

SEEKER

The background of the entire image is a fantastical landscape. In the sky, there are large, billowing clouds. A large, glowing, golden tree with intricate root systems is visible. To the left of the tree is a circular, glowing symbol containing various characters and symbols. To the right of the tree is a large, hooded figure, possibly a deity or a powerful being, with a glowing symbol on its chest. The ground is a rocky, mountainous terrain with a path leading towards the sky. Three small figures, likely adventurers, are standing on the path, looking up at the sky. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, yellows, and oranges.

The Role Playing Game



The Role Playing Game

is published by Vajra Enterprises, Portland Oregon

ISBN 978-0-9713095-8-6

Designed and Written by Brian St.Claire-King

Game Design Assistance by Nick Argall

Consultation by Allon Mureinik

Cover by Jason Juta

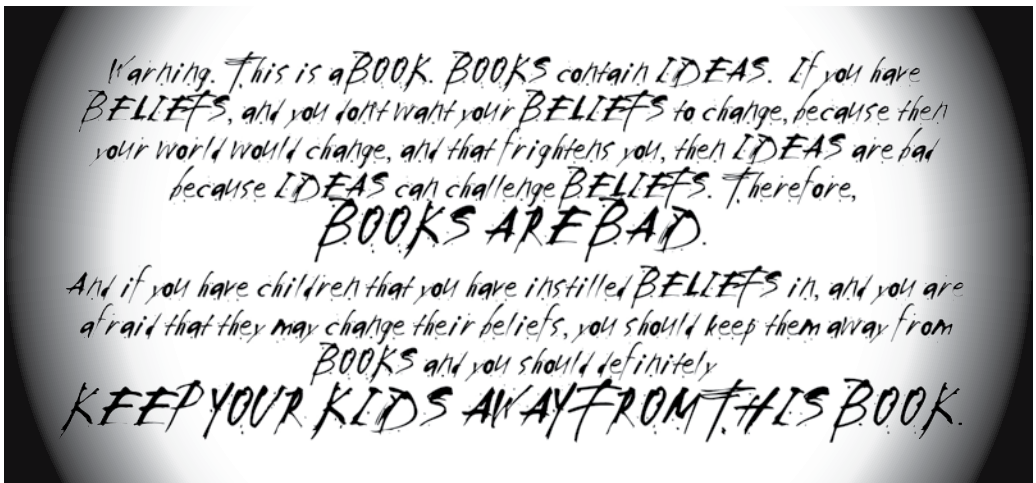
Illustrations by
Eric Williams (p.119, 125, 131, 135, 139), Gerasimos Kolokas (p.111, 115)
and Mike Mumah (p.61, 163).

Playtesting by
Allan Schnoor, Edward Saxton, Charles Crowe, Matthew Lilley, Robert Crouchley,
Robert Richmond, Etay Livne, Guili Abelha, Guy Reisman, Henrik Jespersen,
Jeremiah Barkman, John Christopher Greenleaf Weil,
Jonas Rune Lundgaard Pedersen, Kelson McConnel, Mads Krogh,
Mads Marturin, Mike Hutton, Nick Redmond, Peter Alexander,
Tiffany St.Claire-King, Tony Davis, Yael Reisman, Yonatan Arbel.

Copyright 2012 by Vajra Enterprises
All rights reserved under the Universal Copyright Convention.
No part of this book may be reproduced for commercial purposes.
Small portions may be reproduced for use in play.

Portions of the ORC-L rules have been released under a
Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.

Visit www.VajraEnterprises.com



Seeker In Brief

What Are Seekers?

Seekers are people who are devoting every day to the twin goals of improving themselves and understanding the universe. They must give up loyalty to any ideology or dogma in order to fully pursue improvement and understanding. This turns out to be a very powerful formula. Seekers are able to bypass the limitations that hold back regular people and achieve wisdom, insight and abilities that others might consider “superhuman.”

Who Are Seekers?

Seekers come from all walks of life, all backgrounds. Yet there are certain “traditions” that are more likely to propel a person onto the path of being a Seeker. Scientists, philosophers, mystics, shamans and monks, to name a few, are more likely to become Seekers. Yet there is no tradition guaranteed to create Seekers. The tradition a Seeker comes from tends to color his or her view of the things experienced on the path, and the language one might use to identify those things. Yet Seekers are no longer bound by the limitations and prejudices of their traditions. Each tradition is both a ramp onto the path of Seekerdom but also a barrier that one has broken through to become a true Seeker.

Why Do They Seek?

Seekers have many reasons for being on the path. Common reasons include: curiosity, love of learning, a desire to gain abilities that can be used to help people. Some are thrust on the path by circumstances beyond their control (e.g. a fugitive from the law, by virtue of having to give up his or her entire life, may become a Seeker). Other Seekers are driven by personal demons. It may seem paradoxical for someone whose life is dedicated, in part, to self-improvement to have such mundane problems as alcoholism or a bad temper, but for many Seekers it is the desire to defeat these demons that leads them to Seekerdom.

Where Do They Seek?

Seekers cannot stay in one place. They must be constantly exposed to new situations, and so this means being wanderers. Since few have dependable sources of income, most are reduced to walking, hitchhiking and other cheap or free means of transportation. Seekers’ wanderings may take them all over the world, but this volume focuses on the possible adventures of Seekers on the back roads and in small towns of the United States. As Seekers have a knack for running into interesting or challenging situations, the America they experience is darker, stranger, weirder, more dangerous and more amazing than the America most people know.

When Have Seekers Existed?

Seekers have been around as long as people have, but this volume concerns itself with Seekers of today. The modern world, with its ability to expose people to multiple ideologies and traditions, has produced more Seekers per capita than any other era of recorded history.

With Whom Do They Seek?

One of the coincidences that Seekers experience is that they run into each other. Often, Seekers find it useful to travel together for a time and learn from each other. Many adventures happen to Seekers while they share the road with other Seekers.

How Do They Seek?

No one source of wisdom can provide a Seeker with everything he or she needs. A teacher, a book, a self-imposed regimen of study are all things that can teach a Seeker, but each can only teach a Seeker so much and then the Seeker must move on. Yet knowledge without practice is useless. Seekers must live their wisdom, embody it in the day-to-day choices they make. A Seeker’s life could be said to be an ongoing experiment in ways of living

and of interacting with others, with the environment and with one's self. Philosophies can inform these experiments, but only living them can tell whether they were successful or not.

A Seeker achieves best results from constantly being on the move and from being open to learn from whoever they meet and whatever situation they encounter. Challenges help Seekers learn, and the universe provides challenges for Seekers at every turn.

How Do Seekers Act?

For the most part they act like regular people: they can have character flaws, or bad habits, they can be confused, scared, unsure or mistaken. They can do unwise things. Yet in the areas they have studied (their "paths") they are one-in-a-million in their level of insight, wisdom and skill. They are able to act confidently and ably in situations that would be challenging for any non-Seeker. Also, Seekers are people who are not content to live and behave as others do. Their lives and lifestyles are ongoing experiments and this can come across as eccentricities or even as madness.

How Powerful is a Seeker?

Seeker's abilities are subtly powerful. They perceive and understand things that normal people don't. Their skills and understanding make them very capable in a wide range of situations. In most arenas they can compete with a highly trained and well equipped professional: solving mysteries as well as top FBI investigators, infiltrating hostile turf as well as Navy Seals, treating illnesses as well as doctors, etc. Yet because they are not specialists and their powers are subtle, they are often underestimated.

What Are The Rules?

Seeker uses ORC-L, a rules-light version of Organic Rule Components. ORC-L was used because it requires less keeping track of physical world minutia (e.g. equipment lists) and thus allows Seeker gameplay to focus more on philosophical, psychological and spiritual aspects of gameplay. The basic mechanic of ORC-L involves computing your AV (applicable attribute + any applicable skills or focus + any applicable equipment package) and pitting that against either another character's AV or against a set difficulty. 50/50s, a coin toss or anything else with an equal chance of winning or losing, are done until the player either loses his or her AV's number of times or wins the opposing AV's number of times.

*Do you, Seeker
take this road
to walk on
and to learn from
and to live on
until you grow too tired to walk?
And do you promise to have the
humility
to go wherever the road leads
you
even if it's not where you
thought you wanted to go?
And do you promise to have the
faith
that the road will give you what
you need
if you keep following it?
And do you promise to use your
skills
learned on the road
to help the people you meet
along the road
even if it is dangerous to do so?*

*And do you, road
take this Seeker
to guide
and to nourish
and to teach
until the Seeker grows too tired
to walk?
And do you promise to lead to
knowledge
of things that your Seeker
never knew they were ignorant
of?
And do you promise to provide
that which your Seeker needs to
stay alive
and keep walking on you?
And do you promise to lead to
challenges
that will test every skill your
Seeker has
that will force your Seeker to
grow or die trying?*

*Then, by the power vested in me
I now pronounce you
Seeker and road*

*-Written on 34 consecutive mile
markers on Highway 101 in
California*

SEEKERS
IN
BRIEF

Introduction

*Aleister Crowley rescues kids
from a burning building.*

*Richard Dawkins protects a small
town from a biker gang.*

*Mother Theresa must beat a pool
shark at his own game.*

Nietzsche fights a bear.

A person giving a piano lesson does not generally promise that learning to play piano will make you better at diagnosing illnesses or designing buildings. A book on the botany of orchids does not generally promise to give insight into the psychology of serial killers or predicting the path a tornado will take. Yet there are some disciplines, studies, philosophies, mystical and religious systems that promise to teach universal truths or give universal personal benefits. If these claims are true, then these systems should give their students some kind of advantage, even if only a tiny one, in any given activity, such as fighting a bear.

Part of the design of Seeker was to create a space for performing thought experiments on the efficacy of various -isms and -ologies. Imagine a practitioner of one of these disciplines, one who can spend every waking hour on that discipline, and imagine how that practitioner would use the skills or wisdom gained to deal with various real-life problems and dilemmas. In this game you can have Nietzsche, or his modern equivalent, fight a bear and see what would happen.

Yet you don't have to be a philosophy major to play Seeker. Some of the -isms Seeker was designed to simulate are based on complex abstract concepts, but others are based on very simple ideas: harness the power of emotions, strive to be selfless, don't let ideas get in the way of intuition and common sense, etc.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Seekers in Brief.....	2
Seekers vs. Other RPGs.....	6

Chapter One: Character Creation

Step 1 - Character Concept.....	9
Step 2 - Attributes.....	11
Step 3 - Mundane Skills.....	12
Step 4 - Paths.....	16
Step 5 - Equipment.....	20
Step 6 - Advantages & Disads.....	23
Step 7 - Eccentricities.....	28
Step 8 - Character Advancement.....	29

Chapter Two: Organic Rule Components

What Is ORC-L.....	32
Basic Mechanics.....	32
Combat.....	37
Using Paths.....	40
Demons.....	42

Chapter Three: The World of Seekers

There is No One Truth.....	46
The Supernormal.....	47
About Seekers.....	48
Advancing on the Paths.....	56
Traps & Leaving The Path.....	57
Evil Seekers.....	64
Prodigies.....	66
Sorcerers.....	66
Advanced Practitioners.....	66
Seeker Crafts.....	69
Demons.....	69

Chapter Four: Traditions

About Traditions.....	72
African American Culture.....	74
African Syncretisms.....	74
Alternative Medicine.....	75
Anthropology/Sociology.....	75
Art.....	75
Athletics.....	76
Body Modification.....	76
Brujeria.....	76
Buddhism.....	77
Clowning.....	78
Computer Science.....	78
Curanderismo.....	79
Existentialism.....	79
Feminism/Ethic Studies/ Queer Studies.....	80
Fictional Traditions.....	80
Freedom.....	80

Freemasonry.....	81
Hippies.....	81
Kabbalah.....	82
Occultism/Magick.....	82
Martial Arts.....	82
Mathematics.....	83
Military.....	84
Monotheism.....	84
Mysticism.....	86
Native American Spirituality.....	86
Neopaganism/Wicca.....	87
New Thought.....	87
Ordinary Life.....	88
Politics.....	89
Psychology.....	89
Science.....	91
Self-Help.....	92
Sex.....	92
Shamanism.....	92
Sufism.....	95
Taoism.....	95
Transcendentalism.....	96
Western Philosophy.....	97

Chapter Five - Paths

About The Paths.....	100
Plus and Minus.....	101
-Thought.....	104
+Thought.....	109
-Self.....	113
+Self.....	117
-Harmony.....	122
+Harmony.....	127
-Feeling.....	133
+Feeling.....	137

Chapter Six - Adventures

Typical Seeker Adventure.....	143
Other Adventure Types.....	146
Communities.....	146
Mundane Antagonists.....	153
Supernatural Antagonists.....	155
The Iglesias Family.....	156
Nature & Accidents.....	169
The Unexplained.....	169
Psychological Challenges.....	172
Navajo Country.....	174
Introductory Adventure: Weaponized Honeybees.....	177

Appendix:

ORC-L to ORC Conversion.....	183
PC Character Sheet.....	184
NPC Character Sheet.....	185
Community Character Sheet.....	186

"Clarksdale Police."

"Hello, is this Detective Pendleton?"

"This is Chief Pendleton."

"Sorry, Chief. I'm Julie Yee. I'm an officer in the Soldier's Peak, Alaska Police Department."

"Alaska, huh? What can I do for you, Office Yee?"

"Well, I've got a fellow in lock-up here. Real weird character. Claims to not have a name, but says his birth certificate reads Jacob Goldman. He told me that if I called you, you would vouch for him."

"Mm-hmm."

"So do you? Vouch for him?"

"If you'll indulge me, Officer Yee, let me tell you what went through my mind when this fellow first came to town."

"Okay."

"So this fellow hitchhikes into my town, he doesn't know anybody here, he doesn't have any business here, he doesn't have a pair of shoes, much less a dollar in his pocket. He gives weird answers to questions. The most he'll say is that he's gone on some sort of spiritual quest, although he won't claim any religion I've ever heard of. To my mind, this person is obviously a crazy person and he's liable to kill one of the people I'm sworn to protect if I don't do something about him. I end up dusting off my law books, checking to see if there's a law against vagrancy on the books. Any of this sound familiar to you?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, I'll tell you, I couldn't have been more wrong. I won't tell you the whole story, because my shift is over soon and my wife will kill me if dinner is cold when I get home. Let me just say that this individual, he stuck his neck out, he

put himself in considerable danger. It was a situation I never could have handled on my own. And he saved my bacon. He helped protect the lives and well-being of every person in Clarksdale, without even being asked. He didn't ask for any reward. He didn't even stick around long enough for us to properly thank him. He did it for no other reason than that someone needed help and he had the ability to help them. And let me tell you: this person has some talents, some incredible talents. I've never met anyone who can do the things this person can do."

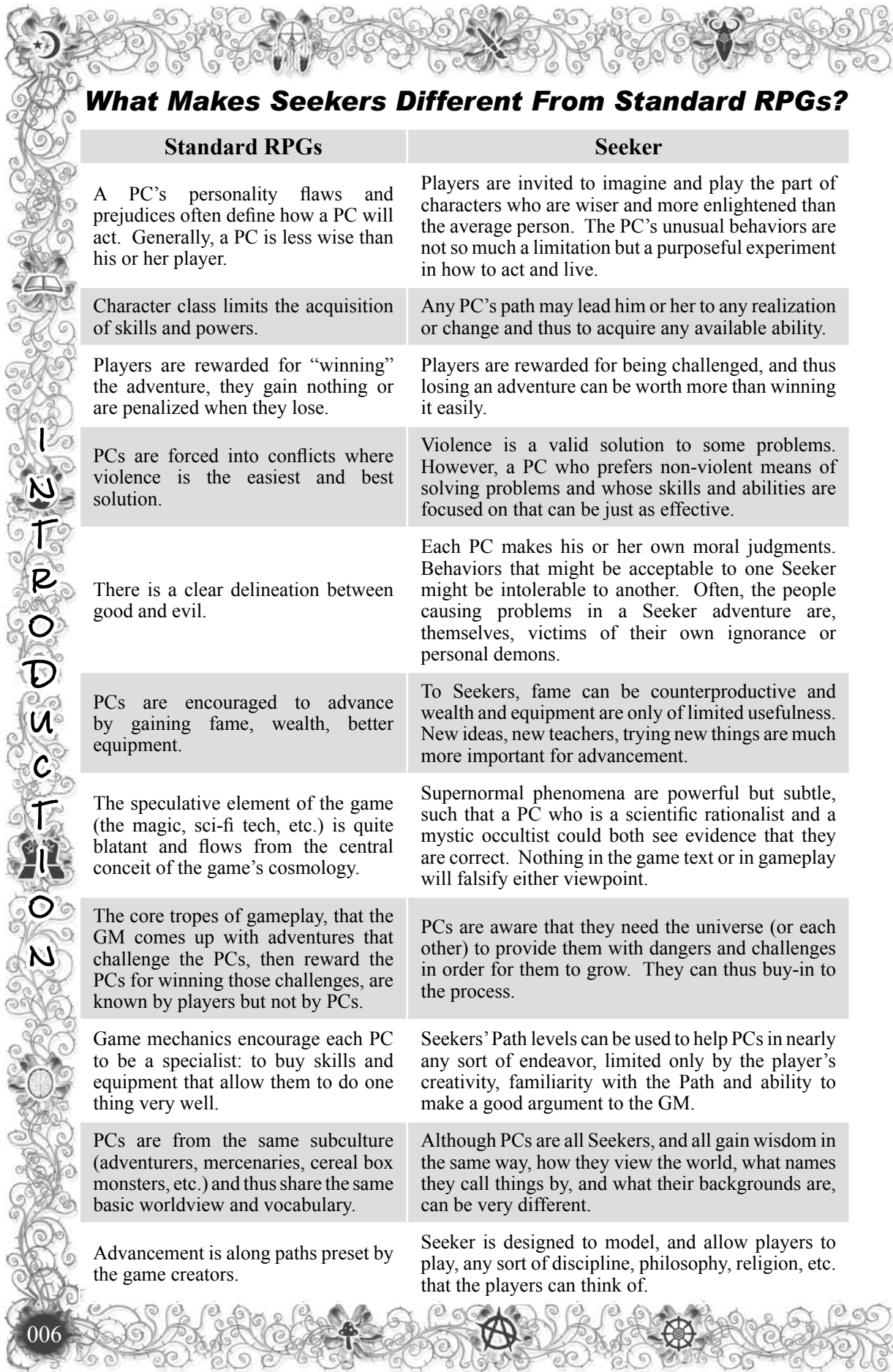
"I... no offense, Chief Pendleton, but showing up in town and throwing himself into a dangerous situation, how exactly does that prove he's not crazy?"

"What does crazy mean, Officer Yee? Does it mean someone is different, doesn't do what you'd expect them to? If so, then my friend is definitely crazy. Does it mean you don't see the world as it really is? If that's what it means, he's the least crazy person I know. He wasn't in my town half a day and he had the entire situation here pegged. He even had me pegged, understood all my faults and weaknesses as well as my wife does. Now, does crazy mean you do things you shouldn't ought to? Every thing this person did here in Clarksdale was something that ended up helping people, no matter how little sense his actions made at the time."

"So you're saying I should... what, let him have free run of my town?"

"That's what I would do. Since you've more-or-less asked for my advice, here it is: Let him out of lock-up, invite him home for dinner, let him sleep on your couch. I don't expect that to sound right to you, but it's the best advice I can give. However, I doubt that having to spend a night in a jail cell will phase my friend in the least."

"Thank you, Chief Pendleton. I... I'll take that under advisement."



What Makes Seekers Different From Standard RPGs?

I
N
T
R
O
D
U
C
T
I
O
N

Standard RPGs	Seeker
A PC's personality flaws and prejudices often define how a PC will act. Generally, a PC is less wise than his or her player.	Players are invited to imagine and play the part of characters who are wiser and more enlightened than the average person. The PC's unusual behaviors are not so much a limitation but a purposeful experiment in how to act and live.
Character class limits the acquisition of skills and powers.	Any PC's path may lead him or her to any realization or change and thus to acquire any available ability.
Players are rewarded for "winning" the adventure, they gain nothing or are penalized when they lose.	Players are rewarded for being challenged, and thus losing an adventure can be worth more than winning it easily.
PCs are forced into conflicts where violence is the easiest and best solution.	Violence is a valid solution to some problems. However, a PC who prefers non-violent means of solving problems and whose skills and abilities are focused on that can be just as effective.
There is a clear delineation between good and evil.	Each PC makes his or her own moral judgments. Behaviors that might be acceptable to one Seeker might be intolerable to another. Often, the people causing problems in a Seeker adventure are, themselves, victims of their own ignorance or personal demons.
PCs are encouraged to advance by gaining fame, wealth, better equipment.	To Seekers, fame can be counterproductive and wealth and equipment are only of limited usefulness. New ideas, new teachers, trying new things are much more important for advancement.
The speculative element of the game (the magic, sci-fi tech, etc.) is quite blatant and flows from the central conceit of the game's cosmology.	Supernormal phenomena are powerful but subtle, such that a PC who is a scientific rationalist and a mystic occultist could both see evidence that they are correct. Nothing in the game text or in gameplay will falsify either viewpoint.
The core tropes of gameplay, that the GM comes up with adventures that challenge the PCs, then reward the PCs for winning those challenges, are known by players but not by PCs.	PCs are aware that they need the universe (or each other) to provide them with dangers and challenges in order for them to grow. They can thus buy-in to the process.
Game mechanics encourage each PC to be a specialist: to buy skills and equipment that allow them to do one thing very well.	Seekers' Path levels can be used to help PCs in nearly any sort of endeavor, limited only by the player's creativity, familiarity with the Path and ability to make a good argument to the GM.
PCs are from the same subculture (adventurers, mercenaries, cereal box monsters, etc.) and thus share the same basic worldview and vocabulary.	Although PCs are all Seekers, and all gain wisdom in the same way, how they view the world, what names they call things by, and what their backgrounds are, can be very different.
Advancement is along paths preset by the game creators.	Seeker is designed to model, and allow players to play, any sort of discipline, philosophy, religion, etc. that the players can think of.

Take a walk, not to get to any particular place, but just to walk.

Breathe fresh air. Feel the sun on your face.

Leave behind, if only for a while, your distractions and worries and duties.

Walk wherever you, and you alone, want to.

Report to no one. Explore places you've never been.

Take the time to notice details. Notice the feel of a place.

Let your thoughts wander. Be aware of your feelings as they wash over you.

Explore your memories. Think about huge, important issues.

Think about tiny, inconsequential things.

Have new ideas, hunches, inspiration.

Feel stronger. Feel clear-headed. Feel balanced.

Feel on top of things. Feel smarter and wiser.

Don't turn around. Don't go back to your home and job and responsibilities.

Keep walking.

Walk until your legs are thickly muscled and your skin is deeply tanned.

Rely on the kindness of strangers or the whims of fate for your next meal.

Find and read odd books. Have philosophical debates with passing strangers.

Have huge, frightening revelations. Fight the dark things inside your own head.

Build theories. Practice new ways of thinking, experiencing, being.

Give yourself dangerous and arduous tests.

Find others who can test you.

Stop, briefly, to help people, and then move on.

Leave nuggets of wisdom that may inspire people, and then move on.

Come across others who walk, like you,

and share their journey with them for a while, then move on.

Amaze people, change lives, change whole communities, then move on.

Never stop walking, never stop growing, until your journey is done.

SEEK

VS

OTHER

REPORTS

Joe believed that regret is a form of weakness. To regret something is to wish you could go back in time and do things differently. To wish for things you could never have was a habit of lesser souls. Of all Joe's reading about and experiments with occultism and native brujeria, the lesson he believed he had learned was this: the strong decide what they want to be and be it, the weak sit around wishing for the world to be different. This was the principle upon which Joe had built many things, including a successful drug dealing operation that kept him comfortably wealthy.

Yet something like regret, something that wanted to be regret, tugged at Joe's heart as he looked down at the body of his friend, lying in a spreading pool of bright arterial blood. Joe reminded himself that Cal knew the Code, has sworn an oath to the Code while smoking a joint impregnated with sacred plants. Joe reminded himself that Cal had chosen, of his own free will, to betray Joe, knowing the punishment for betrayal set forth in the Code. Joe reminded himself that everything he had achieved for himself: the money, the power, the respect, had all come from his fastidious observance of and enforcement of the Code. The Fresno pot-dealing scene had been chaos, back-stabbing and rip-offs until Joe had created the Code. The Code had been inspired by Joe's dabblings in the occult and he borrowed language and ritual from the occult to give the Code some authority. The Code said some crimes must be punished by death. Those transgressed against had not just permission, but an obligation, to kill. Betrayal was one of those crimes, and that's why Joe has to shoot his lieutenant, his friend. To have not shot him was to endanger the entire system Joe had worked so hard to build.

Joe knew that, on the off chance that someone had heard the shots and called the police, he should now be walking to his car and driving away. It was not likely that the police had been called, given that it was the middle of the night in a part of town dominated by railroad tracks, abandoned industrial buildings and vacant lots. Yet Joe had spent relatively little time in prison by refusing to take unnecessary chances.

Yet something felt wrong. The fact that he was standing there making excuses, explaining to himself why it was okay that he shot his friend, that felt like the action of a weak person. Does a strong person make excuses, tell stories to justify his or her actions? What would the occult masters or the crazy old Indian brujos say?

They would say, Joe realized, that you must decide on the kind of person you want to be and be that person. And Joe needed to be brave enough to deal with the truth of the matter: he didn't want to be the kind of person who shoots a friend.

Suddenly Joe was angry. If the Code said he must shoot a friend, then fuck the Code. If his modest drug empire was threatened by not following the Code, then fuck that empire. If his ability to afford a nice house, fine liquor, fancy cars and a big screen TV was imperiled by the loss of his empire, then fuck all of that shit.

Joe has long ago chosen to be strong rather than weak. Yet somehow, without realizing it, he has slipped into weakness, become a slave to his desires, his responsibilities, his beliefs. And this had led him to shoot a friend, to not even realize that he had another choice.

Joe realized that tears were streaming from his one good eye. He knew what he needed to do: choose what kind of person he wanted to be and be it. And yet he didn't know what kind of person he wanted to be, only that he didn't want to be the person he was now.

Then it struck Joe that the only way to find the person he wanted to be was to give up the things that had grown to imprison him: his wealth, his empire, his Code. He had to set out, not knowing what he would find. It was terrifying, but also thrilling, like many of the great epiphanies described in his occult books.

Finally, Joe holstered his pistol, he turned, and he left the vacant parking lot with the lone yellow light buzzing overhead. He got in his car, started the engine and drove. Yet he didn't turn back towards the city, back to his expensive condo with the king bed, the whirlpool bath, the fortune's worth of native American art on the walls, the occult library and the safe full of drugs and cash. He turned in the direction that led away from the city. Where the road led, he did not know.

Chapter One

CHARACTER CREATION

Character Creation In Brief

1. Create a concept for your character.
2. Spend 24 points in 8 attributes. 10 Hit Points.
3. Spend 10 points among 11 skills. Different skills have different costs.
4. Choose 4 levels of Paths.
5. Spend 5 points on equipment.
6. Take advantages and/or disadvantages.
7. Choose 3 eccentricities.
8. Gain and spend XP from gameplay.

Step One - Character Concept

In Brief: Create the basic idea of the character.

First, decide on the basic concept and details of the PC. What is the PC's gender, age and ethnicity? Where does the PC come from? What does the PC look like? What is the PC's personality?

Why is the character seeking wisdom, power or knowledge? Is it pure curiosity? Is he or she seeking power to help people? Seeking power to battle some inner demon? Is it belief that it is his or her fate?

How did the PC gain the freedom to wander the roads of the world with no responsibilities or attachments? Did the PC slowly shed his or her attachments? Did the PC leave his or her normal life behind in a moment of crisis? Or was the PC forced into a life of wandering by external forces (e.g. finding himself or herself on the run as a wanted fugitive)? What philosophical or mystical systems did the PC study before coming a Seeker? (See Traditions, p.72, for more ideas on this.)

How Are Seekers Perceived?

The answer depends mostly on the Seeker himself or herself. Path levels play in to this. Someone with levels of +Harmony is likely to be perceived as friendly and likeable. Someone with +Feeling as passionate and intense. Someone with -Self is likely to not be noticed at all. Eccentricities play a large part as well: someone who comes into town barefoot, or wearing monk's robes, or leading a pack of wolves, is likely to be judged based on those things. The fact that a Seeker is a wandering, homeless, jobless stranger is likely to make people perceive the Seeker as mentally ill, a criminal or grifter, or as a lazy bum.

People with training, money or power (e.g. a serial killer, an FBI agent, a cult leader, a rich eccentric, a spy, etc.) tend to underestimate Seekers. Since the Seeker does not have what those people look for in their peers or enemies, they tend to dismiss Seekers, on first blush, as being nobody of consequence.

All of these, of course, are first impressions. After Seekers have had a chance to help or hurt (or, in some cases, just confuse) people, they are perceived quite differently. Seekers may end up being perceived as geniuses, messiahs, devils, magicians, incredibly well trained individuals or extraordinarily lucky, all depending on what they do and how they choose to explain what they've done.

Character Concept Example: *We envision our sample PC, Christina, as a tall, proud, eccentric, itinerant country preacher, wearing blue-jeans, a flannel shirt and a white priest's collar. She is seeking the power to help her fellow human, driven by a belief in compassion above all else. When her church was destroyed by a hurricane she took it as a sign that she should wander the earth.*

What You Know

As a new Seeker, you've learned the following:

- The world is vastly more complicated than most people believe. Most people's view of how the universe works is only a small part of the picture, only answering the questions that those people have thought of to ask.

- There are others who, like you, are gaining knowledge and abilities beyond those of normal humans. What tradition they come from, what they believe, what their abilities are, what their reason for seeking is and what they consider ethical can all vary widely. The only common factor is that they are all wanderers or travelers, people not rooted by family, career or community.

- The path you are on is not a straight path towards a known goal. It twists and turns, branches off, dead ends, sometimes even leads you full circle to where you started. It is your willingness to go wherever your path leads you, rather than insisting on a particular dogma or goal, that makes you special.

- The knowledge gained by one Seeker cannot simply be taught to another. Each path is personal and unique.

- True Seekers are never disciples of any one teacher, book or dogma. Seekers may temporarily act under someone else's direction to try to learn some skill or lesson, but Seekers only truly progress when they are free to do, think and learn whatever seems right to them at the moment. A Seeker can never predict where the next insight will come from, or what the Seeker will gain from that insight.

- You cannot understand the universe without fixing your own flaws, and you cannot fix your own flaws without understanding the universe. Being a Seeker is the difficult and strenuous act of trying to do both simultaneously.

- A challenge, especially a difficulty one and especially when there is much at stake, can help prompt new breakthroughs for a Seeker.

- Others that have supernormal abilities include those rare people who were born with them, people who learned them by rote (and have none of the wisdom that accompanies them in Seekers), people who are advanced practitioners of various magical, mystical, philosophical, religious or intellectual systems, and those who were once wanderers like you (although they may have since descended into a state of abject ignorance or insanity).

- Some of the worst problems of individuals and communities are those that some Seekers call "demons." These problems adapt and are hard to destroy (so much so that the words 'alive' or 'intelligent' may, in some contexts, be applicable to them) and operate on levels that regular people are usually unaware of.

- Some Seekers believe in a higher being or beings (gods, totems, ancestor spirits, aliens) and some do not. There has been no definitive proof either way and those that believe do so as a matter of faith. The wisdom and abilities of Seekerdom are open to believers and to non-believers equally.

Step Two - Attributes

In Brief: Split 24 points between 8 attributes, min. 1, max. 5. 10 Hit Points.

You have 24 points to spread between 8 attributes. You must put at least 1 point in each and you cannot put more than 5 in any. Later character creation options may increase or decrease attributes above 5 or below 1.

1 represents the lowest a person can be in that attribute without being considered disabled.

2-3 represents the attribute level for an average, healthy adult.

5 represents the highest a person can be in that attribute without being considered superhuman.

The attributes are as follows:

Agility (AGY)- This represents limberness, coordination, balance and speed of physical reactions. Agility is used when a character needs to move silently, keep his or her balance, scale a wall or get through a small space.

Awareness (AWR)- This represents the ability to notice things. This is not the acuity of one's senses, but rather the ability to be aware of important details. Awareness is used whenever characters need to notice a clue, avoid an ambush or sense attempts at mental manipulation.

Charm (CHM)- This represents likeability, social presence, persuasiveness and ability to read people. Charm is used when a character needs to put on an act, convince an audience, seduce someone or pick up on subtle social cues.

Endurance (END)- This represents stamina for intense physical exertion as well as the body's ability to fight disease and resist toxins. Endurance is used when a character needs to hold his or her breath, go on a long hike or survive a serious illness.

Intelligence (INL)- This represents the speed at which the mind reacts, ability with abstract thought, learning, creativity and memory.

Speed (SPD)- This represents the ability to run and leap.

Strength (STH)- This represents upper body strength, including the strength of the character's hands and back. A character would use Strength to yank an item from someone's hands or lift a heavy object.

Willpower (WIL)- This represents the ability to resist emotions, discomfort or psychological manipulation. WIL would be used to control oneself in the face of strong emotions, resist pain, stay conscious or battle against mind control.

The PC also starts with 10 Hit Points.

***Attributes Example:** We decide Christina should be Smart, Charming, Willful and just a little Stronger than average. Altogether we spread our points out as AGY 2, AWR 2, CHM 5, END 2, INL 4, SPD 2, STH 3 and WIL 4 (24 in total). We also note that Christina has 10 Hit Points.*

Step Three - Mundane Skills

In Brief: 10 skill points, skills cost 1 to 4 points per level, min. 0 max. 5 levels for each skill, 1-2 levels gives 1 specialty, 3-5 gives 2.

You start with 10 skill points to buy skills with. Skills are bought in levels, with each skill having a different per-level cost:

- Academic - 2 points per level
- Athletic - 3 points per level
- Combat - 4 points per level
- Creative - 1 point per level
- Criminal - 4 points per level
- Tech - 1 point per level
- Investigation/Espionage - 4 points per level
- Labor - 1 point per level
- Medicine - 3 points per level
- People - 2 points per level
- Traditional - 1 point per level

Specialties- Specialties act as one extra level in that skill (see p.33 for more). For instance, if you have 2 levels in Academic and a specialty of Math, you can do Math as if you had 3 skill levels. For every skill you have at least one level in, choose one specialty. For each skill you have at least three levels in, choose two specialties. Each specialty can be taken only once.

Some advantages give a free skill specialty without conferring any levels in that skill. If a PC has a specialty without levels in the skill, he or she can make a skill roll, dealing with that specialty only, as if the PC had one skill level.

Skills and their specialties are as follows:

Academic

Cost: 2 points per level

Typical Attribute: INL

Specialties:

Sciences*: Includes biology, chemistry, geology, meteorology, archeology, paleontology, physics, psychology. Example Equipment: *Reference books, calculators, microscopes, chemical reagents, picks, brushes, barometer.*

Humanities*: Philosophy, religion, mythology. Example Equipment: *Reference books.*

Business & Law*: Business law, criminal law, tort law, legal research, business, economics, social work, government, politics. Example Equipment: *Reference books.*

Math*: Mathematics, statistics, accounting, cryptography, mnemonics. Example Equipment: *Calculator, reference books, graphing calculator, computer.*

Athletic

Cost: 3 points per level

Typical Attribute: AGY

Specialties:

Outdoors*: Running, hiking, rock climbing, mountain climbing, swimming, SCUBA diving. Example Equipment: *Running shoes, climbing gear, wetsuit, flippers, SCUBA gear.*

Skills Example: We want Christina to have the sort of skills a country girl might have, and we want her to be skilled at dealing with people, so we give her two levels of Traditional (costing 2 points), two levels of Labor (costing 2 points) and three levels of People (costing 6 points). This uses all 10 skill points. In Labor we choose the specialty of Building, in Traditional we choose Livelihood and in People (since she has 3 levels) we choose Performance and Social.

Since Christina has 5 CHM, her AV for People rolls is 8 (5 CHM + 3 skill levels). Her AV for People rolls where she is Performing is 9 (5 CHM + 3 skill levels +1 for having a specialty).

Vehicles: Bicycling, skating, skateboarding, kayaking, parachuting, hanggliding.

Martial Arts: Control: Aikido, tae kwon do, wrestling. This is the combat style Control, but with no equipment packages available. See p.37 for more.

Martial Arts: Exhaust: Boxing, kickboxing, wrestling. This is the combat style Exhaust, but with no equipment packages available. See p.37 for more.

Combat

Cost: 4 points per level

Typical Attribute: N/A (see p.37)

Specialties:

Kill*: This is the combat style Kill. See p.37 for more. Example Equipment: *Knives, swords, sniper rifles, bow and arrow, shotgun.*

Control*: This is the combat style Control. See p.37 for more. Example Equipment: *Armor, rope, chain, net.*

Exhaust*: This is the combat style Exhaust. See p.37 for more. Example Equipment: *Armor, brass knuckles, steel-toed boots.*

Ruin*: This is the combat style Ruin. See p.37 for more. Example Equipment: *Pepper spray, taser.*

Creative

Cost: 1 point per level

Typical Attribute: AWR

Specialties:

Visual Arts*: Photography, sculpture, painting, drawing, filmmaking. Example Equipment: *Sketch pad, pencils, pens, paint, brushes, camera, movie camera, carving tools, clay, computer with video editing software.*

Music*: Writing and reading music, playing instruments, singing. Example Equipment: *Instrument, books of sheet*

music, amp, computer with music editing software.

Writing*: Writing fiction, writing non-fiction, editing, penmanship. Example equipment: *Notebook, pen, dictionary, thesaurus, laptop with word processor.*

Criminal

Cost: 4 points per level

Typical Attribute: AGY

Specialties:

Underworld*: Black market, organized crime, drugs, gambling. Example Equipment: *Stylish suit, small scales, cell phone, loaded dice.*

Trickery*: Disguise, impersonation, forgery. Example Equipment: *Disguise kit, x-acto knife, laminator, computer and color printer.*

Theft*: Lock picking, alarm systems, pocket picking, prowling, auto-theft. Example Equipment: *Lockpicks, slim jim, dark clothes, electronics tools, crowbar.*

Tech

Cost: 1 point per level

Typical Attribute: INL

Specialties:

Hardware*: Electronics, repairing and upgrading computer hardware, networks. Example Equipment: *Electronics tools, electronics reference book, voltmeter, spare parts, laptop with network diagnostic software.*

Software*: Doing internet research, using software, writing computer programs, internet publishing. Example Equipment: *Smart-phone, laptop, satellite internet service card.*

Hacking*: Hacking, phone phreaking, data pirating, anonymity, denial of service attacks. Example Equipment: *Laptop, telco linework handset, common hacking tools, rented bot-nets.*

M
U
N
D
A
N
E

S
K
I
L
S

Investigation/Espionage

Cost: 4 points per level

Typical Attribute: INL

Specialties:

Military*: Military tactics, using and disarming explosives, offensive driving, WMDs. Example Equipment: *Maps, GPS, bomb-disarming tools, chemical and biological weapon sensors.*

Investigating People*: Interrogation, brainwashing, torture, law enforcement research. Example Equipment: *Handcuffs, sodium pentothal, background-check database access.*

Crime Scene*: Crime scene forensics, forensic pathology, autopsies. Example Equipment: *Tools, evidence collection kits, microscope, field gunpowder residue tests, autopsy kit.*

Labor

Cost: 1 point per level

Typical Attribute: INL

Specialties:

Building/Repair*: Blacksmithing, welding, electronics, carpentry, mechanics, plumbing. Example Equipment: *Leatherman, tool kit, blowtorch, spare fuses, tape measure, duct tape.*

Transport: Driving passenger vehicles, driving construction machinery, sailing, flying.

Power: Demolitions, heavy machinery.

Medicine

Cost: 3 points per level

Typical Attribute: INL

Specialties:

Trauma*: Emergency medicine, physical therapy. Example Equipment: *First aid kit, fully stocked paramedic case.*

Surgery*: Surgery, plastic surgery. Example Equipment: *Field surgical kit, anesthetics.*

Pharmaceuticals*: Pharmacology, psychopharmacology. Example equipment: *Common medications, physician's desk reference, syringe.*

People

Cost: 2 points per level

Typical Attribute: CHM

Specialties:

Performance: Oratory, storytelling, dance.

Social*: Seduction, fashion, makeup, counseling. Typical Equipment: *Various outfits for different occasions, makeup, skin creams, perfume or cologne, counseling handbook.*

Language*: Speaking foreign languages. Example Equipment: *Foreign language phrasebooks, dictionaries, pocket translators.*

Traditional

Cost: 1 points per level

Typical Attribute: AWR

Specialties:

Traditional Medicine*: Ethnogenic psychoactives, herbal medicine, acupuncture. Example Equipment: *Common medicinal herbs, common psychoactives, acupuncture needles.*

Survival*: Wilderness survival, light sleep, navigation, finding and making shelters, building fires, tracking. Example Equipment: *Compass, hatchet, canteen, water purification tablets, flint and magnesium fire starter, fishing line, fish hook.*

Tricks: Hypnosis, lip reading, sleight of hand.

Livelihood*: Animal training, cooking, traditional crafts, wildcrafting. Example equipment: *Knives, scissors, grooming tools, scrapers, animal care books, wild plants handbook, mini-blowtorch, pliers.*

*Indicates that an equipment package is available for this specialty, see Step 5.

Talents

In Brief: 1 skill point for an extra specialty to be able to do one specific thing.

Anything that humans can learn to do but that is not mentioned in the skill descriptions can be learned as a Talent. Talents cost 1 skill point each and act as an additional specialty for whatever skill is most appropriate. The specialty allows the PC to make skill rolls to do that one specific activity. Talents are good for “tricks” that are not part of any normal course of study. For instance, no normal curriculum in Athletic or People or Traditional will teach a person sword swallowing, although it is definitely something people can learn to do.

For example: *Ted wants to learn how to swallow swords, so he spends 1 skill point to buy a specialty of Athletic called “Swallow Swords.” If he has zero levels in Athletic, this Talent gives him a Sword Swallowing AV of AGY +1 (for having a specialty). If he has levels in Athletic, his AV is AGY + Athletic +1. Players should consult with GMs whether equipment packages are available for a Talent. For instance, a GM might say there is no special Sword Swallowing equipment package.*

Talents can be used for things a PC has learned in absence of the greater context of learning that typically goes with it. Say, for instance, that a PC is an avid birdwatcher and knows everything about birds, but knows nothing about any other type of wildlife or about nature, biology or science in general. That PC would have an Academics of zero with a specialty (a Talent) of Bird Knowledge. The things the PC could do with this Talent would be very limited because they wouldn’t have the science background to generalize beyond basic facts.

Talents should be only for very specific activities, e.g. swallowing swords or answering questions about birds. “Surgery” would be too broad of a subject matter and should be purchased by buying the skill Medicine and the Surgery specialty. “Removing Bullets,” however, might be an appropriate talent for a gang member who has no medical training but has been forced to dig bullets out of friends.

Training

Skill costs to buy skill levels with XP during during gameplay can be reduced by studying with a skilled teacher. The exact cost should be negotiated with the GM and cannot go lower than 1 skill point per level. For example: Marita finds a master martial artist and apprentices herself to him, doing whatever tasks or exercises he assigns her. During the period the GM allows Marita to buy Athletic at a cost of 1 skill point per level.

Step Four - Paths

In Brief: Buy 4 levels in Paths. 1-2 levels gives 1 Specialty and 1 Focus, 3-5 gives 2 Specialties and 2 Focuses.

There are eight Paths, and you start with 4 levels among these Paths. You can put all four levels in one Path, or you can spread the levels out among multiple Paths.

Each Path that you have at least one level in gives you access to Path Abilities (listed in Chapter Five, p.100). When you have one or two levels in any given Path, you can choose one Specialty and one Focus in that Path. When you have three or more levels in any given Path, you can choose one Specialty and one Focus in that Path.

For each Path the PC has levels in, write a brief (e.g. one sentence) description of how the PC conceives that Path, or what that Path means to the PC. These descriptions can, and should, change over time as the PC and his or her relationship to the Paths changes. The description helps the GM know the PC's outlook, and it helps the PC to justify different things he or she wants to use the Paths for.

Path Specialties- A Path Specialty is much like a skill specialty. This is an element of that Path that the PC is more practiced in than the others, and thus can use that ability as if he or she has one extra level in that Path. To select a Specialty, choose any one Path ability, an attribute bonus from having Path levels, or an activity that you can gain plusses to from that Path (including combat).

Focuses- A Focus is an activity that puts the PC in the right state of consciousness to use Path Abilities for that particular Path. After using a Focus, the PC gets a temporary one extra level in that Path. The Focus must be either time consuming (e.g. staring at a fire, taking a walk, having a conversation) or carry some level of risk or damage to the PC (e.g. using hallucinogens, sleep deprivation, using a sweat lodge). Even if a PC has two Focuses, only one can be used at any given time.

Different Paths can share a Focus (for instance, a PC might have Medication as the focus for both -Thought and -Feeling) but when using a Focus the PC must declare which Path he or she is boosting (e.g. are you meditating on not thinking or on not being affected by emotions?).

Paths Example: *We decide to give Christina 3 levels in +Harmony and 1 level in +Self. For +Harmony we can choose two Specialties and two Focuses, and for +Self we can choose one Specialty and one Focus.*

For the +Self Specialty we choose +Self plusses to attributes. For all other +Self abilities, Christina has a level of 1, but when computing her plusses to attributes from being on the Path of +Self, we count her as having 2 levels. As her Focus, she chooses Preaching (a time consuming activity). After Preaching, she can act as if she had 2 levels of +Self and has the plusses to attributes consistent with 3 levels of +Self.

For +Harmony Specialties we chose Making Friends (Christina can now add 4 levels of +Harmony to making friends) and Combat (when we are able to add +Harmony to combat, we can add 4 levels). For Focuses, we choose Laying On of Hands and Reading the Bible.

Now we must write a brief description of each Path Christina has levels in, as Christina sees them. +Harmony we describe as "The idea that God loves everyone and everything and so should we." +Self we describe as "We are all always good enough for everything God needs us to do."

Using Paths In Brief

- All Paths give plusses to combat AVs, but only in certain circumstances and only when using certain combat styles.
- Some Paths give plusses to attributes, based on the levels one has in the Path. These attribute plusses are always “on.”
- Each Path has abilities. These are a lot like skills. They are things only people in that Path can do. One rolls Path level vs. a difficulty determined by the GM.
- Any other roll you make can gain a bonus (+1 or +2 per level) if you can convince the GM that your pursuit of the Path, as you understand it, helps with that kind of activity. The PC’s personal understanding of their Path (as described in their one-line Path descriptions) is important in determining what activities can be aided by the Path.
- Having a specialty means you can act as if you had one extra Path level in whatever use of the Path (any of the above) you have the focus in.
- Using a Focus lets you act, temporarily, as if you have one extra level in that Path.

