Over a period of several days (perhaps weeks, depending on the activity level of the campaign) the PCs will begin to notice a young boy roaming the streets near their base of operations. Dressed in rags, covered in dirt, and looking utterly without hope, the boy appears to be one of the (too) many homeless people in today's society. Closer attention to his appearance will show the PCs the boy is not a typical homeless child after all. His clothes, such as they are, are fastened with over-sized buttons and snaps and are made out of very rough cloth, cut in a style used at least a century ago. He is always barefooted, but acts as if that's perfectly natural. The youngster has the disconcerting habit of vanishing once he turns a corner (even a clairvoyant will be unable to see what happens to the boy when he disappears). Finally, no one but the PCs seem to be at all aware of the boy's presence.

Who is this boy? Is he a ghost forced to wander the Earth until his killer is brought to justice or (considering the murder probably took place in the 1880s) simply revealed to the public? Is he an unwilling time traveller caught in a magical gate that sends him back and forth between his time and the present? Is he just an illusion cast by some evil magician to lure the PCs into following him into a trap? Is the boy a young magician himself, trying out his immature powers on the nearest Adepts? You decide, then let the players wrestle with the answers.

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