A brief description of the Paths and their abilities follows. For more, see p.100.

-Thinking

Concept: Those on the Path of -Thinking believe that most of the problems that logic, philosophy and science are attempting to solve are problems that logic, philosophy and science have invented. People already know most of what they need to know about the universe and the answers to most questions are simple, and so -Thinkers try to learn to silence the chattering of the mind so they can hear the wisdom and answers they already have.

Typical Seekers: A student of Zen who uses meditation to silence the mind. A retired housewife who has seen enough foolishness to know that a dose of common sense beats an ideology or philosophy any day of the week.

Abilities: Dumb Luck, Profile Thought Weaknesses, Reading Bones.

+Thinking

Concept: For those on the Path of +Thinking, the human capacity for logic and reasoning is the greatest tool we will ever have and one whose potential we haven’t even begun to tap. They do not believe that some are born smart and others not, but that each person develops their mental abilities through practice. Ideas, concepts and abstractions are considered keys that open different doors to understanding and +Thinkers go around collecting as many as possible.

Typical Seekers: A philosophy major who is out to find out whether there is a practical use for all the books he or she has read. A student of Tibetan dialectic debate who believes that one can arrive at the solution to any problem through logic. A brilliant mathematician who is trying to use advanced mathematical principles to model the more ephemeral aspects of life.

Abilities: Deduction, Improv, Profile Thought Strengths.

-Self

Concept: Those on the Path of -Self learn to distrust and to shed ideas about self. They strive to become egoless, believing neither in their own strengths nor their own weaknesses. They learn to see the self-identities of others as nothing more than poorly-told-stories that have nothing to do with reality except where they create reality as self-fulfilling prophecies.

Typical Seekers: A monotheist who believes the ultimate act of supplication to God is the humility of giving up self. A critic of modern society who thinks that people’s adoption of ridiculous roles is damaging to the human spirit. An Eastern mystic who believes that attachment to selfhood is a barrier to enlightenment.

Abilities: Mirror of Self, Profile Self-Identity Weaknesses, Unnoticeable.

Sample Focuses by Path

-Thought: Meditation, using hallucinogens, reading tarot cards, taking a walk, doing calligraphy.

+Thought: Reading a book, engaging in debate, drinking coffee, making diagrams, blogging, silent contemplation.

-Self: Being an anonymous member of a crowd, being enigmatic, getting others to talk about themselves, menial labor, being alone, providing medical care to others.

+Self: Looking in the mirror, using deliriants, getting dressed up, playing sports, martial arts practice, yelling at people, flirting.

-Harmony: Self-mutilation, engaging in a rant, visualizing one's own death, breaking taboos, observing others while staying unseen, reading about historical injustices, being insulted.

+Harmony: Sitting in nature, giving a massage, eating a meal with a family, keeping an altar, dancing, giving compliments.

-Feeling: Fasting, making calculations, sleep deprivation, sleeping outside, giving things away, solitude.

+Feeling: Having sex, making art, listening to music, hiking, watching a sunrise, getting in a fistfight, singing, using hallucinogens.

+Self

Concept: Those on the Path of -Self learn that self-confidence, believing in oneself, is a key to unlocking human potential. They strive to be able to control what they believe about themselves and to believe it so strongly that whatever they believe in, if it is not already true, becomes so.

Typical Seekers: An athlete or martial artist who has learned that the key to success is self-confidence. A user of native psychoactive plants that give one a feeling of strength and power. A political radical who believes that people need to overcome the feeling of powerlessness that society has instilled in people.

Abilities: Animal Magnetism, Choose Identity, Profile Self-Identity Strengths.

-Harmony

Concept: Those on the Path of -Harmony have purposefully put themselves outside of society so that they can question everything from an unbiased point of view. For those on this Path the saying 'just because everyone believes it doesn't make it true' is a very important one. Those in this Path know that by being on the outside one can see solutions that those on the inside can't, and they learn to resist the instinct to reach harmony with the ideas of others that so often causes "groupthink." Out of all the Paths, -Harmony practitioners are best able to explore their "dark sides."

Typical Seekers: A social psychologist who has studied the errors caused by groupthink. A political and social radical who believes that modern society is as blind to its injustices and moral failings as slave-owning society was to its own. An aboriginal 'sorcerer' whose power comes from exploring activities and items that the native culture considers taboo. A goth poet who seeks to find beauty in what everyone else considers ugliness.

Abilities: Profile Harmony Weaknesses, Sabotage Harmony.

+Harmony

Concept: Those on the Path of +Harmony believe that 'no man is an island,' that each person is connected to and depends on the people and natural world around them, and that being in harmony with one's body, community and environment is a route to peace, prosperity and power. Those on this Path strive to learn the 'healthiest' way of living and interacting with one's environment, and learn that it is much easier to get by in the world by doing so.

Typical Seekers: A Mexican Curandera (traditional healer) who has learned to treat not only physical illness but also illnesses in people's relationships with those around them. A tree-hugging hippie who still believes that it is possible for people to love each other. A devout monotheist who takes seriously his or her religion's laws about treating your neighbors problems as your own. A professional mediator who has learned that cooperation is always more rewarding than competition.

Abilities: Fix Harmony, Luck, Profile Harmony Weaknesses.

-Feeling

Concept: Those on the Path of -Feeling believe that emotions are the key enemy of reason and that far too many people, whether they know it or not, make decisions based on what they feel rather than on what is rational. Those on this Path learn to control their emotions and protect their thoughts from interference by emotion. They also learn not to let the universe provoke unwanted emotions in them.

Typical Seekers: An ascetic yogi learning to live with few earthly pleasures in order to feel cosmic pleasures. A cynical skeptic who sees base emotions like fear and hatred behind what most people call reason. A Buddhist monk who is trying to learn to react only with compassion, no matter what might happen.

Abilities: Absorb Emotions, Profile Feeling Weaknesses, Survive on Little.

+Feeling

Concept: For those on this Path, emotions and feelings are a source of power and wisdom that goes untapped in most people. Students of this Path learn to be aware of their own feelings, to enhance the power of their feelings and draw power from them. They are also able to express their feelings strongly enough to evoke feelings in others.

Typical Seekers: An artist seeking to understand and document the human experience through art. A primal scream therapist who believes that expressing emotions is they key to health. A high-class call girl who believes that the most powerful thing in the world is an un-met emotional need.

Abilities: Chanelling, Gut Intuition, Overpower Emotion, Profile Feeling Strengths.

Sample Focuses by Tradition

Art: Painting, drawing, dancing, reading poetry, singing, playing music, viewing art, listening to music, drinking absinthe.

Buddhism: Meditation, chanting, burning incense, sitting, contemplating riddles, menial labor.

Freedom: Driving, walking, listening to music, being lost.

Hippie/New Age Philosophy: Singing, using hallucinogens, using marijuana, meditating, staring at crystals, chanting, being naked, having sex.

Martial Arts: Doing katas (martial art exercises), doing Tai Chi, meditating.

Mathematics: Doing calculations, making lists, drawing diagrams.

Monotheism: Praying, reading a holy book, meditating, burning incense, chanting, singing, preaching, maintaining an altar, dancing, self-flagellation, visualizing the death of a martyr.

Occultism: Rituals, meditation, sex, using hallucinogens, reading books.

Ordinary Life: Having conversations, walking, menial labor, silent contemplation, making crafts.

Philosophy: Debating, reading books, writing, lecturing, walking.

Psychology: Talking with a trusted confidant, silent introspection, playing word-association games, analyzing dreams, looking at ink blots, role-playing.

Shamanism: Using hallucinogens, using deliriants, fasting, dancing, beating drums, being alone in nature, sleep deprivation, self-mutilation.

Step Five - Equipment

In Brief: The PC starts with 5 Equipment Points worth of equipment. Equipment Points can be used to buy Equipment Packages or special equipment.

Equipment Packages

Many skill specialties have a corresponding equipment package. This is a set of tools and reference materials that help a person use a skill specialty. Equipment packages are bought in levels, from 1 to 3. Level one (O) is the cheapest equipment and level three (OOO) is the most expensive, complete and high-tech set of equipment. For instance, Academic: Humanities O might be a few dusty old paperback books, while Humanities OOO might be a library of hundreds of books and journals on the hard drive of a laptop.

Each level of an equipment package gives +1 to skill rolls of that specialty.

The cost for an equipment package is the as follows:

Cost	Package Level
1 EP	O
3 EP	OO
6 EP	OOO

The following skill specialties have equipment packages available:

Academic: Sciences, Humanities, Business & Law, Math

Athletic: Outdoors

Combat: Kill, Control, Exhaust, Ruin

Creative: Visual Arts, Music, Writing

Criminal: Trickery, Theft

Tech: Hardware, Software, Hacking

Investigation/Espionage: Military, Investigating People, Crime Scene

Labor: Building/Repair

Medicine: Trauma, Surgery, Pharmaceuticals

People: Social, Language

Traditional: Traditional Medicine, Survival, Livelihood

Example: If one were to spend 1 Equipment Point for a package to correspond to the Outdoors specialty of Athletic, one would have Athletic: Outdoors O Package, which might be a backpack, a compass, an old leather jacket and a good pair of gloves and would give +1 to Outdoor skill rolls. If one were to spend 6 EP one could buy Athletic: Outdoors OOO, which might be an expensive gore-tex jacket, GPS, tent, pocket fishing kit, laser fire starter, wetsuit, mountain climbing tools and more and would give +3 to Outdoors rolls.

Combat Packages- Like other skills, one can purchase equipment packages for combat skill specialties. A Combat: Kill O package might be a straight-razor. Combat: Kill OOO might be riot armor and two poisoned katanas.

Equipment Example: Since Christina has the skills Traditional, Labor and People, we decide to give her the packages Traditional: Survival OO, costing 3 EP and People: Social O, costing 1 EP. We want her to defend herself, so we spend her last EP point on Combat: Kill O. We envision this equipment as some wilderness survival gear (a tent, bedroll, hatchet, fishing line and hook), a nice outfit for preaching in and some makeup, a small mirror and hairbrush, and a hunting knife.

Since she has two levels of the skill Traditional, and has the Traditional: Survival OO equipment package, when she makes a Survival skill roll, her AV is the applicable attribute (AWR, which is 2) +2 (from having two levels of the skill) +2 (from having 2 levels of the appropriate equipment package). So her AV is 6 altogether, which is fairly good.

Double the cost to make any combat package ranged, e.g. throwing knives, a bow and arrows, pistol, or sniper rifle, depending on the level purchased.

Encumbrance- Assume that a healthy PC can carry 6 EP worth of equipment packages, e.g. in a backpack. Any more equipment than this and a PC will need a vehicle or some other storage space.

Specific Equipment- Some pieces of equipment don't correspond to any skill specialty and are thus listed as their own separate items. These include drugs, animals, explosives, vehicles and other miscellaneous tools.

Drugs- Only recreational drugs are listed. Plain medical pharmaceuticals should be purchased as Medicine: Trauma or Medicine: Pharmaceuticals packages. Herbal Medicines should be purchased as a Traditional: Traditional Medicine package.

If more than 1 dose of a drug is taken, double the bad effects and keep good effects the same. Withdrawal from a drug (the side effects when a regular user stops using the drug) is, unless specified otherwise, the opposite of the normal effects of the drug.

The cost listed for a drug is the cost for one dose per day. A PC with one of the following should always start play with one dose on hand.

Alcohol (costs 1 EP): +1 vs. pain/fear, -1 AGY, -1 AWR, -1 INL, Addiction OO.

Caffeine (costs 1 EP): +1 vs. unconsciousness.

Cigarettes (costs 1 EP): Addiction O.

Cocaine/Crack (costs 2 EP): +4 vs. unconsciousness, Addiction 6, Paranoid Delusions O.

Deliriants (costs 1 EP): These are various dangerous plants, e.g. jimsonweed, that can cause psychotic behavior. Delusions OOOO, Amnesia OOO, +1 END, +1 Hit Points, -1 AWR, -1 WIL, Heart Attack O.

Should You Buy a Gun?

In most roleplaying games, the wisest thing to do during character creation is to make the PC as combat-able as possible so the PC can survive encounters with increasingly tough enemy combatants. Not buying a gun, or some equivalent weapon, when you have the resources to do so, would be unwise. In Seeker, however, you could buy a weapon, but not having one could be just as valid a choice, perhaps even a better choice, for the following reasons:

- Seeker is a game of great, but subtle powers. There are no giant monsters or super-strong cyborgs, just people. PCs might face enemies with guns, but Seekers have Path abilities that can put them on equal footing with those enemies, even when the PCs are unarmed.

- The prototypical Seeker adventure (see p.143) involves gaining the trust of people in need and then helping them. Violence, or threats of violence, may not be the best way to help people. If the PCs are trying to find a child lost in a mine, or stop a blood feud between two Appalachian clans, or convince the members of a cult that they are being manipulated and brainwashed, a gun might be of no help at all, and character creation points spent on weapons and combat skills might have been better spent elsewhere.

- Finally, Seekers can only progress on the Paths when they are challenged. Failing an adventure, or just barely winning, gives more Experience Points than winning easily. Going into a situation with few resources helps ensure that the PC will actually be challenged. Facing down a bar full of angry, drunk bikers is not going to be much of a challenge if the PC is a world-class martial artist or a pistol-packing badass. Facing a bar full of angry, drunk bikers with no weapons and little or no combat skills can cause a Seeker to reach deep into his or her bag of tricks and find out more about his or her Path

Ecstasy (costs 2 EP): Euphoria OO, -5 vs. hallucinations/delusions, Addiction OO.

Hallucinogens (costs 2 EP): These are various chemicals (e.g. LSD) or plants (e.g. peyote, ayahuasca). Hallucinations 7, Delusions OO, +1 AWR.

Heroin (costs 3 EP): +5 vs. pain, +4 vs. fear, -1 AGY, Euphoria 5, Addiction 6.

Inhalants (costs 1 EP): Euphoria 5, +2 vs. pain, -2 AGY, -2 AWR, -2 INL, Addiction OO.

Marijuana (costs 2 EP): -2 to memory rolls, -1 INL, -2 AWR, +2 vs. fear/anger/pain, Addiction O.

Meth (costs 3 EP): +2 vs. unconsciousness, Addiction 5.

Opium (costs 2 EP): +2 vs. fear, -1 INL, -1 AGY, Euphoria OO, Addiction OOOO.

Psychedelics (costs 1 EP): These are chemicals or plants that have a similar effect to hallucinogens but are milder. Hallucinations O, Euphoria O, +1 AWR.

Animals- Animals come in three basic types: untrained, trained and highly trained. Untrained animals are habituated to human presence but don't know how to follow any commands. Trained animals can follow basic commands common to that animal (e.g. a horse knows "giddyup" and "woah"). A highly trained animal has been specifically trained in one specialty skill, e.g. a bloodhound is trained to track people by scent.

Dog: Untrained (Costs 1 EP). Kill AV 3, Hit Points 6.

Dog: Trained (Costs 2 EP). Kill AV 3, Hit Points 6.

Dog: Highly Trained (Costs 4 EP). Includes seeing-eye-dogs, bloodhounds, fighting dogs. Kill AV 4, Hit Points 6.

Horse: Untrained (Costs 2 EP). Ruin AV 2, Hit Points 8.

Horse: Trained (Costs 4 EP). Ruin AV 2, Hit Points 8.

Horse: Highly Trained (Costs 8 EP). Includes horses trained for hunting, racing or war. Ruin AV 3, Hit Points 8.

Explosives- The PC starts with one explosive per game session.

Explosive O (costs 1 EP) will destroy anything in 5 ft.

Explosive OO (costs 2 EP) will destroy anything in 20 ft.

Explosive OOO (costs 3 EP) will destroy anything in 50 ft.

Vehicles

Bicycle, Kayak or Junker Car cost 1 EP.

Moped or Junker Motorcycle costs 2 EP.

Motorboat, RV, New Motorcycle, New Car cost 4 EP.

Personal Aircraft or Heavily-Upgraded Sports Car cost 6 EP.

Misc Equipment

Binoculars (Costs 1 EP)

Bug (Costs 2 EP): Audio/camera bug or tracking bug. Comes with receiver or tracker.

Cellphone (Costs 1 EP)

Digital Camera (Costs 1 EP)

Flashlight: Heavy Duty (Costs 1 EP)

Gasmask (Costs 1 EP)

GPS (costs 1 EP)

Handcuffs (Costs 1 EP)

Musical Instrument (Costs 1 EP)

Laptop (Costs 2 EP): Comes with wimax access to the internet in any urban area. +1 EP to give it satellite based access anywhere in the continental US.

Nightvision Goggles (Costs 2 EP)

Poison: Deadly (costs 1 EP): 1 dose per adventure. Ingestor dies within 5 minutes without medical intervention.

Poison: Debilitating (costs 1 EP). 1 dose per adventure. Ingestor takes -4 penalty to all rolls.

Poison: Knockout (costs 2 EP). 1 dose per adventure. 5 difficulty save vs. unconsciousness, -3 AWR, -3 INL.

Smartphone (Costs 2 EP): Can connect to the internet in most urban areas.

Spraypaint (Costs 1 EP): 4 cans per adventure.

Tent & Sleeping Bag (Costs 1 EP)

Video Camera (Costs 1 EP)

Walkie Talkies (Costs 1 EP/pair)

Pocket Money- This is a source of income that the PC can depend on to give the PC access to money. This might be dividends from wisely invested money, royalties from a book, care-packages sent by concerned relatives, etc.

Money cannot be saved and accumulated between adventures. It is assumed that money not spent by the end of an adventure will be spent after the adventure and before the next. Pocket money does not include money a PC earns during an adventure ("in game").

Each point of EP gives \$25 at the start of each adventure.

Step Six - Advantages & Disads

In Brief: Buy advantages with BP, get BP for demons and disads. 1 Attribute Point, 3 Skill Points or 3 Equipment Points = 1 Bonus Point.

The PC can gain Bonus Points by taking disadvantages or by reducing Attribute Points, Skill Points or Equipment Points. The PC can spend Bonus Points on advantages or on additional Attribute Points, Skill Points or Equipment Points.

1 Attribute Point = 1 BP

3 Skill Points = 1 BP

4 Equipment Points = 1 BP

A PC can also lower Hit Points to get BP. A PC receives 1 BP for 2 Hit Points. Hit Points cannot be reduced below 6. Hit Points cannot be increased using Bonus Points.

A PC cannot take more than 8 points of disads without special permission from the GM.

Free Equipment

The following very minor or very common equipment costs 0 EP: Shoes, clothing, a hat, gloves, cheap jewelry, a backpack, sunglasses, condoms, a handkerchief, a jacket, glasses, a cane, a walking stick, a cheap flashlight, a few books (nothing powerful enough to act as a skill package), paper, pens, pencils, a padlock.

Available advantages, disadvantages and demons follow:

Advantages

Contact (Costs 1 BP): The PC has a contact he or she can call on for information, advice, or sometimes help. To keep the relationship healthy, the PC should generally repay favors. The contact is high up in one of the following: law enforcement, government, academia, big business, intelligence, military or medicine.

Criminal Background (Costs 3 BP): Gives Criminal (2) and a free Kill or Ruin specialty of Combat.

Fame (Costs 1 BP): The PC has gained some renown, enough so that most people will recognize the PC's name, and about one in thirty will recognize the PC by sight. The PC might be a famous author, artist, guru, scientist, etc.

Advantages and Disads Example: Looking at the list of disads, we decide that Christina will have a young child, her daughter, with her on her journeys. We take the Caregiver: Child disad, which gives 2 BP. We decide not to give Christina any Demons. Looking to spend those 2 BP, we look through the advantages. We find Physically Attractive, which costs 1 BP and will leave her with 1 BP left. We choose to trade that 1 BP for 1 Attribute Point and increase her AGY to 3.

Law Enforcement Background (Costs 3 BP): Gives Investigation/Espionage (2) and a free Martial Arts: Control specialty of Athletic. Costs +1 BP for the PC to still be employed as an active member of law enforcement.

Medical Background (Costs 3 BP): Gives the skills Academic (1), and Medicine (2), and the equipment package Medicine: Trauma (2). Costs +1 BP for the PC to still be able to legally practice medicine and prescribe drugs

Military Background (Costs 2 BP): Gives Athletic (1), the Kill specialty of Combat and the Military specialty of Investigation/Espionage free.

Original Peoples (Costs 2 BP): The PC is a member of an ethnic group with a strong connection to that group's traditional language and traditions, and the community of people of that ethnicity within the united states. The PC starts out bilingual (can speak English and the native language equally well) and gets Traditional (3) free. Note: You choose to be a member of any ethnicity as part of Character Concept, but that alone not convey the language, skill and social benefits of this advantage.

Physically Attractive (Costs 1 BP): +2 to seduction rolls.

Powerful Item (Costs 2 BP): The PC possesses something created by a Seeker, Prodigy, Sorcerer or Advanced Practitioner. It was created with more than just great workmanship or inspired creativity. It has been created with a subtle power the PC is not yet capable of fully understanding. Choose one particular (non-combat) activity the item is intended to perform. The object gives +4 to rolls to do that particular thing. Examples: *a will-work-for-food sign that gives +4 to rolls to beg for change, a pair of dancing shoes that gives +4 for rolls to do a beautiful and enchanting dance, a hand-crafted scalpel that gives +4 to emergency abdominal surgeries.*

Professor (Costs 3 BP): The PC has spent a good portion of his or her life in higher education: learning, teaching, studying, writing papers. The PC still has tenure at

some university, and privileges there, even if the PC is on a "sabbatical" from teaching at the moment. Gives Academic (3) and a free Writing specialty of Creative.

Sorcerous Skill (Costs 1 BP/ea.): This is a Path ability or plus that the PC has gained by rote learning, rather than by having levels in that Path itself. Choose one Path the PC does not have any levels in, and give the PC the equivalent of one Specialty in that Path. For instance, a PC who does not have any dots in +Harmony may still have a Specialty in "Luck" or in plusses to make friends and use these as if he or she has one level of +Harmony. If the PC later gains a level in that Path, the PC retains this as an additional Path Specialty.

Teacher (Costs 1 BP): The PC has a relationship with an elder Seeker (8+ Path levels) who wants to teach the PC. This is useful because the teacher can set up challenges (see p.57) for the PC, and because the PC can seek out that teacher for advice. The downside is that to advance along his or her own Path, the PC may someday have to leave that teacher, and may encounter resistance if the teacher has come to depend on having a follower.

Disadvantages

Addiction: Alcohol (gives 2 BP): 3 difficulty WIL roll to abstain.

Addiction: Cocaine/Crack (gives 4 BP): 4 difficulty WIL roll to abstain.

Addiction: Heroin (gives 4 BP): 3 difficulty WIL roll to abstain. -1 vs. disease from suppressed immune system.

Addiction: Meth (gives 3 BP): 3 difficulty WIL roll to abstain. -2 Hit Points from malnutrition.

Addiction: Nicotine (gives 1 BP): 3 difficulty WIL roll to abstain.

Addiction: Opium/Pain Pills (gives 2 BP): 3 difficulty WIL roll to abstain. -1 vs. disease from suppressed immune system.

Allergy: Deadly (Gives 1 BP): Choose a thing the PC is allergic to. If eaten, the PC will be incapacitated within 10 minutes, dead within 1 hour without medical intervention.

Blind (Gives 5 BP): -4 to combat rolls.

Burned Out (Gives 1 BP): The PC has spent too many decades doing too many drugs and his or her brain has been permanently altered. Gives -2 to save vs. hallucinations and delusions, -1 to memory rolls and the PC exhibits a noticeably 'spacey' manner.

Caregiver: Child (Gives 2 BP): PC is responsible for a child, who has 1 in all attributes, 4 Hit Points and no appreciable skills.

Caregiver: Elderly/Physically Disabled (Gives 1 BP): PC is responsible for a loved one who is too old or disabled to care for himself or herself. One physical attribute (AWR, AGY, END, SPD, STH) is at 0, the rest are at 1. 6 Hit Points. No appreciable skills.

Caregiver: Mentally Disabled (Gives 2 BP): PC is responsible for caring for a mentally incompetent loved one. INL is 0 for most purposes, other attributes at 2, 10 Hit Points.

Criminal/Mental Health History (Gives 1 BP): Anyone doing a background check on the PC will find that the PC has a significant criminal record, has recently spent time in a mental institution, or both. Even if the PC refuses to give a name, the PC can easily be identified by checking his or her fingerprints against a national database. There's nothing a PC could be arrested for, but it's enough to make anyone in law enforcement very suspicious of the PC.

Deaf (Gives 3 BP): The PC cannot hear. The PC can speak American Sign Language, and can buy ability to read lips for 1 Skill Point.

Disfigured (Gives 1 BP): -4 to seduction rolls.

Follower (Gives 1 BP): The PC has a would-be student following the PC, trying to learn from the PC, who cannot be easily

Other Advantages & Disads

There are many more possible advantages and disads that are not listed here because they can be most easily implemented by changing attributes, skills, equipment, etc. Here are some examples of how un-listed advantages and disads can be created:

Poverty: Reduce EP.

Bad Leg: Reduce SPD, possibly AGY.

Old Age: Reduce END, AGY, SPD, STH, AWR, Hit Points, possible INL. Perhaps take the Senile disad.

Computer Genius: Increase INL, buy tech skills.

Bad Heart: Reduce END, Hit Points.

persuaded to quit. Not only is this bad for the student (who should be seeking his or her own path), it is bad for the PC, who may become trapped (see p.62) if she of she becomes attached to being an authority.

Hemophilia (Gives 2 BP): Any Hit Point damage from injuries is done again every 5 minutes until PC dies or receives medical treatment.

Hunted: Law Enforcement (Gives 3 BP): The PC is wanted by law enforcement, for a serious crime that the PC might or might not have committed. The PC's face is on wanted posters in Post Offices and police stations around the country. Even if the PC didn't commit the crime, the PC has no easy

means of proving his or her innocence. If caught the PC will be put in prison for a long time. Cannot be taken in conjunction with Illegal Immigrant or Criminal/Mental Health History.

Hunted: Organized Crime (Gives 2 BP): A major organized crime group has a hit out on the PC, and is offering a big reward to any other organized crime group, gang or random street thug who can take the PC out. The organized crime group is angry enough at the PC to have a few experienced enforcers driving around the country hunting for the PC.

Hunted: Seeker (Costs 2 BP): Another Seeker, with approximately the same number of Path levels as the PC, is out to kill or ruin the PC, probably due to irreconcilable moral judgments (see "Evil" Seekers, p.64).

Illegal Immigrant (Gives 2 BP): The PC is not an American citizen and does not have a currently valid visa or green card. If caught the PC will be deported. Cannot be taken in conjunction with Hunted: Law Enforcement or Criminal/Mental Health History.

Illiterate (Gives 1 BP): PC cannot read and cannot have the skills Academic,

Tech, Investigation/Espionage or Medicine. Can buy this off during gameplay by spending 4 Skill Points.

Missing Loved One (Gives 1 BP): The PC has a loved one (child, lover, spouse, parent, sibling) who is lost, ran away, has been kidnapped, or for some other reason is missing. One big reason the PC is on the road is to search for this lost loved one.

Naive (Gives 1 BP)- The PC was raised in very isolated circumstances (e.g. on a hippy commune, or in an Amish town) and is ignorant about much of how things work in "normal" America. The PC may be surprised to discover, for instance, that marijuana is illegal, or that people lock their doors at night.

Minor (Gives 4 BP): The PC is not yet an adult, and cannot quite pass as an adult, so if caught by law enforcement may be returned to the PC's parents or to a foster home. -2 Attribute Points, -1 Hit Point.

Missing Arm (Gives 2 BP ea.): STH is halved for most purposes.

Mute (Gives 3 BP): The PC cannot speak. The PC gets American Sign Language as a free native language.

Senile (Gives 1 BP): -4 vs. unconsciousness, regular 5 difficulty saves vs. amnesia.

Terminal Illness (Gives 4 BP): The PC is dying of something that neither western nor alternative medicine have any good hope of curing. The PC starts with -1 END, -1 to Seduction rolls (from physical signs of the disease, e.g. gauntness or rashes), -1 to memory rolls and -2 to save vs. disease. Each month choose either -1 END or -1 Hit Point.

Wheelchair Bound (Gives 2 BP)- The PC is, for the most part, bound to a wheelchair. For most purposes, use half of STH, rounded up, to compute the PC's effective SPD.

Demons

A Demon is more than just a disadvantage. A disadvantage is just a circumstance in the PC's life that can potentially be overcome. A Demon is a disadvantage that adapts, reacts and can grow stronger if given the opportunity. To those of a more scientific worldview, a Demon is a self-reinforcing psychosocial dysfunction, while to those with a more magical worldview it is an actual living entity that feeds on the PC. Either way, subduing a Demon is a major undertaking, even for an accomplished Seeker. Choosing a Demon is not something that should be taken lightly: having a Demon means a constant psychological and spiritual battle that is likely to become the central conflict of the PC's life. See p.69 for more about Demons and p.42 for rules concerning Demons.

Having a Demon gives 6 BP. A PC cannot start with any more than one demon.

A PC's demon starts at 3 Power.

Come common demons are:

Compulsion

Abilities: The demon can roll vs. the PC's Will to make the PC do some compulsive activity (lying, gambling, stealing, pulling out hair, swearing, barking).

Strengthened By: Anxiety that acting on the compulsion will cause problems for the PC or others.

Weakened By: The PC not being afraid of acting on a compulsion, either because the PC doesn't think he or she will, or doesn't care about any consequences of doing so.

Discrimination

Abilities: Gives the PC a minus (equal to its own power) to hide a given characteristic that the PC may be discriminated against for. Gives other people a minus (equal to its power) to avoid acting on any feelings of fear, hatred or disgust engendered by the host's status.

Strengthened By: Anxiety, anger or sadness that people dislike the PC because of some characteristic the PC is unable to hide.

Weakened By: Successfully confronting a person who is discriminating against the PC, and either defeating that person's attempts to harm the PC or teaching that person not to discriminate against the PC.

Feud

Abilities: The Demon links a PC and an enemy of approximately equal power. This enemy has the same Demon. The Demon causes coincidences that again and again put the PC and his or her enemy together and in conflict. The Demon rolls vs. the PC's Will to cause anger against the enemy.

Strengthened By: Being hurt by an enemy.

Weakened By: Making peace with, working together with or mutual forgiveness with/from an enemy.

Intoxicants

Abilities: Can roll vs. the PC's will to make the PC seek out and consume intoxicating substances.

Strengthened By: Anxiety, shame, worry or regret due to the things the PC has done while intoxicated or to get intoxicants.

Weakened By: Resisting using intoxicants and using the advantage of sobriety to make one's own life better in a significant way.

Loneliness

Abilities: Can roll vs. the host's Will to make the host nervous while meeting new people or while trying to make a relationship stronger (e.g. move from acquaintance to friend). If the host fails to resist the nervousness, he or she either terminates the contact, does or says something inappropriate, or becomes unable to communicate effectively.

Strengthened By: Lack of companionship.

Weakened By: Gaining valuable, trusting friendships.

Lost Love- This is a demon that forms after a loved one is lost (typically dies) out of the person-shaped-hole the loss leaves in that person's life.

Abilities: Can make a roll vs. the PC's WIL to make the PC too sad to engage in activities that might fulfill the PC's emotional needs.

Strengthened By: The PC's emotional needs not being met (e.g. for love, companionship, friendship, an ally, someone to care for), needs that were previously fulfilled by the loved one who has been lost.

Weakened By: Finding other people or other ways to fulfill the PC's emotional needs.

Need

Abilities: Gives the PC a minus (equal to the Demon's strength) to any roll to secure the necessities of life.

Strengthened By: Anxiety about where the PC will find the physical necessities of life (food, water, a safe place to sleep).

Weakened By: Not worrying about where the necessities of life will come from, either because the PC knows he or she will get them, or because the PC is able to not care.

Psycho-Magnet

Abilities: The Demon can make a roll to attract the attention of psychos and evil people, can manipulate circumstance to put the PC in contact with psychos and evil people, can give the PC a minus (equal to the Demon's strength) to determine whether or not people are crazy or evil.

Strengthened By: Anxiety that the people the PC knows are secretly evil or crazy.

Weakened By: Repeatedly discovering that people are secretly crazy or evil in time to deal with them before they can hurt the PC or people the PC cares about.

Rage

Abilities: Can roll vs. the PC's Will to make the PC lose his or her temper.

Strengthened By: Fear that the PC will hurt someone.

Weakened By: The PC being able to deal with frustration, disappointment, etc. in a way that helps people, rather than hurting them.

Sadness- Sadness can start as sadness about a particular thing that has happened, e.g. the loss of a loved one, but ends up being sadness about sadness itself, or, to put it another way, sadness that prevents one from choosing to be happy and thus perpetuates itself. A person under the grip of Sadness is fully aware that they are focusing on the negative rather than the good, and that they are failing to make the choices that would lead to their happiness. Yet self-knowledge does not help them, and may even make their pain more acute.

Abilities: Can make an opposed roll vs. the PC's WIL to make the PC not want a potential source of happiness. Give the PC a plus (equal to the demon's strength) to be aware of anything ugly, terrible or tragic.

Strengthened By: The loss of a potential source of happiness for the PC, even if that loss is caused by the PC's own inaction.

Weakened By: Anything that gives the PC joy.

Shame- This Demon takes a different form depending on what the infected would feel most ashamed of. It might cause a vegetarian to eat meat, a celibate Seeker to have sex, a polite person to be rude, a person trying to respect their body to self-mutilate, etc.

Abilities: The Demon can roll vs. the PC's will to make the PC do something the PC would feel bad about doing.

Strengthened By: The PC feeling shame about doing things he or she feels bad about.

Weakened By: Consistently resisting the urge to do things the PC feels bad about -or- consistently resisting feeling bad about the things the PC has done.

Unrequited Love

Abilities: Can make a roll vs. the PC's Will to make the PC infatuated with some inappropriate person. Gives the PC a minus (equal to the demon's strength) to rolls to impress, befriend or seduce the person the PC is infatuated with.

Strengthened By: Sorrow and frustration about loving someone who does not love the PC back.

Weakened By: Finding someone to love who loves the PC back or finding an alternate way to meet the same emotional needs.

Step Six - Eccentricities

In Brief: Choose 3 unique, easily noticed things about the PC.

A large part of being a Seeker is experimenting with other ways of living and being. Thus Seekers often do things that normal people don't. These practices and restrictions can easily change as the PC finds new roads to travel on the path of seekerdom, but whenever one is shed the PC will always adopt a different one.

Keep in mind that eccentricities are choices, not rules, and a PC can always choose not to follow an eccentricity when the PC knows something bad might result from following it.

Choose 3 Eccentricities about the PC.

Some examples of eccentricities:

- *Doesn't eat cooked food.*
- *Pacifist: will not engage in combat.*
- *Never wears shoes.*
- *Claims not to have a name.*
- *Wears animal skins.*
- *Wears monk's robes.*
- *Always says whatever is on his or her mind.*
- *Loudly argues that God does not exist whenever anyone brings it up.*

Eccentricities Example: *We decide that Christina will wear a priest's collar, never wear shoes, and call every person 'brother' or 'sister.'*

Step Eight - Character Advancement

In Brief: 0 to 1 XP per adventure. 1 XP = 4 EP, 1 Attribute Point or 3 Skill Points. 1 Path costs 2 XP, but requires a crisis.

Gaining XP

PCs earn XP (experience points) for completing adventures. Unlike other ORC games, a Seeker can gain more XP for failing at adventure goals than for succeeding, because failure can teach a Seeker more. This doesn't happen if PCs fail because they didn't try, or didn't use all of the resources available to them, only if they tried their best but still failed. In general the PC should get:

- Despite best attempts, PC failed: 1 XP
- PC succeeded, but doing so was extremely challenging: ½ XP to 1 XP
- PC succeeded, easily: 0 XP to ½ XP.
- PC failed by not really trying: 0 XP.

Additional ways to gain XP are:

Adopt a new lifestyle (½ XP). The PC must live by it for at least a month. This should be something very different from the lifestyle the PC is used to. The PC doesn't have to "believe" anything, just change the way he or she lives. E.g. an atheist scientist could live a month by the lifestyle of a Catholic monk.

Study under a tradition teacher

 (½ XP).

This is someone, not necessarily a Seeker, well versed in one of the Traditions listed in Chapter Four. The PC has to follow the directions of the teacher and learn by the methods used by that Tradition to teach new students. Depending on the Tradition this could mean anything from reading a dozen books to taking peyote and chanting in a sweat lodge. Note that studying under a traditions teacher can also reduce skill costs (see p.15). Note that teachers don't always know they are teachers. Often a PC will find someone who has wisdom to impart, but who doesn't think of himself or herself as special. It is up to the PCs to tease the wisdom out of these people.

Experiencing something the PC doesn't understand

 (½ XP).

The PC experienced something that makes no sense to the PC and that doesn't fit in with how the PC thinks the world works. A PC might see someone make a marble appear from thin air and think "oh, it must be some sleight-of-hand" and not get XP because they have a reasonable theory, but if the PC is an accomplished stage magician and knows every sleight-of-hand trick and still can't explain the marble, then the PC will gain XP. Such experiences are useful because they remind the PCs that they don't know everything and send them hunting for new ways of understanding the universe.

Advancement Example: *In her first adventure, Christina succeeds, but only barely, earning her 1 XP. In her second adventure, she fails to achieve her goals, and gains 1 XP. In her third and fourth adventures she succeeds, but without much challenge, so she only earns ½ XP each. Altogether, she has earned 3 XP. She decides to spend 1 XP to buy 3 Skill Points. She buys 1 level in Creative, which costs 2 Skill Points, choosing Music as her specialty. In game she explains that she has been studying creative arts, and especially music, whenever she runs across someone who can teach her. With her next 2 XP, she wants to buy a Path level. However, she can't actually buy that level until she runs into a crisis where she has exhausted every other solution and something bad will happen if she doesn't advance. This is not something that comes easily and so Christina keeps adventuring, trusting that the universe will provide her with the challenge she needs.*

Finding a new idea (½ XP). This is an idea that the PC has never known before, but that “clicks” for the PC: seems important and useful. This idea could be something the PC hears someone say, something the PC reads in a book, in a fortune cookie, on a bumper sticker, etc. New ideas could be found anywhere. The only predictable thing about them is that they usually don’t show up where you were expecting them (as an expected or sought after idea is usually not new to the PC).

The usefulness of an idea is generally unique to that Seeker at that point in his or her journey. Present the same idea to another Seeker, or to the past or future versions of that Seeker, and they would probably say “that makes no sense” or “I thought that was obvious.” An idea is like a key that opens the next door in the Seeker’s personal journey through the labyrinth of ideas.

Roleplaying Finding Ideas

Depending on the style of play, these may be actual ideas that are discussed in detail and that players must decide if their characters find them useful, or the GM could just say “you find a bit of wisdom” without any further description.

Overcoming a disadvantage (½ XP). Any time a PC can rid himself or herself of some flaw (either physical, social, legal or psychological) doing so frees the PC from an inhibitor or limiter of personal growth. This could be a disadvantage the PC selected during character creation, or something that was picked up during gameplay.

Defeating a PC’s own personal demon (1 XP). The demon should be brought to 0 Power, see p.42.

A surprising accomplishment (½ XP). This is when the PC succeeds at something that the PC has no relevant training, experience or Path abilities for, an accomplishment that surprises anyone who knows the PC but also the PC himself or herself. For example: *an unathletic, bookish scientist beats a thug in a fistfight, a +Feeling poet with no mathematical training or known talent is able to solve a difficult equation, etc.*

Using XP

XP can be used to buy additional skill points, equipment points or attribute points as follows:

- 1 XP = 3 Equipment Points
- 1 XP = 1 Attribute Point
- 1 XP = 3 Skill Points

XP can also be used to buy Path levels for 2 XP per level. However, Path levels can be bought only if the PC is in a crisis: a situation where the PC is in trouble and the PC can find no other way out of trouble than to gain a Path level. The PC must have tried his or her best to find a solution and failed, and there must be real consequences (e.g. to the PC’s life, limb, freedom or sanity, or to the life, limb, freedom or sanity of another) if the PC fails to find a way out of the trouble.

Note also that psychological issues may appear as a PC nears being able to buy a new Path level. This is the subconscious resisting the trauma of a major worldview change. See Psychological Challenges (p.172) for more. For more on Crises, see p.57.

*“Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can make me turn back;
This land was made for you and me.”*

-Woodie Guthrie, This Land is Your Land

In the employee parking lot, guards and other prison employees were arriving for the day shift. Tom introduced himself to a guard, remarking on how nice the guard's car was. "I'm Tom," he said with a smile, extending his hand. "Today's my first day." Tom chatted with the guard about restoring old cars. Other guards joined them on their walk through the parking lot and Tom introduced himself to each with a smile. Tom asked a lot of questions: how long had they worked there, how did this prison compare to other prisons they had worked at, did they like the job? He seemed genuinely interested in their answers, and soon they were reeling out stories without any prompting from Tom.

The guards were still talking animatedly when they reached the checkpoint. Each guard raised a photo ID on a lanyard, pointing the little image of themselves at another guard who sat on a stool in a little booth. Tom mimicked the gesture, but instead of showing an ID he gave a little wave and a knowing smile. If the woman in the booth noticed a lack of ID, her eyes did not betray such knowledge. She simply pressed an unseen buzzer and the gate opened to let them through.

Tom spent the rest of the day meeting prison employees. He steered clear of the Human Resources office and the Warden's office, instead sticking with the rank-and-file workers. He talked to guards, janitors, facilities engineers, kitchen staff, nurses, educational directors and the prison librarian. Each time he introduced himself as "I'm Tom, I'm new here." When people asked what his position was, he would say "I'm still trying to figure out exactly what they want me to do here." Then he would distract them with questions about themselves.

By the end of the day, Tom had gotten to know almost every employee of the prison, and many of the prisoners, on a first name basis. As he walked the long concrete-floor halls he would call out to them: "Hey Jim, how's it going?" "Everything good Juanita?" "Hey Chester, how's it hanging?" He would ask people for things: a pen, a cup of coffee, a cigarette. Somehow, the way he asked for and received things made people feel good, made them feel like they had won something.

Evening came and Tom didn't leave with the other day shift workers. Instead, he stayed on and met the evening shift workers. Then the evening shift ended and the graveyard shift came on. Tom spent most of the evening chatting with a group of guards in Cell Block B, laughing at their jokes and stories, patting them warmly on the back.

Tom convinced Pablo that he really did look beat, which Pablo didn't even notice until Tom brought it up, and that it would be okay for him to go take a quick nap. Then he convinced Bill that the coffee at the guard's station was shit and that he really ought to go try out the flavored-espresso machine in the waiting room for prisoner visits. He assured them he would keep an eye on things and radio them if anything came up.

When they were gone, Tom extracted three prisoners. He had them carry their mattresses and told them to complain about having been roused from their beds in the middle of the night. He convinced the guard at the vehicle gate that he had to do an emergency bed-bug disposal. The guard at the gate replied that all bed-bug mattress disposals had to be done during the day shift. Tom admitted that he had messed up and was trying to cover his ass before he got in big trouble. "I know I don't have the right to ask this," Tom said with a smile, "but can you help me out here? I really don't want to get in trouble on my first day."

The next day, the morning head-count showed three prisoners missing. The warden found an envelope pushed under his door. Inside an anonymous note read "My apologies for any trouble I might have caused. The three men I took were, in fact, innocent and were urgently needed elsewhere." The Commissioner of Prisons convened an inquiry panel. They conducted weeks of interviews, talked to nearly every employee in the prison. Some employees claimed to have seen Tom wearing an official ID card. A few even claimed that Tom had been working at the prison for weeks. Yet in the end, the panel reported that they could find no compelling evidence that Tom had ever shown an ID, worn a uniform, told anyone his position or who his supervisor was, or even given his full name.

Chapter Two

ORGANIC RULE COMPONENTS

WHAT IS ORC-L?

ORC-L stands for “Organic Rule Components - Lite.” It is a version of Organic Rule Components designed for light or live-action play. ORC-L was used for Seeker because we wanted “mundane” things like equipment, skills and physical attributes to be simpler so that more of gameplay and character creation could revolve around the Paths. ORC-L characters and gameplay can easily be converted to regular ORC and vice versa (see p.183 for more).

ORC and ORC-L are what some would call a “simulationist” system. The idea is that a GM (Game Master) simulates reality, and tells players what happens when their characters do or try to do things, with the rules there to help answer any questions that the GM and players are not sure of (e.g. can I lift this rock, can I disarm this bomb?). The rules should only come into play when uncertainty exists. When a PC wants to do something and the GM is sure it would or wouldn’t work, no rules are needed.

So, for example: *Max wants to jump over a building. The GM, whose job it is to simulate reality, says “you fail” and describes what happens next. Next, Max wants to jump over a small crack in the ground. The GM says “you succeed” and describes what happens next. Finally, Max wants to jump over a 6 foot wide chasm. The GM isn’t sure whether Max could do this or not, and so asks Max to make a roll vs. a difficulty that the GM thinks is appropriate for jumping over a 6 ft. chasm.*

Co-GMing

In the standard mode of play, each player controls one PC (player character) and the GM controls the rest of the universe. The GM controls everything from NPCs (Non-Player Characters) to Demons, to bizarre twists of coincidence.

An alternate way to play is for each player to have a PC and to take turns controlling the “universe.” The PCs are Seekers who have decided to take turns leading and being led into situations designed to teach and challenge them. Each “adventure” is a challenge or expedition arranged by one Seeker for the benefit of his or her compatriots. The player whose Seeker is creating the challenge acts as the GM, controlling NPCs, demons and coincidence.

Example: The Seekers Nate, Achmed, Lotus and 3.14 are walking down the road together. 3.14 sees a town she had been to before, and has an idea. “I think I might be able to arrange for an interesting challenge for you three. Let me go ahead and arrange things. You stay here for the night and then come into town.” When the other Seekers come into town the next morning, 3.14 is nowhere to be found and they find the xenophobic and violent sheriff has been led to believe the Seekers are terrorists. 3.14’s player invents the town, its people and challenges, and narrates to the other players what the results of their actions are. When the PCs deal with the sheriff and leave the town, 3.14 rejoins the Seekers and then it becomes the turn of another Seeker.

BASIC MECHANICS

Skill vs. Non-Skill Actions

In Brief: Sometimes you can roll just your attribute when you don’t have a skill, other times you need a skill.

Some actions don’t require a skill, although a skill can help. Examples includes lifting objects, sneaking around, seducing someone. Other actions can’t be attempted without at least one level in the appropriate skill, e.g. programming a computer, speaking a foreign language, picking a lock. The GM decides what actions require a skill.

Example: A character with no levels in Athletic can climb just using AGY (and any climbing equipment the character happens to have). A character without any levels in Tech, however, can’t attempt to write a computer program, no matter how high his or her INL.

Your AV

In Brief: AV = attribute + skill +1/specialty +equip

Your Action Value (AV) for any non-combat action you try to take is computed as follows:

Applicable attribute
+ applicable skill (if you have one)
+1 if an applicable skill specialty
+ the value of any applicable equipment package.

Example: *Dem's AV for climbing is 3 (his AGY) +3 (his Athletic skill) +1 (he has the Outdoors specialty of Athletic) +2 (he has an Athletic: Outdoors OO equipment package), a total of 9.*

50/50s

In Brief: Anything where you win half the time.

50/50s refers to any random procedure by which a player has a 50/50 chance of succeeding or failing.

Example 1: *The initiator of an action takes out a coin and flips it, each heads is a success, each tails is a failure.*

Example 2: *The initiator of an action pulls out a 6 sided die and rolls it, each odd number is a success, each even is a failure.*

Example 3: *The player plays rock-paper-scissors against another player, or the GM, ignoring any ties.*

Example 4: *The players take turns dealing out cards. For each pair of cards, whoever gets the highest value card is the winner. Ties are ignored.*

Difficulties

O **Very Easy**
Average people can do this most of the time.

OO **Easy**
An average person has a better than 50% chance of being able to do this.

OOO **Moderate**
An average person has slightly less than a 50% chance of being able to do this.

OOOO **Moderate-Hard**
This is something an average person can only do rarely.

OOOOO **Hard**
This is a significant challenge for even a highly capable person.

OOOOOO **Very Hard**
The best people in the world at this activity would fail half the time.

OOOOOOO **Legendary**
Even the most able person on the planet can only achieve this occasionally.

Rolling Ties Faster

When AVs are equal (in other words, tied) the player or players have a 50% chance of winning, so only one 50/50 needs to be made. Say two great chess masters with an AV of 10 each are playing each other. Rather than having to do ten 50/50s, just do one.

Human vs. Inanimate Object

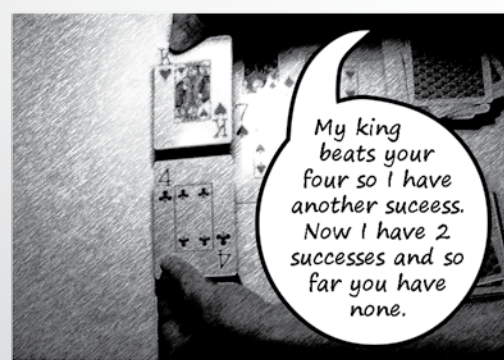
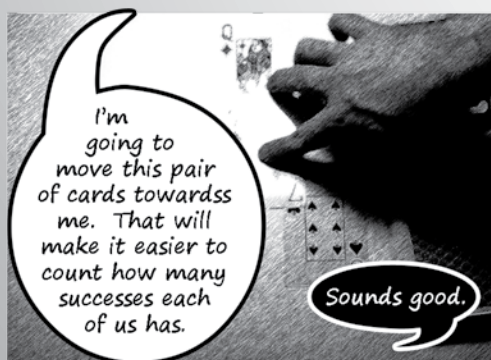
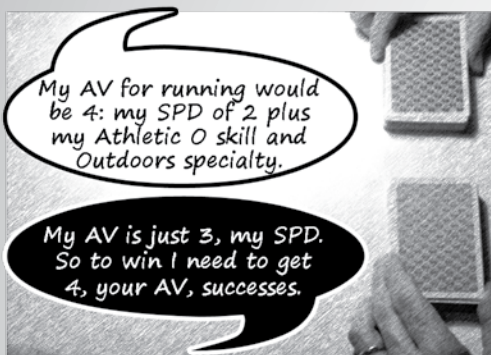
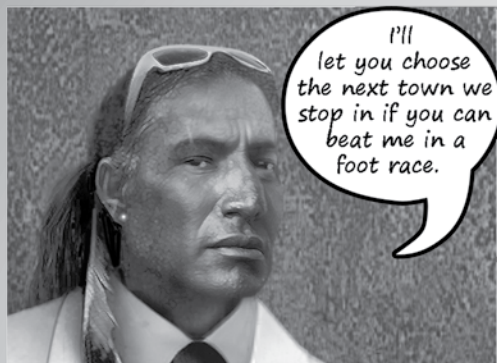
In Brief: 50/50s until you fail your AV's worth of times or succeed the difficulty's worth of times

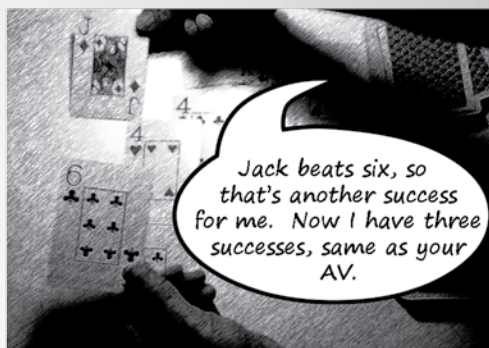
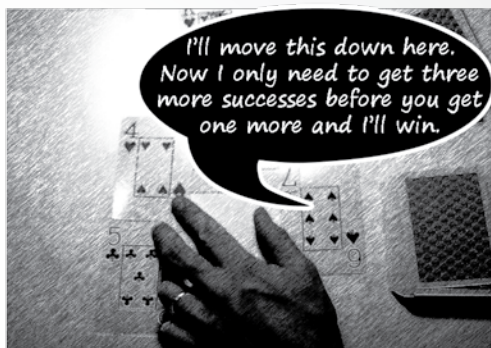
When a human wants to do something to an inanimate object, e.g. lift a barrel, pick a lock, climb a wall, hack a computer, etc. compare the human's AV for that action to the object's difficulty for that action. Then do 50/50s until one of two things happen:

•If the human **fails** a number of times equal to **his or her AV**, then the human loses.

•If the human **succeeds** a number of times equal to the **object's difficulty**, the human wins.

Example: *Tim has an AV of 6 to pick locks. The lock he wants to pick has a difficulty of 3. Tim does 50/50s until he either succeeds a total of 3 times (and successfully picks the lock) or fails a total of 6 times (and is unable to pick the lock), whichever comes first. Tim takes out a coin and flips it, getting heads (a success), then heads (2nd success), then tails (failure), then tails (2nd failure), then tails (3rd failure), then heads (3rd success). At this point he stops because he has 3 successes and has picked the lock.*





Character Vs. Character

In Brief: AV vs. AV. First person to win a number of times equal to the opponent's AV is winner.

When two characters are opposing each other on something (e.g. both have a grip on a briefcase and are trying to pull it from the other's hands) then compare the first character's AV vs. the second character's AV. The first character to get a number of successes equal to the opponent's AV is the winner.

Example: *Andy and Petra are trying to beat each other in a sprint. Andy's AV for sprinting is 2 and Petra's is 3. They do 50/50s until either Andy wins 3 times (meaning Petra failed 3 times) or Petra wins 2 times (and Andy has failed twice). Whoever meets their target number of successes first wins.*

Saves

In Brief: Attribute vs. difficulty.

A save is a roll to prevent something bad from happening, e.g. hallucinations, unconsciousness, disease. There are only rarely skills or equipment that help with a save. Rather, the AV for a save is typically the attribute alone. The exact effect of failing is determined by the GM but a failure typically incapacitates or kills the character.

Example: *Tim, who has WIL 2, takes a drug which causes hallucinations OOO. If he succeeds at 3 50/50s before he loses 2, he is not debilitated by hallucinations, otherwise he is.*

Cooperative Rolls

When several characters are involved in an action, first you should determine if the action is cooperative or if each person's success or failure is independent of anyone else's participation.

An example of a Cooperative roll would be several PCs getting together to try to lift a fallen tree. In this case you can add every person's AV together. In other circumstances it might be more appropriate to split up the difficulty between the people involved. For example: If several antique vases fall from a shelf, it might be 6 difficulty for one person to catch them all before they hit the ground, but if three people are trying to catch them it might only be 2 difficulty each.

An example of an independent roll would be hearing a faint noise. Each person either hears it or they don't. In this case, you can do simultaneous 50/50s against the difficulty. For example: *Amanda, Bill and Caroline have AWRs of 2, 3 and 4 respectively. There is a scratching noise that the GM has determined is 3 difficulty to notice. The GM could do separate AV vs. difficulty sessions against each player, but to save time the PC runs them all simultaneously. Say the GM is using cards. The GM puts a card on the table and so does each player. Each player might have had a success or a failure. Each player keeps track of his or her number of successes and failures until they either succeed 3 times or lose their AV's number of times. Thus each player may or may not notice the scratching noise.*

Live Action vs. Tabletop Play

All rules included herein are suitable for both live action and tabletop play. Live action play may necessitate a few extra rules and conventions, most of which are common sense:

Everything any players says or does is something the character says or does unless:

- The player is a GM not currently playing an NPC.
- A player is referring to or making notes on a character sheet.
- The player has indicated he or she is acting or talking "out-of-character."

Players can interact (even fight if they are comfortable enough with combat rules) without requiring a GM be present. Players should generally make sure a GM is present when they effect the environment (e.g. pick the lock on the mysterious storage locker), unless a note has been provided to tell a PC the result of an action (e.g. the locker has a notecard taped to it listing the difficulty to pick on one side and the contents of the locker on the other).

Combat

In Brief: Combat uses essentially the same system, except for two changes: AV is calculated differently and even the loser has an effect on the situation.

AVs

In Brief: Attribute 1 + Attribute 2 + skill + specialty + combat package (or half if not appropriate), all divided by 2, rounding down.

There are four different styles of combat: Kill, Control, Ruin and Exhaust. Each are a specialty of the Combat or Athletic skills. The AVs for each can be calculated ahead of time. AVs are calculated as follows:

*(Attribute 1 + Attribute 2
+ Combat Skill +1 if Specialty
+Equipment level*)
all divided by 2 (round down).*

*If equipment is appropriate to this combat style (e.g. you're computing Kill and it's a Combat: Kill package), add in the full equipment level. If the package is not appropriate (meant for a different combat style), add in half, rounded down, of the level.

The attributes for each combat style are as follows:

Kill: WIL + AGY
Control: AWR + AGY
Ruin: INL + AGY
Exhaust: STH + AGY

Example: Tim has WIL 3, AGY 2, INL 4, Combat 2 (Specialty: Kill) and has the equipment package Combat: Kill OOO. His AV for kill is 5: WIL (3) + AGY (2) +2 (skill) +1 (specialty) +3 (weapon), all divided by 2. His AV for ruin is 4: INL (4) + AGY (2) +2 (skill) +1 (weapon/2), all divided by 2 and rounded down to the nearest one.

A Combat Round

In Brief: As per normal AV vs. AV, with success effects based on AV and effects by loser based on half AV.

The combat initiator must declare what style he or she is using and what his or her AV is. The defender must next declare his or her style and AV. Then the opponents do 50/50s until one player wins a number of times equal to the opponent's AV, as per usual person vs. person rolls.

The style you are using, your AV for that style and whether you won or lost determines the effects on your opponent for the round. The effect when you lose is, for the most part, half of the effect of winning. Always round down to the nearest point.

Kill

Winning: For each point of AV you do 2 Hit Points damage to the opponent.

Losing: For each point of AV you do 1 Hit Point damage to the opponent.

Example: You have a Kill AV of 3. If you win a combat round you do 6 Hit Points damage to your enemy. If you lose a combat round you do 3 Hit Points damage.

Ruin

Winning: For each point of AV you do 1 damage to opponent's combat AVs.

Losing: For each 2 points of AV you do 1 damage to opponent's combat AVs.

Example: You have a Ruin AV of 4. If you win a combat round you reduce all your opponent's combat AVs by 4 points each. If you lose a combat round you reduce all your opponent's combat AVs by 2 points each.

Control

Winning: For each point of AV you can protect yourself from 1 point of damage to your Hit Points or combat AVs. Also, you now have the opponent in a hold (see sidebar).

Losing: For each 2 points of AV you can protect yourself from 1 point of damage to your Hit Points or combat AVs.

Example: *You have a Control AV of 5. If you win, you protect from 5 damage done that round to your Hit Points or Combat AVs and have your opponent in a hold. If you lose you protect from 2 damage to your Hit Points or Combat AVs.*

Exhaust

Winning: For each point of AV you can protect yourself from 1 point of damage to your Hit Points or combat AVs **and** for each point of AV you do 1 damage to the enemy's Hit Points. Also, you do exactly 1 damage to the combat AVs of the enemy. This damage to AVs **cannot be protected from** in any way.

Losing: For each 2 points of AV you can protect yourself from 1 point of damage to your Hit Points or combat AVs **and** for each 2 points of AV you do 1 damage to the enemy's Hit Points.

Example: *You have an Exhaust AV of 3. If you win a combat round you protect yourself from 3 points of damage to your Hit Points or AVs and you do 3 Hit Points worth of damage, plus 1 damage to the enemy's combat AVs that cannot be protected from. If you lose, you protect yourself from 1 point of damage to Hit Points or Combat AVs and do 1 Hit Point damage to the enemy.*

After a combat round is over and the results are calculated and applied, the opponents can continue with a new combat round, or one of the opponents can try to end combat (e.g. by running away, trying to talk to the enemy).

Holds

While in a hold, an opponent cannot attack so long as the PC maintains the hold. A victim of a hold can attempt an AV vs. AV roll to escape the hold (using STH to overpower, AGY to outmaneuver or WIL to win a contest of withstanding pain) but the person in the hold is at a significant disadvantage (-3 AV) to such rolls.

Blindness/Darkness

Partially Blinded: -2 to combat AVs

Fully Blinded: -4 to combat AVs

Narrative Descriptions of Combat Styles

Kill: *You're trying to do as much damage as quickly as possible. You go right for vital organs. You go in fast, hit hard, pay little attention to defense. You don't want to scare them or hurt them, you want to kill them before they can hurt you.*

Ruin: *You're here to fuck up your opponent. You want to poke their eyes out, break their fingers, cut their tendons, smash their kneecaps, cause them so much pain they can't think. Your goal is to destroy their ability to fight.*

Control: *You stay calm. Your first goal is to prevent them from hurting you. You dodge and deflect attacks, when they move into weapon's range you move out. All the while you looking for an opportunity to grab and twist a limb, or knock them down and put a foot on them, putting them in a position they can't easily get out of.*

Exhaust: *You are here to outlast your opponents. You are going to wear them down, while defending yourself from harm. Block, hit, block, hit, again and again until they are too exhausted to keep fighting, and then you take them out.*

Incapacity and Death

In Brief: <5 HP means mortally wounded, 0 HP means dead, 0 combat AVs means incapacitated.

If a combatant's Hit Points are reduced to 4 or below it means the character has received mortal injuries. The character can continue to fight or do other things until one of two things happens: the character's Hit Points are reduced to 0 or the character's END's worth of combat rounds passes. If either of these happens the character is incapacitated: cannot fight or do anything else that requires 50/50s.

A mortally wounded character whose Hit Points are still more than 0 can be saved by medical intervention (Medicine: Trauma specialty) within the character's END worth of minutes. Characters at 0 Hit Points cannot be saved.

If a character's combat AVs are all brought to 0 by use of the Ruin or Exhaust combat styles, the character is incapacitated and can no longer fight, but the character is not in danger of dying. The character stays incapacitated until medical care is given.

Injuries are halved every week (round up to the nearest Hit Point) as the character heals.

2 on 1

In Brief: When fighting multiple opponents, you can split your combat AVs.

When two or more opponents make a concerted attack on one person, the person who is being ganged-up-on must split his or her combat AV between the opponents. Although each combat is 50/50d separately they are considered to have happened simultaneously and the effects of combat are not applied until the end of the combat round. The gangedee can divide points however he or she wants.

Example: Kawahara, who has Control 8, is being attacked by Billy (Ruin 3), Carla (Kill 2) and Josiah (Exhaust 4). Kawahara decides to divide his Control as follows: 3 against Billy, 3 against Carla and 2 against Josiah. Combat is rolled 3 times with 3 different AV vs. AV combinations: 3 vs. 3, 3 vs. 2 and 2 vs. 4. Only after all 3 are rolled is damage to HPs and AVs applied.

Full Combat Example

Doktor Smash (Kill AV 5) and Chubby Pete (Control AV 4) are fighting.

Round 1 - Doktor Smash, who initiated combat, declares he will be using Kill (5). Chubby Pete says he will use Control (4). They do rock-paper-scissors for 50/50s. Smash's goal is to get 4 successes (Pete's AV) while Pete's goal is to get 5 successes (Smash's AV). Smash gets a success, then Pete gets a success, then Pete gets a second success, then Pete gets a third, then Smash gets a second, then Pete gets a fourth, then Smash gets a third, then Smash gets a fourth success, equal to Pete's AV, so Smash wins.

As the Winner, smash does 10 damage (2 times his AV), enough to kill Pete. As the loser, since he is using Control, Pete can protect himself from 1 damage to HP or AV for every 2 points of his Control AV. Therefore, he protects himself from 2 of Pete's damage, and takes only 8. He has received mortal injuries but can still fight for 2 (his END) more rounds or until his Hit Points are reduced to 0.

Round 2 - Doktor Smash will use Kill (AV 5), Chubby Pete will use Control (AV 4). Pete gets a success, then a second, then Smash gets a success, then Pete gets a third success, Smash gets a second, Pete gets a fourth success, then a fifth (equal to Smash's AV).

As the loser, Smash does 4 damage (his Kill AV), but as the winner Pete protects from all 4 damage (1 x his AV) and now has Smash in a hold, meaning combat is over.

Using Paths

In Brief: Use Paths: to add +2 per level to activities central to that Path; to add +1 per level to activities not central but that can be aided by the Path; as the AV to roll Path abilities (used much like skills); to add +1 per level to combat in certain circumstances; to add to attributes (only some Paths). Multiple Paths can be used simultaneously, their benefits stacking. Add +1 to the effective Path level when a Focus is used and +1 if what is being done has been chosen as a Specialty.

There are five ways to use the levels one has in a Path:

Plusses to Attributes

Some Paths give plusses to attributes based on the PC's level in that Path. These plusses are always on in every situation (except where the description lists a way to defeat them) and don't have to be justified or rolled for. Increasing the effective Path level though a Focus or through having this as a Specialty will increase the PC's attributes even further.

Adding to AVs for Primary Path Activity

When the PC is attempting to do something which is the primary activity of a Path, the PC can add 2 points for each level of the Path to the AV for that action.

Example: *Bill is trying to make a save vs. fear, and would normally have an AV of 3 (Bill's WIL). However, Bill has 3 levels in -Feeling, and since resisting acting on emotions is one of the primary activities of the Path of -Feeling, Bill can add 2 points per level (6 points in total) to his AV. Now, Bill's AV for a save vs. fear is 9 (2 x 3 levels of -Feeling + 3 WIL).*

Having a Specialty in that type of roll boosts the PC's effective Path level by one. Using a Focus boosts the PC's effective Path level by one. Only one Focus can be used at any one time and any given focus can only boost one Path at a time.

Example: *As per the example above, except Bill has a -Feeling specialty of resisting fear and a focus of using a sweat lodge. If Bill uses a sweat lodge prior to having to make his save vs. fear, his effective Path level is now 5 (3 levels in -Feeling, +1 for specialty, +1 for focus) and so he adds 10 (2 x 5) to his AV. Now his AV for saving vs. fear is a superhuman 13.*

The plusses and abilities section for each Path will give examples of things that are primary to that Path. Yet a PC can add +2 per level to any AV, even one not listed in the examples, so long as the PC can make the case that this is a primary activity of that Path as the player and the PC understands it. The GM is the final arbiter of whether Paths can be added to AVs.

Adding to AVs for Aided Activity

The PC can add +1 per level of a Path to AVs for activities that are not primary to the Path, but that can be aided by the skills learned or personal traits achieved on the Path.

Example: *a PC with 3 levels of +Thought is trying to move a heavy log that has fallen on a friend. This is primarily a challenge of strength, and not a challenge central to the Path of +Thought. However, +Thought can be used peripherally, via knowledge of physics, leverage, relative hardness of things that might be used as levers, knowledge of human physiology, etc. to help the Seeker approach this problem in the most intelligent way possible. Thus, the PC can add 3 (one for each level of +Thought) to his or her STH to determine the AV for moving the log.*

Plusses can also be used to reduce a penalty, e.g. -Thought being used to reduce the penalties for being blind.

As with primary activities, examples of aidable activities are listed in the Paths section for each Path, yet the PC need not be limited by this list. The PC can add +1 per level to any AV where the PC can make a good argument that being on that Path would aid one's ability to accomplish that thing.

As with primary activities, count the effective Path level as +1 if the PC has used a Focus and +1 if the player has specifically chosen this sort of action as a Specialty (for example, if the +Thought Seeker wrote down “+to manual labor” or “+ to feats of strength” as a specialty).

Adding to Combat AVs

Each Path lists a very specific circumstance in which one point per Path level can be added to combat AVs. For the sake of game balance, the listed circumstance is generally the only circumstance in which Path level should be added. Like everything else, using a Focus will add one and having combat plusses as a Specialty will add two.

Path Abilities

Each Path description lists abilities particular to that Path. The Path abilities are much like skills: only a person with at least one point in that Path (or sorcerous abilities, p.66) can use these abilities. Like skills, the PC is assigned a difficulty based on what he or she is trying to do with the ability. Unlike skills (which use attribute + skill + equipment for AV) the AV for a Path ability is the Path level alone (+1 if a Focus has been used, +1 if this Path ability has been chosen for a Specialty). Players are encouraged to create new Path abilities (with approval by the GM) beyond those listed in the book.

Combining Paths

PCs can combine different Paths together to achieve something, so long as they can justify how both Paths would come into play in the situation. The plusses to the AV from multiple Paths might be combined, or one Path may give plusses to using a Path ability from another Path, or combat plusses can even be combined (where the situation meets the requirement of more than one Path).

Example One: *Leticia has -Self OO and -Feeling O and -Harmony O. She wants to hide her fear from a group of bikers who are taunting her by dangling a poisonous snake in her face. She makes a case that hiding emotions from others is a primary activity of -Feeling and that not letting others read you is a primary activity of -Harmony and an activity aided by -Self. The GM agrees and allows her to add 6 (1 for each level of -Self and 2 for each level of -Feeling and -Harmony) to her AV.*

Example Two: *Javier has -Self OO and -Harmony OO and is trying to use the Mirror of Self ability (a -Self ability) to make an old wino think that Javier is like him. Javier points out that because dealing with outsiders is something aided by -Harmony, he should be able to add 1 point per level of -Harmony. The GM agrees and allows Javier to use an AV of 4 (2 for -Self and 2 for -Harmony).*

Example Three: *Ravine has +Feeling OOO and -Harmony O. She has been hiding in a bathroom stall watching some young skinheads roughing someone up. She is about to exit the stall and make a surprise attack on the skinheads, using the Ruin style of combat. She makes an argument that she meets the criteria for using -Harmony (a no-holds-barred surprise attack using Ruin or Kill) and +Feeling (a no-holds-barred rage attack using Ruin or Kill) in combat. The GM agrees and allows her to add 4 to her AV (+3 for +Feeling and +1 for -Harmony).*

Beyond Five Levels

PCs who buy more Path levels with XP can go beyond five levels in any Path. It is up to the player and GM to work together to determine the gameplay effects of having more than five levels. These can include:

- Extrapolation of existing plusses and abilities.
- Abilities and plusses from other Paths (for instance, a Seeker with 6 levels of -Self may gain some -Harmony abilities and plusses).
- Brand new plusses and abilities. These should be unique to that Seeker and his or her understanding of that Path.

Demons

In Brief: Demons can roll Power vs. hosts WIL, Power/2 vs. other nearby people's WIL, can manipulate circumstance. Some things increase a Demon's power by 1, others reduce it by 1. At 0 Power the Demon is unconscious. Demons can occasionally help (add Power to host's AV).

A Demon exerts influence on the people it has infected (and to others around them) in ways that tend to make it stronger. A Demon's current strength is measured by Power, its only attribute.

A Demon is controlled by the GM just like an NPC.

A Demon has three ways of exerting influence:

- Creating feelings or desires in the Demon's host. The host must make a roll of his or her WIL vs. the demon's Power to resist these feelings or desires. Paths can be used to help a PC resist these impulses.
- Creating feelings or desires in other people the host encounters. This is harder for the Demon and the target, if he or she wants to resist, only has to beat half the demon's Power (rounded down).
- Manipulating seemingly random circumstance to put the host in situations likely to force him or her to do something that will make the Demon stronger.

The listing for each demon will describe that which will make the demon stronger, and that which will make the Demon weaker. Depending on the severity of the circumstances it could take weeks or months for the Demon to grow noticeably weaker or more powerful, or it could take seconds. This is a decision made by the GM or the player controlling the Demon. The listed circumstances will raise or lower the Power of a Demon by one point at a time.

If a Demon is lowered to zero dots of Power, it is essentially unconscious, unable to exert any influence. A Demon never fully goes away, though. Should the right Demon-strengthening circumstances re-occur, even decades later, a zero-Power Demon will come back, at one dot of Power.

A Demon does not always harm a PC and can occasionally even be helpful. A Demon can help a PC by using its standard means of manipulating the PC at a time that helps the PC, e.g. a Demon of rage helping a PC fly into a rage to survive a desperate situation. A Demon may "decide" to help a PC of its own accord, or a PC may be able to force a Demon to do so with a WIL vs. the Demon's power roll.

A Demon that infects a community follows the same rules, except instead of having one host it has several simultaneously.

Demon Example: *Alberta starts play with the demon of Rage. The demon starts at 3 Power. The write-up for rage lists the following:*

Abilities: *Can roll vs. the PC's Will to make the PC lose his or her temper.*

Strengthened By: *Fear that the PC will hurt someone.*

Weakened By: *The PC being able to deal with frustration, disappointment, etc. in a way that helps people, rather than hurting them.*

During the course of an adventure, Alberta is trying to use herbal medicine to aid a sick mother; who refuses, saying that the herbs are "witchcraft, the work of the Devil." The GM decides that this will cause Alberta to become frustrated and forces her to make a save vs. anger. The roll is made with the

PC's WIL vs. the demon's Power (3). Alberta wins the roll, and so does not lose her temper and do something she regrets. Yet Alberta is worried about becoming more frustrated and exits the room, leaving the sick mother untreated. The GM decides to count this as the PC acting on fear of hurting someone and raises the demon's Power by one.

Some time later, Alberta is in a barber shop listening to a group of young men making plans to try to scare a new town resident, who is of Arabic descent, into leaving town because they think he "might be a terrorist." Before the GM can make Alberta roll vs. anger, Alberta goes on the offensive, standing up and making an angry diatribe about how the young men are being stupid, ignorant, uneducated and prejudiced. This diatribe shames the men and they call off their plan of trying to frighten away the town's new resident. The GM decides this counts as Alberta using her frustration to help people and reduces the Demon's power by one.

Later, Alberta finds herself trapped in a cave with a bear. Knowing it is her only hope to survive, Alberta makes a roll of her WIL vs. the demon's Power and wins, meaning the Demon must now work on her behalf. She makes a CHM roll to try to frighten off the bear (by screaming at it, throwing rocks at it, stomping, baring her teeth and otherwise trying to act as mean, angry and dangerous as possible) and gets to add in the demon's Power so that her AV is now her CHM + 3. Note that Alberta could not have added the Demon's power to make friends with the bear because that is not among the Demon's abilities.

Much later, Alberta has continued to use frustration to help people and has lowered the Demon's Power to zero. The demon is now "unconscious" and can no longer make rolls to try to make Alberta lose her temper. However, Alberta can still lose her temper mundanely, given a strong enough frustration, and if she ever shows fear that she will lose her temper and hurt someone, the GM can bring the rage Demon back with 1 point of Power.

The Humble One sat on a flat rock in the middle of a stream, his legs crossed and his eyes closed. Behind him, water cascaded down rocks, splashing into the stream. Tall trees rose up on either side of the stream, their canopies meeting overhead, letting through only sporadic shafts of sunlight. The Humble One wore a coarse brown cloth wrapped around him, covering one shoulder but leaving the other bare. The Humble One had long, wavy grey hair and a long beard.

Maxie stepped into the stream. The legs of her jeans were rolled up so that they would not splash through the cold water. She stepped carefully, not wanting to slip on the rocks. Where she stepped, clouds of green-grey silt rose up and were carried away by the flowing water.

When she came close to the rock, the Humble One's eyes opened and a warm smile spread across his face. "Maxie," she said warmly, "as always, seeing you brings me joy."

Maxie smiled back. She wore no makeup and her only jewelry was a silver ring in her nose and another in her eyebrow. He hair was short, black and spiky. She wore a striped sweater in grey and black and jeans. Her eyes, usually curious and enthusiastic, seemed wary this morning.

"I sense something bothers you," the Humble One said, "Please, share it with me. I will help however I can."

Maxie thought and then spoke carefully. "I want to say... thank you. I have learned so much during my time with you. I have come to understand so much."

"I only provide the opportunities," the Humble One said. "You did the work of learning. Yet this is not what bothers you."

"I..." Maxie said, biting her lip. "I have learned so much here, but I think I should move on, seek opportunities for learning elsewhere."

The Humble One's smile did not falter. "I know you have felt frustrated lately at what you see as a slowing of your progress. Great leaps of understanding are close for you. Just keep working at it and you will gain great rewards."

"That may be true," said Maxie, "but still, I would like to take a different path, see what else is waiting for me out there. I may return here someday, if you are still willing to give me more of your wisdom. Right now, though, I am going to try something else."

For a long moment there was nothing but the rush and splash of water and birds singing in the trees overhead. He stared at her compassionately and she stared at him with concern. Cold water continued to flow over the tops of Maxie's feet, which were becoming painfully cold, close to cramping.

At last he spoke. "You do not need to worry that your words will hurt my feelings. Nothing you say will injure me."

She let out a relieved breath. "I'm glad to hear that."

"But," he continued patiently, "Your feelings deceive you. You cannot see the path that lies before you, but I can. I know that right here is where you should be, where you will find the wisdom you seek. Yes, you have learned much, but you have also resisted many revelations. They frighten you and so you think 'that's not right, I don't believe that, I will put it from my mind.' Yet the truth does not go away just because you are not ready to accept it. It waits for you, and with my help you will find the courage to accept those truths that frightened you."

Maxie sighed, putting her hands on her hips. "It comes down to this: I believe that everyone must have their own unique path. I believe everyone must find truths that mean something to them, and nobody can decide that for you. I believe everyone makes their own mistakes, and when they realize the nature of those mistakes they can learn from them, and that's how they grow. I believe that when it comes down to it, this thing I've been doing, seeking out truth and wisdom and power and beauty, that's something nobody can do for you. And that's why I'm going to leave."

The Humble One closed his eyes gently. He breathed deeply and several small birds dove from a tree, fluttering by on either side of him. He opened his eyes again. "This is a mistake too grave to your spiritual health for me to allow you to make it."

Maxie stepped closer. She sunk down and put a knee on the Humble One's rock. Her face was now only a few feet from his. "Are you saying you won't let me go?"

"Spend more time, allow me a chance to convince you. I know you think your heart is telling you to leave. I know your rational mind has come up with what you think are compelling arguments why you should leave. Yet these are your weaknesses deceiving you, and the only way to defeat those weaknesses is to stand and fight them. You must stay."

Maxie stood. "I understand that is what you want, but you can't keep me here. You can't stop me from leaving."

"I know everyone in this valley," he said, still calm, still smiling. "I have helped everyone who lives here in some way or another. Everyone trusts me. If I say I need help keeping you here, they will do whatever I ask."

Maxie let anger seep into her voice. "You don't have the right to keep me here against my will. You aren't perfect and you don't know everything. I've seen you act from selfish motives, I've seen you act from pride. When I first met you I was so overawed with what you had to teach me that I couldn't see your prejudices, but now I can. If you think you've achieved perfection then you're deluding yourself."

"I am like a mirror. You look in me and you see your own pride, your own prejudice reflected back, because that is what you understand. In time you will see that only compassion and understanding has guided my decisions."

"Please," Maxie said, "If you acknowledge the possibility that you may be wrong, then you have to let me go. To do otherwise would be to risk stifling my progress. If you don't acknowledge that you might be wrong, if you believe you are without a flaw, then I have to leave, I won't be the student of someone who thinks they are perfect. Do you understand?"

He only smiled.

She turned towards the bank of the stream, took a step away. Then she looked back at the Humble One and said "I'm going now. Call your friends in the valley if you want, have them try to stop me. I should warn you that I won't be afraid to hurt them, so make sure you take that into consideration."

Maxie walked away.

Chapter Three

THE WORLD OF SEEKERS

There is No One Truth

In Brief: No one ultimate truth. No one route to truth. Everyone is ignorant about some things, but can also have useful wisdom.

Most mystical and religious systems are predicated on the idea that there is one fundamental truth about the universe, and that all other truths are either false, are unimportant, or follow logically from the one fundamental truth. Anyone who can grasp this fundamental truth, these systems say, need look no further.

Seeker is based on the idea that the universe is of infinite complexity. There is no fundamental truth, not even one definition of “truth” that all reasonable people would agree on. There are countless ways to understand how the universe works, and all of them are useful in their own way.

Anyone who claims that “everything you need to know” about the universe could fit in one book, or be taught by one guru, is absolutely wrong. If acquiring knowledge about the universe is a journey, then it is a journey with no right direction to go in and no ending.

Since there is no one true wisdom and thus no one true route to wisdom, it also means that all humans are equals, in that they all have equal capacity (whether they choose to use it or not) to improve themselves and gain useful understanding of the universe. A person who is born with greater capacity for abstract thought is better suited to learn wisdom and truths based on abstract reasoning, but a person born with less capacity can learn other truths and other wisdom not dependent on abstract thought. Thus truth can be found in anyone.

People who believe there is one path, one truth, can gain great things and can become powerful, but they are always limited. They can only go so far.

Since there is no higher truth, being wrong about one thing does not mean that someone is wrong about everything. Everyone is ignorant. The wisest, most powerful Seeker who ever lived is completely ignorant about some important things. And at the same time, someone can be a horrible, ignorant, petty, prejudiced failure of a person, but still have some valuable bit of wisdom or knowledge. The goal of most religions, philosophies and scientific systems is to not be wrong, but in the Seeker universe this is an impossible, counterproductive goal. A better goal is to always be ready to accept, and thus

“People keep looking for wisdom from perfect messiahs, because they don’t want to get their wisdom from people with flaws. It’s because people want a dogma that will answer any question, like a key that will fit any lock, and if someone has that perfect answer then how could they possibly be flawed? We need to accept that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to everything. Wisdom abounds, the world is verdant with it, but it cannot be gotten from a perfect person because there are no perfect people. If we go looking for perfect people we will find people whose flaws we are blind to because they match our own and we will accept flawed wisdom from them. We need to learn to gather the wisdom that is all around us. Maybe the idiot understands how to enjoy life, maybe the racist understands the value of art, maybe the wino understands how to get along with people. If we start learning from what they got right rather than rejecting them for what they got wrong, then we start moving towards becoming truly better people.”

-Fred, a gas station attendant in New Mexico

"I think it's better to have ideas. You can change an idea. Changing a belief is trickier. Life should be malleable and progressive; working from idea to idea permits that. Beliefs anchor you to certain points and limit growth; new ideas can't generate."

-Rufus in the movie Dogma

move beyond, this moment's ignorance. Looking for a teacher who is perfect is just as impossible of a goal. When seeking out a teacher, a student can only hope to learn whatever of value the teacher is ready to teach and the student is ready to learn at the moment and then be ready to move on.

Many things in the Seeker universe can be understood in very different ways. A phenomenon may be understood with complex mathematical and scientific ideas, or it may be seen as magic or miracle. Both are equally correct (and, on the flip-side of

the coin, equally wrong) ways of viewing the universe. That they seem to contradict each other is only evidence of how much left we have to learn.

In the Seeker universe, understanding the universe, and understanding oneself, are one-in-the-same and are each a prerequisite to each other. Thus, great understanding and great personal powers, ability and refinement are available to those willing to engage in a constant cycle of self-improvement and gaining wisdom.

The Supernormal

In Brief: Things beyond what normal people consider likely abound, especially among Seekers. To most, they make no sense, but to those with wisdom they are perfectly understandable.

The Seeker universe is full of amazing things; things that most ordinary people don't believe are even possible. To call them supernatural, paranormal, magical or miraculous would be to ascribe one worldview's explanation to them. Instead, this volume will call them "supernormal." Supernormal things abound. All Seekers have supernormal abilities, but supernormal events and abilities are not restricted solely to Seekers.

Supernormal events do not directly contradict the laws of physics, and so are more subtle than typical ideas of "superpowers" or "magic." No Seeker, for example, can conjure fireballs from thin air. Yet there are Seekers who can walk through fire without getting hurt, or predict every move a chaotic firestorm will make, or make others believe there is a fire where there is not, or sit naked in a snowstorm warmed only by a meditation on internal fire, or create a painting of a burning house-fire so evocative that it makes people weep or cower in terror, or take an ordinary person and make some minor change in her life that will turn her into a pyromaniac, etc.

The supernormal is in everything that stretches or breaks the limits of what ordinary people believe is likely or possible. A mathematical prodigy is supernormal. Someone who is healthy and active at 115 years old is supernormal. A hard-to-believe coincidence is supernormal. A series of misfortunes that plague a person or community can be supernormal. Ordinary people don't understand how or why these things happen, and many Seekers may not even understand, but there is some Seeker somewhere who understands the universe in such a way that any of these things would make perfect sense, be just another example of the universe quietly following its own rules.

Fantastic Nomenclature

When Seekers meet, they find a common language to speak about the things they have experienced, and this language is passed down to younger Seekers and may have very old roots. That's why many terms Seekers use, e.g. "demons," "sorcerers," "powers" have magical connotations, even though a large portion of the Seekers using them do not believe in magic and think there is a rational/scientific explanation for these phenomena.

About Seekers

In Brief: Seekers wander, seeking wisdom, power, self-improvement. They often end up helping people wherever they go.

The people called Seekers in this book call themselves by a variety of names, or refuse to be called by any name at all. Seekers are people in search of power, wisdom or enlightenment who have found that the best way to find what they're looking for is to wander this world. There is no one church or dogma that Seekers belong to: they come from many different backgrounds and view their quest in many different ways. Seekers don't know who will be their next teacher or what task will be their next lesson. That's why they wander with no physical goal in mind. Seekers can usually recognize others of their kind and while there is no 'organization' or 'culture' of Seekers, sometimes Seekers find it pleasant and useful to share the road with each other for a time.

By learning and improving themselves far beyond what most people think is likely or possible, Seekers gain useful abilities that make them much more powerful and able than a normal human being. There are eight primary 'Paths': general routes to knowledge, self-improvement and power. Seekers may have walked a little of each Path, or may have gone far down a single Path. See p.100 for more on the Paths.

Seekers as Anti-Fundamentalists

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

-Aristotle

"A fundamentalist puts a stick in the sand and says 'this is what I believe' and defends that belief from all contradictory arguments. A Seeker puts a stick in the sand and say 'this is as far as I've explored. Tomorrow, I'll go even farther.'"

-The Mad Monk

There are many possible definitions of "fundamentalism." One is that fundamentalism is the act of taking certain truths to be true and unquestionable and to basing one's life around these truths.

Given this definition of fundamentalism, a Seeker is the exact opposite of a fundamentalist. A Seeker questions everything, and all of his or her beliefs are subject to change. Anyone who holds certain beliefs as "unquestionable" cannot be a true Seeker.

A Seeker may have a goal that he or she does not waver from, e.g. to become closer to the divine, or to discover truth, or to be good. An unwavering goal and an unwavering belief are very different: an unwavering goal allows for (even prompts) one's basic view of the universe to change, an unwavering belief does not.

"Fear not the path of truth for lack of people walking on it."

-Arabic Proverb

"Not all who wander are lost."

-J.R.R. Tolkien

"There is no religion higher than truth."

-Vedic saying

"Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone.... Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good. If it doesn't, it's of no use."

-Carlos Castaneda

"Revere the goals. Never revere the methods used to achieve them. Revering a method makes you blind to its flaws, meaning you can never reach your goal."

-Sally, a retired scientist

Not every Seeker has compassion as a motivation or goal, but most do. Wherever they go, Seekers find people having problems and they usually want to use their special abilities and understanding to help those people. Helping others overcome their problems acts as a useful challenge for Seekers. Thus, much of a Seeker's life is made up of arriving in a new place, noticing that there are people who are suffering or are in danger, and trying to find a way to use their abilities to help those people. The world is a much more dangerous place than most people realize, and would be a much worse place without Seekers traveling the world quietly making things better. Some of the problems Seekers help people with are problems of the mundane world (e.g. a racist skinheads terrorizing a community, a small child lost in the woods, a nuclear plant in danger of meltdown). Others involve forces and abilities that normal people aren't generally aware of but that Seekers are. This can include people with Seeker abilities (sorcerers (p.66), prodigies (p.66), advanced practitioners (p.66), "evil" Seekers (p.64), trapped Seekers (p.56)) or it can include what some Seekers call Demons (p.69).

A Seeker doesn't see ordinary people as ignorant or lesser beings. Ordinary people often have important insights that can help Seekers move to the next level of understanding and power.

"When you are in charge of your own life, you end up reading only books that say things you already believe, talking to people who are like you, doing things that are like the things you have already done. If you want to grow, you need to not be in control of your own life, let the universe toss you around a little."

-Hoang, punk band drummer.

What Are Seekers Like?

Seekers are Eccentric.

Seekers are all involved in the attempt to become something more or better than a normal person. There is no set path, no list of steps they can take to achieve this goal, and so they must experiment with different ways of thinking, behaving and being. Some of these experiments are not visible to the naked eye and some are. Almost every Seeker dresses or acts in ways that are distinctively different from the mainstream. These eccentricities could be as mild as going barefoot everywhere or as extreme as refusing to communicate in anything other than barks and growls.

Seekers are Flawed.

The enlightenment gained on the path of Seekerdom is not a "rising tide that raises all boats." That is to say that knowledge, wisdom and power gained in one domain does not automatically grant knowledge, wisdom and power in all domains. Seekers, no matter how accomplished they are, can be just as flawed as normal people. In fact, their flaws can seem even greater because the personal power they wield makes those flaws much more dangerous. Depending on their path, a Seeker might be a rude asshole, an alcoholic, a pushover, neurotic, prejudiced, paranoid, etc.

Seekers are Amazing.

Although Seekers are not superior in every way to regular people, they are superior in some very distinct and very important ways. All Seekers, no matter their path, gain incredible wisdom and understanding and the power to do incredible things. Seekers have abilities that seem superhuman to regular people, and any given Seeker can consistently take on and succeed at a huge variety of challenges.

The only difference between Seekers and normal people is one of degree. A Seeker's lifestyle is configured such that it provides exponentially more opportunities for insight and revelation than an ordinary lifestyle. Beyond that, there is little difference.

There are many who believe they are on the path to truth, wisdom and power, but who are not true Seekers. The major difference is that Seekers are beholden to no master, no tradition and no followers, and thus feel free to change paths whenever their current path, whatever that may be, has nothing to offer them. A good analogy would be gold prospectors. Ordinary people are stuck on one claim, one plot of land, where they may find lots of gold, or they may find nothing. No matter how much gold they find, it will eventually run out and no amount of digging will get them any more. A Seeker is a miner who can leave a claim at any time to look for another with more potential.

Seeker History

In Brief: Since the first human communities, people have left their lives to seek strength and knowledge with which to protect their communities. Organized religion and government tried to wipe out these practices but failed. Today there are more resources available and thus more Seekers.

Long ago, before there were governments, organized religions or books, people lived, not necessarily in harmony with nature, but in close contact with nature. Yet nature was (and still is) unpredictable and dangerous. Diseases, wild animal attacks, mental illness, poor weather, attacks by strange tribes and strings of bad luck in hunting were unpredictable and deadly to the average person. The chains of cause and effect that led to these phenomena were incomprehensible to these ancient people, and thus these events seemed to be the work of invisible, malevolent beings.

Out of the desperate need to protect themselves from these dangers, these ancient groups all created traditions by which one person from the tribe would be selected and trained to understand and deal with these dangers. In most cultures this training included leaving the community. There were often long periods of isolation in the wilderness, or travelling to other communities and studying under their protectors. Even when there was no physical separation from the community, there was a severing of relationships. The student changed his or her name, gave up bonds of kinship and friendship, often experienced a ritual death and funeral. The new person was an outcast, depended upon but at the same time separate from the people they protected and cared for. This sacrifice helped our ancestors survive.

These people went by many names, but the most common term used by western anthropologists is shaman.

When organized religion, academics and governments came along they largely tried to wipe out these traditions (or, in some cases, to kill the people practicing them) because power sought by an individual was a threat to organizations that depended on the awarding of power to individuals via the authority of a bureaucracy.

Many of the iniquities of history have disproportionately hurt Seekers: the "burning" of witches, the censure of heretics and dissidents, the destruction of native culture in the name of progress, people who think or believe differently being forced into madhouses, etc. One could go so far as to say that for the last few millennia the world's powers have been at war with Seekers, and only now is this war starting to abate.

Yet these ancient techniques, of leaving one's home and oneself to seek power and wisdom, could never be wiped out. In some cases, shamanism has survived in its original form. In other cases, the techniques of shamanism were incorporated into occult or mystical systems. And in many more cases these techniques have been re-discovered by each new generation. Seekerdom has never stopped.

Seekers and the Public

Rise of the Seekers- Today, there are many more Seekers per capita than there has been in many millennia. Even within the past half-century the numbers have risen dramatically. Here's why there are so many Seekers today:

- The decline of Western Cultural-centrism: Somewhere around the 1960s the idea that Western culture was superior to all other cultures and that those cultures had nothing to offer to the West came into question and has been slowly eroding.

- Easier travel means that a would-be Seeker can go more new places and meet more new Seekers. A Seeker-to-be, today, can live with African tribespeople, then French bohemian existentialists and then Thai monks, all in the space of a single year.

- Media technology makes more teachings from more cultures and times available to would-be-Seekers.

- Higher standards of living means more people can afford to quit their jobs and roam around the country.

- New ideas mean more traditions that can spawn Seekers and more food for Seekers hungry for new ideas. Even in the past few decades, new disciplines have appeared that are capable of spawning new Seekers, including social and cognitive psychology, postmodernism, computer science, game theory and chaos mathematics.

- By inspiring or mentoring would-be-Seekers, Seekers tend to create more Seekers, so more Seekers on the road means more Seekers being created.

In Brief: Many individuals know about Seekers, but society at large does not. Bureaucracies are incapable of grasping Seekers.

The world at large knows very little about Seekers. This is because Seekers come in so many different forms (different abilities, different traditions, different words they use to describe that they do) and because Seekers make few attempts to gain students, followers or converts. Another reason that Seekers aren't known better is that many of those who start to investigate Seekers and what they are end up dropping out and becoming Seekers themselves.

Seekers are rare enough that the average person has never met one. Those who have met Seekers think they are something one-of-a-kind, not one example of a class of people. They think of Seekers as saints, holy men, geniuses, prodigies, prophets or just extraordinary lucky crazy people. Sometimes a Seeker comes, helps people and passes, and then a small new religion blossoms where they had been, with the Seeker an unwitting prophet, angel or God.

Major institutions (government, churches, corporations, universities, news agencies) all have no idea that Seekers exist. A few individual members of these institutions may know that Seekers exist, but they cannot communicate this knowledge through the official channels of their particular institutions. The very concept of Seekers is one that bureaucracies are unsuited to dealing with. That there is a group of people with no common origin, no common ideology, no rules, no organization, of unpredictable powers, motivations and methods, moving about the country randomly doing whatever they happen to think is right, is as hard for bureaucracies to grasp as it is for the two-dimensional beings of Flatland to grasp the existence of three-dimensional beings. In other words, Seekers as a whole are as good as invisible to the major power structures of the world, although not to individuals within those structures.

Sam Downs, Seeker-Aware FBI Agent

Sam is a senior field agent in the FBI's criminal apprehension division. He is responsible for interfacing with local law enforcement in the entire Midwest region to apprehend criminals wanted by the FBI. His office is in Denver, Colorado but he ends up driving all around the Midwest, staying in hotels as he pursues criminals. Aside from the occasional intern, he typically works alone.

For several years, Sam has been aware of the existence of Seekers, ever since a Seeker helped him catch a serial killer. He has met a handful of Seekers and has been collecting news stories and law enforcement reports that he thinks are indicative of Seekers. He knows that Seekers are wanderers, students of philosophy and mysticism, and that Seekers have remarkable skills and talents. He doesn't believe that all Seekers are good, nor that they have the right to break laws. He is willing to disregard very minor rule breaking, especially if done when pursuing a good cause, but will arrest, even go out of his way to hunt down, Seekers who blatantly break the law.

Sam has written several memos and reports trying to explain the Seeker phenomenon to his superiors. He has received responses like "what am I supposed to do with this?" or "I see no way to verify these assertions and, even if I could, I see no actionable items." He has since stopped writing such memos and is bitter and angry about not being heard by his superiors.

Appearance- Short (5' 2") white male, looking to be in his 30s with curly dark-brown hair, clean shaven, prominent nose, wearing a charcoal grey suit.

Attributes- AGY OOOO, AWR OOO, CHM OO, INL OOOO, END OO, SPD OOO, STH OO, WIL OOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic O	Specialty: Business & Law
Combat OO	Specialty: Kill
Investigation/Espionage OOO	Specialties: People, Crime Scene

Equipment

Handcuffs, Smart Phone
 Ranged Combat: Kill OO (automatic pistol)
 Investigation/Espionage: Crime Scene O (small evidence collection kit)

Personality- Sam believes in hard work, honesty, law and order, in the chain of command, and in the power of the government to make things better. His pet peeves are prejudice and people who think they can do whatever they want.

Personality Strengths and Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOO	Weaknesses OO (Well educated, mostly unprejudiced.)
Self Strengths OOO	Weaknesses OOO (Has had to fight to be accepted as an equal.)
Harmony Strengths O	Weaknesses OOO (A loner who is angry about not being heard.)
Feeling Strengths OO	Weaknesses O (Tries to maintain an emotional distance.)

Combat AVs

Kill OOOOOO	Control OOOOO
Ruin OOOOO	Exhaust OOOO

Becoming Seekers

In Brief: To become Seekers, people must leave their lives behind. This is almost always painful.

The life of being a Seeker starts when someone gives up ties to job, friends and residence and decides (or is forced) to wander the world seeking truth or wisdom or power. This split from ordinary life can happen in many ways and for many reasons. For some Seekers it is the culmination of a slow process of years or decades spent giving up attachments. For others it is something that happened suddenly, over the course of a single, extremely intense evening. Some Seekers have simply put on their shoes, opened their front doors and left, not even bothering to close the door behind them. Some Seekers choose the path, others have it thrust on them by some psychological crisis or by things happening in their lives. Some become Seekers after a tragedy leaves them without a family. Some become Seekers after fleeing from the law leaves them unable to go home. It is frightening and difficult to leave the life one knows, especially when all one gains instead is an uncertain future. No matter how much they believe becoming a Seeker is the right thing to do, that first step is almost always painful.

Disabled Seekers

Sometimes, being a Seeker helps people learn to deal with serious disabilities, even to become more capable than an ordinary non-disabled person. Someone with extremely poor memory due to brain damage or senility might walk the Path of -Thought and learn to make up for, with intuition and wisdom, what they lack in mental vigor. A person who is deaf and dumb might walk the Path of +Harmony in order to learn to communicate without words. A person with neurochemical imbalances might walk the Path of +Feeling in order to control and make use of what would otherwise be debilitating periods of mania, depression or fear. A person with muscular dystrophy who is stuck in a wheelchair may walk the Path of +Thought to learn how to substitute calculation for fine control in his or her interactions with the world. Disabilities can thus be a reason for becoming a Seeker.

"Grasshopper wanted to go on a journey. 'I will find a road,' he said. 'I will follow that road wherever it goes.' One morning Grasshopper found a road. It was long and dusty. It went up hills and down into valleys. 'This road looks fine to me,' said Grasshopper. 'I am on my way.'"

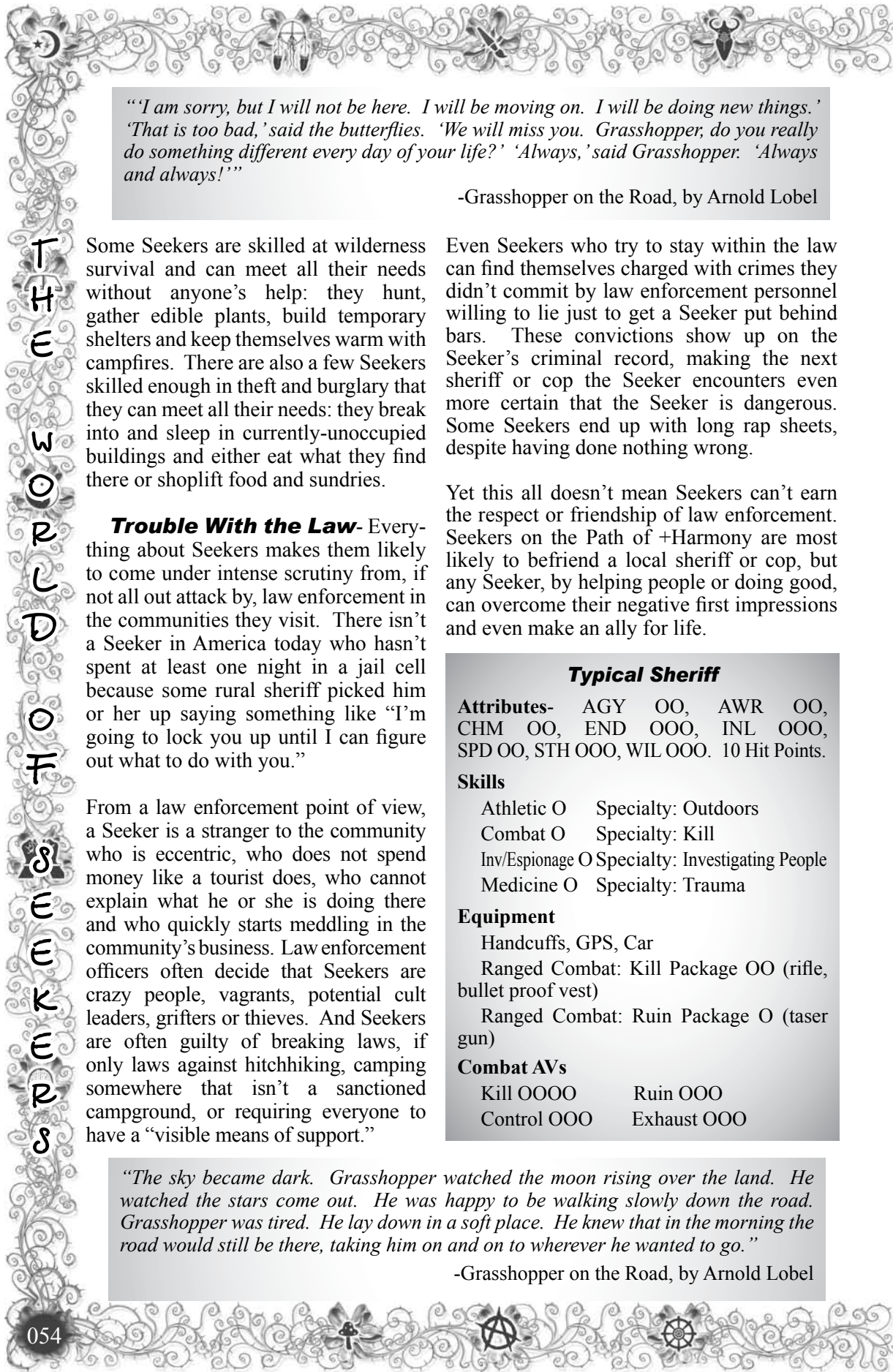
-Grasshopper on the Road, by Arnold Lobel

Seeker Lifestyle

In Brief: Most Seekers walk and hitchhike, do odd jobs for room and board, are often treated with suspicion or hostility by local law enforcement.

Travel- Some Seekers travel the back roads of the country in cars or on motorcycles. Some feel a strong connection to their vehicles, and some even exercise their Path abilities in the repair and maintenance of vehicles. Yet the majority of Seekers walk or hitchhike from place to place. Most find that operating a vehicle requires money, which means getting a job, which means forming connections to a place that can distract one from the path. Also, many find that walking gives one a better chance to enjoy the environment and hitchhiking gives one a better chance to meet new people than riding alone would.

Room and Board- For the basic necessities of life: food, water, shelter from the elements during the night, multiple opportunities present themselves to Seekers. A small number of Seekers are wealthy and can afford to pay to eat in restaurants and stay in hotels (or, in communities too small to have restaurants and hotels, pay some community member to take in guests in their homes). Other Seekers do work in exchange for room and board, e.g. washing dishes in a restaurant in exchange for a hot meal, painting a barn in exchange for permission to sleep in it. Many are willing to give a Seeker room and board with nothing in return, perhaps because they see the Seeker as an innocent in need of charity, as a friend, or as an important person or an important guest. Seekers have learned not to underestimate the kindness and willingness to give of ordinary Americans.



"I am sorry, but I will not be here. I will be moving on. I will be doing new things." "That is too bad," said the butterflies. "We will miss you. Grasshopper, do you really do something different every day of your life?" "Always," said Grasshopper. "Always and always!"

-Grasshopper on the Road, by Arnold Lobel

Some Seekers are skilled at wilderness survival and can meet all their needs without anyone's help: they hunt, gather edible plants, build temporary shelters and keep themselves warm with campfires. There are also a few Seekers skilled enough in theft and burglary that they can meet all their needs: they break into and sleep in currently-unoccupied buildings and either eat what they find there or shoplift food and sundries.

Trouble With the Law- Everything about Seekers makes them likely to come under intense scrutiny from, if not all out attack by, law enforcement in the communities they visit. There isn't a Seeker in America today who hasn't spent at least one night in a jail cell because some rural sheriff picked him or her up saying something like "I'm going to lock you up until I can figure out what to do with you."

From a law enforcement point of view, a Seeker is a stranger to the community who is eccentric, who does not spend money like a tourist does, who cannot explain what he or she is doing there and who quickly starts meddling in the community's business. Law enforcement officers often decide that Seekers are crazy people, vagrants, potential cult leaders, grifters or thieves. And Seekers are often guilty of breaking laws, if only laws against hitchhiking, camping somewhere that isn't a sanctioned campground, or requiring everyone to have a "visible means of support."

Even Seekers who try to stay within the law can find themselves charged with crimes they didn't commit by law enforcement personnel willing to lie just to get a Seeker put behind bars. These convictions show up on the Seeker's criminal record, making the next sheriff or cop the Seeker encounters even more certain that the Seeker is dangerous. Some Seekers end up with long rap sheets, despite having done nothing wrong.

Yet this all doesn't mean Seekers can't earn the respect or friendship of law enforcement. Seekers on the Path of +Harmony are most likely to befriend a local sheriff or cop, but any Seeker, by helping people or doing good, can overcome their negative first impressions and even make an ally for life.

Typical Sheriff

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OO, CHM OO, END OOO, INL OOO, SPD OO, STH OOO, WIL OOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Athletic O Specialty: Outdoors
Combat O Specialty: Kill
Inv/Espionage O Specialty: Investigating People
Medicine O Specialty: Trauma

Equipment

Handcuffs, GPS, Car
Ranged Combat: Kill Package OO (rifle, bullet proof vest)
Ranged Combat: Ruin Package O (taser gun)

Combat AVs

Kill OOOO Ruin OOO
Control OOO Exhaust OOO

"The sky became dark. Grasshopper watched the moon rising over the land. He watched the stars come out. He was happy to be walking slowly down the road. Grasshopper was tired. He lay down in a soft place. He knew that in the morning the road would still be there, taking him on and on to wherever he wanted to go."

-Grasshopper on the Road, by Arnold Lobel

Seeker Coincidences

In Brief: Seekers tend to run into other Seekers, run into challenges that test their abilities, find sources of wisdom and find the basic necessities of life.

The life of a Seeker is rife with coincidences. To some Seekers this is a sign that “the universe” or some higher power is guiding Seekers and easing their way. To others this is a rational and mathematical consequence of the Seeker lifestyle. The rationalist explanation can be simplified to two points: “people with the same interests often end up having the same experiences” and “people are more likely to find the things they expect to find.” The biggest coincidences in the life of a Seeker are:

Running Into Other Seekers:

Seekers are continually crossing paths with other Seekers. Seekers quite often meet new Seekers and run into old Seeker acquaintances, with absolutely no pre-planning on a Seeker’s part. A Seeker can pick a highway at random, can hitchhike to “wherever you’re willing to take me to,” can end up in a small town with a population of 100 in the middle of nowhere, and can run into three other Seekers who just happen to be in the same town at the same time. Or a Seeker might be at a cocktail party in a Manhattan high-rise and look across the room to notice a Seeker she met in a sweat lodge on Navajo land. Seekers often discover that other Seekers have preceded them in the places they explore.

Finding Challenges: Seekers are never without challenges. Everywhere they go they find some problem that needs to be fixed, mystery that needs to be solved or danger that needs to be overcome. These

could be challenges personally affecting the Seeker (e.g. the Seeker spends the night on someone’s couch, wakes the next morning to find that person has been murdered and the Seeker is the natural suspect) or affecting people the PC meets (e.g. the PC stops in a café, chats with the owner and finds out that the owner is in fear for her life because of a biker gang that has been harassing her).

Finding Wisdom: Seekers are continually finding new sources of knowledge that have meaning to them, personally, on their particular point on their particular paths. This wisdom is most likely a person who has some wise observation about the universe to pass on to the PC, but it could also be a book, a piece of art, a historical artifact or even a place where the beauty and power of the universe is strikingly evident.

Finding Basic Necessities: Life as a Seeker is not necessarily easy (see Finding Challenges, above) but Seekers seldom have their journey ended by want of basic needs. Seekers hardly ever starve to death, or die for want of medical care, or freeze to death outside at night because they can’t find a warm place to stay. These basic necessities of life seem to make themselves available to Seekers when they truly cannot do without them. A Seeker will find a kind soul willing to give the PC a place to sleep for the night, or a job that can earn the PC enough money for diner and a hotel, or an abandoned cabin in that wilderness that can shelter the PC for the night, etc. See Lifestyle, p.53 for more.

“As ye seek so shall ye find.”

-Robert W. Service, Rhymes of a Rolling Stone

Advancing on the Paths

"Ideas are not wisdom, although they can be molded into wisdom. One cannot transmit wisdom to another, one can only transmit ideas. To try to give wisdom to another is like sending someone chunks of metal, rubber and plastic and saying 'look, I have given you a car.'"

-Eskimo Bill

The Paths Cannot Be Taught

In Brief: One cannot teach Paths, as each person arrives at wisdom in a unique way.

The Paths (described in detail in p.100) are the general areas of wisdom, knowledge, skill and power that Seekers gain. No person, no matter how advanced they are in the Paths, can teach the Paths to another. This is because each person's path is unique. Each person is somewhere on a string of knowledge, realizations and self-improvements that are unique to them. A concept that will open up new worlds of understanding for one Seeker will, to another, be meaningless, or will seem like unremarkable common sense. Although two Seekers on the same level of the same Path may be similar in what they can do and how they do it, what they know and believe can be completely different.

Path abilities can be taught by rote, but not the actual wisdom of the Paths themselves. See Sorcerers (p.66) for more on people who learn Path abilities by rote.

While the paths cannot be taught, it is possible for one Seeker to create challenges that may prompt a crisis (next page) in another Seeker. This is a difficult and dangerous art. Since the abilities of all Seekers are so different it can be very difficult to judge the right difficulty for a challenge. A challenge which is not difficult doesn't help the Seeker, one that is too difficult can kill the Seeker. Yet despite all this, when they work, challenges are the greatest gift any Seeker can give another.

The Black Gulf

In Brief: Major leaps in wisdom and knowledge can be terrifying.

Many of the traditions that Seekers come from have some sort of frightening or terrible, often dangerous, gulf that practitioners must pass through. Most shamanistic traditions have the practitioner experience a death of self and be reborn. In some occult traditions based on the Kabbalah, practitioners must cross a terrifying void, situated at the sephira of Da'at (knowledge, sentience), to continue growing closer to the divine. In existentialism, one must experience an existential crisis, a depressing and anxious time where one must acknowledge that there is no God and no inherent meaning to life. Christian mysticism has the concept of the "dark night of the soul," a harrowing, confusing sense of withdrawal of God's presence that accompanies the final stages of giving up ego. On the other side of each of these black gulfs are, according to these traditions, new levels of power and understanding, but only for those with the courage and will to cross the gulfs.

Why do such disparate traditions have such similar themes? It is because truly changing how one views the universe is always a harrowing experience. One must sometimes give up one's old ideas about the universe before one can adopt new ones, leaving one temporarily ungrounded, unsure what one believes about anything or what the future will hold. It is the difficulty of these radical changes that typically keep them out of reach of the average person.

"Problems can not be solved at the same level of awareness that created them."

-Albert Einstein

"If it was easy," many Seekers say to non-Seekers who want to do what they do, "everyone would be doing it." What makes Seekers unique is their willingness to, again and again, traverse this black gulf.

Traversing the black gulf is so harrowing that even approaching it can cause a deep subconscious fear that can manifest as psychological symptoms (e.g. panic, hallucinations, amnesia, hysterical blindness). These symptoms are the Seeker's subconscious trying to prevent them from walking willingly into this dark pit. Most Seekers learn to ignore these psychological problems and keep advancing despite them. A few Seekers, versed in the shamanic arts of visions and journeying, fight against hallucinated/imaginary embodiments of these fears to try to conquer them so they can advance along the paths unmolested by them. See p.172 for more.

Crises

In Brief: Seekers can only advance along the Path when they face a crisis where advancement is the only solution.

The Black Gulf makes advancement along any Path a painful, frightening experience. It is not a thing a person can just decide to do. A Crisis is required to force a Seeker to take that next step. A Crisis is any circumstance where a Seeker:

- Faces some challenge, problem or dilemma.
- The consequences of failure are meaningful to the Seeker.
- The Seeker has looked at every possible solution within his or her current set of abilities (including just giving up) and have found that none will work.
- The only way to succeed is to advance along one of the Paths.

When all these circumstances are met, and when enough ideas and experiences have planted the seeds of new realizations in the PC's mind, the PC can advance along the Paths.

A crisis can be an external circumstance that a PC finds himself or herself in (e.g. the PC is trapped in the basement of a serial killer and can find no means of escape). A crisis can come from within when a Demon grows too powerful to control. A crisis can be something a Seeker inflicts on himself or herself in order to learn and grow, but a self-inflicted challenge can't be easy to get out of. A PC cannot just assign herself a hard math problem and say "I'm not going to stop until I solve this," because there really isn't anything preventing the PC from quitting. A PC can, however, get herself lost in a cave system with no lights, because once in that circumstance the only solution is to finish.

See p.30 for more on the mechanics of Path advancement.

Traps & Leaving the Path

Retired Seekers

In Brief: Some Seekers retire but keep much of their wisdom and abilities.

There are many ways to leave the path of seekerdom. Some Seekers consciously choose to retire, to stop traveling and seeking. There is no shame in this, and these ex-Seekers usually remain wise and powerful, and still capable of teaching something new to an active Seeker.

Retired Seekers slowly lose their Path abilities. This is not so much because Seekers forget the wisdom they have learned (although this can happen) because that they do not have the time to put that wisdom into practice. Leading a normal life takes a lot of time, energy and attention, as does maintaining great Seeker abilities, and retired Seekers find it is impossible to do both.

A good analogy would be a world-class chess champion or martial artist. While they spend most of each day, every day, practicing their crafts their skills remain incredibly high. When they are distracted by normal life and only have a little time for practice, their skills slowly deteriorate. They remain highly above average, but they are no longer world-class. Retired Seekers remain the wisest, most skilled, most insightful people in their communities, but they no longer have powers that some would call superhuman.

Unlike Trapped Seekers (p.62), Retired Seekers are under no great illusions about what is happening to them. They might not know the particulars of their new failings and flaws (because people cannot know what it is they don't know) but they do know that they are not what they once were.

In mechanical terms, a Retired Seeker's Path levels slowly go down. When they disappear, specialties and focuses can remain, especially if the Retired Seeker can use these abilities in their new lives. At the end, a retired Seeker's profile can look much like that of a sorcerer: zero levels in Paths but several Path specialties. It is rare, although possible, for retired Seekers to lose all of their Path abilities. When Path levels disappear, it is appropriate to write up Psychological Strengths and Weaknesses profiles (p.145) for retired Seeker NPCs. The ghost of Path levels will appear here as very high strengths ratings and very low weaknesses ratings.

Mariko "M" Yamamoto, Retired Seeker

As a teen, M has the misfortune of looking at the nuclear blast at Nagasaki. She was far enough away to avoid other injuries, but her vision slowly deteriorated and within a few years she was mostly blind. She joined a Buddhist nunnery where she studied Buddhism and foreign languages, including English. In the 1960s, she joined "Global Voices For Peace," an international anti-nuclear weapons group. She started giving speeches on behalf of the group, first in Japan and then all over the world. Her intense, charismatic style and the fact she had been disabled by a nuclear blast made her a very popular speaker. While staying in the US she met and fell in love with an American peace activist. He talked her into giving up being a nun and moving with him to a commune in the California mountains. Their relationship soon soured (despite his proclaiming himself to be a feminist, he wanted Mariko to be submissive) and M grew frustrated with politics in the commune. So one day she left, hitchhiking away with nothing but a backpack and an expired visa.

M became a Seeker and walked the Paths of -Thought, +Harmony and -Self. The Path of -Thought increased her ability to use her other senses to make up her lack of vision. When she needed money she would set up in a public place and do tricks (juggling, guessing people's height and weight). Eventually she gained a sword and came up with a "blind samurai" routine that pleased audiences. The routine involved, for instance, cutting in half apples that audience members had thrown in the air.

As she traveled, M met people with deformities or strange talents who wanted to join her on the road. At first she tried to dissuade them, saying that it was a hard and often dangerous road she walked on, but eventually she relented and her act became a traveling sideshow. Now responsible for the welfare of other people, she found she could no longer go where she wanted or stay as long as she felt like. She realized she was leaving the path of Seekerdom but she decided that she was okay with that.

As years passed, her Path abilities began to wane. She had too much other work to do to constantly practice and hone her abilities. One of her main focuses as a Seeker had been on shedding ideas about or attachments to selfhood. As an aging showperson, though, she no longer had the time or energy to constantly battle against "self" and a self-identity slowly reappeared.

Meanwhile, she ran across many travelers she recognized as Seekers. She was always happy to take in Seekers for as long as they wanted to stay with the troupe. Then she had a run-in with Coyote (p.65) who tried to separate her from her sideshow (in hopes of putting her back on the Path of Seekerdom). She realized, then, that all Seekers are not good, and she began to test the Seekers she met, hoping to find and ruin those who thought it was okay to hurt innocent people.

Social Status- M is the leader and paymaster of a traveling sideshow. People come and go but she typically has 5-10 people (mostly performers) working for her. She acts as a mentor to her employees and inspires fierce loyalty from them. Her employees know her as a very wise and very talented woman, although they fear the lash of her tongue when she catches them doing anything stupid.

Appearance- A short, plump, elderly Japanese woman, appearing to be in her 60s. Her skin is tanned, wrinkled and leathery. Her hair is thinning, grey and cut very short. Her eyes have milky cataracts over the pupils. She smokes cigars. She typically wears a white t-shirt and oil-stained coveralls and smells like cigar smoke and pine needles. She speaks with a thick Japanese accent and a voice tinged with cynical humor.

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OOOOO, CHM OOO, INL OOOO, SPD O, STH O, WIL OOOOO. 7 Hit Points.

Psychological Strengths and Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOO Weaknesses O
(Respectful of the teachings of wise men and women, but always skeptical.)

Self Strengths OOO Weaknesses O
(Too busy to think about her own weakness or flaws.)

Harmony Strengths OOO Weaknesses OO
(Devoted to the welfare of her troupe.)

Feeling Strengths OO Weaknesses OOO
(Too old to have patience with idiots or liars.)

Paths

-Thinking: Zero Specialties: Operating without seeing (+1), letting go of manipulation/mind control (+2), combat plusses.

-Self: Zero Specialties: Profile Self Identity Weaknesses, avoiding being read by others (+2).

+Harmony: Zero Specialties: Noticing changes to familiar environments (+1), make people feel guilty (+2).

Skills

Academic O	Specialty: Humanities
Combat: O	Specialty: Kill
People OOOO	Specialties: Performance, Language
Traditional OOO	Specialties: Tricks, Traditional Medicine

Equipment: RV

Combat: Kill OOO (high quality katana)

Traditional: Traditional Medicine OO (herb and acupuncture needle kit)

Advantages & Disads: Blind (-4 to combat AVs)

Combat AVs (Note: M has -4 to AVs from being blind, but +1 from her -Thought specialty: Operating Without Seeing).

Kill OOO	Ruin O
Control O	Exhaust -1

+1 when she is engaging in combat without premeditation

Personality: M makes it a practice to say whatever is on her mind. Sometimes she can be warm, empathetic, supportive and full of wise advice. Yet she also has a temper and will tell off anyone, at great lengths, when they piss her off. She is angered the most by people who let their beliefs in their own flaws hold them back or who do stupid things when they "should have known better." Being a business woman and a carnie has made her cynical, tending to think most people are trying to cheat each other. She puts on an act as an uncompromising, cynical, iron-willed businesswoman who is used to getting her way. This act is calculated to make people treat her and her crew fairly.

As one might expect from a former -Self Seeker, M avoids talking about herself and her background and does not often reveal her past as a Seeker.

Methods: M rarely performs any more: she is out of practice and is no longer limber or agile enough. Instead, she manages money for her traveling sideshow, does promotion, negotiates with sponsors, venue operators, local law enforcement, recruits and trains new talent and mediates disputes between member of her crew.

She is always happy to meet anyone with talents, especially Seekers. She will try to find them a place in the troupe and try to help them find firendship (even love) among troupe members. She never pressures anyone to perform, but when they do she makes sure they got a piece of the profit.

Yet at the same time she is mentoring and helping new sideshow employees, she is also testing them. She puts them in situations that will test their morality.

continued next page

Mariko "M" Yamamoto, Retired Seeker (continued)

Her long-time crew are happy to play-act to help create these moral challenges. She is looking, in particular, for willingness to hurt other people or take away people's freedom (even if done in the name of helping people). Depending on how dangerous she thinks someone is, M might simply leave them behind (they wake up to find up the sideshow has moved on without them) or she may frame

a person for a crime (e.g. hide drugs in someone's tent then tell the local Sheriff that person has been dealing). If she worries a Seeker is powerful enough to evade capture she may even drug his or her food with herbal tinctures before framing him or her.

For those Seekers who pass her tests, she offers to impart what wisdom she has to them. This includes creating challenges for the Seekers.

M's Troupe

Randolph 'Dumb Randy' Carlson-

This is M's senior-most troupe member and is her driver. He has the features of someone with Downs Syndrome (short, plump, round face, small chin, almond shaped eyes). His "act" is to convince the audience that he is severely developmentally delayed but then he solves math problems suggested by the audience. He is not of subnormal intelligence, nor is he a savant: just someone of normal intelligence who is good at math and is a good actor.

Selma Gutierrez- Selma is a 'tattooed lady' who strips down to her bra and panties to show her various tattoos. She also has a knife throwing act. For her "volunteer," who stands on stage while knives are thrown around him, Selma chooses a man from the audience who thought he could impress his friends by flirting with the sexy tattooed lady. When not on stage she is shy, has trouble reading other people and spends most of her free time reading fantasy novels.

Susan and Peter Stare 'The Wonder Twins'-

This brother and sister pair are attractive, 20-something, of mixed race, tattooed and pierced. Their act starts as an acrobatic, highly choreographed fight in which they jump and tumble around stage, grab and throw each other, ripping each other's clothes off in the process. The "reveal" comes when enough of their clothes are off that the audience finds the one who they assumed was male is female and vice versa. Off stage they are friendly, gregarious, love to joke, are both sexually voracious bisexuals, have a dislike of authority figures (except for M) and whisper to each other very mean jokes about the people they meet.

Jain 'Snake Man' Campbell- A sixty-something Caucasian man with long stringy hair and a long grey-and-brown beard. On stage he wears a leather jacket and pants dyed bright green. Off-stage he wears a plaid flannel shirt and blue jeans. He walks around with a large snake draped around his neck. His act involves pulling snakes out of terrariums and doing things with them, including letting them eat live mice out of his hands. Many of the snakes are poisonous. They seldom bite Jain, but he has had venomous bites and he knows how to deal with snake venom. Jain considers himself a simple, fairly normal guy with few needs. He has had little education and gets embarrassed and angry when he is caught making a mistake (e.g. calling snakes amphibians). He gets mad at M for questioning the few things he takes pride in, and for what he calls "poking" (bringing up things about him he'd rather not talk about, like his lack of education). Several times he has lost his temper, screamed at M and stormed off, vowing never to return. Yet he does return, claiming that he couldn't find any other work that paid as well.

Kaelani 'The Bishop' Clark- A teenage African American girl with straightened hair to her shoulders and a round, youthful face. On stage she wears a red sequined dress that shows off her zaftig (plump and curvy) figure. Her arms end at her elbows without any forearms or hands. Her act consists of her doing complicated things, with apparent ease, using what she has for arms. She tosses and spins a beachball, uses a fork and spoon, writes with a pen, shuffles and deals cards and even does three-card-monte. Although she has a forged birth certificate claiming she is 19, Kaelani is actually an underaged runaway. Her family were very religious, very conservative and very poor. Kaelani feels incredibly lucky to have found M and joined the sideshow. She is kind and polite and has a seemingly endless capacity to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

Lucas 'Wild Man' Albertson- A caucasian male whose age is hard to determine. His skin is tanned, leathery, dirty, with scars and tribal-style tattoos. He has large tusk-shaped bone jewelry in his septum and ears. His hair and beard have been formed into long dreadlocks with green plants growing in them. On stage he wears a bear skin and leather loincloth. Off stage he wears dirty t-shirts and jeans and is often seen smoking a joint.

TRAPS AND LEAVING THE PATH

It takes Lucas a while to open up to people, but once he does he barrages them with corny jokes and puns. He claims he has a mean, paranoid streak, and that he smokes marijuana to suppress that part of himself, but nobody else in the troupe has ever seen evidence of this mean streak.



Trapped Seekers

In Brief: Think they are perfect when they aren't or that they are progressing towards enlightenment when they are really doing nothing. Megalomaniacal Trapped Seekers can be dangerous because they think anything they do is right.

Other Seekers leave the path without even realizing they have done so, and those Seekers can be dangerous. We call these Seekers "trapped" because they have met a dead end in their path to understanding and self-improvement that they have not been able to find their way back from. Any Seeker may become trapped. The essence of being a Seeker is change and any Seeker who stops changing is trapped.

One major trap is megalomania. A Seeker can come to believe that he or she has found the ultimate truth, knows all the answers. The majority of these trapped Seekers become teachers or religious leaders. When try to instill the wisdom they have learned in others (rather than letting others find their own wisdom) they create Sorcerers (p.66). Their conviction that they are right can make them dangerous. They often demand absolute loyalty from their students and punish any who disobey them or restrain any who try to leave. They are not doing this maliciously. They honestly believe that they are the only ones in the world who knows what is best for their students and thus their students shouldn't be allowed free will.

A trapped Seeker can be a useful teacher to other Seekers, for a time. They can teach new ideas and provide useful challenges that can help a Seeker achieve higher levels in the paths, but after the Seekers have learned all they can learn from that teacher they often find the teacher unwilling to release his or her grip on the student.

Other trapped Seekers become convinced that they should be leaders. They use their abilities to take over political parties, churches, unions or fraternal organizations. However, they become so obsessed with

the process of gaining power that they forget about doing anything good with their power. They feel their right to rule is absolute so they feel they have the right to do anything, even hurt people, to increase their power. Some subtly use their powers to control every aspect of a community. They try to create a utopia but as their understanding of the universe is incomplete, their communities can never be completely perfect. Sometimes they blame these imperfections on some outside force (e.g. a Seeker who just came to town). At other times the imperfection grows to become a serious problem, leading the Seeker to exert more overt control until the community is suffering under the grip of a totalitarian leader.

Giving oneself over fully to a teacher is another kind of trap. When a Seeker comes to believe that his or her teacher is perfect, and thus always will have higher wisdom to teach the Seeker, then the Seeker fails to recognize when the Seeker's path must diverge from that of the teacher and that the Seeker must move on.

Other Seekers become trapped when they come to believe they are achieving something when they are really achieving nothing. They may spend years, or decades, in a state of euphoria, or sitting in meditation with an empty mind, or high on hallucinogens, or rereading the same book over again, learning nothing new even when they think they are progressing towards enlightenment.

Freeing Trapped Seekers

In Brief: One can help trapped Seekers by showing them they are wrong.

A Seeker can only be freed if he or she can be made aware that he or she is trapped. One cannot force another to have such an epiphany, but one can make it more likely. Defeating a trapped Seeker (without killing him or her) is a good way to show the trapped Seeker that he or she doesn't have perfect wisdom. Creating a sufficient challenge (p.57) for trapped Seeker can also jumpstart advancement along the Paths, freeing that Seeker.

Infinity, Trapped Seeker

Infinity, once known as Martha Duncane, is a Seeker who believes she has achieved perfect freedom from emotion and operates solely on the basis of logic and rationality. Believing that she has achieved her goal, she has stopped traveling and seeking out wisdom, and has instead founded a commune/monastery/school where she attempts to teach her students what she has learned. Believing that names carry with them emotional ties, she has renamed herself and her followers after numbers, giving herself the name Infinity to denote her perfection. She does not consider this arrogance, because arrogance implies irrationality and she does not think it is possible for her to be irrational.

Infinity's school is called simply "The School" (although some call it "The School of Numbers") and is located on a farmhouse in the foothills northeast of Los Angeles. At any given time Infinity has about 12 students. Infinity and her students all wear white t-shirts and blue jeans, all have shaved heads and are all clean-shaven. They lead quiet, simple lives. They farm, they read various philosophy books (so they can critique the irrationality of their authors in group discussions with Infinity), they listen to long lectures by Infinity, they travel to LA in a van to help the needy and recruit new students. They take cold showers, sleep on wooden planks without blankets and are supposed to be completely abstinent.

Infinity believes it is her job to help rid her students of irrationality based on emotion. Whenever a student does something she doesn't like or doesn't agree with, she surmises that they are being irrational. She points out the irrationality and tells the student to go into seclusion and meditate until they can overcome this emotion. If anyone ever tries to leave the school, that too is an act of irrationality and Infinity has no moral qualms about ordering her students to lock the dissenter up until the dissenter agrees that the desire to leave was an irrational emotion now surpassed.

Appearance- Tall, skinny white female, appearing to be in her 40s. She has a shaven head, wears a plain t-shirt and blue jeans, walks barefoot, has tanned skin, has piercing amber-colored eyes and a slack, emotionless face. When she speaks it is with a slow, calm, emotionless tone.

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR 7, CHM OOOO, END OOOOO, INL 8, SPD OO, STH OO, WIL OOOOO. 11 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic OOO	Specialties: Humanities, Sciences
Athletic OO	Specialty: Martial Arts: Control
Labor O	Specialty: Building/Repair
Medicine O	Specialty: Trauma
People O	Specialty: Performance

Paths

-Self O ("Freedom from the prejudice of self-concepts.")
Specialty: Not allowing her intentions to be read (+2).

Focus: Cold Showers

+Thinking O ("Applying logic to understanding the universe.")

Specialty: Deduction

Focus: Group Discussions

-Feeling OOOO ("Freeing the rational mind from the prejudices of emotions.")

Specialties: Attribute Plusses, Absorb Emotions

Focuses: Meditation, Lectures

Combat AVs

Kill OOO Control OOOOOO

Ruin OOOOO Exhaust OOO

+4 to Control or Exhaust when Infinity's opponent is attacking from anger or fear. +1 to combat when Infinity has examined the situation and had time to formulate a strategy. +1 to Combat when opponent has a higher combat AV.

Eccentricities- Note: As Infinity is trapped, she believes her Eccentricities are immutable laws about how one should live, rather than temporary experiments.

- Insists on being called a number rather than a name.
- Lives ascetically (cold showers, hard beds, bland food).
- Is celibate.
- Always tells everyone the truth as she knows it, making no attempts to spare their feelings.

continued next page

Typical Finite

This is one of the students of Infinity's school. Although they do not know it, they are Sorcerers who have been taught Path abilities by rote (rather than coming to their own understanding of the Paths).

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OOO, CHM OO, END OOOO, INL OOOO, SPD OO, STH OO, WIL OOOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic O	Specialty: Humanities
Traditional O	Specialty: Livelihood

Paths

-Feeling: Zero Specialties: Resist acting on emotions (+2), resist pain (+2).

Combat AVs

Kill OOO	Control OO
Ruin OOO	Exhaust OO

"Evil" Seekers

In Brief: Seekers have different moral judgments. An Evil Seeker is any Seeker whose actions you find unforgivable and who you cannot come to a compromise with.

Despite the many things they learn, Seekers don't find a single code of ethics imprinted in the fabric of the universe. Each Seeker must create his or her own code of ethics, and it is rare that those codes will completely match that of other Seekers. This difference is where conflicts may arise. For instance, a Seeker who believes in easing suffering by any means necessary may kidnap a drug addict and keep her prisoner in a basement while she detoxes. Another Seeker, who puts human free-will above all else, feels that the violation of the addict's rights does not justify the potential good of helping her overcome the addiction.

A different moral code is not a mistake (like the mistaken beliefs that keep Trapped Seekers trapped) and so there is no way to prompt a Seeker to adopt a different moral code.

Some Seekers value the search for truth and knowledge so much more than compassion and justice that they choose to experiment on unwilling humans. Some of these experiments are quite benign, others are very harmful: using dangerous psychoactives on people to learn about human psychology, destroying a small town to watch complex systems dissolving, creating Demons to observe their nature, etc.

Other Seekers may put increasing the 'beauty' of the world as their highest priority, and may decide that one way to do that is to kill ignorant, prejudiced, hateful, greedy or disruptive people.

Or, similarly, a Seeker may decide that the knowledge to be gained from exercising his or her 'dark side' (the petty, hateful, greedy side) outweighs the damage this dark side might do while in charge. Such a Seeker may even have a Jekyll-and-Hyde behavior, acting at times wise and compassionate and at other times cruel and ignorant.

It is quite natural that Seekers would have disagreements about what the right thing to do is, yet most find ways, some civil and some not, to resolve their disagreements. They may say "let's flip over it" or "do what you think is right and so will I, even if that means trying to stop you." After that disagreement is over, they can usually be friends again.

Yet when some Seeker's moral code is so diametrically opposed to your own that you, the Seeker, do not feel you can let that person continue to walk the Earth acting by that code, then that Seeker is, to you, an "Evil" Seeker. In other words, an Evil Seeker is one whose morality is so different from yours that it becomes your moral duty to stop them.

By this definition, it is not always other Seekers who are "Evil." Any Seeker PC might someday run into a Seeker who thinks they are the evil one.

Coyote, "Evil" Seeker

Coyote is a Seeker who likes to free people by destroying whatever those people own and depend on. He burns down people's houses, gets them fired from their jobs, forces them to move to new places (often new countries) and breaks up relationships. He has even been known to damage attractive people in ways that will make them ugly. By removing people's psychological anchors he is giving them a chance to surpass their normal mind-set, to learn they don't need the things that they thought they did, to become better and happier people. Some become better and happier people after encounters with Coyote, a few even become Seekers. Yet there are others who do not benefit from the experience, they only suffer. Coyote also likes to indulge his own sense of humor by tricking people in clever ways or causing what seem like bizarre coincidences.

By Coyote's moral code he is in the right: he gives people opportunities and if they don't take them it's their own fault. Other Seekers, however, think Coyote is unethical. Many Seekers have tried to stop Coyote, but so far he has turned out to be more powerful than any Seeker he has come up against.

Appearance: Native American male, small, compact, muscular, appearance of age varies (people think he is anywhere from 20 to 60), with long black hair braided in a ponytail, wearing a Hawaiian-print shirt, blue jeans and a canvas backpack with a wooden flute sticking out of it.

Attributes (includes plusses from Paths) AGY OOOO, AWR OOOOO, CHM OO, END OOOOO, INL OOOOO, SPD OOO, STH OOO, WIL OOOO, 14 Hit Points

Skills:

Academic O	Specialty: Humanities
Athletic OOO	Specialties: Martial Arts: Control, Outdoors
Creative O	Specialty: Music
Criminal O	Specialty: Trickery
Labor O	Specialty: Power
People O	Specialty: Social
Traditional OOOO	Specialties: Tricks, Livelihood

Paths

-Thought OOO ("Trusting the universe's wisdom.")

Specialties: Dumb Luck, combat plusses

Focuses: Smoking Tobacco Pipe, Woodcarving

-Self OO ("Don't be puffed up with ideas about self.")

Specialty: Unnoticeable

Focus: Whipping Self With Branch

-Harmony OOO ("Give up what you thought you needed.")

Specialties: Sabotage Harmony, Profile Harmony

Weaknesses

Focus: Vandalism

+Harmony OO ("Be open to the divine spirit that binds all creation.")

Specialty: Move through environments without leaving traces (+1)

Focus: Chanting

+Feeling O ("Humans are animals and should act more like animals.")

Specialty: Persuasion (+1)

Focus: Hallucinogens

Equipment:

Athletic: Outdoors O (hiking boots, rope, swim goggles)

Creative: Music O (flute)

Criminal: Trickery O (small disguise kit, small ID card making kit)

Traditional: Survival O (compass, fire starter, fishing line and hook, sleeping bag)

Eccentricities:

- Speaks in riddles, never giving a straight answer to a question.
- Often found whistling a tune.
- Does not carry or use money.
- Destroys that which people have come to depend on.
- Bathes in cold water every morning.

Combat AVs

Control 6 Exhaust OOOOO

Kill OOOO Ruin OOOO

+3 to combat engaged in without any premeditation, +2 to combat where opponent has a higher AV, +3 to Kill or Ruin surprise attacks, +2 to Control or Exhaust when trying to end combat without anyone getting hurt, +1 to Kill or Ruin when in an angry rage.

Prodigies

In Brief: Some children born with Path wisdom and abilities, typically lose them when they grow up.

A tiny percentage of children grow up with knowledge, wisdom and power that it usually takes a Seeker years to develop. Prodigies can be born in any place to any parents. In some cases it seems that the mind has developed differently from that of normal people with different strengths and weaknesses and a unique way of viewing the universe. In other cases it seems that, by random chance, the child never started making the mistakes that adult Seekers work so hard to stop making. Occasionally, brain damage can make someone a prodigy.

Most Prodigies have only one level in one of the Paths. More levels are exponentially more rare. Most Prodigies will eventually forget the wisdom they had as children as they are indoctrinated into the behaviors and beliefs of those around them. A few will keep their wisdom throughout their lives and a few will even become Seekers.

The reincarnated masters ("tulku" in Tibetan) of Buddhism, who show compassion, wisdom and insight from a young age are, to most Seekers, one example of Prodigies.

Sorcerers

In Brief: People who have learned Path abilities by rote without any of the accompanying wisdom.

These are people who have some of the same abilities of Seekers but without the understanding that accompanies those powers in Seekers. Seekers gain their abilities as a consequence of understanding the universe, sorcerers learn the ability by rote and have no understanding (or an incorrect understanding) of how their abilities work.

Most sorcerers can be traced back to something someone created by accident or something that a Seeker (usually one in a trap) taught to non-Seeker students. Once sorcerous techniques are created, Sorcerers can teach them to others, creating more Sorcerers. Sorcerers can thus easily come to outnumber Seekers, and to be found in high concentrations.

Most Sorcerers are students of an occult tradition, although some rationalize their power in religious or psychological terms.

Seekers usually consider Sorcerers dangerous, because they can do the things Seekers can but without the wisdom or knowledge to do them in a way that helps people.

Mechanically, treat a Sorcerer as having a specialty or specialties (but not levels) in a Path, allowing them to use certain Path abilities as if they had one level in that Path. Some sorcerers also have Focuses, allowing them to act as if they had two levels in those things they specialize in.

Advanced Practitioners

In Brief: Some adherents of traditions can gain Path levels even without being Seekers.

The lifestyle of a Seeker is the fastest and surest way a person can gain understanding, wisdom, power and self-improvement, but it is not the only way. As described in Chapter Four, there are many traditions that, if followed sincerely, can bring wisdom, insight and power. Advanced practitioners of these traditions can have

wisdom and abilities equivalent to Seeker Paths, but without ever having to have been a wandering sampler of various paths.

Advanced practitioners rarely have more than one Path level. They usually have Specialties and may or may not have Focuses.

Flora "Escepticita" Gutierrez, Young Prodigy

Everyone knows Flora was born "different." As a toddler, she was willful and disobedient. No punishment seemed to phase her except spankings and even those only caused her to try harder to not get caught. She would steal, lie and hit other people (even grown-ups). Then, when she was four, she asked her mom what "good" was and, when it was explained to her as "helping people, not hurting them," she said she wanted to be good. Her behavior changed and she stopped doing things that hurt other people, yet she didn't become any easier to live with.

She has spent every day since questioning everything her parents, teachers and peers tell her. After each explanation she stops, thinking and decides whether or not she believes they are right. For example: although her parents are very religious Catholics, Flora has decided she doesn't believe in God, and only goes to church because her parents force her to. Her constant questioning has earned her the nickname "escepticita" ("little skeptic"). Once, when her parents told her that coffee makes children sick, she didn't believe them and to prove them wrong she shoplifted and ate an entire jar of instant coffee. She had no physical complaints and her parents have been letting her drink coffee since then.

Flora doesn't care what others think of her and is unaffected by taunts, insults and ostracism of other kids. One time a group of girls at school tried to ambush and beat her up in the girls' bathroom, but she stabbed one of the girls in the eye with her house keys, and nobody has messed with her since. Flora is brutally honest with people (e.g. she will tell strangers she meets in the street "You are really very ugly.") She also swears quite a lot, both in Spanish and English. Most of the kids and adults who deal with her on a regular basis dislike her,

but Flora doesn't care. Flora also stands up against any sort of cruelty, prejudice or unfair treatment. She will even speak out on behalf of kids who have told Flora they hate her. She has virtually eliminated bullying in her school by speaking out against any form of picking-on or discriminating against other children. She is effective not because she is an imposing figure, but because she refuses to shut up about something until it is fixed. She has openly accused several people in her town (including teachers at her school) of being racist.

Lately, she has started asking adults how much money they make and telling those making little "that doesn't seem fair, they should be paying you more." Although most people brush this off as childish naïveté, her words have implanted subtle ideas that are causing the low-paid workers of her community to talk about demanding more.

Appearance- Young Hispanic girl about the size of a seven year old, although those who meet her are often very unsure about what her age is. She has short curly dark-brown hair, brown eyes, wears glasses, a faded grey Ninja Turtles shirt with stains and holes in it, blue jeans and sneakers. Her right leg is deformed and she walks using a pair of crutches.

Attributes- AGY O, AWR OO, CHM O, END OO, INL OO, SPD zero, STH O, WIL OOO. 6 Hit Points.

Paths

-Harmony OO ("Many things people say or do or believe are wrong.")

Specialty: Outsider empathy (+1)

Focus: None

Combat AVs

Kill OO Control O

Ruin O Exhaust O

+2 to Kill and Ruin AVs when making a no-holds-barred surprise attack.

Colton Donaldson, Sorcerer and Self-Help Guru

The son of fairly wealthy parents, Colton spent a year backpacking around Europe after graduating from college. There he met a Seeker (although he doesn't know her by that term) who became his traveling companion. The Seeker tried, and failed, to teach Colton about the Path of +Feeling. Colton never understood the basic wisdom of +Feeling, but was able, through practice, to learn +Feeling abilities. After returning from Europe, Colton got a corporate job and used his Path Abilities to rise through the ranks, becoming a well-paid executive. Finding corporate life boring, he quit and began his own company teaching +Feeling Path abilities to young executives.

Many powerful young executives, who have risen through the ranks after graduating the program, have required their subordinates to take the program (paying out of their own pockets, of course).

His company and program have gone through several name changes (currently the program is "the Power" and the company is "Power Unleashing, LLC"). Participants pay \$5,000 for a two-week program held in the conference facilities of some big hotel, usually located near a major airport. At the program, Colton and his assistants run the participants through several exercises and Colton gives nightly high-energy lectures. The program is about equal parts complete bullshit, learning Path abilities by rote, and Colton using his own abilities to make participants believe that their lives have been changed and that they should recommend the program to all their friends. The sessions can get very intense, with Colton, who is trying to make people lose control of their emotions, ridiculing, yelling at, and not allowing participants to leave for food, water or to use the bathroom. Some, but not all, participants leave the course with +Feeling Path abilities.

For the most part, Colton believes the bullshit he is selling. He believes he knows the secret to unlocking people's "hidden power" and that he is changing the lives of his students, making them better people, and that his program is worth every dollar that people pay. The truth is, though, that he does not understand +Feeling and thus doesn't understand how or why the Path abilities work.

Appearance- A handsome Caucasian male in his mid-thirties. He is of average height and build, but often people perceive him as being tall. He has short blonde hair in a conservative cut, is clean shaven, has intense green eyes, wears a silver stud in one ear, wears exquisitely tailored business-casual clothing in bold colors and a gold Rolex.

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OO, CHM OOOOO, END OOO, INL OOO, SPD OOO, STH OOO, WIL OOOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic OO Specialty: Business & Law

People OOO Specialities: Performance, Social

Paths

+Feeling: Zero

Specialties: Channeling, persuasion (+1)

Focus: Making a speech

Personality- Colton has become dangerously arrogant, believing he is the wisest and most powerful person he knows. Not only does he lie habitually, but he is in the habit of believing his own lies. He knows he can be cruel to his students, but he believes pain is a small price to pay for what they will gain. He thinks he is doing good in this world and would only knowingly damage another person if he thinks they are trying to sabotage or hurt him.

Personality Strengths & Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOO Weaknesses OOOO
(Thinks he knows all the answers.)

Self Strengths OOOO Weaknesses OOOOO
(Dangerously arrogant, megalomaniacal.)

Harmony Strengths OO Weaknesses OO
(Surrounds himself with sycophantic followers.)

Feeling Strengths OOOOO Weaknesses OOO
(Allows his passions to run wild, to guide him.)

Combat AVs

Kill OOO* Control OO

Ruin OO Exhaust OO**

*+1 if Colton can make a 3 difficulty Channeling roll.

**+1 if Colton can make a 1 difficulty Channeling roll.

Seeker Crafts

In Brief: Powerful Seekers can create objects that are supernormally good at one thing.

For the most part, the supernormal things that happen because of Seekers last only as long as those Seekers are around. The exception is that very powerful Seekers (and occasionally Prodigies) can use their incredible and unique understanding of the universe to create something that no normal person, no matter how skilled, could have. These crafts are supernormally effective, yet they are only effective for the exact purpose they were created for. A sword might be superb at slicing in half other swords, but for all other purposes it acts as a regular sword. A house designed by a Seekers might be an excellent place to recuperate from an illness, but in other respects it is a regular house. A painting might make anyone who has been in a fire burst into tears, but seem like only a moderately good painting to anyone else.

Why these crafts work as well as they do is a mystery to everyone, except perhaps to Seekers who happen to have come to the same conclusions about the universe as the creators.

A Seeker's craft contains no hidden magical force. Its power is in the details of its form. So, in theory, if it could be exactly reproduced the replica would have the same power. Yet in reality it is not so easy to replicate every detail. Things one wouldn't think matter end up making a big difference, like the oil a sword is wiped with, or the unique scent of a piece of canvas a painting was painted on. Those who have attempted to mass-produce Seeker Crafts have generally failed.

Demons

In Brief: A recurring bad luck or bad behavior that can adapt and grow stronger.

A Demon is a pattern of bad circumstances that a person repeatedly gets into. The pattern follows its host everywhere, reinforces its own existence, can adjust to new circumstances and, if unchecked, can grow stronger.

When regular people are infected by Demons, they typically fail to see them for what they really are. Ancient people may have seen them as harmful spirits, but modern people see mental illness, bad luck, a string of coincidences or a persistent character flaw.

The typical +Thought explanation is that a Demon is an unconscious pattern of behavior that has created a self-reinforcing feedback loop between the host and the world around the host. Take alcoholism for instance: an alcoholic drinks because

he cannot bear the state of his life, yet being a drunkard makes the circumstances of his life worse, so he is forced to drink even more. The fact that many people see their Demons as something outside themselves (e.g. as "bad luck") is only because people are unaware of how their own behaviors and nonverbal signals help bring about these situations.

The typical -Thought explanation is that a Demon is a real demon, an entity that lives inside you, that feeds by hurting you and those around you and that will grow more powerful if not fought or tamed.

People can have Demons, but so can communities. A family feud is one example of a Demon that can haunt a community for generations. For more on the Demons of communities, see p.168.

Nemesis

In Brief: A Demon of prejudice, infecting communities and attacking Seekers.

This is a family of Demons (or perhaps a single Demon, depending who you ask) that is of special interest to Seekers because it seems to “notice” and attack Seekers, and thus has often earned the name “Nemesis” among Seekers. This is a Demon of prejudice and elitism. The Demon uses discrimination to consolidate power among a few people in a community and to keep power concentrated there generation after generation. The discrimination can be based on ethnicity, on religion, on nationality, on level of education, or even on less tangible things like intelligence, social skills or attractiveness.

Integral to the Nemesis’ operation is a multi-level hierarchy. Each person on the hierarchy (except those on the very bottom) help enforce the social hierarchy because they fear losing whatever status that have in that hierarchy. The people at the top are given authority as preservers of the social hierarchy. The leaders of the community may have the power to decide where in the community’s hierarchy of status each person stands. It is also necessary, for the Nemesis to thrive, that the people at the bottom of the hierarchy suffer, so that everyone else fears being at the bottom.

The Nemesis can be found infecting communities to a greater or lesser degree all around the world, going back to the beginning of recorded history. Some Seekers even believe that Nazi Germany was an instance of the Demon growing to infect an entire country.

A classic (although less and less frequently encountered) example of a community ruled by the Nemesis is that of a town where the hierarchy is wealthy whites, poor whites and poor Blacks or Hispanics. The poor whites (via some organization like the KKK) work to help keep the Blacks or Hispanics “in line” and the wealthy whites are the ones who most benefit.

Another example is a town where the town’s wealthy and powerful people belong to one church. That church’s minister might be at the top of the social ladder, his inner circle next, then regular parishioners and, at the bottom, all of the town’s non-believers, agnostics or followers of other faiths.

Although the Nemesis usually infects a town, it can infect other communities, such as a corporation or a high school. In the high school the top of the hierarchy might be the clique with the school’s most popular kids (e.g. the football players and cheerleaders) with every other clique arranged along a social hierarchy. The most popular clique sets, or influences the position of, every other clique in the hierarchy.

The Nemesis is especially sensitive to anything which might threaten the social order. Seekers are always a threat to any unfair or dysfunctional social order, first because they meddle in other people’s business, and second because they represent authority gained personally, not granted by another. A Seeker’s power comes from within, not from money, property, heritage, degrees or authority granted by a government or church, and thus they are anathema to the artificial hierarchies that the Nemesis depends on.

The Demon notices Seekers when any person it has infected notices anyone acting in a Seeker-like way. The Demon makes each person it infects hyper-sensitive to anyone who acts differently, who doesn’t follow the mores of the community. When it notices a Seeker, the Demon attacks. The Demon’s primary weapon is prejudice and it bring that weapon to bear with full strength upon suspected Seekers. Word spreads quickly through the town about this new strange person and nearly everyone hearing this reacts, thanks to the Demon, with fear or anger.

Destroying the Demon involves destroying the social hierarchy and dethroning the community’s leaders. This usually means coming into conflict with nearly every person in the community. Yet in the few cases where the Nemesis had been destroyed, the majority of people in the community find themselves better off afterwards.

Sapphire was lying on a cold, musty concrete floor. Cold water was dripping down her face and soaking through her clothes. She wanted to wipe the water from her eyes, but found her wrists were secured together tightly behind her back. She rolled over, trying to blink away the water. Then she saw three bearded men, one of whom held a bucket. They were in a shed made of unpainted wood. There were no windows and only one door, which the bearded men stood before. The only light was from a bare, yellowish bulb from which cobwebs stretched.

One of the men spoke. He had a thick Middle-Eastern accent and a deep voice. "What did you do with the briefcase?"

Sapphire sat up, feeling a bit dizzy. "I hid it," she said plainly, "I put it somewhere that it wouldn't irradiate anyone and where nobody would be able to do anything stupid with it, like try to hurt innocent people."

The man stepped forward. "Tell me where you hid it," he commanded.

"I might," she said, "Tell me what you plan to do with it."

"Do not waste our time, whore. For every minute of our time you waste, we will make you pay." Her dug into a pocket of his jacket and pulled out a pair of old pliers. "We start by pulling out your fingernails, and go from there."

He looked to his companions, motioning towards Sapphire and saying something in Arabic which Sapphire knew meant "hold her down."

"Seriously though," Sapphire interrupted, "Sell me on this. You think you've got a good cause? You think you're in the right? Then you should be able to convince me."

He shook his head. "There is no way you would understand. You are an infidel, a corrupt, sinful whore, the product of a corrupt, sinful nation, where only money and power is valued."

"You may be wrong there," she said, with a tone of warning. "You say I wouldn't understand, yet I have studied Islam in some depth. For instance, when you said 'infidel' I imagine you are thinking of the Arabic word 'kāfir,' used in the Qur'an to mean

an unbeliever, or more literally 'someone who hides or covers the truth.' A kāfir is someone who denies the truth, even when it is staring him or her in the face. You see the truth in front of you and yet you deny it, out of arrogance, or spite or fear." Deflily, she put her feet under herself and rose to a standing position. "That is what kāfir means."

"So you claim to be a Muslim?" the man with the pliers demanded incredulously, looking Sapphire up and down, noting the tattoos, the black tanktop and jeans, the dyed black hair, the now-smudged lipstick and mascara. "You are not a Muslim. And even if you were, that would not save you."

"I don't claim to be anything," Sapphire answered, "because claiming means nothing. Claiming to be a Muslim doesn't make my will the will of the creator any more than claiming to be an Olympic weightlifter makes me strong." The man with the pliers opened his mouth to interrupt, but Sapphire pierced him with a glare. "What I can tell you," she continued, "is that I have taken the teachings of the prophet Muhammad, may the creator honor him, and I have submitted myself to those teachings. I have tried my best to hear those teachings without prejudice or judgement, without fear, to accept what they have to teach me, whether it was something I wanted to learn or not. Can you truly, before the creator, say the same about yourselves?"

He surged forward and grabbed a handful of black hair on the back of her head. Sapphire did not flinch. "You dare to questions our faith, you tattooed whore? We are mujadeen. We fight a holy war, are prepared to die in Allah's name, to protect the Muslim world from those who would invade it and corrupt it."

"You call yourself mujadeen?" she asked sharply, cutting him off. "You think you are engaged in Jihad? You think your willingness to give your life is the most you have to offer the creator? What you offer is a pittance, an insult. How about willingness to face down your worst fears? When will you offer that to your creator? How about facing down some uncertainty and doubt? How about an interpretation of the Qur'an that forces you to make moral judgments instead of relying on unwavering rules? Is that too much to do for your creator?"

continued next page

Chapter Four

TRADITIONS

About Traditions

In Brief: Traditions are wisdom and approaches to wisdom codified into a system or doctrine. Seekers must bypass Traditions to become Seekers, yet Traditions still affect their outlook. Traditions encountered on the road can help give wisdom to Seekers.

Traditions are wisdom, or approaches to finding wisdom, that has been codified into some body of beliefs or practices. Traditions can go by the names “religion,” “philosophy” or “discipline,” among others.

Traditions have two major roles in the lives of Seekers:

First, most Seekers were launched into Seekerdom by a Tradition. The Tradition gave the Seeker a taste of the wisdom and power that could be achieved. Although becoming a Seeker, by definition, involves surpassing the limitations of any particular

Tradition. Yet the Tradition a Seeker comes from can still color how a Seeker perceives or talks about things.

Second, when Seekers find wisdom on the road, wisdom that will help them grow and advance along the Paths, that wisdom often comes in the form of something from one of the Traditions. This could be someone accomplished in one of the Traditions (especially an Advanced Practitioner, p.66) who can teach the PC or lead the PCs to a new challenge, or it could be a book (or even something as small as a bumper sticker to the message in a fortune cookie) containing wisdom gleaned from one of these Traditions.

continued from previous page

“Shaytan is the author of all doubt,” came the soft voice of the man on the left.


“No,” countered Sapphire quickly. “To doubt one’s convictions is an act of humility before the creator. To deny doubt is to hide from the truth, to cover it, as a kāfir. You would use nuclear materials to hurt innocent people, most of whom believe in a kind and loving creator, most of whom respect Islam. You act out of fear and hatred and you call it the will of Allah, you call it Jihad.” She grinned darkly at them. “It’s amusing how backwards you’ve gotten everything. You are the kāfir and I am the mujahid. You hide from the truth, while I have spent my life trying to understand the will of the creator. After all, isn’t a Jihad a struggle to protect the innocent? I may be wrong, because I am a human and my understanding of the creator is imperfect, but my best guess is that the creator would want me to fight you.”

The man in the middle laughed, and his companions joined him. “Fight us? You think you could win?”

She stood proudly, her arms still secured behind her back. “You still judge me too quickly, kāfir. There is more to me than your limited flirting with spirituality could ever allow you to understand. And the fact is that I cannot lose. If I fight you until my last dying breath, then either I defeat you and leave this place, or I force you to kill me and you never find your stupid briefcase. Either way, I win.”

The three men balled their fists, hunched their shoulders.

“Now,” she hissed, her words seeming to come not from her lips but from the entire room, “Let me teach you what the words of the prophet, may the creator honor him, have taught me about real Jihad.” Swiftly, Sapphire turned and launched herself towards one of the shed’s bare walls. She ran up the wall, jumping off of it and towards the bare bulb hanging from the middle of the shed’s ceiling. Her head bent down, her shoulder shattered the bulb. Shards of glass flew, along with a glowing filament that winked out as it fell. Sapphire landed gracefully on the concrete floor. It was too dark for anyone to see her grin.



It is important to remember that a Seeker is a person who tries new things, but then moves on once they have learned what they can learn. Accordingly, a Seeker may adopt the practices or lifestyle of one of the Traditions (take a monk's vows, keep a Santeria shrine, meditate in a Zen temple, study the Torah with Kabbalists, sit in sweat lodges and eat peyote, etc.), and these can be valuable learning experiences for Seekers, but this doesn't mean the Seeker has limited himself or herself to those Traditions. A Seeker has the ability to learn from Traditions without being bound by them.

Do All Paths Lead to Seekerdom?

Does Satanism help some people to become Seekers? Scientology? Being a junkie? Being a construction worker?

Anyone can wake up one day and decide to become a Seeker. Yet there are some disciplines that make people more likely to become Seekers. Some only contribute a tiny bit to the likelihood of becoming a Seeker (e.g. Self-Help) and some contribute much more (e.g. Shamanism). What they all have in common is that they give a person a taste of wisdom that helps them understand more about the universe and helps them become better, more capable people. Each gives a sample of what they can only gain in great quantity by becoming Seekers.

So, any Tradition that offers a chance at both knowledge and self-improvement is a Tradition that can lead to Seekerdom. It doesn't matter how many people have done that Tradition "wrong" and gained nothing. As long as someone could do it right and gain something valuable, that could be the first step to becoming a Seeker.

America the Spiritual

America has a unique spiritual character. By most measurements, America is the most religious among prosperous, well-educated nations. Yet America also teems with fervent spiritual experimentation and diversity. In its short history, America has spawned spiritual traditions that have circled the globe, including Transcendentalism, New Thought, Spiritualism, several new branches of Christianity and new-age spirituality.

One factor in America's unique spiritual character is that religious freedom was set forth as a human right and religious tolerance (although often embattled) has remained an important part of the culture. Another factor is that America was an experiment, one guided by the belief that one could create a better government, and this sense of experimentation and faith that newer can be better has leaked into the spiritual culture of the country.

The restless desire to find a better way of being can be found among every type of American, in every walk of life. It can be seen when young urban professionals go to yoga studios after work, when gutterpunks with mohawks and septum piercings try to find happiness without the material comforts of a home, when graduate students meet in the coffee shops of small college towns to discuss Sartre and Derrida, when urban farmers compost their kitchen scraps and grow their own veggies, when couples attend classes on how to have more fulfilling sex lives, when working moms convert to Wicca after reading about it on the internet, and in any of the countless other spiritual, religious, philosophical or lifestyle experiments that are carried out every day in America.

African American Culture

There is a significant current in African American culture towards self-taught scholarship and philosophy. The ability to educate oneself through solitary reading, to be versed in a wide variety of books, and to be able to speak eloquently on philosophical matters is highly prized. This is because for most of African American history, access to education was both a key to improving economic status and something that was systematically denied to them. In places where regular education is difficult to obtain, the respect for self-taught scholarship is often the highest: in poor neighborhoods, in prisons and among homeless people.

There is also a feeling among some African Americans that mainstream scholarship and education is largely about telling White people's story and about describing the world as seen from the limited, often biased, perspective of White people. Through self-education, these African Americans hope to find or create a less biased worldview. African-American self-taught scholars often enter onto the Paths of -Harmony (seeking to root out subconscious prejudices and biases), +Harmony (seeking a more aboriginal understanding of the relations of people with each other and with the cosmos), +Self (because of the emphasis on pride to fight against internalizing negative stereotypes) or +Thought (from the emphasis on ideas and reason).

African Syncretisms

There are several Latin American and Caribbean religions that combine African polytheistic beliefs with Christianity. These include Vodoun (from Haiti, Dominican Republic and parts of Cuba, with Voodoo as a New Orleanian offshoot), Candomble and Umbanda (from Brazil and adjacent countries) and Santeria (from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic).

The syncretic religions believe in a creator god but that god is remote and unknowable and is seldom appealed to. More important are ancestor spirits and a large number of "loa" "orisha" or "orixa" (lesser gods) that are able to aid humans by interdicting in human matters. Most are associated with a Christian saint. Each of these lesser gods are active in the life of every practitioner, although there is one primary lesser god who is "in charge of" each person. Shrines are kept and offerings are made (including animal sacrifice) but the most important rites are dances wherein practitioners are possessed by these beings.

Each group calls these beings by different names and each group has a few major beings that are unique to that region. Some major members of the Haitian pantheon are:

- **Papa Legba** (male loa of crossroads, pranks and compacts, a messenger to other loa)
- **Damballa** (male loa of serpents, co-creator of the universe)
- **Ayida-Wedo** (female loa of rainbows, co-creator of the universe)
- **Erzulie** (female loa of love, sensuality, femininity, rivers and freshwater)
- **Obatala** (male chief of the loa and creator of humanity)
- **Chango** (male loa of war, justice, lightning and dance)
- **Oggun** (male loa of hunting, plants, tools, minerals, wild animals)
- **Baron Samedi** (male loa of the dead and death)
- **Maman Brigitte** (female loa of thunder, storms, cemeteries, war, passage to the afterlife)

When practitioners are possessed, the loa speak and act through them. The practitioners show remarkable abilities: amazing strength, bravery, fortitude, charisma, the ability to eat glass and touch fire without being harmed, etc. Some Seekers on the Path of +Self would say that "possession" is simply a trick to allow practitioners to utilize more of their inherent human potential. Some practitioners

of African Syncretisms become Seekers on the Path of +Self and hold an abstract belief that the loa are both real and also represent the untapped power of human potential.

Other syncretic practitioners are led into Seekerdom by their religions' emphasis on balance between cosmic forces, between people and the cosmos and between people and their communities. These are typically led to the Path of +Harmony.

Alternative Medicine

A culture's ancient healing beliefs often persist even after other elements of the culture have been modernized. These traditions tend to view a human as a being whose internal forces must be kept in balance (ying with yang, hot with cold, the four 'humours' with each other) and who must stay in a harmonious relationship with other forces. The practices of these healing traditions vary: herbs, dancing, singing, piercing with needles, massage, etc. but

the goal is always to restore the patient's internal and/or external harmony.

Alternative Medicine can be studied by Westerners who are self-consciously seeking an alternative to modern medicine, or by members of traditional cultures who see it as normal medicine. Either way, these traditions lead some to Seekerdom, almost always starting on the path of +Harmony.

Anthropology/Sociology

These are the study of the beliefs, traditions and rules of human cultures and societies. Students of these fields quickly become aware that everyone thinks the arbitrary choices of their particular culture or society are universal, undeniable truths. Few ever think to question those "truths" that they have grown up with, whether that be that witches cause crop failures or that manic depression is an "illness." The realization that a culture's truths are mistaken for universal truths leads to "cultural relativism": trying to see truths as malleable and subjective rather than absolute,

while acknowledging that our membership in a culture makes it difficult us to see anything objectively. The skepticism about our own culture and its beliefs and judgments can often lead to Seekerdom via the Path of -Harmony or -Feeling.

Anthropology can also lead to the path of Seekerdom by exposing anthropologists, who often look at the facets of other cultures from a utilitarian ("how does this help them") viewpoint, to the wisdom or utility of other Traditions, e.g. Shamanism (p.92).

Art

As a tradition, art doesn't have many beliefs, except the belief that great art requires not only technical skill but the ability to tap into and express one's true emotions.

Just as an artist learns that there are more shades and tones of color than there are words for, the discipline of art teaches an artist to appreciate the complexity, depth and power of emotion. Many artists feel that by channeling their emotions they are tapping into a power that can overcome illness, lack of sleep, the effects of drugs, etc.

Many artists are influenced by the schools of Dadaism and Surrealism, both of which

are as much philosophies as they are artistic styles. Both are anti-thought. Dadaism is an attempt to destroy all pre-conceived notions, to reveal and revel in a world that makes no sense. Surrealism is about tapping into one's subconscious as a source of information.

Artists who become Seekers usually start on the Path of +Feeling. The Paths of -Thought (a state of heightened creativity demands the suppression of thought) and +Self (it's not a long leap from learning to express oneself to learning to feel strongly about selfhood) are also common.

Athletics

To achieve the highest levels of most sports requires high self-confidence and an extremely strict code of self-discipline. It also requires learning to ignore one's feelings, e.g. play through pain, ignore fear

and develop a near inexhaustible supply of self-confidence. Athletes who become Seekers typically start out on the Paths of +Self or -Feeling.

Body Modification

In the modern West, the body modification movement finds much in common with ancient traditions that use self-torture and painful rituals. Body Modders experience ecstasy and a boost in self-confidence from enduring the pain of tattoos, piercings, even

suspension by hooks. Body modders who become Seekers typically end up on the Paths of +Self, or (because they are purposefully marking themselves as outside the mainstream) of -Harmony.

Brujeria

Just as the healing techniques of shamanism often survive long after the shamanic worldview is gone (see Alternative Medicine), so do the shamanic techniques of hurting people. The latter typically goes underground and is passed from generation to generation as a secret society. The stories about these groups grow larger with each retelling, while the societies themselves stay tiny, until the fiction almost completely overwhelms the reality. The "witches" of Europe might once have been a cult who passed down harmful shamanic practices, but such a cult, if it ever existed, was wiped out long ago. Most of those persecuted as witches were innocent scapegoats and the "witchcraft" of today is a modern reconstruction.

In Latin America these traditions are collectively called Brujeria ("witchcraft") and the practitioners Brujas (f) and Brujos (m). Again, the myth of Brujeria is much larger than the reality, but it is an actual tradition with real adherents a few of which become Seekers.

Those who actually practice Brujeria don't necessarily think of themselves as evil any more than a gun owner does. They think of themselves as learning and teaching power, power that can be as easily used for self-defense as it can for evil.

The discipline of Brujeria usually involves taking dangerous deliriant herbs containing drugs of the atropine family. Dealing with the unpleasant hallucinogens and delusions caused by these drugs requires practitioners to develop an incredible strength of will. The drugs also

cause students to believe wholeheartedly that they are physically, mentally and spiritually powerful. They often learn to believe that they can transform themselves into powerful animals to prowl, travel and fight with extreme skill.

Students of Brujeria are taught about different poisons and how to use them. They are taught to resist the effects of these poisons should they accidentally poison themselves. They are also taught how fragile the health of people, animals and communities are, how little things can disrupt that health, and how one small act of sabotage can have a cascading effect that can affect entire communities.

Brujas and Brujos are also taught the power of being an outsider, of refusing to accept group morality and taboos and believe the consensus reality. Brujeria teaches its students to act like other people, but to think of themselves as a class apart from other people. In cultures where collectivism is the standard, Brujeria teaches that it is possible to get away with being selfish.

When Brujeria leads to Seekerdom, the Seekers usually start out onto either the Path of +Self (because of the emphasis on developing strength of will, believing oneself to be powerful and taking on the identity of a powerful animal) or the Path of -Harmony (because of the emphasis on being an outsider and disrupting the harmony of others).

Buddhism

"I gained nothing at all from Supreme Enlightenment, and for that very reason it is called Supreme Enlightenment."

-Gautama Buddha

Buddhism is unique among major organized religions in that (at least at its more philosophical levels) it is not centered around the worship of a higher power. Instead, Buddhism is about easing, and eventually eliminating, a soul's suffering by successive improvements of that soul. Buddhists believe that souls are reincarnated and that each incarnation includes suffering. We unenlightened sentient beings bring suffering upon ourselves. We cause our own suffering by believing in things that don't exist, by wanting things we can't have or don't need, and by karma, a natural law which causes suffering we cause (either to ourselves or to others) to be revisited on us later.

Buddhism teaches people recognize and let go of the desires and beliefs that cause suffering and to avoid hurting others so that less bad karma will come back to affect the practitioner. The end goal, although it may take many lifetimes to achieve, is a state of no desires and no bad karma, allowing escape from the cycle of reincarnations into a state where one both exists and does not exist (nirvana). This is the state of enlightenment, believed to have been achieved by Gautama Buddha, who then taught others how to achieve it, thus creating the Buddhist religion.

A major tenet of Buddhism is that all existence is empty. The universe does not exist and we only believe it exists because we desire it to. Life, death, even suffering itself are thus all meaningless. The soul itself only exists because it has a desire to exist. Buddhists thus class beliefs and desires as the same thing: a belief that a chair exists is really a collective desire that it should exist. Outside, behind, before, after and in-between the illusion of reality (samsara) is a state of perfect non-existence (sunyata) where all distinctions are false. Alive and

dead, existing and not-existing, real and fictional, all are meaningless in sunyata. It is because things don't exist and distinctions don't matter that wanting things and caring about distinctions causes suffering.

There are three major branches of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Theravadans believe that there is only one real way to progress toward enlightenment: living as a monk or nun. In Theravadan countries, most of the population will spend a few years living as a celibate monk or nun before starting a family. A minority will stay monks or nuns all their lives.

Mahayana ('larger vehicle') is based on the idea that there are many ways to progress towards enlightenment. Some ways are good for some people, others for other people. Some Mahayana Buddhists become monks or nuns, others are lay practitioners. One practice within Mahayana Buddhism is Zen ('sitting') which focuses on achieving brief flashes of enlightenment when the mind is cleared of all thought. These flashes are achieved via meditation, an insolvable riddle, or a sudden shock.

Vajrayana Buddhism, which was developed in the isolated region of Tibet, teaches that there are shortcuts to enlightenment that can allow one to achieve enlightenment in a single lifetime. These techniques can be psychologically dangerous, so aren't for everyone. Instead of slowly extinguishing passions, these techniques use passion to destroy passions: anger to destroy fear, lust to destroy anger, etc. Some of these practices involve ritual sex. Another Vajrayana practice, Chod, involves going to a graveyard and meditating on one's own death to the point that the practitioner actually believes he or she is dying. Overcoming the fear of death can allow the practitioner to overcome

BUDDHISM

his or her attachments to beliefs about self. Vajrayana, although the smallest subtype of Buddhism, is growing rapidly because Tibetan communities in exile have been teaching the religion to Western converts.

Buddhists are a small minority of the world's population, yet Buddhism has made significant inroads into the US, both among Asian immigrants and their descendents, and among non-Asians who have adopted Buddhism, mostly as an alternative to monotheism. Many non-Asian Buddhists can trace their beliefs back to the 1960s, a time when there was a lot of hope that wisdom from Asian countries could help solve some of the Western world's problems.

America has millions of 'armchair Buddhists': people who don't belong to

a Buddhist community, don't attend a Buddhist church, don't even necessarily identify as Buddhist, yet read about Buddhism, believe many of the tenets of Buddhism and try to find ways to put Buddhist principles to work in their everyday lives.

The Buddhist focus on not causing suffering leads many Buddhists to the Path of +Harmony. The concept that all beliefs are false leads many Buddhists, especially practitioners of Zen, to the Path of -Thought. The work of extinguishing passions leads many to the Path of -Feeling and giving up attachments to ideas of self leads many (especially Vajrayana Chod practitioners) to the Path of -Self. Those Vajrayana practitioners who try to use passion to combat passion occasionally find themselves on the Path of +Feeling.

Clowning

Almost every culture has a class of people whose job it is to make others laugh. In many aboriginal cultures the clown has an important and sacred role in ceremonies. Whether a dancer in a mask doing a parody of an animal or spirit, or a stand-up comedian making wry observations about the world, all clowns have one thing in common: they shine a light on the failings, especially the stupidity, of others. An important duty of a clown is to keep people from taking themselves too seriously. Thus, as a discipline, clowning hones skepticism. Clowns see the downside of every other tradition. For example: too much deep thought leaves you with your head in the clouds, bereft of common

sense; being too holy and righteous makes you a 'stiff' who doesn't know how to have fun. This broad skepticism of everything, can, itself, lead to Seekerdom.

Clowning can lead to the Path of -Thought when clowns realize that the smartest, most educated people do just as many stupid things as anyone else. It can lead to the Path of -Self when the Clown decides that most people are 'full of themselves,' puffed up with ideas about themselves that, to an objective outsider, are ridiculous. Less often, Clowning leads to -Harmony (when the clown decides most people are sheep) or -Feeling (when the clown decides that emotions are the cause of most stupidity).

Computer Science

This field, and especially the sub-field of artificial intelligence, has contributed a few Seekers to the Path of +Thought because of the focus on how best to process information and make rational decisions.

Curanderismo

Native Latin American healing traditions have largely survived in a pan-Latin-American tradition known as Curanderismo. Curanderismo is found most often in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Colombia and Cuba and among communities of immigrants from these countries living abroad. Influences include Catholicism, African beliefs, Native American shamanism, 19th century Spiritualism and mediumship and even ancient Greek healing treatises.

Each country has its own Curanderismo traditions incorporating native beliefs and plants. Some South American curanderos, for instance, use ayahuasca, a native admixture of hallucinogenic plants.

Curanderos can be male or female, though the majority are female.

Curanderismo, as the name implies, is primarily a system of healing practices. Diseases are believed to be caused by malevolent spirits, attack by brujos (see Brujeria, p.76) or by an imbalance of humors (yellow bile, black bile, blood, phlegm), or imbalance of “hot” and “cold” in the body (usually caused by diet).

Curanderos believe that it is possible to operate on three different levels. The majority of Curanderos operate only on the material level: they use material things (e.g. herbs, eggs, oils) to cure illnesses. The spiritual level is less common and those who work on this level can cure via candles, prayers and benevolent spirits. The mental level is the least common. Those who operate on the mental level can effect the world and effect cures via power of the mind alone. The mental level is considered the highest level of Curanderismo.

Curanderos who become Seekers usually enter onto the Path of +Harmony.

Existentialism

Existentialism was created in the mid-20th-century by French writers and philosophers, drawing inspiration from, among other things, the theories of Freud and Karl Marx. Existentialism is based on atheism (the belief that there is no God), but it is more than just Atheism. While Atheism is just the statement of belief (there is no God), Existentialism is about the highly personal journey of how one comes to deal with living in a godless universe.

Existentialists say that since the universe and humans have no intelligent creator, human lives have no inherent meaning. If someone creates a tool (e.g. a paper cutter) then that tool has an inherent job (to cut paper) and can be judged as good or bad depending on how well it does that job (how well it cuts paper). Humans have no creator and thus no inherent purpose and no inherent means of being judged as “good” or “bad.”

The only meaning in human lives is that meaning which humans give to their own lives. In most Existentialist fiction the hero goes through a crisis where he or she first feels sadness and horror (the “existential crisis”) about the lack of meaning to the universe and then finds joy in the ultimate freedom of it. This freedom does not absolve people of responsibility. Since people have ultimate freedom they cannot blame biology or experiences for how they’ve turned out. People must take responsibility for their own character flaws. It is this personal journey, of building one’s own meaning in life, one’s own values, that launches many Existentialists onto the path of Seekerdom.

Existentialists who become Seekers usually enter onto the Path of -Harmony (because of the emphasis on creating one’s own meanings, not accepting those assigned by culture or belief systems) or +Self (because of the emphasis on humans’ freedom to choose what kind of people they are going to be).

Feminism/Ethnic Studies/Queer Studies

These are all recently created academic disciplines, all with a common purpose: to counterbalance mainstream academia's over-emphasis on the stories, ideas and viewpoints of heterosexual white males. Students of the disciplines are critical of mainstream science and philosophy. They think that mainstream science and philosophy are good at finding "truth" as defined in the Western tradition, but that there are other types of truth that are equally valid. For every objective scientific truth, there are many more subjective truths about perceptions, point of view and feelings, that are just as important.

Much of Western Culture is predicated on the idea that anything that destroys something else is superior to that which it destroyed.

If pantheism destroys shamanism and monotheism destroys pantheism, then monotheism is the superior religion. If militaristic nation-states conquer peaceful hunter gatherers, then the nation states are superior societies. Those in feminist/ethnic/queer studies are critical of this idea, and this often sends them looking for value among the traditions and beliefs of conquered peoples.

Those from these traditions who become Seekers often come to the Path of +Feeling, from their study of subjective truths, to -Thought, from their criticism of Western standards of logic and knowledge, and to +Harmony from their study of collectivist rather than individualistic societies.

Fictional Traditions

Occasionally, a discipline from a piece of fiction will be enough to launch a person into Seekerdom. These fictional traditions are often modeled off of real traditions. Their primary value is that they provide a goal that students can aspire to. Just as Christianity provides Jesus or Buddhism provides Gautama Buddha, the fictional traditions might provide a wise wizard or mystic knight. A follower of such a tradition would argue that it doesn't matter if the figure being aspired to is real or not, so long as aspiring to be like them makes one a better person.

Most fictional traditions come from the beloved classics of sci-fi and fantasy fiction. There are also fictional occult and shamanistic traditions. The highly popular Carlos Castaneda books contain the teachings of a fictional Yaqui shaman, yet the fact that this shaman is fictional doesn't mean that the series hasn't given many a Path to wisdom and even launched a few into Seekerdom.

The most common starting Paths for those that come from fictional traditions are +Self, -Feeling and -Thought.

Freedom

Rather than being led to Seekerdom by the wisdom inherent in some tradition or gleaned through some discipline, some are made into Seekers just by the act of leaving the confines of their lives. This could be a literal escape, e.g. from a prison, human trafficking or abusive household, or it could be an escape from self-imposed limitations. For example: *a miserable workaholic might one day become so stressed and*

unhappy that she decides to quit her job and become a homeless wanderer. The son of a rich industrialist, who has been groomed to believe it is his destiny to take over the family business, might decide instead to give up everything and live by his wits.

Freemasonry

Almost every fraternal organization around today is based in some way on the Masons. Many are “appendant bodies”: orders that are open only to Masons and that provide additional levels of initiation while remaining a distinct organization from the Masons. Others are completely separate organizations who modeled themselves after the Masons. These freemasonry-influenced groups range from the Knights of Columbus, founded as a Catholic alternative to the Masons, to the Golden Dawn, one of the most famous and influential occult orders (see Occultism/Magick, p.82).

For most members of the Masons and freemasonry-inspired orders, their group is just a means to meet and socialize with peers. Some members, though, take

seriously the stated goal of these groups to “elevate the character” of their members. This goal comes with a philosophy, told mostly through allegorical tales and play-acting, that focuses on being righteous, self-sufficient, true to one’s principles and choosing to do the right thing no matter the circumstances. Out of the millions of masons and members of freemasonry-inspired orders worldwide, a handful dedicate themselves to elevating their character to such a great degree that they become Seekers.

Those who become Seekers often enter onto the Paths of +Self (because of the emphasis on righteousness and principles), of -Feeling (because of the emphasis on doing what’s right despite fear) and of -Harmony (because of the emphasis on doing what’s right regardless of what others are doing).

Hippies

The 1960s saw one of the largest and most ambitious counterculture movements of all time, one which launched many Seekers. Cultural change built up such momentum that many believed that every flaw in Western culture would be fixed. As a discipline, hippies tried to cultivate in themselves the qualities they thought the culture of their parents lacked.

Although hippies did not transform Western culture into what they hoped it might be, they did have a significant effect on the culture. The 60s counterculture movement also served as a progenitor to the New Age movement and every subsequent youth counterculture movement.

Even today, hippies exist as a subculture, made up of holdovers from the 60s who refused to reintegrate into mainstream society as well as those from later generations who joined this subculture.

The emphasis on avoiding the mistakes of the mainstream leads some Hippies to the Path of -Harmony, while the emphasis on peace and love leads some to the Path of +Harmony. The use of hallucinogens and idea that normal people can be ‘freed’ by being ‘freaked out’ leads some to the Path of -Thought. The emphasis on art, creativity, free love and self-expression leads some to the Path of +Feeling.

Hippies thought mainstream culture was...	So they tried to be...
Sexually repressive.	Free and open with their sexuality.
Too concerned with rules.	Free spirits.
Not creative enough.	Wildly artistic.
Not in touch with their feelings.	Openly emotional.
Aggressive and competitive.	Peaceful, compassionate and loving.
Obsessed with cleanliness and hygiene.	Unconcerned with arbitrary standards of cleanliness.
Greedy, obsessed with being middle or upper-class.	Happy being poor and homeless.
Prejudiced.	Unprejudiced.
Not respectful of the wisdom of other cultures.	Willing to learn from other cultures.

Kabbalah

This is mystic Judaism, based on the idea that the Torah (the holy texts of Judaism, the Old Testament of Christianity) contains both literal truths, allegorical truths, and hidden, esoteric truths. The beliefs of Kabbalah are said to be found in the Torah's hidden truths. Kabbalah as we know it today was first codified in the 13th Century in a book known as the Zohar.

The basic cosmology of Kabbalah is that everything in the universe emanates from God. God himself is unknowable, transcending all distinctions, and can only be perceived and known through his emanations (each of which are lesser than God himself). The emanations are continuous: all of existence depends, moment by moment, on God for its continued being.

Kabbalah is most commonly found among Hasidic Jews. In more recent times, Kabbalistic ideas have become separated from Judaism itself, spawning Christian, Muslim and Occult Kabbalist doctrines.

Kabbalistic practices include study of Kabbalistic texts as well as the Torah (including marathon all-night Torah study sessions), philosophy, contemplation, meditation on divine names and meditation on "cleaving to" God. Study and prayer sometimes leads Kabbalists to deep trance-like altered states of consciousness.

Some forms of Kabbalah feature the practice of magic via the use of angelic names and the magical power of Hebrew letters, especially in amulets. Hasidic kabbalists typically do not practice magic, preferring instead to internalize the mysticism of Kabbalah.

When Kabbalah leads to the path of Seekerdom, it often leads to the Path of +Thought (because of the focus on reading, reason and contemplation), +Harmony (because of the emphasis on understanding all things as an emanation of the divine) or -Thought (because of the mystical doctrines of coming to know the unknowable through meditation and altered states of consciousness).

Occultism/Magick

These are two of many names for modern Western occultism. Modern occultism draws from many sources: from Jewish Kabbalah, from alchemy (interpreted as an attempt to refine and transmute the spirit, rather than refine and transmute matter), from Greek Neo-Platonism, from freemasonry, from gnosticism and from various pagan traditions. Magick makes heavy use of ritual. The basic worldview, similar to Kabbalah, is that every thing (including lesser deities) is an emanation of the Godhead. Some things,

like physical matter, are farther removed from divinity and power than others. The goal of most occult practice is to purify the self, to connect it with its inherent divinity and with the will of the universe (which are actually the same thing). The ability to affect people and things via spells is only a by-product of this larger goal. Spells are mostly used to remove anything that stands in the way of one's destiny. Practitioners of Occultism often enter into the Path of +Self, and less often onto the Path of +Feeling or -Thought.

Martial Arts

Most martial arts are not simply about learning to beat people up: they are a discipline with strong philosophical underpinnings. Most Eastern martial arts can trace their practices back to Buddhist (p.77) and Taoist (p.95) ideas. Many martial arts could even be described as a "moving meditation."

All martial arts teach high-level practitioners to act without their internal dialogues getting in the way or slowing them down. Thus those who come to Seekerdom via martial arts often first come to the Path of -Thought. A few enter onto the Path of +Self, as some martial arts teach people to project self-confidence as a weapon. A few, whose arts teach non-violent self-defense, enter onto the Path of +Harmony.

Mathematics

Today, people rarely associate academic mathematics with philosophy or mysticism, yet math used to be inseparable from those. The idea of numbers as perfect ideals, concepts whose meaning, properties and importance are unaffected by anything going on in the real world, can be traced back to Plato's idea of perfect forms (which was also the basis of much of western occultism).

Much of mathematics is either too abstract (e.g. trying to prove whether all imaginary nine-dimensional shapes have a certain property) or too simplistic (e.g. computing compound interest on a loan) to lead to Seekerdom. There are some fields of math, however, practical enough to show real-world usefulness yet complicated enough that they can enlighten people to new truths about the world around them. These are the fields that lead to Seekerdom.

Probability and statistics answer the important question: from what I can see and measure around me, what can I know about the world at large? For instance, if you poll a handful of people about their opinions, what do their answers let you guess about the population as a whole and how confident can you be about those assumptions? Probability and statistics are also the backbone of modern science and medicine, because statistics is necessary to separate the real effects of a treatment or experimental condition from the effects of random chance. In other words, statistics separates those things that are actually correlated from those that only appear to be because of chance. Statistics gives insights into how we generalize from what we observe to truths about the world as a whole.

Game theory looks at people's choices as strategies within a game. The efficacy of those choices can be computed. The classic problem in game theory is the prisoner's dilemma: imagine that you and your fellow criminals have been caught by the police. The police only have enough evidence to charge you with a lesser offense than the

offense you actually committed. If you and your compatriots stay silent, you'll all be convicted of the lesser offense. If one of you squeals, that person will go free while the rest will be convicted of the greater offense. Each prisoner has no idea what the other prisoners are going to do. The dilemma is whether the best strategy is to squeal or stay silent.

Game theory is surprisingly useful in predicting and explaining people's choices and suggesting the optimum choice in a broad range of situations: international diplomacy, economic strategies, couples counseling, even dealing with traffic congestion. Game theory tells us that, despite the prejudice of many Westerners towards "winning" by making others lose, most games with real world analogues have outcomes where everybody can win ("non-zero sum" outcomes) and cooperating to achieve these outcomes is usually a good strategy.

Chaos theory, also called complexity theory, deals with things that, until recently, mathematicians thought had too many independently active parts to be accurately modeled, such as the weather, or an economy, or an ecosystem. What mathematicians are discovering is that these very complex systems often have self-organizing principles. Patterns can develop in the chaos and seemingly unimportant factors can have big effects on the whole system.

Mathematicians who become Seekers usually end up on the Path of +Thought after coming to believe that mathematical principles can be used to understand and predict much about the things that go on around us.

A smaller number enter on to the Path of +Harmony when their study of chaos shows them that the fate of every part of a system is strongly effected by the fate of any other piece, and their study of game theory shows them that cooperation, when it can be achieved, is almost always the best strategy.

How Mathematicians View:

Supernormal Abilities: Seekers, Prodigies, Sorcerers and Advanced Practitioners are outliers on the natural bell-curve of human ability. Not impossible, merely unlikely and therefore rarely seen.

The Coincidences That Plague the Lives of Seekers: The self-organizing principle of seemingly random things. Seekers seem to move around randomly, but really they follow rules (even if they themselves are not aware of what those rules are) and thus fall into recognizable patterns.

“Demons”: These are no more “alive” or “sentient” than a hurricane is. They are self-sustaining patterns in the normally chaotic systems inside people or that people are parts of. The patterns remain as long as the forces that fuel them do. Because they are self-reinforcing they can change and move, seeming to adapt to changes in their environment.

Military

In nearly every culture there is a discipline for those that will go to war, from the braves of some Native American cultures, to Japanese Samurai, to the modern military. These disciplines have their own traditions and rituals meant to help warriors achieve bravery and calm focus in battle. They also tend to emphasize personal codes of honor. A major component of these traditions are austerities. Many Native American warriors, for example, would forgo sex, sleep on the hard ground and

eat very simple meals before a battle. In the modern military there are grueling boot camps, designed not merely to train the body and teach skills but to harden the wills of soldiers.

Those from the disciplines of warriors who become Seekers usually go to the Path of -Feeling (because of the emphasis on resisting fear and doing without life's pleasures) or the Path of +Self (because of the emphasis on personal honor and bravery).

Monotheism

This category encompasses Christianity, Judaism and Islam as well as lesser known religions (Zoroastrianism, Baha'i, etc.). Despite their outward differences, the core principles of these religions are very similar.

Although the majority of the world's people are believers in some form of monotheism, only a very tiny minority become Seekers (and Seekers from monotheistic traditions make up a significant portion of, but are not an overwhelming majority of, Seekers). This is because most people are content to engage in their faith at a fairly passive level: reading holy books, listening to sermons, praying, making offerings, asking forgiveness for sins, etc. This type

of religious practice asks relatively little from its followers, especially in terms of personal change.

A small number of believers, however, feel strongly enough about their faith that they seek out new religious ideas and practices and try to radically change themselves in order to be closer to the divine. And of those, many fall into the trap of worshipping the beliefs and rules of their particular religion rather than worshipping the divine itself. Those who avoid this trap are those likely to become Seekers. And because of the incredible variety of beliefs, techniques and schools of thought in monotheism, Seekers from the traditions of monotheism can start in any and all of the Paths.

Monotheists who enter onto the Path of +Thought tend to be from traditions that put a high value on scholarship, philosophy and reason, such as the Jesuit order of Catholicism or Jewish rabbis. Those who enter onto the Path of -Thought are mostly mystics, such as Sufis, Jewish Kabbalists or Christian Quakers.

The Path of -Self is the most popular starting Path for those from the monotheistic branches and schools that stress humility. Islam tends to put the most emphasis on humility, the name Islam meaning, literally, "to submit." Mystics are also likely to see value in removing selfhood.

The Path of +Self, by contrast, is much more rare. This could be an evangelical preacher who thinks God has given him the power to win hearts and minds, or a Jihadist in the original sense (meaning a righteous warrior, and not necessarily a terrorist) who thinks Allah has given her the strength and bravery to defend innocents against evil.

The Path of -Harmony is little found where monotheism is in the mainstream. Yet those who find themselves in a persecuted religious minority may come to the Path of -Harmony. Christians often take inspiration from the martyrs of the past, who died rather than denying their beliefs. Jews have had a history, both ancient and recent, of preserving their culture and beliefs even while among a hostile majority.

In Judaism, the principle of pikuach nefesh places the importance of life above almost everything else, and teaches that to save a life one should transgress most religious laws (and, certainly, the lesser laws of government or culture). This dogged pursuit of life above all else can also lead to the Path of -Harmony.

The Path of +Harmony is also popular among monotheists, since each monotheistic religion is full of admonitions to "love thy neighbor," "turn the other cheek" and to engage in charity, forgiveness, toler-

ance and peace. Even the Jihad of Islam is meant to be used only in defense of the innocent and only after all peaceful options have been exhausted. Although these admonitions are ignored by many modern practitioners, they are seen as the most important message of these religions by many who become Seekers.

The Path of -Feeling is usually the domain of monotheistic ascetics (often monks and nuns) who try to rid the mind of worldly desires and emotions to better experience the love of the creator.

The Path of +Feeling is fairly rare as a starting Path for monotheists. It is most common among Sufis (p.95), who use singing, music and dance to achieve ecstatic trances, and Southern Protestants, who are encouraged to express a full range of emotions, most importantly joy, at religious services.

Common Ground Between Atheists and Believers

Although they start from very different places, Seekers who believe in a God and those who believe in none, when they compare notes, often find that they have a lot in common. Atheists often come to the conclusion that, to have a life worth living, one must organize one's life around certain principles, such as compassion, love, truth, beauty and/or justice. Monotheists, on the other hand, choose to believe that at the center of creation is a being who personifies compassion, love, truth, beauty and/or justice. Either way of seeing it can lead Seekers to make similar choices and adopt similar goals for themselves. In fact, some Seekers switch belief systems entirely, or come to believe, in a very abstract way, that both are true, with little change to their day-to-day lifestyle or behavior.

Mysticism

This is an attempt to transform oneself by developing awareness of or union with the divine. Most mystical traditions are monotheistic (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.). Mystic traditions make use of prayer, meditation, asceticism, poverty, and sometimes hermitage. Mystics often experience feelings of ecstasy, the awareness of the divine at work in ordinary things and ordinary occurrences, ability to perform miracles (what some might call supernormal abilities) and even physical

changes (e.g. stigmata). Mystics can enter onto the Path of -Self (because of the emphasis on giving up ego in preference for divine presence), -Thought (because of the emphasis on divine inspiration), -Feeling (because of the emphasis on asceticism and giving up all feelings other than divine love) or +Harmony (because of the emphasis on the harmony between mystics, the divine and creation).

Native American Spirituality

There is a rich and varied field of Native American traditions. Pre-contact native beliefs varied considerably between cultural groups. Furthermore, each tribe has weathered contact with White Christian culture (and its repeated attempts to wipe out native beliefs) in different ways. For some tribes, pre-contact beliefs and traditions remain mostly intact, in others all that remains of native spirituality is a Native American-flavored Christianity. Thus there are, today, hundreds of different Native American spiritual traditions.

Most Native American belief systems posit the existence of an all-powerful creator being, who created humans, the natural world and the spirit world. Yet most human interaction with the spirit world is not with the all-powerful creator but with lesser Gods, nature spirits and ancestor spirits. The natural and spiritual worlds are typically thought of as the same thing. Most bad things (sickness, madness, misfortune) are believed to be caused by a damaged relationship between people and the natural/spiritual world around them. Maintaining a relationship with the natural/spiritual world is a matter of how one chooses to live one's own life. A simple, observant, respectful relationship with one's world is usually considered the best. Everything a person does, from hunting, to making a pot, to bathing, is an opportunity to act in a way that maintains good relationships with the spiritual/natural world. Observances of taboos (things that shouldn't be done or touched or eaten during certain times) are also important for maintaining healthy relationships with the spiritual/natural world.

Native American cosmology typically envisions the universe's forces and beings, both those that can be seen and touched and those that cannot, as being interconnected, so that the fate of every being is intertwined with the fate of every other being.

Most Native American groups have a spiritual geography where the traditional homelands of those groups is full of sacred places. These places are powerful and important to the health of the tribe and have to be treated with special respect.

Native American rituals often take the form of dances: night-long sessions of smoking tobacco, dancing, beating drums and chanting. Sweat lodges as a means of purification are also common.

Most Native Americans cultures had or have a role for a "shaman" or "medicine worker" or "holy person." This person is responsible for diagnosing spiritual ills, prescribing and performing healing ceremonies and communicating with spirits on behalf of the tribe. Becoming one of these spiritual specialists can mean long periods of ascetic living (e.g. living alone and bathing in ice cold water every day). In some cultures, hallucinogens or delirants (peyote, jimsonweed, black drink, etc.) are used to gain power and facilitate communication with invisible beings. In others, ordeals of exhausting dancing or self-torture are used.

Native American spiritual beliefs tend to put a heavy emphasis on dreams or “visions” (waking hallucinations) as a means of receiving communication from the spiritual world. These communications are seen as extremely important. Some cultures believe that holy people can “spritwalk”: leave their bodies as spirits and travel throughout this and to other worlds.

Many Native American cultures also have or had a body of beliefs about “sorcery”: taboo means of hurting other people via dangerous, spiritually polluted or taboo substances and actions. See Brujeria (p.76) for more.

Similarly, many Native American cultures had a role for a sacred clown. Sacred clowns would usually perform at dances and ceremonies, often wearing

masks, displaying lewd, antisocial or taboo behavior or acting contrary to how everyone else was expected to act. These clowns were considered important to the success of ceremonies. The anthropological explanation is that the clowns validated cultural boundaries and rules by transgressing them. See p.78 for more on Clowning.

Most who become Seekers from the traditions of Native American Spirituality enter onto the Path of +Harmony (from the emphasis on keeping in harmony with the spiritual and natural world), -Thought (from the emphasis on spiritual information received via visions, dreams and observing the natural world) or occasionally -Harmony (from the emphasis on transgressing a culture’s mores by sorcerers or sacred clowns).

See also Navajo Country, p.174.

Neopaganism/Wicca

There are pockets of original paganism still surviving across the globe, but the majority of those who identify as pagan in the United States are students of purposeful attempts to resurrect vanished pagan traditions. These attempts started in the 1950s and peaked in the 1980s. They were mostly an alternative for those dissatisfied with the perceived weaknesses of monotheism (and Christianity in particular). Where Christianity was dismissive of nature, of sex, of the feminine and of personal power, the creators of neo-pagan faiths wanted religions that would put those things on a pedestal. Where Christianity was full of rules and taboos, they wanted a religion that would encourage them to express themselves in any way that didn’t

involve hurting other people. The result has been a number of religious faiths and attendant magical systems, resurrected from the gods and beliefs of ancient peoples, notably the people’s of Europe. The most popular is Wicca, which uses a horned god and mother goddess culled from various European legends.

Neo-pagans and wiccans who come to Seekerdom typically come to the Path of +Harmony (because of the emphasis on pagan Gods signifying natural forces that should be kept in balance), +Self (because of the emphasis on personal power and free self-expression) or, more rarely, -Harmony (because of the emphasis on exploring taboo subjects).

New Thought

This is an American invention, starting in the late 19th century and taking some inspiration from Transcendentalism (p.96). There have been many New Thought movements and churches, some Christian and some not. What all have in common is the belief that human thought

creates the circumstances of our lives and that people with positive thoughts have better and healthier lives. New Thought is the antecedent to most self-help movements. Those coming to Seekerdom from New Thought are most likely to enter onto the Path of +Self.

Ordinary Life

"You may be capable of great things, but life consists of small things."

-Deng Ming-Dao

As much as Seekers like to point out the flaws in western culture, it can be a discipline that spawns many Seekers. Everyday life can be its own discipline when someone undertakes, seriously, to be the best child, parent, lover, friend or coworker one can be. In other words, taking the normal roles of everyday life and trying to fulfill them as well as one can is potentially as enlightening as any mystical, magical, religious or intellectual discipline. There are no austerities or rituals. Every workday, every party, every friend who needs help moving, every quiet evening at home with one's family gives a practitioner of this tradition the opportunity to try to be a better person. There are no lofty or extreme goals, such as being one with the universe or eliminating all worldly desires. Instead, the goal is balance: to be confident but not arrogant, assertive but not aggressive, kind but not self-sacrificing, skeptical but without losing faith, empathetic but able to retain one's perspective and thoughtful without losing common sense. Achieving and maintaining this balance is a goal as difficult as those found in any other discipline. Most people are content with simply 'good enough.' Only a minority continually push themselves to be better, and only a tiny minority of those will be launched onto the path of Seekerdom.

Even serious students of this discipline are often prevented from becoming Seekers because their commitments to their families friends and careers keep them anchored in one place. They are most likely to become Seekers when they have these commitments taken away from them, either by sudden tragedy or by the slow movement of the wheel of life. Take, for instance, a retired widow whose children have all moved away. After decades spent being the best daughter, wife, mother and

employee she can be, she is no longer able to fulfill these roles and so decides to travel the world, using the skills that made her so valuable in her family, community and workplace, to help random strangers.

As a discipline grounded in humility, rather than lofty cosmic goals, those from the tradition of Ordinary Life often end up on the Path of -Self. The emphasis on getting along with those around you also leads many to the Path of +Harmony.

Gender

'Even gender can be a Tradition capable of launching people into Seekerdom when people look towards, and try to emulate, the highest ideas embodied in gender roles in their culture.

For instance, in the US, the idealized female is caring, nurturing, socially adept, empathetic (+Harmony) as well as passionate, in touch with her feelings (+Feeling). The idealized male is proud, self-confident, boastful, competitive (+Self), independent, self-sufficient, not caring what others think of him (-Harmony) and keeping tight control over his emotions (-Feeling).

Of course, the traditions of female and male ideals are not limited solely to people whose biological anatomy corresponds to that gender. A person does not even have to be homosexual, transgendered or a cross-dresser to be able to explore the ideals of the gender opposite their biological one.

Politics

Along with positing what form of government will work best, political philosophies also describe how ideal political systems will produce better people and what kind of person is the best member of one of these hypothetical societies. Thus, political ideals can provide a model for self-improvement and from there can lead to the path of Seekerdom.

Liberal ideals lead a person to try to be empathetic, altruistic, understanding of other cultures, living in harmony with the environment and being constantly critical of traditional taboos and values. Thus liberal ideologies often lead to the Path of +Harmony and -Harmony.

Conservative ideology values respect for traditions, self-sufficiency, rationality, competitiveness and leadership, often leading to the Paths of +Self and -Feeling.

Less mainstream philosophies can lead to the Path of -Harmony because they are so far from the mainstream (the same way being a persecuted religious minority can lead to -Harmony). The anti-consumerism in some forms of anarchism can lead to asceticism, which can lead to the Path of -Feeling. The focus in socialism on equality of all people and of removing the high status enjoyed by the wealthy, royalty and the clergy can lead to the Path of -Self.

"I'm shutting this commune down because I realized that the worst possible thing I could be doing is taking a bunch of bright young political radicals and sticking them together in the middle of nowhere. When you're with people who believe the same things you do, your beliefs become shallow, prejudiced. You forget your own faults while developing an us-versus-them attitude towards everyone else. This place was too comfortable for all of us, and the last thing someone who wants to change the world should be is comfortable. Growing organic potatoes may feel like the right thing to do, but it isn't going to save the world. If you want to save the world, move to a red state and rent a room with a conservative, evangelical family. You might both learn something."

-Leftist Lenny

Psychology

The discipline of psychology has two very different, yet constantly intermingling, branches. The first branch, scientific psychology is based on an understanding of the mind that can be supported through experimental and statistical evidence. It focuses on what we can be sure we know via the scientific method (see Science, p.91). The second branch, clinical psychology, is the practical discipline of working with patients to help them with their mental difficulties. Clinical psychology focuses on whatever model of the human mind seems to work best with actual people, regardless of whether there is a scientific (or even a rational) basis for it. Despite the obvious differences, ideas are constantly being traded between these two branches of psychology.

There are hundreds of models for explaining how the mind works, but most fall into one of the following basic categories:

- Psychodynamic models say that the human mind is made up of opposing forces, each of which want different things. People are typically unaware of the actions and interplay of those forces.
- Behavioral models say that human behavior is the product of learning, that we do that which we have learned will give us rewards and avoid that which we have learned will result in punishment.

•Gestalt models say that our thoughts, feelings and behaviors can only be understood as a result of our experiences, choices, beliefs and desires creating something more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts.

•Cognitive models view the human mind as a set of algorithms, like programs on a computer, that we learn to use to solve problems.

•Biological models focus on the anatomical and chemical basis of thoughts, feelings and behavior. One part of the brain might be implicated in recognizing faces, one chemical might cause depression when it is underactive. Each biological feature is considered for the evolutionary advantage it would have given our ancestors.

•Social models concern themselves with how we perceive the hows and whys of other people's behaviors and how those perceptions alter our own thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

Study of self-concept and self-esteem can lead to the Paths of +Self and -Self. Those on the +Self Path are more likely to have come from clinical psychology, where building up self-confidence is considered a key to success and happiness. -Self Seekers are more likely to have come from experimental psychology, where studies have shown that people's ideas about self are either inaccurate or are self-fulfilling prophecies.

The Path of +Thought is most often the first Path of cognitive scientists, who see the mind as a toolbox of problem-solving techniques. -Thought is more often the domain of psychodynamicists, who believe that the knowledge that our rational, conscious selves are aware of is dwarfed by the knowledge in our subconscious minds.

Entering onto the Path of -Feeling is often the result of experimental studies showing how emotions and desires influence people's rational minds, causing them to come to incorrect or illogical conclusions even when they think they are behaving quite rationally. +Feeling is often the result of styles and sub-disciplines of clinical psychology and gestalt psychology where it is believed that being conscious of and voicing one's feelings is the key to health and happiness.

Evolutionary psychology can also lead to the Path of +Feeling because of the emphasis on emotions as useful biological features that help humans survive and prosper, both for our ancestors and for us today.

The studies of obedience in social psychology, designed to explain why people can be convinced so easily to do horrible things, lead some psychologists to the Path of -Harmony. Seekers who come first to the Path of +Harmony are often couples, family, organizational, or social skills therapists, who specialize in helping people get along with others.

Another way Psychology might lead to Seekerdom is through the study of extraordinary people. Most of psychology deals with the study of either "average" people or of people with psychological deficits. Yet a small number of psychologists are trying to study people who surpass normalcy: great leaders, heroes, prodigies, great athletes, people who speak out against immorality even when nobody else is, etc. This study may lead psychologists to discover those who have found a reliable means of becoming extraordinary: Seekers.

Science

At its deepest and most philosophical, science is about avoiding error. The scientific method is one designed to dispassionately and accurately test hypotheses and reject those hypotheses there is no evidence for. As a personal discipline, science is about not letting oneself believe ideas, even ideas that “seem” true or are supported by anecdotal evidence without critical investigation. Just as an ascetic might think people’s lives need structure, rules and discipline, a scientist thinks that people’s beliefs need structures, rules and discipline.

The process of science and the body of knowledge gained from that process are two

different things. Science leads to beliefs about the universe, but it also leads one to be ready to discard those beliefs if contradictory evidence is provided. The beliefs of a typical scientist are that all of the universe operates by natural laws, that these laws are stable, and that any phenomenon can be explained as the result of the operation of these laws.

Scientists who become Seekers tend strongly to the Path of +Thought. The Paths of -Self, -Feeling and -Harmony also appeal to scientists’ natural skepticism of the things people feel and believe.

Criticisms of Science

Many Seekers who do not come from a science-based tradition have serious criticisms of the scientific method as a means of discovering truth, wisdom and power:

- Science does not deal well with complex systems. The standard means of finding out anything in science, the experiment, involves changing one condition and looking for one consistent result. In complex systems, however, one change will not have consistent results, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t have understandable effects.
- Science tries to separate a subject from its environment. An experiment attempts to take a subject and isolate him, her or it from the environment as much as possible, so that only one condition is known to have changed. E.g. experimenting on a mouse that is living in a little plastic box by itself. Yet this can’t reflect the true nature of any being. Beings are constantly affecting and being affected by their environments, and are not the same beings once removed from that environment.
- Science discounts that which it cannot understand. Science recognizes no means for believing things other than science, which makes science blind to that which it has not

yet discovered scientifically, even if it is something other cultures have known for millennia.

- Science does not recognize subjective experience. In fact, science takes special steps to eliminate the subjective from data collection, searching for the most objective criteria possible, because it fears scientists prejudicing results from their beliefs. What this means, though, is that the vast realm of subjective experiences cannot be penetrated by scientific inquiry.
- Science can say how to achieve goals, but not what the right goals are. For instance, psychologists can take a group of behaviors that tend to be found together and use science to discover what conditions are correlated to the development of those behaviors, and what drugs, surgeries and therapies are most likely to reduce these behaviors. Yet science can’t tell people whether these behaviors are a disease that should be eliminated, or a normal variation that society should get used to. The former was, until recently, science’s position on homosexuality.

SCIENCE

Self Help

The world of self-help is made up of stealing the best-sounding elements of psychology, medicine, philosophy and religion and putting them together into a package to sell books, tapes, seminars, etc. Sales correlate to promises made and so self-help usually promises as much as it can get away with: confidence, success in every aspect of life, physical health and overcoming all bad habits and emotional problems.

Most Seekers consider the self-help movement to be fluff: a collection of techniques that require neither real sacrifices nor give real revelations about the nature of the universe. Self-help techniques that do anything at all are

generally considered “sorcery” as defined on p.66: rote learning of Seeker-like techniques without learning how or why they work.

Yet among the fluff it is possible to find valuable lessons which, if taken seriously and adhered to diligently, can launch people on to the path of Seekerdom. Some of these lessons are about health (especially when self-help overlaps with Alternative Medicine) and about emotions (especially when it overlaps with psychotherapy). Yet most of the useful lessons of self-help are about how self-confidence can be created and can help a person deal with personal and interpersonal problems. Thus most who come to Seekerdom from self-help disciplines start on the Path of +Self.

Sex

For some people, getting and enjoying sex is important enough that it becomes its own discipline. Some make it a discipline to try to perfect the mainstream sexual experience: meeting a person, falling in love and lust with them, seducing them and sharing an intensely pleasurable, enjoyable and fulfilling physical experience with them. The diligent pursuit of their craft often launches “lovers” onto the Path of +Feeling.

Others who turn sex into a discipline are fetishists. They try to go outside the mainstream, to explore means of achieving sexual pleasure and gratification beyond what is generally considered sexual. These fetishists tend to believe that there is no one ‘right’ or ‘healthy’ way to have sex and that humans are naturally heir to a wide range and variation of sexual preferences, and are able to enjoy many different kinds of things. When these fetishists become Seekers they usually start out on the Path of -Harmony.

Shamanism

This is a tradition (often inaccurately called a religion) that was independently invented all over the world. Whether in the arctic or a tropical island, shamanistic beliefs and practices are remarkably similar. The original word ‘shaman’ comes from a word from the Siberian Tungus tribe, but is now applied to people throughout the world. Once, before the advent of organized religion, shamanism was the world’s default belief system. Today all ‘modern’ religions are still rife with practices that can be traced back to shamanism

Ashaman is the person a tribe sends to deal with the supernatural world, yet a shaman belongs to no organization, follows no person’s rules. A shaman’s authority comes from his or her own personal power and relationships with the supernatural. A shaman is to a priest what a vigilante is to a police officer.

The core beliefs of shamanic cultures are that the world is filled with invisible spirits, that they can affect the lives of humans and visa versa and that these spirits can be helpful or harmful depending on how they are dealt

with. It is believed that humans have souls (there are usually different types of souls in a single person, each causing different types of phenomena) and that under the right circumstances human souls can travel to other worlds.

The beliefs of shamanism are not written down or otherwise codified. There is no such thing as an orthodox shaman. The beliefs shamans hold are unique to the individual and are open to change. Far more important than beliefs are techniques: those used to create shamans and those used by shamans to do their work.

Since there is no church, no organization that holds and can grant sacred authority, one can only achieve power over and relationships with the supernatural world via personal trials. Most of the trials that give shamans their power are things that induce altered states of consciousness: sweating, fasting, self-torture, use of deliriants and hallucinogens, long periods of isolation from other people, exhaustive multi-day dances, etc. The physical and psychological difficulty of these tasks help build willpower and self-confidence, which are useful in a shaman's dealings with both humans and supernatural entities. The alternate states of consciousness these practices induce make it possible for shamans to access visions.

Those undergoing visions see, hear or feel the supernatural world. The most powerful form of visions are those where the shaman experiences leaving his or her body and traveling through this world and into other worlds as a spirit. Visions are important because they allow shamans to make alliances with powerful spirits. The spirits typically give power in exchange for offerings and prayers.

In "shamanic death," the shaman's spirit journeys to another world and is killed and resurrected there. Sometimes the shaman is physically put in a grave and a funeral is carried out by his or her tribe. After resurrection or rebirth, a new name is often adopted. The death is not just symbolic or nominal. The shaman actually feels as if he or she is dying and, afterwards, feels that he or she is a completely new person. The primary effect of this change of identity is that it helps the shaman-to-be shed any last ideas of his or her own weakness. The new shaman is incredibly self-confident, believing himself or herself to be mostly immune to physical, spiritual and psychological harm.

Of all the traditions, sincere students of shamanism are most likely to become Seekers (yet, because of the relative scarcity of shamans in the developed world today,

Shamanism as a Seeker Factory

There is no doubt that shamanism has launched many onto the path of Seekerdom and that ancient shamans were often Seekers. Yet some Seekers have a theory: they believe that shamanism in ancient cultures was a tradition that evolved as a means of manufacturing Seekers. Ancient peoples living in a harsh and dangerous world did the best possible thing they could to ensure their survival: select the member of the tribe most likely to become a Seeker, then initiate them in a way designed to put them on the path of Seekerdom (or, failing that, at least teach them some Sorcery, gleaned from past Seekers).

Shamanic cultures typically choose shamans from young people who show independence, strong will, intelligence and powerful (sometimes dangerously powerful) emotions. They put these people through an initiation that severs them from their identities and social standing. They go through a ritual death and rebirth, are given a new name, sometimes even sever their family ties. Their 'training' includes long periods of travel away from the rest of the tribe, either in seclusion or travelling to other villages. Given paleolithic technology and society, these were the optimum means to prompt the creation of Seekers. It wouldn't always create Seekers (nobody can make you a Seeker, you have to chose to become one) but even one Seeker a century who could teach following generations Sorcerous skills would give a tribe a distinct edge.

shamanism only has a moderate representation among Seekers). Many shamans start out on the Path of +Self because of the difficult personal challenges of shamanic training and the extreme willpower and self-confidence that results. Others start out on the Path of -Self because their shamanic death has shown them how liberating it is to lose one's preconceived notions about self. The fact that shamans live apart from their tribe and are often called on as impartial judges leads some on to the Path of -Harmony. Yet the focus on fixing people's problems by repairing their relationships with the supernatural world leads some shamans to the Path of +Harmony. Some are led to the Path of -Feeling because of the arduous and painful rituals they endure, others to the Path of +Feeling because of the focus on channeling ecstasy and passion as a tool to achieve greater power. The focus on pursuing dreams, visions and various forms of divination to access hidden knowledge leads some shamans to the Path of -Thought.

Neo-Shamanism

Shamanism can still be found all over the world, but it is often influenced by newer religions. Much of Vietnam, for example, practices a mix of shamanism and Buddhism with some elements of Chinese pantheism. Many who consider themselves shamans today are people who are consciously trying to rediscover a purer form of their aboriginal ways. A Native American, for instance, may be trying to revive shamanistic traditions and practices of his or her ancestors for the sake of exploring his or her roots. There are also "neo-shamans." These are mostly white Westerners who, without a shamanic tradition of their own, have tried to create a universal shamanic tradition by piecing together the most common shamanic beliefs and techniques from around the world.

Some neo-shamans fit the stereotype of "salad bar" new-agers: picking and choosing pieces of others cultures that they like and ignoring the bits they don't like. Yet many do not fit this stereotype. Instead, they are making a sincere attempt to dive into humanity's shared shamanic heritage, and significant numbers of these neo-shamans become Seekers.

Shamanic Techniques Found in Other Traditions

Technique	Other Traditions
Development of willpower through arduous rituals	Buddhism, Monotheism, Military, Athletics, Martial Arts
Music, drumming, dance or chanting to achieve altered states of consciousness	African Syncretism, Native American Spirituality, Hippies, Magick/Occultism, Buddhism, Sufism, Neo-Paganism
Ritual Death and Rebirth	Buddhism (especially Chod), Magick/Occultism
Use of Hallucinogens or Deliriants	Brujeria, Hippies, Native American Spirituality
The Experience of Leaving One's Body As a Spirit to Interact With Spirits or Travel to Other Worlds	Magick/Occultism, Mysticism, Vajrayana Buddhism
Speaking Directly to Invisible Beings and Maintaining a Relationship With Those Beings	African Syncretism, Native American Spirituality, Curanderismo, Magick/Occultism, Neo-Paganism
Healing by "Fixing" One's Relationship to Nature or The Spirit World	Alternative Medicine, Hippies, Magick/Occultism, African Syncretisms, Native American Spirituality, Taoism, Neo-Paganism
Attacking Enemies With Invisible ("Spiritual") Poisons	Brujeria, Magick/Occultism, African Syncretisms
Herbalism Understood as Calling on the Spirits of Healing Herbs, Ethnogens and Poisons to Do Work	Alternative Medicine, Brujeria, Magick/Occultism, African Syncretisms, Neo-Paganism
Pain, Sleep Deprivation, Starvation or Exhaustion to Achieve Altered States of Consciousness	Monotheism (especially Monasticism), Mysticism, Magick/Occultism, Art, Native American Spirituality, Kabbalah, Sufism
Divination by Inspection of Random Things (e.g. Entrails)	African Syncretism, Magick/Occultism, Taoism, Neo-Paganism
Knowledge Gleaned Through Visions (Waking Hallucinations) and Dreams	Magick/Occultism, Freudian Psychology, Art, Neo-Paganism
Living Apart From Others	Brujeria, Monotheistic Monasticism, Buddhist Monasticism, Sufism, Transcendentalism

Sufism

Sufism is the mystical arm of Islam. Although Sufis say they can trace their practice back to Muhammad (or even before), Sufism as a distinct tradition appeared in the 8th Century in response to the great power and materialism of Islamic leaders (e.g. Caliphs). The goal of Sufism is to beautify and purify oneself, cleanse the heart of base desires, and to turn away from all else but the divine. A Sufi wants to have only one motivation: the love of Allah, and wants to have no concept of an individual self and to never do anything that defies the will of Allah. Through all this the Sufi hopes to comprehend Allah.

A Sufi must find a teacher and must spend years or decades in total obedience to that teacher. Sufis believe that there are a variety of practices, and that each practitioner must be prescribed different practices by his or her teacher depending on how the student's heart needs cleansing or healing. Most Sufis practice humble, ascetic living. They follow normal Islamic observances (prayer facing Mecca five times a day, observance of

Ramadan, a pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.). They often visit the tombs of saints, scholars and other righteous people. Other Sufi practices include use of incense, singing, music, dance and meditation, often resulting in ecstasy or trance. Some practices are more extreme: using hunger, sleep deprivation, solitude and sensory deprivation to break down the Sufi's unwanted habits, desires and ideas.

Today Sufism is practiced all over the world, but is most popular in Africa. Sufi ideas have found purchase in Western culture primarily through English translations of the emotionally-charged poems of Rumi and the work of Idries Shah.

Sufism often leads to the Path of -Self (because of the emphasis on obliterating selfhood in submission to Allah) or -Feeling (because of the emphasis on having no feelings other than love for Allah) or -Thought (because of the emphasis on gaining knowledge through mystical, rather than rational, means).

Taoism

"The Way that can be described is not the true Way."

-Tao Te Ching

Taoism is a combination of philosophy, organized religion and folk religion/magic from ancient China (around 200-300 BC). Although Taoism contains medicine, religion, magic and philosophy, it is the philosophical ideas of Taoism that have had the most far reaching influence. Taoism has strongly influenced Buddhism and martial arts, and many of the concepts of "Eastern philosophy" that have filtered into Western consciousness, which most assume are Buddhist in origin, are actually Taoist.

Central to Taoism is the concept of the Tao, usually translated as "the way." The Tao is the flow of the universe, the invisible motion behind all things in existence (or even in non-existence). When people act against the flow of the Tao, what they try

to do is difficult or even impossible. When they act in accordance with the Tao, what they do is effortlessly successful. It's like being in a river: swimming against the flow is hard, swimming with the flow is easy. One major goal of Taoism is to achieve union of one's desires and methods with the Tao, so that everything one does can be achieved with effortless ease. This effortless action is so powerful that it makes those who have mastered it into virtual superhumans.

The Tao is not intelligent, nor is it simple enough to ever be completely knowable. It is not a force for "good" or "evil." If anything, the Tao tends towards balance between forces and cycles. One primary symbol of this is the famous symbol that shows the two primary forces of Yin and Yang flowing from and

into each other. In Taoist cosmology, all opposites depend on each other, create each other, mix into each other and become each other infinitely. The Yin, the black part of the symbol, is passive, yielding action, and is associated with darkness, shadow, night, water, femininity, slowness and is sometimes symbolized by a dragon. The Yang, the white part of the symbol, is forceful, unyielding action, and is associated with light, heat, focus, speed, the sun, daytime, masculinity, and is sometimes symbolized by a tiger. Both forces are considered to be of equal value and equal importance and best kept in balance within people, within communities and within the universe as a whole.

Another goal of Taoist practice is to achieve a state of passive receptiveness, where one sees the universe without prejudice, and without applying labels (e.g. good, bad, beautiful, ugly, worthy, unworthy) to anything. In other words, to be completely non-judgmental and thus to see the universe as it truly is.

Unlike Buddhism, which sees natural human desires (e.g. the desire for sex, desire for food) as the source of suffering, Taoism sees human desires as natural, and as healthy and empowering when kept in balance.

Taoism has its own associated healing arts, all based on the idea of balancing internal forces within the human body. There is also the idea that a diligent Taoist practitioner can create an alchemical transformation of his or her own internal forces and become immortal. Taoist immortals are part of the pantheon worshiped in the religious side of Taoism.

Taoism appears in many Chinese martial arts, where the concept of “effortless action” is put into effect. A practitioner of these martial arts attempts to move very little, to do little work, rolling with punches and using the momentum of the opponent’s own punches and kicks against them. An advanced martial artist is no more forceful than is a leaf fluttering in the breeze, yet is able to avoid every blow and send the enemy flipping or stumbling into walls and to the ground.

Many Taoists practice the I Ching, a form of divination. Small bundles of sticks are thrown (coins can also be used), and the resulting piles create “hexagrams” which can be looked up in the I Ching book. Each entry has a lengthy, metaphor-laced explanation. Some Taoists also practice mediumship (being possessed by spirits).

Taoism leads often to the path of Seekerdom because the idea of allowing the flow of the Tao to take one where it will is very similar to a Seeker’s state of wandering and allowing his or her studies to be guided by fate/chance/the universe. Also, the concept of the Yin and Yang is perhaps the best way to envision the Paths and how they relate to each other (e.g. the Path of +Self is the Yang of selfhood while -Self is the Yin).

Taoists who become Seekers often enter onto the Path of -Thought (because of the emphasis on observing and knowing without making judgments), onto +Harmony (because of the emphasis on working with the world around you instead of in opposition to it) and to the Path of -Self (because of the emphasis on putting one’s own actions and desires in harmony with the universe).

Transcendentalism

This is a philosophy from early-19th century America. It advocated individualism and finding one’s true character by spending time alone with nature. Transcendentalism tried to combine rationalism with valuing of one’s own intuition. Later in its history, Transcendentalism became involved in both utopian and abolitionist movements.

Transcendentalism never became a major movement, and today most people discover it primarily through the original writings of its founders (e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essays from *Walden Pond*). Those who become Seekers through the tradition of Transcendentalism typically enter onto the Paths of +Self, -Harmony or +Feeling.

Western Philosophy

At its heart, philosophy is any attempt to use reason, logic and arguments to try to answer “invisible” questions: those questions that can’t be answered by direct observation or experimentation with the physical world. The invisible questions philosophy tries to answer include: What can we be sure of and how? What is right and wrong? What is beautiful or ugly? What is the relationship of the mind and consciousness to the body? Every culture has philosophy, yet when spoken of in the West, philosophy means a Western tradition, a conversation (or argument) that stretches back to ancient Greece.

Philosophy is often denigrated as a discipline with no practical value. To a degree this is true: for some, philosophy is simply an intellectual exercise, an attempt to solve a puzzle or win an argument, with no attempt to use it to make one’s life better. Yet many of today’s disciplines, including physical science, psychology, anthropology, political science and math, once emerged from philosophy. And every modern discipline, from science to law, has at its heart a philosophy that describes and justifies its basic methods. At the heart of science, for instance, is the scientific method, and at the heart of that method is a philosophy that describes how and why the scientific method is a valid method of inquiry. From the philosopher’s point of view, then, philosophy is the basis of all disciplines. Even utilitarianism, the idea that things are only useful if they have real world practical applications is, itself, a philosophy.

Philosophy has even come to question the limitations of thought, language and rationality. Recent philosophers have wondered whether people are invariably limited in the questions they can ask and the answers they can find by their languages and cultures. Philosophy thus explores even the limits of philosophy itself.

Philosophy is like Seekerdom in that it concerns itself with big questions: the nature of the universe, of life, of how we learn about the universe. Yet philosophy is not Seekerdom. At its best, philosophy can suggest practices that, if followed vigorously, can lead to Seekerdom. Philosophers who become Seekers usually do so after making a decision to try to put their ideas to the test in their own lives.

Philosophers who become Seekers almost always end up on the Path of +Thought, although a few students of recent schools (structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism) become critical enough of reason to enter onto the Path of -Thought.

When Richard came hiking down the mountain into the town he saw small but comfortable looking homes, with well-cared-for gardens. It was early in the morning, dew still on the grass, and he went to the town's Church of Christ for the Sunday service. He had on a comfortable backpack, a grandfatherly-looking sweater and corduroy pants. The others at the church service peered at him curiously. He returned their looks with kind smiles. After the service he met and talked with parishioners. Then he met with the minister. They chatted for a while. Richard pitched the idea of an inter-faith understanding meeting, where members of the community of different faiths could come together and find out what they had in common. Richard talked about other communities he had held such meetings in and the beneficial effects experienced there. Richard gave the minister the contact info for other ministers who had been involved in such meetings and encouraged him to call them. The minister said he would consider it and Richard said that would be fine.

When Alestair came to town, a trucker let him off at the side of the road. It was night and had been raining. Alestair could see the large buildings of the lumber mill, illuminated with halogen floodlights and steam rising from the stacks on the other side of barbed wire fences. Alestair found a bar and went in. The bar was full of lumber mill workers who had stopped in for a drink after the end of the day shift. They stared at Alestair, who wore a black leather jacket with an anarchy symbol, had a green mohawk and several piercings. Alestair ordered a drink and eavesdropped on people talking. He inserted himself into conversations without invitation, saying whatever his opinion was on the matter being discussed. Within an hour he had gotten into a fistfight and gotten a bloody nose. Some of the bar's patrons bought him a drink and slapped him on the back, telling him "It's about time someone punched out that asshole." Alestair's new friends, when they found out Alestair was looking for work, suggested he get job at the mill.

The first Interfaith Understanding Meeting was held at the Elk's Lodge. Most of the attendees were retirees with nothing better to do. The Church of Christ minister was there, as were several denominations of Christians, a few Jews, a few atheists and the town's only Muslim. It started slow. People were guarded. With help from Richard, they started to open up, speak from the heart. By the end of the meeting they were speaking openly about their prejudices and apologizing for having made negative judgments about others in the town. When the meeting was over the attendees congratulated each other and expressed eagerness for the next meeting. Several people clustered around Richard, asking his plans. He told him he thought he would stick around town for a while, making money giving therapeutic massages. Several people signed up for appointments.

Alestair was there when the mill's HR office opened up. He got a job and was allowed to start that day. Alestair immediately rankled his new supervisor by complaining about things he thought were unsafe. When the supervisor talked down to the boiler operators Alestair came to their defense and was given a warning and a finger wag. At lunch, the other workers told him about degrading treatment by supervisors, about the plant's poor safety record, about how hard it was to make ends meet on what they were paid. After lunch his boss told him to scrub out a flue and Alestair said "Not for nine-seventy-five an hour, not a fucking chance." His supervisor fired him on the spot and Alestair laughed at the man, and then loudly, in front of several workers, went on a rant about everything that was wrong with the mill until security dragged him away. Alestair's last words before he was forced out of the mill were "you people need a union!"

Richard spent the next few weeks travelling from house to house giving therapeutic massages. He talked a little and listened a lot. People treated him like a therapist, telling him their secrets and innermost feelings. Richard learned that there was a lot of anger in the town. Richard counselled that anger was counterproductive, that it prevented people from understanding one another. He

advocated a calm, dispassionate approach, one where people could discover their common goals and needs and find mutually beneficial arrangements.

Alestairs spent the next few weeks sleeping on couches. He met with mill workers in the town's bar or in worker's homes. He visited workers who were home after being injured at the plant. He visited a widow whose husband had died when he was crushed by a log that tumbled down off of a truck. He told people that they should not accept their pay and their working conditions as immutable facts of life. He told people they should get angry, should act on their feelings. He told people "if you act reasonably, always make the most rational decision, then they will always be able to control you, to force you down a path by making the alternative less appealing. If we get angry, though, we can force them down the path we want them to take." The mill's management got wind of this and fired several workers. Alestairs retaliated by spray-painting angry slogans on walls around town and by throwing a rock over a fence into a hopper that jammed a machine and halted production for a day.

At the fourth Interfaith Understanding Meeting a skinhead came in and started talking about how Jesus was an Aryan and Jews and Muslims worshiped the Devil. Richard implored everyone else at the meeting to let the skinhead talk. Richard asked calm questions, getting the young man to reveal more and more about his past, his feelings, anger and fears. "What if I told you that you could let all those feelings go," Richard asked, "and start a new day free from them?" By the end of the meeting the skinhead was sobbing and begging those present at the meeting to forgive him.

At Alestairs's advising, the mill workers walked out and the company bussed in scabs to replace them. Alestairs led protests in front of the plant. He took to sneaking around town at night, hopping fences and jimmying the locks on buildings, committing small but powerful acts of sabotage that had cascading effects. Production in the plant ground to a complete halt, the mill's general manager

was arrested on suspicion of having child porn on his computer; several embarrassing emails were sent from the mill's email system to local newspapers, and the mill's safety manager went on a multi-day drinking binge that ended with him being fired. The mill's management figured Alestairs was behind all this and sent his description to the police. Alestairs changed from his leather jacket to a sports jersey, removed his piercings and hid his Mohawk under a baseball cap.

It was late at night, but Richard asked nicely and so the Sheriff allowed Richard to visit with the prisoner being held in the small jail cell in the back of the Sheriff's office. Richard extended his hand through the bars to shake Alestairs's hand but Alestairs just looked at him, his face unreadable. "I've been working," Richard said calmly, "to try to get the people of this town to come together, to forget the past, to unburden themselves of corrosive emotions, to reach a state of mutual understanding and work for the common good. Yet lately I've seen evidence that someone out there has been working against me, and I believe that person may be you."

"The people of this town don't need to get along," Alestairs responded, "They've been 'getting along' for years and some people in this town have benefited from it but many more have suffered because of it. The people here need to be riled up. They need to be put in touch with their anger and they need to let that anger push them to better their lives. They need to stomp their feet and say 'fuck the consequences, I won't stand for this kind of injustice anymore.' I've been trying to help them do that but I've been getting this feeling like someone or something is fucking me up, and I think it's you."

They stood and regarded each other across the jail cell's bars. Finally Richard spoke. "Why don't we work together? Coordinate our efforts. Try to reach a common ground and work from there to do more than either of us could do alone."

Alestairs thought about it. "That is the most nonsensical, impossible, bat-shit crazy fucking idea I have ever heard." He grinned. "And that's why I like it."

Chapter Five

PATHS

About the Paths

In Brief: The Paths correspond to every type of human mental activity. By improving their faculties in these realms, Seekers both improve themselves and improve their understanding of the universe, far surpassing the basic competence that is required of every adult.

The Paths can be conceived of as all the means of improving oneself and better understanding the universe by improving the four major spheres of human mental activity (feeling, thinking, having ideas about self, and relating to that outside oneself) and then each of those subdivided into the “-“ and “+” subdivisions.

The Paths Are Not Goals

Truth, compassion, power, oneness with the divine, these are all goals. The Paths are a means of achieving these goals.

The Paths Are Not Curricula

There is no one set of things to learn or conclusions to come to. Rather, the Paths are general fields of inquiry: facets of human’s interaction with the universe that one can attempt to improve (and by improving, understand the universe better).

The Paths Face Inwards and Outwards

Thought, feelings, conceptions of self and relationships with the other are all ways a person interacts with and learns about the universe. Each Path involves coming to understand oneself, to improve that type of interacting with and understanding the universe, and thus to better understand the universe. A Seeker must necessarily learn equal amounts about himself or herself and about the universe.

The Paths are Infinite

Many things which are said about the Paths may seem contradictory. There are an infinite number of Paths that one may take, but they can be grouped into 8 primary categories. It’s like dividing the compass into 8 octants: You can still go in any of an infinite number of directions, but the direction you choose could be roughly described as being one of those 8 quadrants. An individual’s Path may stray into another one of the octants, or even circle

around to the other side entirely. Someone who starts out on the Path of +Feeling may end up on the Path of +Self, and from there to -Thought, and from there to +Thought, yet to that Seeker he or she has only traveled one path: his or her own.

The Paths Are Like Childhood

The Paths roughly correspond to what children need to learn in order to be competent members of society. Kids learn how to think, how to use logic and reasoning, but they also learn that some problems have simple solutions and don’t require too much thought. They learn to recognize and even to prompt different emotions in themselves, but they also learn that sometimes emotion must be resisted. They learn how to get along with their friends and family, but they also learn that sometimes peer pressure must be resisted. They learn to be confident, but they also learn that estimations of their own abilities can be wrong. Children are amazing in their ability to go from knowing nothing to knowing all this in only a handful of years.

Seekers take the learning that children must do in these basic categories of competence and continue the learning. Where most people’s learning slows when they reach adulthood, mostly because they’ve reached the level of competence that society demands from them, Seekers keep learning in these arenas at the same rate children do. It is not unfair to say that a Seeker is to a normal adult what a normal adult is to a child: basically the same, only far more advanced.

The Paths Are Sacrifice

The +Paths require you to constantly push yourself to do more than you ever thought was possible. The -Paths require you to admit that you were and are wrong, and thus to try to fix yourself.

Learning and Meta-Learning

Humans are good at learning. It's what we're designed to do. There is an astounding variety of things that people can learn to do if they put in enough practice.

But what if you could learn to learn better? What if there was something you could practice doing that would make whole categories of learning easier? Psychologists call this "meta-learning": learning how to learn better. The simplest forms of meta-learning, the forms that psychologists

have studied, are small mnemonic tricks that kids learn to help them get through school.

The Paths can be conceived as a rigorous course of meta-learning (and meta-meta-learning and meta-meta-meta-learning, etc.). Seekers learn how to learn about emotions, about thinking, about being in harmony with others or about selfhood. The Paths make people so much better at learning and adapting that they can seem superhuman.

Plus and Minus

In Brief: Plus Paths about increasing ability, becoming more powerful and making more use of abstract mental objects. Minus Paths are about avoiding error, becoming perfect and dealing more directly with the universe that can be seen and touched. It is possible to walk both the plus and minus of a Path simultaneously.

The plus ("+") Paths are all about recognizing the inherent power of human ability, of learning to strengthen and enhance the strengths of the human race. They are about trying harder, doing more, getting better through practice and examination of what works best. These are Paths of faith, whether faith in the divine, faith in science or philosophy, or faith in humanity itself.

The minus ("-") Paths are about avoiding inherent human weaknesses, not making mistakes, sidestepping problems that don't really need to be problems. These are Paths of skepticism. A person on the minus Paths laughs, sometimes with pity, sometimes with disgust, sometimes with empathetic concern, at the foibles and blindness that continually plague normal humans.

Those on the plus Paths usually achieve high levels of what average people aspire to: intelligence, confidence, emotional intensity, ability to get along with others. Thus those on the plus Paths are usually recognized and understood quite easily by the general population as being "superior" or "skilled" or "talented." Those on the minus Paths, on the other hand, are more likely to shortcut past, to do without, what ordinary people want for themselves.

Ordinary people often view those on the minus Paths as lucky or as savants. Or, they try to explain the minus Paths Seekers with nebulous concepts such as "enlightenment" that posits an unknowable gulf between the enlightened and normal people. So, in the minds of ordinary people, the plus Paths are about advancement, progressing along the scale, while the minus Paths are about enlightenment, jumping off the scale. The truth, however, is that the plus and minus Paths are more alike than ordinary people realize. Neither is so mundane as "advancing along a scale," and yet each is merely an extension of the improvements and refinements that mark all human self-betterment.

The goals of the minus Paths, to eliminate the weaknesses of thought, feeling, self-identity and connection to others, are probably not fully attainable in any one lifetime. Every time a Seeker thinks he or she is close to achieving that goal, they discover some major chunk of the unwanted weakness inside themselves, and suddenly the goal seems as far away as it ever has. For instance, a -Self Seeker might spend years carving away her self-identity, believing she is near to complete selflessness. Yet that -Self Seeker realizes,

in a moment of painful epiphany (see *The Black Gulf*, p.56) that “the self-less one” has become her new identity and that this identity itself must be cleansed. Any Seeker who believes he or she has achieved complete enlightenment and no longer suffers under any of the errors of thought, self, feeling or harmony, is deluded and has most likely fallen into a trap (p.62).

Another way to see the difference between the two types of Paths is that the plus Paths tend to deal with ideas and concepts, while the minus Paths tend to deal with what can actually be seen and touched:

+Self is all about concepts of self, while -Self is all about dealing directly with the world without consulting abstractions about selfhood.

+Thought is about learning to manipulate ideas and concepts, while -Thought is about focusing on simple and self-evident facts.

+Harmony is about learning about and anticipating relationships, and figuring out the “right” way to interact. -Harmony is about trying to view and interact with the universe without regard to pressure from culture, peers and instincts.

+Feeling is about being aware of feelings and emotions and aesthetic perceptions, while -Feeling is about trying to ignore those things and deal with the absolute facts of the universe around oneself.

Perspectives On Mental Illness

+Thought: Illogical and irrational beliefs cause much mental illness. These beliefs reflect poor knowledge of what is likely. A paranoid schizophrenic, for instance, might not be paranoid if he knew that vast conspiracies were statistically improbable.

-Thought: Mentally ill people spend too much time worrying about questions that don’t matter, like: Is the world a good or bad place? Am I worthless or worthy? These questions are essentially meaningless and their answers irrelevant, so mental energies spent on them is at best a waste and at worst is self-torture.

+Harmony: Mental illness is usually a symptom of separation from one’s community. In the spaces where people are alone (or think they are), they start doing things which are shameful to them (e.g. drugs, self-mutilation) or believing things which reference to common wisdom would say is wrong (e.g. paranoid delusions).

-Harmony: “Mental illness” is any belief or behavior that makes one a liability to the surrounding society. What is thought of as “crazy” in one society is perfectly acceptable, even prized, in another. The idea that there is one state of “mental health” that all people should be returned to ignores the fact that cognitive variety is natural. People should no more be made to think alike than they should be made to look alike. Maybe a person who is having trouble working in an office shouldn’t be working in an office, maybe they should be an artist or explorer. Suffering occurs when people are forced into roles that are not natural for them.

+Feeling: Mental illness is mostly a product of trying to deny emotions. Emotions cannot be canceled out simply by denying them and tend to come out in other ways. For instance, anxiety about one’s worth as a person, if denied, may pop up as a phobia of snakes. Fear, anger, desire and even love, if not expressed in healthy ways will be expressed in unhealthy ways.

-Feeling: Mental illness occurs when people give feelings precedence over rational thought. Paranoia is the triumph of fear over reason. Depression is the triumph of sadness over reason. Almost every mental illness can be cured if one can learn the discipline to control one’s emotions.

+Self: Even though they may not be aware of it, most people today suffer from low self-esteem. They don’t believe in themselves and they don’t believe they have the strength to conquer their own demons. People try different methods to hide from their own self doubts, from drugs to avoiding the company of others, but the only cure is to start believing in themselves.

-Self: Most mental illnesses are caused by concepts of self that are not only false (as most self-conceptions are) but severely dysfunctional. The focus on self makes people think that the universe revolves around them and what they are feeling (e.g. there must be a conspiracy against me, or I feel bad so therefore the universe must be a horrible place). Concepts of “mental illness” hurt people because people start thinking of themselves as “ill” and stop trying to improve themselves.

Despite their differences, the plus and minus Paths are not incompatible. It is an unfortunate weakness of the human mind that it is difficult to keep both the plus and minus sides in mind at once, but just because it is difficult doesn't mean that Seekers won't do it. Many Seekers walk both the plus and minus of a Path at once, endeavoring, for instance, to learn to create and use the power of emotions within themselves while, at the same time, learning to bypass emotions and make decisions based on logic free from emotional bias. Walking both the plus and minus Paths at once can be very powerful.

Perspectives On Evil

+Harmony: Evil is ignorance. It is the incorrect belief that you can achieve happiness and prosperity for yourself while destroying happiness for others.

-Harmony: Evil people rarely think of themselves as evil. They believe the moral judgments of those around them, assume that if good people are all doing something then that thing must be okay. Evil is, thus, the lack of an independent check on the moral assumptions of a community.

+Thought: Morality is a negotiation between people: you respect my property rights, I'll respect yours. You agree not to kill me if I make you angry, I'll agree to the same. Evil is when someone breaks these social contracts.

-Thought: There is no evil. Some people just get too caught up in other things to do what they know is right.

+Self: Evil is when people have never decided for themselves to be good, or they forget that they have decided to be good, and so without this moral anchor they let circumstances push them towards extremes of behavior.

-Self: Humans are not programmed to hurt other humans, except when we view them as 'others,' as being not like us. It is the creation of false categories of 'my people' and 'not my people' that causes evil.

+Feeling: Evil is caused when people try to deaden within themselves the empathy and compassion that are natural to all humans.

-Feeling: Evil is caused when hatred, fear and desire overcome the rational desire to get along with others.

Perspectives On Nature

+Harmony: Whether we know it or not, we are part of nature and it is part of us. To respect nature is to respect ourselves. To be fully healthy and fulfilled, we must live with and be part of nature.

-Harmony: Nature is brutal, violent, ugly, dirty, diseased and amoral. We are dependent on nature for things like the air we breathe and the food we eat, but we should learn to temper, not celebrate, the weakness that is that dependence.

+Thought: Nature is a wonderful example of how simple principles, such as that of evolution, can create something of astounding complexity, so much so that merely understanding it all is a task worthy of our greatest thinkers.

-Thought: Nature is all around us, even within us. If we work with it, let it do what it wants to do, our way will be easy. If we try to fight it back or force it to do what it doesn't want to do, our way will be difficult.

+Self: Nature can provide great obstacles and be a challenge to survive. In this way, it is a great way for us to prove our power and industriousness.

-Self: Nature is good to be around because it does not recognize, nor respond to, our self-concepts. Living with nature can be unpleasant and dangerous, and dealing with that can be a great way to practice being selfless.

+Feeling: Nature is beautiful, a worthy subject for our appreciation. Like the human heart it can be calm and gentle, or changing and wild, but always powerful.

-Feeling: Nature is too complicated to be accurately called beautiful or ugly, harmonious or violent, those are just how people want it to be to justify their own interactions with it and with each other. It can be useful to us, and it can create hardship for us, yet even this hardship can be a good opportunity for people to practice living without comforts they don't really need.

P
L
U
S
A
N
D
M
I
N
U
S

-Thought

Principles

The Path of -Thought can be most simply explained as not overthinking things that don't need to be overthought. -Thought is not about being ignorant or dim-witted. Those on this Path try to develop undirected rather than directed mental skills. Rather than trying to think of the solution to a problem, a Seeker learns that it is often more effective to relax, be aware and recognize the solution when it presents itself. To someone on the Path of -Thought, the relaxed mind is as powerful as the active mind, perhaps more so. Those on the Path of -Thought love anything random: clouds, tea leaves, tarot cards, etc. because it is easy for them to find answers to their questions in randomness. Similarly, those on the Path of -Thought are big believers in intuition: they know that the conscious mind is not the only part of the mind with knowledge and intelligence.

Those on the Path of -Thought try to never prejudice themselves. They know that anyone who asks a question usually has an answer they are hoping for, and they tend to pay attention to the evidence that supports that answer and ignore that which doesn't. Often -Thought Seekers try to avoid any kind of decision, instead considering multiple beliefs or plans but not deciding on any until the moment that concrete action is required. This can cause them to be frustratingly vague when asked a question.


The Path of -Thought is also the Path of being skeptical of the beliefs, ideas and abstractions that are the products of human minds. Words and concepts are just dim or simplistic representations of real things, yet people commonly forget this and start to believe in the words as entities unto themselves. Ask someone on the Path of -Thought if they believe God exists and they might say 'tell me what you mean by that word and I'll tell you whether I believe in it.' To most on the Path of -Thought, concepts like "good", "life," "justice," "beauty," "sanity," are only simplistic ideas of limited usefulness. Even an idea like "cold," for instance, is relative. A thing does not have its own coldness, there must be another object and a consciousness that wants to compare the two. One fire could be "cold" if compared to another, hotter, fire.

Some on the Path of -Thought even begin to question whether the concepts "real" or "exists" have universal meaning. This is best illustrated by the Buddhist concept of sunyata, often translated as "all encompassing nothingness." Sunyata seems a paradox: universal non-existence and meaninglessness that is, itself, non-existent and meaningless. Yet to many -Thought Seekers, Sunyata represents a truth so simple and basic that complicated minds have trouble grasping it: that concepts such as "exist" only have meaning when applied to things we can see and touch, not to the entirety of the universe.

"The key to being a successful children's book author is to realize that adults are ridiculous. All the great classics of children's literature are about some normal kid going around being entertained by the silliness of grown-ups. The crazy characters in Alice in Wonderland with all their quirks, fears and petty squabbles, they're all just grown-ups. They worry about silly things, they believe in abstract "isms" that have little effect on reality, they don't know how to relax and enjoy the world around them, and they look for complex answers to questions when most questions actually have very simple answers.

That's why I've set off on my own 'journey through Wonderland.' I don't want to be a kid, but I do want to remember what kids know that adults have forgotten. I want to disconnect from the adults around me, divest myself for a while of adult society, so I can look at it objectively and recognize all the things that are just silly."

-The Children's Book Author



Those on the Path of -Thought are very nonchalant about the ‘big questions.’ They don’t stay awake wondering about the purpose of life, whether God exists, if the pleasures in life are worth the suffering, if there is a universal right or wrong, if humans have souls, if there is life after death, etc. Even if it were possible to answer those questions with a simple yes or no, the answer wouldn’t affect the day-to-day lives of those on this Path. The right way to act is based on the road in front of you, the people you’re with and the fullness or emptiness of your belly, not on abstract truths about the universe.

Inter-Path Relationships

Many come to the Path of -Thought from the Path of +Thought. They use logical thought to prove the limits of the usefulness of logical thought, then they go on the Path of -Thought to explore the alternatives to logic.

The Path of -Thought often leads to the Path of +Feeling. Without an abstract meaning to life, the only reason to do something is because you feel like it, so -Thought Seekers set about exploring what it is they feel like doing. Similarly, when one on the Path of -Thought decides there is no ‘higher purpose’ to life, they turn towards more simple goals: being healthy and happy, causing no harm, getting along with others, which leads them to the Path of +Harmony.

The Path of -Harmony can sometimes lead to the Path of -Thought when skepticism of a culture’s most important concepts leads the Seeker to believe that concepts are, at their root, meaningless. -Thought can also lead to -Self when a -Thought Seeker decides that the concept of Self is an empty one. Similarly, the Path of -Self can lead one to the Path of -Thought: belief that one’s Self is nothing special can lead to belief that one’s thoughts and ideas are nothing special.

Traditions

The major traditions that contribute to the Path of -Thought are Eastern and Western Mystical traditions. The Eastern traditions include Taoism, with its emphasis on observing and knowing without making judgments, and Buddhism, especially Zen, with its concept that all distinctions are false. Indian philosophy also has a lot to say about the unreality of the physical world. The Mystic traditions include Jewish Kabbalah, Sufism in Islam, various Mystic paths of Christianity and the mystic paths of Western occultism.

Other traditions that have been known to lead to the Path of -Thinking are Anthropology/Sociology (mostly from the study of other culture’s mystical systems), Art (because a state of heightened creativity demands the suppression of thought), Clowning (because clowns realize that the smartest, most educated people make just as many stupid mistakes as anyone else), Feminism/Ethnic Studies/Queer Studies (from their criticism of Western standards of logic and knowledge), Fictional Traditions (through the fictional recreations of mystical traditions), Hippies (from the use of hallucinogens and idea that normal people can be ‘freed’ by being ‘freaked out’), Martial Arts (mostly from their connection to Eastern mysticism), Native American Spirituality (from the emphasis on spiritual information received via visions, dreams and observing the natural world), Ordinary Life (from its emphasis on practical living rather than abstract thought), Philosophy (from those schools of thought that are critical of the capabilities of reason), Psychology (from the psychodynamic concept that the knowledge we are conscious of is dwarfed by the knowledge in our subconscious minds) and Shamanism (from the focus on pursuing dreams, visions and various forms of divination to access hidden knowledge).

The St. Ives Riddle

As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives. Every wife had seven baskets, and every basket had seven cats. Man, woman, baskets and cats, how many were going to St. Ives?

Challenges

Most -Thought challenges are those that try to trick the Seeker into thinking they are more complicated than they really are. The actual answer ends up being something that the Seeker already knows or that there is no answer for. The 'St. Ives' riddle (above) is a classic example: it tricks people into attempting a complex multiplication (because they think that is what is necessary to find the answer) when really the answer is in the first stanza of the riddle: "As I was going to St. Ives."

Sometimes a challenge is accompanied by a sudden shock, designed to make the student skip out of the groove of their normal thought processes. Zen masters would sometimes slap students to induce this shock.

Sometimes meditation (especially that which stops thought in preference for total awareness) and hallucinogens or deliriants (used to make normal logical thought impossible) are useful tools for those on the Path of -Thought. Yet they can be dangerous: those who come to depend on them can become trapped. At best they give beginning Seekers a glimpse into what it's like to not think, but Seekers must then learn to find this state in their waking, sober lives.

Recognizing

-Thought Seekers often have a smirk on their faces, as if privy to some in-joke.

It often seems like they aren't paying attention, yet they can react quickly to the smallest thing or remember the smallest detail.

Often seen paying attention to 'meaningless' things like clouds, tea leaves, coin flips, tossing sticks into piles, etc.

Often answer questions with questions.

They tend to be quiet people, speaking only when necessary.

View of Normals

A Seeker on the Path of -Thought sees normal people as addled by ideas they believe in that do them no good. The constant chatter of the mind distracts people from using their senses. The answers to life's most important questions are obvious, but the average person doesn't trust simple answers and so needlessly complicates questions until they are impassable quandaries. Even worse, people use 'rational thought' to justify what they already believed (or wanted to believe), making them inflexible because they believe their ideas have been "proven right." People spend far too much time thinking about the future and the past, of places where they aren't and possibilities that aren't happening. They would be so much more capable of dealing with problems and enjoying what there is to enjoy about life if they kept their minds open to the here and now.

*"I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body.
Then I realized who was telling me this."*

-Emo Phillips

"Most of philosophy is just people trying to find justifications for believing in the things they already believe in. If they just went ahead and admitted that they believe in those things because they want to, they could save themselves a lot of trouble"

-the Retired Professor

"You know the secret wisdoms which everyone seeks.... I even suspect that you know the explicit wisdoms, the ones hidden in plain view, which practically no one looks for."

-Terry Pratchett, Thief of Time

Path Plusses

Primary: +2 per level of -Thought to any AV that involves letting go of harmful thoughts/ideas or that involve letting one's minds go blank and letting instinct, reflex, training or awareness take over. Examples: *AVs to react quickly and simply, rolls to be aware of what is happening around the PC, rolls to "let go of" delusions, hallucinations or mind control.*

Aided: +1 per level of -Thought to any AV which is aided by having a quiet mind, thinking in ways other than with words, or having a well-rested mind (one not tired out from unnecessary thoughts). Examples: *AVs for nonverbal communication (with people who don't speak your language or with animals), AVs for operating in the dark, or in other situations where lesser-used senses must be depended upon, AVs to save vs. loss of balance.*

Combat: Add +1 per level to combat rolls only when the PC is engaging in combat without premeditation (either the PC was surprised by a sneak attack, or the PC decided to attack without any plan or preparation).



M
I
N
U
S
T
H
O
U
G
H
T

"I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells."

-Theodor Seuss Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss

Path Abilities

Dumb Luck: Use this ability to find something the PC wants by not actively looking for it yet recognizing opportunities when they appear. The PC might have to do tiring, unpleasant, tedious or dangerous things to get the object or his or her desire, e.g. a PC who wants money might notice \$20 on a small island in the middle of a swiftly moving river. Dumb Luck can't be used to find specific things, only general classes of things or solutions for general problems. A PC can't use Dumb Luck on more than one thing at a time. The difficulty is based on how broad the request is:

Easy (1): Find a warm place to stay the night.

Moderate (3): Find a ride to the next town.

Hard (5): Find a way to get a certain door open.

Legendary (7): Find a replacement heart.

Reading Bones: The PC can find answers to questions in anything random: tea leaves, the shapes of clouds, tarot cards, etc. Some would say that invisible forces of the universe are affecting the "random" outcomes things, others would say that randomness allows the PC to express unconscious knowledge the PC already had, others would say that introducing randomness into the problem solving process allows for the PC to think of solutions he or she wouldn't be able to otherwise. The difficulty is based on how specific the question the PC wants answered is:

Easy (1): "What general trends does my immediate future hold?"

Moderate (3): "What will be my relationship with this new person I just met?"

Hard (5): "What's the best strategy to escape from this prison?"

Legendary (7): "What is the password to this bank network?"

Profile Thought Weaknesses:

The PC can recognize when a person's abstract reasoning faculties are likely to cause them to reach an incorrect or inapplicable conclusion. This can include application of a general rule when it doesn't apply, obsession with abstract principles that have no practical use in the current situation, thinking one is more knowledgeable than one really is or that one's experience is useful in a larger breadth of situations than it really is, or clinging to a belief despite contrary evidence. Once a thought weakness is perceived the PC can attempt to illuminate the weakness and thereby give the person an opportunity to cure it, or can try to take advantage of the 'blind spot' in the person's thinking. The difficulty is based on how much contact the PC has had with the person.

Easy (1): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the weaknesses of someone after observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the weaknesses of someone upon first seeing them.

"If the questions you're asking demand complicated answers then you're probably asking the wrong questions."

-Raggedy Cecilia

+Thought

Principles

To a person on the Path of +Thought, intelligence is not a static thing. The ideas, concepts, abstractions, mnemonics (means of remembering things) and problem solving techniques a person learns as they age are a toolkit. The larger a toolkit a person has and the more well versed they are in what tools to use in what situations, the more problems the person can solve.

The goal of someone on the Path of +Thought is to use thought to understand more about how the universe works and use that knowledge to one's benefit. Abstractions are used to model how different aspects of the universe work. These abstractions may come from the realms of science, philosophy and mathematics, among other disciplines, or they may be unique to the Seeker. A +Thought Seeker collects and uses thousands of these ideas. To a Seeker on the Path of +Thought, an idea is not holy, it is useful. An idea itself is not correct, it is something that can be used to evaluate or reevaluate whether conclusions are correct.

The criticism most commonly leveled against the Path of +Thought is that thought cannot be used to comprehend the universe. The most common answer by +Thought Seekers is that the universe can never be directly comprehended, but that abstract models of the universe built up in our minds can approach true comprehension.

Most +Thought Seekers believe that all the supernormal phenomena that Seekers exhibit and experience can all be explained rationally. They do not find it necessary to talk about spirits, souls, the malleability of reality, gods, fate, etc. to explain things happening in physical reality. This is not to say that they think the world is simple. They borrow ideas from chaos theory (p.83) to explain how complex systems can have unexpected and sometimes quite remarkable properties, including the fact that

order can suddenly emerge from chaos. Yet Seekers don't always limit themselves to what they can understand. If a phenomena behaves predictably, then thought can help one to deal with it, regardless of whether it is understood. Scientists discovered and learned to do useful things with the inheritability of genes long before DNA was ever discovered.

Inter-Path Relationships

More than any other Path, those on the Path of +Thought try to understand the whys and hows of Seekerdom. They consider the Path of +Thought to lead to all other Paths. One can, they believe, logically derive the theoretical existence of and benefits of the other Paths by analyzing the different capabilities and failures of human thought and behavior. Yet they will generally not claim to presuppose the wisdom of these Paths. As they will readily tell anyone: one can't know what one doesn't yet know. Yet the Path of +Thought does lead easily to the other Paths. Many Seekers on all the Paths started on the Path of +Thought and understand its usefulness and power.

Those on other Paths may see those on the Path of +Thought as dangerously arrogant with their assertion that they understand the whys and hows of other Paths. Many +Thought Seekers also take flak for insisting that other Seekers do not have supernatural powers. Many on the Path of +Thought come from a Western tradition (Western philosophy, math, science, academia) while many on the other Paths come from non-Western traditions, traditions that have been persecuted or denigrated in favor of Western traditions. This traditional animosity can cause problems between +Thought and other Seekers. Some have doubted that +Thought is a real Path.

Perhaps the strongest affinity is between +Thought and -Feeling. Trying to develop one's ability to accurately model the universe through thought often leads to trying to eliminate prejudice of thought by

P
L
U
S

T
H
O
U
G
H
T

"Today, then, since I have opportunely freed my mind from all cares [and am happily disturbed by no passions], and since I am in the secure possession of leisure in a peaceable retirement, I will at length apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions."

-Rene Descartes

emotions, and vice versa.

Traditions

The greatest contributors to the Path of +Thought are the traditions of Western Philosophy, Mathematics and Science, each of which have contributed many of the models that +Thought Seekers use to try to understand the universe.

Other traditions that contribute to +Thought are African American Culture (with its focus on self-taught scholarship, philosophy and ability to argue), Computer Science (with its emphasis on efficient decision making), Monotheism (from those sects that put a high value on scholarship, philosophy and reason, such as the Jesuit order of Catholicism, Jewish rabbis, Kabbalah), and Psychology, especially cognitive science (where the mind is seen as a toolbox of problem-solving techniques).

Challenges

The challenges that can help Seekers along the Path of +Thought advance are those that demand that Seekers absorb and utilize new concepts or new ways of thinking. Most challenges take the form of puzzles and games, as simple as a verbal riddle or as complicated as a custom built computer game or a mechanical device that only unlocks when wheels are rotated in a certain way.

Recognizing

+Thought Seekers are more likely than any other Seekers to use technology, such as smartphones, iPads, slide rules, etc.

They tend to like books and usually have at least one physical book (or digital device capable of reading e-books) on their person.

The Path of +Thought gives slightly fewer opportunities for exercise, compared to the other Paths, so +Thought Seekers are not always as athletic looking as other Seekers.

Have the annoying tendency to interject with "Actually, it's not that simple," followed by a long explanation.

Can often be seen distracted in thought, looking like they are daydreaming, counting off something on their fingers or scribbling incomprehensible notes or figures on scraps of paper.

Rarely act spontaneously or quickly, they usually take a moment to think before every action or response.

Usually speak with a large vocabulary, including many terms that are seldom heard outside of certain mathematical, philosophical or academic specialties.

View of Normals

Normal people only develop their cognitive skills to the level necessary to get by in modern society. A good analogy would be physical strength: the average person builds his or her muscle to the point necessary to carry out day-to-day activities, but no more. The relationship between +Thought Seekers and normals is like that between Olympic weightlifters and normals: just a matter of the work put into it.

"The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce and gives it some of the grace of tragedy."

-Steven Weinberg

Path Plusses

Primary: +2 per level of +Thought to any AV roll that involves using thought or reason to solve problems or arrive at new knowledge. Examples: *AVs for using INL based skills, for deducing facts based on small clues, for inferring the presence of unseen elements in a system by noting its effects on visible elements, for modeling complex systems.*

Aided: +1 per level of +Thought to any AV that can be aided by the application of reason, planing or strategy. Examples: *AVs to determine the falsehood of delusions, hallucinations or deceptions, rolls to do things that use non-INL attributes but where a smart approach can help (like using knowledge of leverage and physiology to figure out how best to lift a heavy rock).*

Combat: Add +1 per level of +Thought to combat rolls only when the PC has examined the fighter's capabilities or the environment the fight will take place in long enough to formulate a strategy.

Path Abilities

Deduction: This is the Sherlock Holmes-like ability to take one small, seemingly irrelevant piece of information and deduce some important fact from it. For example, to deduce from the scuff marks and stains on someone's shoes that they work as a short-order-cook, or deduce from examining parasitic infections of trees that someone has been poaching deer in a forest. A PC with knowledge of Psychology can even make psychological deductions based on behaviors (e.g. "he strangles schoolgirls, so he must hate his mother.") The difficulty is based on the amount of time the PC



P
L
U
S
T
H
O
U
G
H
T

"Any philosophy that can be put in a nutshell belongs there."

-Sydney J Harris

has been studying the subject matter and collecting clues. In general, the PC should tell the GM what it is he or she wants to determine and the GM will say what led to that determination. Note that a failure means that the PC has come to an incorrect conclusion but thinks that logic supports that conclusion.

Easy (1): Determine someone's occupation by rifling through his or her house for an hour.

Moderate (3): Determine someone's occupation by rifling through his or her car for five minutes.

Hard (5): Determine someone's occupation by looking at him or her for a few seconds.

Legendary (7): Determine someone's occupation by examining their handwriting.

Improv: By making monumental leaps of deduction, the PC can work from common knowledge to knowledge possessed only by specialists. For example, a PC with no medical training can cut open a person and, using knowledge of the basic principles of evolution and facts remembered from grade school biology, determine what the function of each organ must be well enough to perform successful heart surgery.

Easy (1): Temporary 1 level in an INL based skill

Moderate (3): Temporary 2 levels in an INL based skill

Hard (5): Temporary 3 levels in an INL based skill

Legendary (7): Temporary 4 levels in an INL based skill

Profile Thought Strengths:

By watching someone solve problems or listening to someone talk, the PC can determine what mental strengths a person has going for him or her. This is more than just sensing intelligence vs. stupidity or knowledge vs. ignorance, but sensing what kind of intelligence or knowledge a person has. A person may have 'book smarts' and be good at abstract intellectual problem solving, or a person may have 'people smarts' and be good with people, or have good spatial abilities, or good musical sense, or good imagination, etc. The difficulty is based on how much contact the PC has had with the person.

Easy (1): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the strengths of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the strengths of someone upon first seeing them.

-Self

Principles

Most of what people believe about themselves is false. Beliefs about self are a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you think you have athletic ability you'll play sports a lot and become skilled. If you think you're ugly you won't flirt with people and won't find anyone that finds you attractive. People's beliefs about themselves become a layer of prejudice that affects everything they do. It is also broadcast to others: people catch on, even if only at a subconscious level, to what a person thinks about themselves and treat the person accordingly.

What's more, ideas about self limit one's ability to adapt, to learn and to understand the universe. A person who considers themselves 'liberal' will reject any idea they consider 'conservative' out of hand, even if it is an idea they might have agreed with otherwise. A person who considers themselves Christian will reject a teaching of Buddha even if it is a teaching which coincides well with Christ's teachings.

People feel discomfort when they act in a way they think is at odds with their self-identity. Psychologists call this 'cognitive dissonance.' It is a powerful force, one which leads people to change their behavior or to invent and believe phony stories about why they did what they did.

Self-identity is a crutch, one that makes every decision easier (it is easier to do "the kind of things I normally do" than to have to make a decision on its own merits each time). Self is the one thing people think they can always depend on. No matter how external circumstances change, people think they can trust that their own capabilities, desires, opinions and allegiances won't change without warning. A potential change of identity rocks the very base of one's reality. Thus, ideas about self become self-imposed shackles.

Self-identification causes prejudices. People assume that those who belong to the same category as themselves have the

same thoughts and operate from the same motives, while they assume that 'others' are fundamentally different. These assumptions are quite often false.

Self-identity is built on ideas of difference from others. If you think you are strong, then you must feel that others are weak. If you think you are moral, you must feel others are immoral. Thus, identity is a source of most prejudice. Identifying one-self as belonging to one gender, religion, nation, tribe or race almost always leads to negative beliefs about, or hatred of, other genders, religions, nations, tribes or races. -Self Seekers thus see identity as the root of most violence and warfare.

In the end, identity is just a simplistic story that is incapable of matching the true complexity and power of a human being. When -Self Seekers learn to see identity as a story, they see people 'telling' this story with everything they do: with how they talk, what clothes they wear, what job they take, who they hang out with, etc. Yet while most people think they are telling people about their strengths (a punk with a skull tattoo tells people "I'm tough"; a businessman with a tailored suit tells people "I'm rich and sophisticated"), to a -Self Seeker they're only saying how they have limited themselves, what roads of exploration they have closed themselves off from. In other words, they broadcast their own weaknesses.

Those on the Path of -Self prefer to eschew ideas of self altogether. They can avoid the limitations of self by not having any beliefs about self. The ideal is to believe nothing about self that isn't believed about all of humanity (e.g. "like all humans, I need to eat") and even then they try to be extremely skeptical about the supposed limitations of the human creature.

-Self Seekers try to suppress their sense of self when observing the world around them. They find that more energy can be put towards understanding things as they really are once one stops worrying

M
J
N
U
S
S
E
L
F

"Most people are constantly supported by these inflexible ideas about who they are, what their duties are, what their limitations are, what rules govern their lives. We have learned not to rely on such things. Where they have skeletons, we are flexible. We're like octopi: we can fit into any space and go places the others can't."

- "Mr. I'll Fix Anything"

about self. They also find that being a passive observer helps them to blend in, go unnoticed.

Yet it is not so easy to escape ideas of self. It is a long, hard, often painful process. It involves giving up everything one has associated oneself with: one's home, job, possessions, family, even one's name. Those on the Path of -Self, long after they think they had given up every possible attachment to self, find something else, often something new, to give up.

Inter-Path Relationships

The Path of -Self is closely related to, and often overlaps with, the Paths of -Feeling, -Thought and -Harmony. It is related to -Feeling because many of the feelings that -Feeling Seekers try to avoid are about self and overcoming fear helps one live without the comfort of selfhood. It is related to -Thought in that -Thought is about not believing things and -Self is about not believing things about self. It is related to -Harmony in that -Self is about shedding self-identification with any group, while -Harmony is about resisting the desire to adapt to the beliefs of those around you.

Most beginning -Self and +Self Seekers see their philosophies at odds with each other, yet more advanced Seekers in these Paths see more similarities than differences.

Those on the Path of +Harmony usually don't see the point of -Self except when it is explained as "not trying to impose your selfhood on those around you" or "not thinking about the differences between yourself and others."

Traditions

The major contributors to the Path of -Self are the major monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and Eastern philosophies (such as Buddhism and Taoism). Monotheism comes to -Self because of the focus on humbling oneself before God. Any sincere monotheist may find himself or herself on the Path of -Self, but mystic schools (e.g. Sufism, Kabbalah) are especially likely to lead to that Path.

Buddhism and Taoism contribute to -Self with the idea that ego is a falsehood and attachments to it cause hardship. The practice of Chod in Vajrayana Buddhism, where one meditates on death in order to bring about a death of selfhood, sends many Seekers to the Path of -Self.

Other traditions that contribute to -Self are Clowning (from the realization that most people are 'full of themselves,' puffed up with ridiculous ideas about themselves), various schools of Mysticism (because of the emphasis of giving up ego in preference for divine presence), Ordinary Life (because of its grounding in humility as opposed to lofty cosmic goals), Politics, and especially socialism (with its focus on the equality of all people and on eliminating the high status enjoyed by elites), Psychology (from its studies of self-concept and how it is inaccurate and often creates self-fulfilling prophecies), Science (from the skepticism of the things people feel and believe without evidence or proof) and Shamanism (where "shamanic death" helps liberate one from preconceived notions about self).

"Easy is the path to wisdom for those not blinded by themselves."

-Star Wars: Clone Wars the Series

Challenges

A few teachers try to make lessons custom-made for a student, that take advantage of something the student believes about themselves. Usually, this means a challenge that forces a person to do something they think they are bad at.

Other challenges, which don't have to be custom made to a particular Seeker, involve observing a person (or even just looking at a person's belongings) and discovering the faults in their concept of Self. A master might show a student three items from a person's pockets, or allow the student to ask three questions of a person, then determine something hidden about that person's identity.

Recognizing

-Self Seekers tend to exhibit a lack of personal style. What they wear, do with their hair and nails, etc. is usually utilitarian.

They usually speak very plainly, avoiding both slang and obtuse vocabulary.

They have no 'attitude,' so much so that it's hard to tell whether they are arrogant or humble or what their opinion is of anything.

Won't give clear answers to personal questions (e.g. where are you from, what do you do, what religion are you?).

View of Normals

The average person depends on, is controlled by, and is constantly trying to convince others of a fiction of self-identity. From the prejudiced redneck to the arrogant philosophy professor, all are crippled by their sense of identity. The story people tell about themselves is not only untrue, it is so ridiculously simplistic that it is an insult to the complexity and potential inherent in each human.



“...you're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job.
You're not your family You're not your name.... You're not your problems....
You're not your age.... You are not your hopes.”

-Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club

Path Plusses

Primary: Add +2 per level of -Self to any AV that involves not having ideas about self and thus not communicating ideas about self to others or that involve being a passive observer. Examples: *AVs to avoid having the PCs emotions, attributes or intentions be read by others, rolls to notice things happening around one.*

Aided: Add +1 to any AV roll that can be aided by being able to think, act or perceive unhampered by thoughts about self and the prejudices they can cause. Example: *empathy, fighting against things that others would perceive as human weaknesses.*

Combat: Add +1 per level of -Self to combat rolls only when the PC is outmatched (opponent has a higher combat AV, prior to addition of Path plusses) and where thoughts of self would have caused fear or loss of confidence.

Attributes: Add +1 to Hit Points per level of -Self (from the PC's refusing to believe in his or her own body's weaknesses).

Path Abilities

Mirror of Self. By presenting people with a blank slate, the PC allows people to project their own ideas about self onto the PC. The target comes to believe about the PC what the target believes about himself or herself: stupid or smart, good or bad, happy or sad, well liked or hated, brave or cowardly, etc.

Roll Mirror of Self AV vs. the targets INL (if the target wins he or she realizes that these assumptions are unfounded).

Profile Self-Identity Weaknesses:

The PC has become sensitive to the things people believe about themselves that do harm to those people by making them believe that they are weak, keeping them from seeking self-improvement, or making them concentrate on one set of abilities when they could be doing other things. Self-Identity can be recognized by interviewing a person or even just observing how a person walks, what they wear or what they own. Once weaknesses are sensed the PC can attempt to make a person aware of their false beliefs so they can try to overcome them, or can attempt to take advantage of those weaknesses.

Easy (1): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the weaknesses of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the weaknesses of someone upon first seeing them.

Unnoticeable: When the PC is passively observing his or her surroundings, not trying to change them, the PC broadcasts little or no 'selfhood' and is thus very hard to notice. This skill works equally well on humans or animals.

Roll twice the PC's -Self Path level vs. the target's AWR to avoid being noticed.

“Only the shallow know themselves.”

-Oscar Wilde

+Self

Principles

Those on the Path of +Self agree with those on the Path of -Self that people's ideas about themselves often limit those people, becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. Most human weakness is thus just illusion. The worst of all these harmful self-concepts is 'low self-worth': the belief that one is worth less than other humans and is thus less deserving of peace, freedom and happiness. Low self-worth is much more prevalent than most people believe. Most who have it cover it up with a shallow, situational self-worth and pretend self-confidence. This shallow self-worth mostly requires someone that a person can feel themselves superior to. The strong man needs weaker men he knows he can beat up, the smart woman needs stupid people she can feel superior to, etc. This fragile, weak self-confidence creates a world of bullies, all trying to feel better about themselves by making someone else feel bad about themselves.

Those on the Path of +Self believe that the remedy to the weaknesses of self-identity is to develop true self-confidence and self-worth. To one on the Path of +Self, if you can believe that you are strong, smart, attractive and brave then you really will be. And if you are truly confident in these beliefs, you won't need to denigrate others in your own mind to feel good about yourself.

Those on the Path of +Self are very interested in the placebo effect: when people think they are being aided or compromised by some factor external to themselves (e.g. a fake "drug") and do better or worse than those who haven't been led into this false belief. For instance, African-American kids taking an intelligence test do significantly better when they are told the test has been 'culturally corrected' to help them do better, even when this is not the case. Or people who have been falsely led to believe that they have been exposed to

an allergen show every outward sign of an allergy attack. These myriad experiments show that belief is very powerful. They also show that the human mind has an incredible power to control nearly every aspect of human biology. Beliefs can affect strength, immune system response, healing rates, resistance to toxins, oxygen need, etc. In other words, the difference between a 'normal person' and a 'superhuman' is only a matter of belief.

Seekers on the Path of +Self know that people automatically, subconsciously radiate their self-concept to everyone around them via body language and how they choose to present themselves to the world. People automatically and subconsciously receive these signals from others and tend to believe them. These signals are often given more credence than real life evidence. A person who believes he is strong and acts strong will be seen as strong, even if he is not actually very muscular.

To +Self Seekers, any self-identity one can adopt is useful so long as that self-identity pushes the limits of human capability. For some, this means adopting a highly-improved version of their original pre-Seeker identity: a stronger, smarter, braver, more attractive, more worthy version of themselves. For others, this means adopting an identity or identities from outside themselves. These +Self Seekers try to believe that they are (or have all the qualities of) a historical figure, a deity, a fictional character, an animal, a force of nature, etc. A Seeker may "channel wolfhood," taking on the self-identity of a powerful wolf. Another may be "possessed by" a number of Afro-Caribbean deities. All of these strategies are just a means of overcoming the limitations of mundane identities.

Of all the Paths, the Path of +Self requires the least theory. Seekers don't have to know why believing in themselves works, they just have to do it.

P
L
U
S
S
E
L
F

Inter-Path Relationships

The Paths of -Thought and +Harmony often feel too 'passive' to those on the Path of +Self. The Path of -Harmony, on the other hand, can feel like a natural extension of +Self: it's easy to go from enhancing one's sense of selfhood to learning to resist the desire to conform.

Those on the Path of +Self often find themselves attracted to both +Feeling and -Feeling. Their self-confidence makes them feel both that they are too strong to allow their emotions to control them and at the same time that their feelings are incredibly important and powerful and should be respected.

Traditions

Traditions with aboriginal roots tend to contribute most strongly to the Path of +Self. These include African American Culture (with its emphasis on pride and power to avoid internalizing prejudices), African Syncretism (where those who believe themselves possessed by powerful spirits can do extreme feats of strength and endurance), Brujeria (with its emphasis on developing strength of will, believing oneself to be powerful or taking on the identity of a powerful animal), Occultism/Magick (with its emphasis on developing personal power over the universe) and Shamanism (because of the difficult personal challenges faced in shamanic training, and the willpower and self-confidence they build). Anthropology can also contribute to the Path of +Self because of the study of shamanic and other ancient techniques of gaining personal power.

Popular modern religions, which stress humility before a higher power, almost never spawn Seekers on the Path of +Self. When modern religions do contribute to the Path of +Self it is in those cases where one believes oneself to possess special strengths as an agent of God, e.g. a preacher fighting for people's souls or a righteous warrior.

Other traditions that sometimes contribute to the Path of +Self are Art (because it's not a long leap from learning to express oneself to learning to feel strongly about selfhood), Athletics (with the focus on self-confidence as a prerequisite for excellence), Body Modification (with its painful ordeals and radical self-expression), Existentialism (because of the emphasis on humans' freedom to choose what kind of people they are going to be), Freemasonry (because of the emphasis on righteousness and principles), Martial Arts (especially where they teach one to project self-confidence as a weapon), Military (because of the emphasis on personal honor and bravery), New Thought and Self-Help (with their emphasis on succeeding by believing in oneself), Politics (especially conservative and libertarian ideas which value self-sufficiency, rationality, competitiveness and leadership) and Psychology (especially clinical psychology, where building up self-confidence is considered a key to success and happiness).

Challenges

Most +Self challenges involve overcoming fears or perceived weaknesses, e.g. walking over hot coals, beating a physically superior opponent in combat, walking a thin plank over a deep ravine, dancing a sundance (dancing around a pole, attached to it by hooks through one's chest, and leaning back against the ropes), taking a mixture of herbs designed to cause frightening delusions, ritual scarification, etc. +Self challenges are often thought of as the most brutal and dangerous (although sometimes the danger is just an illusion).

Other challenges involve convincing other people of the Seeker's self-perceptions. E.g. bluffing one's way into a corporate board meeting simply by acting important.

"How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?"

-Fight Club screenplay by Jim Uhls, adapted from the novel by Chuck Palahniuk

Recognizing

+Self Seekers typically dress in a unique, often flamboyant personal style.

Whatever physical assets they have, they wear clothes that show off those assets. 'Modesty' is rare in +Self Seekers.

Many have scars, often evidently self-inflicted, that they wear proudly.

They tend to dress as if they have no fear of the elements (e.g. in a t-shirt and jeans when it is snowing out).

They have confident expressions and stare people directly in the eye.

View of Normals

To a +Self Seeker, the average person is crippled by delusions about their own weaknesses. People think they can't quit smoking, can't succeed in school, can't stand up to the local bully, can't make it as an artist, can't resist eating that piece of cake in the fridge, can't stand the pain of a broken hand without drugs, etc. Mostly, they don't even try to do these things, or if they do try they give up quickly. When they do give up, they call it "failure" and it feeds their belief in their own weakness. Or, they sabotage themselves before even trying so they have an excuse why they failed (e.g. "I didn't do well on that test because I was out late drinking the night before.")



P
L
U
S
S
E
L
F

*"Because he believes in himself he doesn't try to convince others.
Because he is content with himself he doesn't need others' approval.
Because he accepts himself the whole world accepts him."*

-Tao Te Ching

In the end, most people find one thing they're sure they can do fairly well and they depend on that one thing to keep themselves from feeling like a total loser. They don't try to do anything else and they don't try to do anything really great in their one thing because they fear failing at the one thing they have.

For most people, the only chance they will reach their true potential is if some life-or-death event makes them forget their perceived limitations, e.g. if their child is trapped under a car and they find the strength to lift that car. This is the inner strength they could be using every day if they knew they had it.

Path Plusses

Primary: Add +2 per level of +Self to rolls to have, and communicate to others, self-confidence and high self-worth. Examples: *AVs to make others believe that which the PC believes about self.*

Aided: Add +1 per level to rolls that can be aided by having a very high self-confidence. Examples: *saves where failure would violate the PC's self concept.*

Combat: Add +1 per level of +Self only when the opponent is trying to use pain or exhaustion against the PC (opponent is using the Ruin and Exhaust styles) and where the PC can use strength of will and determination to keep fighting.

Attributes: By believing in his or her own abilities very strongly the PC can boost his or her attributes. Such boosts can raise an attribute over the normal cap of 5. The attributes raised must be in-line with

the PC's current self-concept (meaning they can be changed on the fly if the PC uses the Choose Identity ability).

At +Self (1): +1 to one attribute, +1 Hit Point

At +Self (2): +1 each to two attributes, +2 Hit Points

At +Self (3): +2 each to two attributes, +3 Hit Points

At +Self (4): +2 each to three attributes, +4 Hit Points

At +Self (5): +3 each to three attributes, +5 Hit Points

Path Abilities

Animal Magnetism: Through pure force of ego, the PC can give commands that weaker-willed individuals find difficult to resist. The PC can't make a person think or believe a certain thing, only do a certain thing. A person, to preserve his or her own sense of free will, may delude themselves afterwards that they wanted to do the thing. The PC is at -1 AV if the person thinks it's something that may harm them, -2 AV if they're sure it will, -3 if they think it might kill them and -4 if they're sure it will.

Roll the PC's +Self Path level vs. the victim's WIL.

Choose Identity: The PC can choose between multiple self-concepts, choosing the one most appropriate for the moment. This is somewhat like multiple personality disorder except the PC is always in control and each personality has access to all the knowledge that other personalities do.

Easy (1): Different person.

Moderate (3): Animal.

Hard (5): Mythical animal.

Profile Self-Identity Strengths:

The PC has become sensitive to the things people believe about themselves that give those people power, e.g. 'I am brave' 'I am attractive' 'I am lucky', etc. Once a strength is sensed, the PC can attempt to invoke that strength to help the person, or attempt to sabotage that strength.

Easy (1): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the strengths of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the strengths of someone upon first seeing them.

Animal Transformation

A PC who can use Choose Identity at 3 difficulty can take on the identity of an animal. The PC can then make CHM rolls (at +2 per level of +Self) to make others perceive and believe that self-concept. The PC can also add the plusses to attributes from +Self to the attributes that animal might have, thus approximating the speed, strength, acuity of senses or agility of an animal. Although the PC won't appear to be an animal on video tape, for all other intents and purposes the PC is an animal.

Seekers of Self and Teens

Seekers on the Path of +Self or -Self often find themselves getting involved in the lives of teenagers. This is because the teen years are almost universally a crisis of identity. Teens are trying to figure out how they should act, what others think of them and, most importantly, who they really are. To a Seeker of Self, a teen's identity crisis is glaringly obvious in everything that teenager does.

Any Seeker on the Path of +Self or -Self sees teenagers as a group of people suffering needlessly by worrying about questions that should be answered by either assuming the best about themselves, or by declaring those questions foolish and refusing to think about them. Seekers of Self thus find themselves drawn to try to counsel teens, often in innovative ways.

P
L
U
S
S
E
L
F

-Harmony

Principles

Humans, and especially Westerners, like to think of themselves as autonomous beings, capable of making decisions and reaching conclusions independently of those around them. In reality, people's perceptions and decisions are affected by their surroundings, by the actions of those around them, and by their own personal and cultural backgrounds. Social psychology experiments have repeatedly shown how easily people are influenced without their being aware of it.

The Path of -Harmony is the Path of trying to recognize and overcome the prejudices caused by one's culture, one's surroundings, even one's body, to be able to perceive and manipulate the world as a disinterested outsider. This is traditionally the Path of heretics: people who have had the courage to buck the status quo, to tell people when their beliefs are wrong or their social codes are unethical, to be an alien and an outsider and face the stigma associated with refusing to belong.

In many low-tech cultures those who walk the Path of -Harmony become outcasts, forced to live far away from others, denied a position as a member of the community, although still sought out for aid, especially aid that involves doing things that community members would be unwilling to do. These dangerous, although useful, outcasts often become mythologized as "brujas" "witches" and "sorcerers."

-Harmony Seekers don't believe that the society's rules apply to them. They believe true progress towards being a better person can only come from creating and obeying your own rules.

-Harmony Seekers are very interested in the evils of history (e.g. war, slavery, holocaust) and how normal people were persuaded to participate in these atrocities or allowed them to happen. There are many answers to this question. One is that all societies have an "immune system," a means of punishing non-conformists by labeling them as criminals, psychopaths, perverts, terrorists and heretics. -Harmony Seekers are willing to be thought of as these things if it means being an independent voice and avoiding the logical or moral mistakes of those around them.

People, by instinct and by cultural training, are more likely to believe and obey those they consider authority figures. Nothing shows this more clearly than the various obedience-to-authority studies performed by psychologists. In these studies it has been shown that perfectly normal people, people who think of themselves as good, can be talked into doing things they think will hurt or kill innocent people simply because someone in authority tells them to.

Another reason people have put up with injustices (e.g. slavery) has been the perception that these injustices are 'just the way things are' and thus there is no moral compunction to change them, or that trying to change these injustices would be too damaging to the fabric of society. -Harmony Seekers consider it a strength that they aren't dependent on any society or community and so they have no fear of destroying a society or community that depends on unjust actions for its survival. To most -Harmony Seekers, leaving a community in ruins is preferable to leaving it stuck in a cycle of injustice. Ruins can be rebuilt into something better.

It is for these reasons that those on the Path of -Harmony decide that the best route to true knowledge, wisdom and power is to question everything their culture presents as unquestionable fact, to resist the innate

"Whenever you find you are on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect."

-Mark Twain

desire to get along with others and to resist society's compunction that everyone in society should do what's best for that society.

A consequence (or perhaps a goal) of their abandoning the values held by their communities is that -Harmony Seekers find it easier to accept unpleasant truths about the universe, e.g. "people are inherently selfish and unjust," "human life is invariably tragic," "the universe is godless." To a -Harmony Seeker, if a belief is comforting, or pleasant, or easy, that belief should come under immediate scrutiny.

Some on the Path of -Harmony purposefully act or dress or modify their bodies in a way designed to make them be rejected by those around them, all so they can avoid the temptation of fitting in. Others strengthen the psychological wall separating themselves from the world around them with gloves, sunglasses, trenchcoats, etc. Some become ascetics, denying themselves pleasures and comforts, not to prove their own strength (like +Self) and not to exercise their ability to ignore unpleasant feelings (like -Feeling) but so that they won't become comfortable enough with a place and its people that they start to feel a sense of belonging.

Many on the Path of -Harmony experiment with practices and things that cultures have deemed too dangerous for people to have access to. Depending on the Tradition they are studying this might mean experimenting with dangerous drugs, going to graveyards and trying to learn from the dead or intentionally invoking in oneself what modern society would call 'mental illness.'

Rather than seeking out the friendly and healthy side of nature, as Seekers of the Path of +Harmony commonly do, -Harmony Seekers often seek out and become acquainted with the dangerous and

unhealthy parts of nature: toxic plants, dangerous deliriant drugs, thorns, stinging insects, etc. They often force themselves to endure these parts of nature so that they will gain some immunity to them (and to help overcome their natural attachment to that which their bodies find comfortable and pleasant).

Normal people tend to 'quarantine' those ideas, feelings, beliefs and parts of their self-concept that their culture tells them is evil or bad. A major part of -Harmony practice is exploring this "dark side" and deciding for oneself what parts of that dark side should be incorporated into one's normal everyday self.

The Path of -Harmony tends to attract those most and least interested in morality. Those least interested in morality are drawn to the Path because it explores what one can achieve when one ignores the taboos of one's culture. Those most interested in morality hope to learn about and avoid the immoralities inherent in their culture. The Path of -Harmony is thus about standing outside of the moral standards of one's culture to gain freedom from it. Whether one uses this freedom for personal gain, or to recognize and fight injustices, or both, is up to the individual Seeker.

Although -Harmony Seekers practice physical or psychological separation from others, this does not mean that it is the goal of -Harmony Seekers to always be alone, no more than it is the goal of -Thought Seekers to never think or -Feeling Seekers to never feel anything. Instead, most -Harmony Seekers spend time apart from others so they can overcome any fear of being lonely or unwanted, and later enjoy relationships with others without those relationships being tainted by fear. A -Harmony Seeker wants to be with others, but to feel free to unreservedly be themselves, to never have to hide anything about themselves or try to conform.

"The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."

-Henrik Ibsen

Inter-Path Relationships

The Path of -Harmony is the most misunderstood Path, both by non-Seekers and by Seekers of other Paths. Most Seekers from other Paths think that -Harmony Seekers are looking for a license to be evil, the power to avoid bad karma or to end their responsibilities to humanity. +Harmony Seekers, especially, think -Harmony Seekers purposefully destroy harmony for their own selfish purposes.

-Harmony does find some allies in the Path of +Thought. +Thought Seekers know, from the history of science and philosophy, that it is very hard and yet very important to question the beliefs that those around you consider sacred. Similarly, some -Feeling Seekers see -Harmony as an extension of not letting one's feelings affect your decision-making. -Self Seekers may see removing oneself from all communities as an extension of destroying ideas about self. +Self Seekers, on the other hand, admire someone who can stand up to the masses by saying unpopular things.

Traditions

Many of those traditions that contribute to the Path of -Harmony come from the experiences of groups who have been persecuted by the majority, e.g. African American Culture (where being a target of prejudice can cause a desire to root out the prejudices and biases that people are unaware they have), Brujeria (with its emphasis on being an outsider and disrupting the harmony of others) and Monotheism (especially those 'martyr' traditions created by persecuted religious minorities).

Other -Harmony Traditions are those that purposefully put themselves outside of the regular culture, e.g. the traditions of Anthropology/Sociology (where practitioners try to be impartial, skeptical observers of our culture and society), Body Modification

(where practitioners purposefully mark themselves as outside the mainstream), Clowning (where focusing on people's foibles convinces practitioners that most people are sheep), Existentialism (which has an emphasis on creating one's own meaning, not accepting those meanings assigned by culture or belief systems), Freemasonry (with an emphasis on doing what's right regardless of what others are doing), Hippies (who have tried to avoid the mistakes of the Western mainstream), Politics (especially liberalism's critical attitude towards traditional values, and other political extremists' critical attitude towards the political status quo) and Sex (especially fetishists' exploration of the edges of what mainstream society considers acceptable).

Other traditions that contribute to -Harmony are Native American Spirituality (from the emphasis on transgressing a culture's mores by sorcerers or sacred clowns), Psychology (from obedience studies, designed to explain why people can be convinced to do horrible things), Science (from the general skepticism about any belief our culture offers up with out evidence to back it up) and Shamanism (from the fact that shamans live apart from their tribe and are often called upon as impartial judges).

Challenges

Some -Harmony challenges involve being put among a group of people who are all completely mistaken about the source of the problem they face. In order to solve the problem, the PC must come to discount what everyone is saying to them. Other challenges may involve having to resist severe forms of indoctrination, even brainwashing. Other challenges involve having to exercise one's dark side by figuring out what's going on in the mind of a complete outsider (e.g. a serial killer, terrorist, child molester). Other challenges may involve breaking cultural taboos (e.g. smearing oneself with feces and walking down Main Street) in order to exercise one's sense of being beyond the concerns of normal culture.

"Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation."

-Oscar Wilde

Recognizing

Seekers on the Path of -Harmony tend to wear clothing which sets them apart from any social group or subculture. Sometimes this is clothing which appears threatening.

They often try to isolate themselves from their surroundings with gloves, long coats, etc.

They can come off as unfriendly, or as aloof: refusing to react reciprocally to the friendly and unfriendly things others do to them.

Usually refuse to engage in normal codes of politeness, e.g. won't shake hands, will respond to "how are you?" by describing an unpleasant genital rash, etc.

View of Normals

Normal humans, no matter how much they believe otherwise, are not independent entities. They are incredibly dependent on those around them and on fragile social structures. Their dependence on the status quo makes them weak and frightened of change, even change which would end up benefiting them. Normal people are overly influenced by authority, believing, as our pack animal ancestors did, that it is wrong to do anything that one would be punished for if caught.

Normal people are incredibly easy to influence: often times all it takes is a well-timed dirty look to ruin their whole day, a hardly noticeable change to their environment to make them sick, or an authoritatively issued command to make them do something they don't want to do.



M
I
N
U
S
H
A
R
M
O
N
Y

Most people are ridiculously dependent on others for their psychological health, self-esteem and happiness. Whether they will admit it or not, nearly everyone is afraid of being hated by those around them.

Only a tiny part of what people do can truly be called their own decision. The rest of it is just taking cues from those around them. Even when they make a decision, the decisions they believe they have available to them are taken from their social and cultural contexts. Most of what people believe about the world is not learned from the world itself but from other people. Normal people don't have the time or courage to try to determine whether what they have been taught to believe is true or not.

Path Plusses

Primary: +2 per level of -Harmony to any AV to resist or sever connections to one's body, environment or to other people that can harm the PC, prejudice the PC or give others information about the PC. Examples: *AVs to resist torture, brainwashing, manipulation, to avoid letting others read the PC's traits, to save vs. exposure to and the effects of diseases and toxins.*

Aided: +1 per level of -Harmony to any AV which is aided by being able to approach a situation as an impartial observer. Examples: *AVs to notice invasion of one's personal space, rolls to notice attempts to manipulate the PC, rolls to intimidate others by being mysterious and alien, rolls to recognize and deal with outsiders, rolls to avoid vomiting or to deal with things others find creepy or disgusting.*

Combat: Add +1 per level to combat rolls only when you are attacking by surprise, when you are ignoring any rules of fair play or ethical behavior in combat and are attacking the most vulnerable spot possible (Kill or Ruin styles only).

Path Abilities

Profile Harmony Weaknesses:

The PC can recognize when people's connections with the people, animals and things around them are harmful to those people. The PC can sense when people are failing to think for themselves or have been convinced to injure themselves for the good of the group. Once the PC has discovered a weakness he or she can attempt to make the person aware of that weakness or can attempt to exploit it. The difficulty is based on how much contact the PC had with the person.

Easy (1): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the weaknesses of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the weaknesses of someone upon first seeing them.

Sabotage Harmony: When the PC finds a system that is in harmony, the PC can work his or her way to a crucial element of that system, one that if disrupted, will throw the whole system out of harmony. Difficulty is based on how small a change the PC can make to the system.

Easy (1): Disrupt the economy and law-and-order in a town by causing a grudge between two citizens.

Moderate (3): Poison one tree in a forest to cause throw the entire ecosystem into chaos.

Hard (5): Cause a family to become dysfunctional by removing arch supports from the dad's shoe.

"To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best night and day to make you like everybody else means to fight the hardest battle any human being can fight and never stop fighting."

-E.E. Cummings

+Harmony

Principles

+Harmony is based on the idea that all living things are part of systems (communities, ecologies, economies, etc.) that connect them to other living things via multiple chains of cause and effect. The chains of cause and effect in these systems are so complicated that the effect of one component on another cannot be predicted. There are two things that can be predicted: first, that every component of the system will have some effect on every other component in the system. Second, actions which go against whatever equilibrium has developed will tend to hurt every member of the system, including the member doing the disruption.

Take a tree for instance. It effects the world around it in many ways: how it blocks the wind, holds the topsoil together, provides shade, produces oxygen, is a home to animals, etc. Cutting down just one tree effects everything around that tree in ways that cannot really be predicted, yet insomuch as the tree has become part of the equilibrium of the world around it, felling tree will tend to make things worse.

The lessons for human life are thus: it is folly to consider oneself a lone entity, because one's fate is closely intertwined with the people and the living things around one. It is also folly to think that one can predict the long-term consequences of one's own actions. The best thing to do is to try to live in equilibrium with your surroundings, doing your part to keep the environments and communities you are part of healthy, avoiding actions which hurt other beings, as these are actions which will most likely cause you misfortune.

Most scientifically-minded people see the taboos and rituals of non-industrial cultures as pure superstition: false beliefs about cau-

sation that try to link harmless actions to unrelated misfortunes. +Harmony Seekers tend to see those cultural beliefs as a catalog of wisdom, accumulated through the cultural memory of millennia, about what things to avoid because they tend to destabilize the biological, psychological, ecological and social systems that members of those cultures live within. Unlike scientists, non-industrial peoples were able to learn when actions had bad results without needing to know the exact causal mechanisms linking them. +Harmony Seekers collect and utilize these "superstitions" in the same way +Thought Seekers collect and use philosophical concepts.

Even within a person, everything is connected: a foot injury could cause a headache, while gently massaging earlobes may ease a stomachache. The mind and body are intimately connected. Everything going on in one affects the other. So, to a +Harmony Seeker, treating a physical problem doesn't just mean treating the body. It means making sure the person's psychology and their relationship with their environment will contribute to their being cured. For modern people this is known as 'holistic medicine' but for non-industrial peoples, and +Harmony Seekers, it is just common sense.

Each person is sensitive not just to their immediate surroundings, but to lunar, seasonal and other celestial cycles. +Harmony Seekers thus pay attention to the effects of 'the stars' on people.

The Path of +Harmony is more about lifestyle than ideology. +Harmony Seekers try to adapt themselves to fit in perfectly with their environments. Instead of trying to change the world around them, they change themselves, but in the end this makes every place they spend time

"No man is an island...."

-John Donne

P
L
U
S

H
A
R
M
O
N
Y

in happier and healthier. A +Harmony Seeker tries to be sensitive to what the environment “wants” and what their own bodies “want.” Every action a +Harmony Seeker takes, including what they eat, what clothing they wear, when they wake up in the morning, even how they walk is designed to fit harmoniously with the needs of their environments and their bodies. They even try to think harmonious thoughts that will put them in the right mind-set to get along with others.

+Harmony Seekers don’t find a need to focus on abstract moral codes. There is no need to reconcile selfishness with altruism as they are rarely, if ever, at odds. Being ‘good’ is a practical, not a moral matter. Only the ignorant think they can make their own lives better by hurting other beings.

“In my country, in Japan, we have... you would call them mileage clubs. It’s like a sport. The object is to drive around and see who can get the best gas mileage. The trick to mileage is to make the engine do as little work as possible. Find what speeds and what acceleration the engine does best, and do that. When you have momentum, use your momentum. Maybe the fact that I was raised Buddhist helped me. You can’t drive like you are boss of everything, you drive like you are partner of car. Somewhere along the way, I figured out: this is how people should be to each other. And then I realized something even more important: I am the driver of me. My body and my mind are the vehicle, and my free-will is the driver, and although I’m in control I must be the partner, find out what my me is saying it wants. That’s why, when I was done with our club’s cross-country tour of America, I said I didn’t want to go back. I could tell that my me wanted to spend more time traveling around here, meeting people, learning things.”

-The Mileage Club Enthusiast

+Harmony Seekers try to avoid perceiving themselves as being in opposition against any person or any thing. +Harmony Seekers tend to think that the universe is what game theorists (p.83) call “a non-zero-sum game,” that it is possible for everyone to have what they need, and so anyone who thinks they need to oppose anyone else is mistaken. +Harmony Seekers see almost every conflict as an opportunity to make peace and for everyone to be happy.

This work-with-rather-than-against approach applies not just to people, but to one’s interactions with the physical world. When swimming, the Seeker tries to swim with the current and not against it. When cutting, they try to cut with the grain. When doing martial arts, they try to use the momentum of the other fighter’s


Thanking Your Knife

+Harmony Seekers can often be seen engaging in odd behaviors such as speaking to inanimate objects. They might, for example, thank their knife for a job well done after cutting something with it. One might ask these Seekers “do you really believe that the knife contains an intelligence that understands what you’re saying?” Some will say yes, others will say no, but all will agree that the important thing is that thanking the knife cultivates, in the mind of the thanker, a respect for his or her tools which encourages carefulness and thoughtfulness, discourages mistreatment of tools and helps the Seeker understand the tool’s capabilities and weaknesses and which will, in the end, benefit the Seeker.

In a similar vein, a monotheistic (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc.) Seeker on the Path of +Harmony might say that it is important to thank God, not because God needs people’s thanks, but because being thankful makes the thankers better people.

“An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.”

-Mohandas K Gandhi



punches and kicks to move the opponents around. The Taoist idea of striving for effortless action, working with the way things are rather than the way you want them to be, is especially appealing to +Harmony Seekers.

This is not to say that all +Harmony Seekers are absolute pacifists. Some believe there are times and situations where force is the best option to restore harmony, some don't. Yet even those who do use force try to use as little force as necessary to get the job done.

Balance is an important concept on the Path of +Harmony. There is nothing in this world that is an unqualified good such that any amount of it is desirable, and there is little that is an unqualified bad such that we should not want any amount of it. Take selfishness, for example. Too much selfishness can cause people to do horrible things to each other and make the world a worse place. Yet if nobody had any selfishness, people wouldn't take care of themselves, or advocate for themselves, and people would also suffer. The more +Harmony Seekers look, the more they find that things are healthiest and best when kept in balance. This is the opposite of the viewpoint of fanatics, crusaders and extremists, who believe the thing they are fighting is an absolute evil.

The Path of +Harmony can be brought to bear on the process of Seeking wisdom itself. Specifically, +Harmony Seekers see apparently contradictory views and opinions as actually compatible. Rather than trying to prove that a belief is wrong, +Harmony Seekers try to find the ways in which it is correct. Often they find that people who are arguing are comparing apples to oranges, using the same terms but meaning very different concepts.

Inter-Path Relationships

It can sometimes be hard to convince +Harmony Seekers that there is a need for other Paths. To +Harmony Seekers, peace, health, happiness and prosperity should be every being's primary goal and the Path of +Harmony is the easiest and most effective way to achieve that goal.

+Harmony Seekers often consider themselves at cross purposes with -Harmony Seekers. -Harmony Seekers try to break communities while +Harmony Seekers try to fix them. This rivalry most likely goes back to the earliest Seekers. The first Seekers were most likely a tribal healer who used +Harmony principles to keep the tribe and its members healthy and a sorcerer who used -Harmony principles to break taboos, hurt enemies and resist tribal collectivism.

+Harmony Seekers see the Paths of +Feeling and -Feeling as having some utility inasmuch as each can be used to avoid or redirect emotions that would otherwise be disharmonious with one's environment.

+Harmony Seekers find themselves more in sync with -Thought than +Thought Seekers. The rational solution to a problem is usually one that creates another problem elsewhere (like medicine that cures one symptom but causes another) because reason and science are best at dealing with simple systems with predictable outcomes, not complex systems where actions have unpredictable outcomes. On the other hand, the intuitive problem solving of -Thought is more likely to find a solution that is harmonious on all levels. For their part, those in the Path of +Thought often accuse those in the Path of +Harmony of believing in ridiculous and unfounded superstitions.

+Harmony Seekers tend to think that +Self Seekers are too self-centered, too likely to think of themselves as independent beings. +Harmony seekers may or may not see the point of the Path of -Self, depending on how it is described to them (and -Self Seekers are notorious for giving unhelpful answers to questions about their Path).

Traditions

Even though some of their believers have engaged in violence in their names, the world's major religions all have admonitions to "love thy neighbor," "turn the other cheek" and to generally engage in charity, forgiveness, tolerance and peace, and so these religions have all contributed to the Path of +Harmony.

Buddhism has contributed to +Harmony with its study of karma and emphasis on decreasing suffering in the world. Taoism has contributed with it emphasis on working with the world around you rather than against it.

Many ancient and aboriginal cultures have knowledge about how to live in harmony with one's surroundings. This knowledge still exists in traditions such as Shamanism, African Syncretisms, Curanderismo and Native American Spirituality. There are also Western traditions that see Western Culture as lacking in this particular type of wisdom and hope to borrow it from other cultures. These include the traditions of African American Culture, Alternative Medicine, Neo-Paganism/Wicca, Anthropology, Feminism, Ethnic Studies and Queer Studies.

Other traditions that have contributed to +Harmony are Martial Arts (especially when they teach non-violent self-defense as a viable means to end conflict), Mathematics (when chaos theory shows that one person's actions in an environment can have a strong effect on everyone else, and when game theory shows that cooperation is almost always the best strategy), Ordinary Life (with its emphasis on getting along with those around you), Politics (especially liberalism, with its emphasis on being empathetic, altruistic, understanding of other cultures and living in harmony with the environment) and Psychology (especially couples, family, organizational, or social skills therapists, who specialize in helping people get along with others).

Challenges

Nothing teaches +Harmony as well as practicing +Harmony. No game or hypothetical situation can teach +Harmony because none are as complicated as the real world. Most +Harmony challenges are diagnostic challenges: the student is presented with a situation of disharmony and they have to figure out what is causing the disharmony, whether it be as obscure as a pebble placed in someone's shoe or as blatant as a toxin added to the water supply.

Sometimes the lesson is that the student himself or herself is put into a state of disharmony and must find out how and why and 'cure' himself or herself.

Recognizing

+Self Seekers tend to wear comfortable clothing, usually natural fabrics.

They tend towards soft, natural colors (greens, browns, oranges, etc.).

They seldom use clothing or makeup to try to make themselves stand out.

They act kind, gentle and exceedingly friendly, rarely ever getting angry or confrontational.

They have the bodies of people who eat healthily and treat themselves right.

They are fairly graceful. In particular their movements seem 'easy,' as if they made it a habit not to overtax their bodies.

View of Normals

Normal people, especially Westerners, underestimate the degree to which they are affected by their environments. They see themselves as autonomous individuals, rather than parts of a

"That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn."

—Talmud, Shabbat 31a

larger system. They pay little attention to how their behavior and actions affect those around them. Many think they can get ahead via selfish or competitive behavior, but the long-term results of their actions will almost certainly be unhappiness. Normal people pay little attention to what's good for them: they don't eat what they should, they don't sleep as they should, they don't exercise or relax as much as they should, they subject themselves to emotional states that damage their bodies and they choose to live in environments that are bound to make them unhealthy. And because they are insensitive to their own needs, they are also insensitive to the needs of those they love and can't make life better for those they most want to help.

Path Plusses

Primary: +2 per level of +Harmony to any AV to form, repair or strengthen mutually beneficial relationships between a PC and the PC's body, other people and the environment. Examples: *AVs to adapt to the skills, habits, customs and language of a community, to blend in with one's environment, to make people feel guilty for doing bad things to you or to make friends.*

Aided: +1 per level to any AV which is aided by having healthy/mutually beneficial relationships with a PC's environment, body or other people. Examples: *AVs to move through one's environment easily and without leaving traces, to notice changes to a familiar environment, to any medical or psychotherapeutic treatment.*



P
L
U
S
H
A
R
M
O
N
Y

ERIC WILLIAMS II

Combat: Add +1 per level of +Harmony to combat rolls only when you are unarmed and are trying to end combat (or escape from combat) without anyone getting badly hurt (Control or Exhaust styles only).

Attributes: These are plusses from the PC acting in a way that maximizes his or her own health.

At +Harmony (1): +1 END, +1 Hit Point, injuries are halved every 5 days.

At +Harmony (2): +2 END, +1 STH, +1 INL, injuries are halved every 4 days.

At +Harmony (3): +3 END, +1 STH, +1 INL, +1 AWR, +1 AGY, +3 Hit Points, injuries are halved every 3 days.

At +Harmony (4): +4 END, +2 STH, +2 INL, +1 AWR, +1 AGY, +4 Hit Points, injuries are halved every 2 days.

At +Harmony (5): +5 END, +2 STH, +2 INL, +2 AWR, +2 AGY, +5 Hit Points, injuries are halved every day.

Path Abilities

Fix Harmony: When the PC finds a system that is out of harmony, the PC can work his or her way back to the malfunctioning element(s) through a combination of logical investigation (e.g. asking people that their problems are, when they started, etc.) and intuition. After finding the source of the disharmony, the PC can determine what would be needed to fix it. Difficulty is based on how obscure the source of the disharmony is.

Easy (1): Track crime and misfortune in a town to an unresolved grudge between two citizens.

Moderate (3): Track high death rate among birds in a forest back to a diseased and insect-infested tree.

Hard (5): Track failure of a marriage back to poor arch support in the husband's shoe.

Luck- The +Harmony Seeker is the beneficiary of what some would call "good karma." So long as the PC has been acting the part of a +Harmony Seeker, using his or her abilities to increase health, happiness and harmony, the PC can request a beneficial happenstance from the GM. This could be, for instance, someone the PC has helped in the past happening to show up in time to offer some help to the PC. Or, the chain of cause-and-effect may not be clear. A good thing just happens seemingly out of nowhere. The nature of the occurrence is up to the discretion of the GM and may not necessarily give the PC what he or she wants.

PC can request 1 beneficial occurrence per level per of +Harmony each game session

Profile Harmony Strengths: The PC can recognize when people have formed mutually beneficial relationships with, or are acting in harmony with, the people, animals and things around them that make those people stronger, healthier and safer. Once the PC has sensed a strength he or she can try to enhance the strength or can attempt to disrupt it.

Easy (1): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the strengths of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the strengths of someone upon first seeing them.

-Feeling

Principles

The Path of -Feeling is predicated on the belief that people are prejudiced by their emotions in most of what they do or think. Rather than logically coming to conclusions about what is true or what the best course of action is, people let their emotions guide their decisions. For instance, people believe ideas presented by people they like and disbelieve those presented by those they dislike. Although people are aware of instances where they have done stupid things because they gave in to emotions, these instances are just the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to making people do stupid things, emotions can make people unhappy by their very presence. Fear, anger, sadness, etc. make people miserable because people don't have constructive outlets for those feelings.

Most mental illnesses and self-destructive habits can be traced back to fear. They are sometimes a direct manifestation of fear (e.g. panic attacks), or more often they are the things people do to distract themselves from fear. Fear even affects the nature of pain. The same pain is much less bearable when the person experiencing it thinks it will go on for hours than when they know it will be over in a second. If not for fear, it would be much easier for people to handle hardship and discomfort.

So, to a -Feeling Seeker, the best way to find the truth, plot out the best course of action and live life free from displeasure is to learn to not be affected by emotions.

The first step, for most -Feeling Seekers is to learn to acknowledge their feelings but not let those feelings affect their rational decision making processes. This requires a lot of self-examination, e.g. "Am I making this decision because it's right, or because I'm angry?"

Avoiding the mistake of emotions means much more than simply ignoring one's emotions. Ignoring an emotion does not deal with it. Ignored emotions can come out in ways a person is unaware of. A bottled-up emotion typically remains, growing stronger and stronger until one slips up and the emotion comes out. Instead, -Feeling Seekers learn how to 'let go' of emotions, to release them without acting on them. The highest level of -Feeling practice is to learn how to not let external stimuli prompt emotions in the first place.

To illustrate: imagine someone walks up to you and slaps you. One option is to suppress the emotion, to sit there stewing in rage but resist doing anything or showing anger in any way. A better option would be to allow yourself to stop being angry. The best option would be to not react in anger in the first place.

Asceticism is a large part of how most Seekers approach the Path of -Feeling. They learn to live with as little as they can without becoming unhealthy. Their comforts are few or none and they experiment with eating little, sleeping little, being cold or hot, even breathing less. The purpose is not to punish themselves or make themselves unhappy. Ascetic -Feeling Seekers consider themselves as content as anyone, if not more so. Instead, the idea is to winnow away all the false needs, all the things we think we need to be happy and worry about getting and work too hard to get and also to conquer the minor and petty feelings (boredom, discomfort) that would otherwise make an ascetic unhappy.

-Feeling Seekers do not necessarily think that emotions are bad. They generally acknowledge that emotions such as love, hunger, humor, pleasure and fascination are what make life worth living. Yet they don't believe that their feelings about people and things exist outside of their heads. When people allow themselves to believe that their feelings about things and

M
I
N
U
S

F
E
E
L
I
N
G

people are the true natures of those things and people, that's when they start to make terrible mistakes. -Feeling Seekers try to cultivate a view of the universe as a cold, meaningless, unfeeling conglomeration of facts and data, onto which we project our perceptions, judgments and feelings.

Inter-Path Relations

Those on the Path of -Feeling usually think those on the Path of +Feeling are taking a foolish and dangerous approach to controlling emotions, akin to trying to control a fire by throwing sticks of dynamite on it. Those on the Path of +Feeling usually think those on the Path of -Feeling are denying their inherent power.

The Path of -Feeling finds kinship with the Path of -Thought in that the meditation techniques which allow one to stop thinking are similar to those which allow one to let go of emotions. -Feeling also shares kinship with +Thought in that both seek an unbiased, logical view of the universe.

Sometimes -Feeling and -Harmony find their Paths help each other: not belonging to a group makes it easier to have fewer feelings and vice versa. Those on the Path of +Harmony, though, often see the Path of -Feeling (like the Path of -Harmony) as an exercise of little practical value.

Those on the Path of +Self sometimes feel that their strength makes them immune to emotions, and this can lead to the Path of -Feeling. The asceticism of -Feeling can lead to the Path of -Self if giving up physical comforts leads to giving up the comforts of identity.

Traditions

Many of the world's major religions have contributed to the Path of -Feeling. The monastic and mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam focus on trying to rid the mind of all desires and emotions other than the love of the creator. Buddhism emphasizes extinguishing passions as part of the path of enlightenment.

Other Traditions contribute to the Path of -Feeling via their practicality, including the Athletics and Military Traditions, where giving in to feelings can lead to failure.

Many Traditions contribute to -Feeling by taking a skeptical look at the role emotion plays in human lives: Clowning (when humorists find emotion at the root of many of the stupid things people do), Psychology (from experimental studies showing how emotions and desires prejudice peoples rational minds), and from the skepticism inherent in Anthropology/Sociology and in Science in general.

Other paths that have contributed to the Path of -Feeling are Freemasonry (because of its emphasis on doing what's right despite fear), Mysticism (because of the emphasis on asceticism and giving up all feelings other than divine love), Conservatism (with its values of self-sufficiency, rationality, competitiveness and leadership) and Shamanism (because of the arduous and painful rituals shamans endure).

Challenges

Many -Feeling challenges, like +Self challenges, are trials of pain and endurance. Others involve resisting other incitements to emotion, e.g. resisting a deliberate attempt to piss the Seeker off or seduce the Seeker. Sometimes the challenge is to solve some puzzle that requires logical thinking in circumstances designed to evoke emotion (e.g. in a room that is on fire, or on top of a pile of rotting bodies, in the mosh pit at a rock concert).

*"If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely,
I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life -
and only then will I be free to become myself."*

-Martin Heidegger

Recognizing

Many -Feeling Seekers, due to an ascetic lifestyle, are skinny, yet are healthy and strong.

They typically have slack, emotionless faces. If they show any expression at all it's 'determination' or 'thoughtfulness.'

Often have weather-beaten skin.

They usually choose clothes for their durability rather than comfort or style, e.g. a leather vest and blue jeans.

Dress as if they're not concerned about being too cold or too hot.

View of Normals

Despite the evolution of rational minds, humans are still ruled by a set of primitive, instinctual drives (fear, anger, pride, guilt, pain, desire, etc.) that are more appropriate for guiding the behavior of a dog than an intelligent, rational being. These emotions can become quite easily invested in things they shouldn't be: we hate people we have no good reason to, want things we don't need, have fears that are out of proportion to the actual danger, feel guilt for things that aren't actually unethical, etc. Normal people come to believe the emotions they have invested in ideas, actions, people and things are actually the truth about these ideas, actions, people and things.

What's worse, normal people don't even notice many of the emotions they have, much less how much those emotions are prejudicing their perceptions and decisions. The average person is constantly making bad decisions due to the influence of emotions. When they consciously act on their emotions they do stupid things and when they unconsciously act on them they don't even realize that they've made stupid decisions.



Path Plusses

Primary: Add +2 per level of -Feeling to AVs to avoid acting on or being prejudiced by emotions or feelings. Examples: AVs to avoid having one's emotions be read, to resist unwanted effects of psychoactive drugs, to save vs. emotions, pain or nausea.

Secondary: Add +1 per level of -Feeling to AVs that can be aided by having a dispassionate attitude or outlook or by having a well-rested mind (one not tired from harmful or unnecessary emotions). Examples: rolls for logical problem solving.

Combat: Add +1 per level of -Feeling to combat AVs only when the opponent is attacking because of an irrational emotion (anger or fear) and the PC can keep a level head (Control or Exhaust styles only).

Attributes: By having a well rested mind, a mind not distracted by unwanted feelings, the PC has more mental resources to devote to other activities:

At -Feeling (1): No plusses

At -Feeling (2): +1 INL

At -Feeling (3): +1 INL, +1 AWR

At -Feeling (4): +2 INL, +1 AWR

At -Feeling (5): +2 INL, +1 AWR, +1 END

Path Abilities

Absorb Emotions: By remaining calm and refusing to react to other people's emotional expression, even on an unconscious body-language level, the PC can reduce the strength of other people's emotions. This skill doesn't work when the PC himself or herself is the cause of the emotion (the PC must be a third party) or where the person is hiding an emotion (he to she must be openly expressing it).

Easy (1): Give another person +1 vs. emotion.

Moderate (3): Give another person +2 vs. emotion.

Hard (5): Give another person +3 vs. emotion.

Legendary (7): Give another person +4 vs. emotion.

Profile Feeling Weaknesses: A PC can sense when a person's emotions and feelings are likely to make them think and act illogically. Once a weakness is sensed the PC can try to exploit it or can try to make the person aware of it so that the person can attempt to think rationally despite it. The difficulty is based on how much contact the PC has had with the person.

Easy (1): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the weaknesses of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the weaknesses of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the weaknesses of someone upon first seeing them.

Survive on Little: By giving his or her body the least it needs to survive on, the PC has adapted himself or herself to be more efficient and survive on less. Note that a successful roll means the PC can survive and function, but doesn't necessarily means the PC can function without penalty.

Easy (1): Survive without sleep for a week -or- survive without breathing for 5 minutes.

Moderate (3): Survive without food for a week -or- survive without breathing for 10 minutes.

Hard (5): Survive without water for a week -or- survive without breathing for 20 minutes.

Legendary (7): Survive at 0 Hit Points for an hour -or- survive without breathing for 40 minutes.

+Feeling

Principles

To +Feeling Seekers, emotions, feelings and drives cannot be avoided because they are the engines that drive our lives. A completely passionless person would just sit there until he or she died of thirst. It is a fallacy to think that a person could discover some purely logical reason to exist. If we are machines then emotion is the fuel that drives us in everything we do, from our basest to our loftiest achievements.

Each emotional state puts humans into the best psychological and physiological state to deal with the situation at hand. Fear, for instance, makes out bodies and minds ready to react quickly and to flee.

Yet people have little consciousness of or control over their emotions. Most people are aware of emotions only after they react to them, as multiple psychological studies (including those involving temporary paralysis of facial muscles) have shown.

The vocabulary for describing emotions is woefully inadequate. It's like trying to describe the entire palate of possible colors using only the words 'white,' 'black,' 'red,' 'green,' and 'blue.'

Emotions cannot be eliminated but they can be changed. Anger, fear, lust, despair and euphoria are very similar in the parts of the brain they light up. One can be easily misinterpreted as, or redirected into, the other. Each is a form of energy, a stimulation of the brain which can propel people to doing great actions.

Emotion is the great motivator. If channeled correctly, it can help humans overcome their psychological weaknesses. Emotions can even be used against each other. Anger can overcome fear, love can overcome anger, etc.

Emotion is not just the fuel of the mind. It can also fuel the body. Strong emotions can drive humans to feats of strength, can make a person virtually immune to pain, can help people overcome physical impairments, etc. Of the incredible physical feats people have done, from mothers lifting cars off of children to Appalachian snake handlers surviving snake bites and drinking strychnine, all happen in a state of heightened emotional arousal where emotion has ramped up the sympathetic nervous system to its highest degree.

Seekers on the Path of +Feeling learn to be more aware of their emotions and to strengthen their emotions by focusing attention on them. They also learn what things they can expose themselves to that will provoke emotion, and how to transmute emotions into each other and to channel them into physical and psychological power.

+Feeling Seekers pay close attention to the world around them. They typically consider emotions and aesthetic experience to be part of the same thing. For example, a sunset is not beautiful in the absence of an observer, it is only beautiful when it excites emotions in the observer. Thus, by exploring the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and physical sensations of the physical world, +Feeling Seekers are exploring their own emotional landscapes.

+Feeling Seekers do not fear intense emotions nor intense experiences. They want to experience, enjoy and savor everything to the fullest, from sex, to a painting, to a thunderstorm, to a barroom brawl. Their feelings in all these circumstances are intense and can be channeled to do great things.

+Feeling Seekers may call themselves hedonists, but they are not stereotypical hedonists. They are able to enjoy a long walk alone in the desert, or a hard day's work, or visiting elderly shut-ins, as much as they enjoy pleasures such as wine, sex or gourmet food.

"I have lived too long with cautious thinking. Now I will make myself mad."

-Rumi

Some +Feeling Seekers don't believe drugs have any place in their Path. Others believe that, like anything else, drugs can be useful and enjoyable for the feelings they provoke. Those +Feeling Seekers who dabble in drugs learn to control the drug experience, rather than letting the drugs control them. By focusing on the effects of a drug they want, they can enhance those effects. Thus, they typically need to use only small doses.

Inter-Path Relations

The Path of +Feeling shares the most with the Path of +Self. Both channel internal power into physical and psychological strength and both have a focus on feeling good about who you are and what you're doing.

The Paths of -Self, -Harmony and -Feeling are often thought of by +Feeling Seekers as unnecessarily trying to deprive yourself of something which is rightfully yours. Seekers of these Paths tend to be, to some degree, ascetics and +Feeling Seekers always feel sorry for ascetics.

+Feeling Seekers agree with -Thought Seekers that thought is overrated and thoughts that make people unhappy should be dropped. On the other hand, +Feeling Seekers tend to see +Thought Seekers as a bunch of people who are deluding themselves into thinking that thoughts and ideas have any importance beyond the degree they contribute to human pleasure.

+Feeling and +Harmony Seekers agree that the best way to get along with people is to cultivate love and compassion for

them. Yet +Feeling Seekers worry that the Path of +Harmony leads one to try to blunt important other emotions (e.g. anger, lust, jealousy) just because they are antisocial. Instead, they agree more with the -Harmony idea that antisocial feelings can be good.

Traditions

One of the biggest contributors to the Path of +Feeling today is Art, which is predicated on the awareness of and channeling of feeling. Similarly, Sex, and the attempt to get the most out of it one can, contributes to +Feeling. The tradition of Hippies, with its emphasis on art, creativity, free love and self-expression, also contributes to +Feeling.

Shamanism and Occultism/Magick contribute to +Feeling with their emphasis on channeling ecstasy and passion as a tool to achieve greater power.

Feminism, Ethnic Studies and Queer Studies can contribute to +Feeling with their study of people's subjective (rather than objective) truths. Psychology contributes to +Feeling, primarily the styles and sub-disciplines of clinical psychology and gestalt psychology, where it is believed that being conscious of and voicing one's feelings is the key to health and happiness.

Among Judaism, Christianity and Islam, certain subgroups contribute to +Feeling by emphasizing passion (e.g. Southern Protestantism with their joyful and raucous services, Sufism with their ecstatic dancing). In Buddhism, the concept in tantric Buddhism that one emotion can conquer another (e.g. love conquering hate), and

*"Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas."
("The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.")*

-Blaise Pascal

in particular the use of sex to try to achieve enlightenment, contributes to +Feeling.

Recognizing

+Feeling Seekers often dress provocatively.

As music can be useful in prompting a wide range of emotions, many carry portable music players or musical instruments with them.

Have a strong and very expressive sense of personal style. They tend towards outfits, hairstyles and colors that can be described as “intense.”

They have very expressive faces. They are always showing some emotion, be it joy, anger, curiosity, etc.

While most other Seekers tend towards utilitarian style, +Feeling Seekers ornament themselves with beautiful or evocative things (tattoos, makeup, jewelry, etc.)

View of Normals

Normal people have no appreciation for the many different shades of feeling they experience. They try to ignore emotions, which only causes those emotions to build up until they are released in a self-destructive way. They fear and thus shy away from anything which will cause intense emotions, preferring bland things. They spend much of their time trying to avoid feeling emotions like stress, worry, loneliness, tiredness and so they numb themselves with banal pleasures such as channel surfing, overeating, drinking, playing trance-



PLUS
FEELING

There Are No Bad Emotions

Evolutionary psychologists are just starting to realize what +Feeling Seekers have known for millennia: that every emotion is useful in the right circumstances. Every emotion changes a person's physiological state and state of conscious to best survive or take advantage of the current situation. Yet when emotions turn on at the wrong time they cause problems, just as the immune system turning on at the wrong time causes allergies and other auto-immune symptoms.

Take depression: for many people in the world, for whom having food every day is not guaranteed, depression is triggered by famine. It lowers the body's metabolism so that the body requires less calories to live. It also puts the mind in a highly introspective state, the better to analyze and re-analyze the current problem, looking for any potential solution.

Anger helps one fight, fear helps one run, hunger helps one seek out food, etc. These emotions are healthy when they are prompted by real things and when people are allowed to respond to them in a meaningful way.

+Feeling Seekers often come to a very +Harmony conclusion: that if people were to live a more natural lifestyle, one not completely insulated from the dangers and challenges that our ancestors faced, that our emotions would never seem inappropriate, fruitless or harmful, but would always be helpful. It is not difficult for +Feeling Seekers to find such a lifestyle, one with actual fighting, actual danger to flee from, actual hunger, etc.

inducing videogames, etc. This clumsy dulling of emotions prevents negative emotions from effecting useful change and prevents positive emotions from being fully enjoyed.

Normal people are so oriented to goals that they forget to enjoy what they experience. When they finally achieve what they want, they have forgotten how to enjoy it, so all they have left is to go on to trying to achieve the next thing. They are weak because emotion drives everything they do, yet they have little control over the sources of and flow of those emotions.

Path Plusses

Primary: Add +2 per level of +Feeling to AVs to recognize, enhance, or communicate one's emotions. Examples: *AVs to make others feel your emotions, to enhance the psychoactive effects of drugs on the PC, to seduce.*

Aided: Add +1 per level of +Feeling to AVs that can be aided by having high levels of passion or strong knowledge of one's own passions. Examples: *AVs to persuade others, to sense the emotions of others or to determine things about a creator of a piece of artwork by observing that art.*

Combat: Add +1 per level to combat rolls only when the PC is so angry that he or she flies into a rage and cannot control his or her actions (Control or Ruin styles only).

Path Abilities

Channeling: The PC can channel strong emotions into willpower and physical energy, giving plusses that last about one hour. The easiest emotions to channel are intense anger or intense fear. At a higher difficulty (+1) the PC can use intense sadness or lust. At an even higher difficulty (+2) the PC can use appreciation of something intensely beautiful (perhaps

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed."

-Albert Einstein

a painting, a piece of music, a naked person, a natural scene, etc. based on the PC's tastes). Appreciation of a thing can only be done one time (e.g. you can only Channel the appreciation of a song on one's MP3 player once), because such appreciation is invariably less intense the next time one goes to appreciate it. These plusses cannot be added to the Combat plusses from being in a rage.

Easy (1): +1 STH, +1 WIL, +1 END, +1 Hit Point

Moderate (3): +2 STH, +2 WIL, +2 END, +2 Hit Points

Hard (5): +3 STH, +3 WIL, +3 END, +3 Hit Points

Legendary (7): +4 STH, +4 WIL, +4 END, +4 Hit Points

Gut Intuition: By paying attention to his or her feelings, the PC can gain access to important information that the PC wouldn't otherwise have been conscious of. All information is in the form of feelings (e.g. sudden dislike of a person, fear of a door, etc.). This skill is especially useful for finding out about the feelings and intentions of other people (because emotions are communicated between people in a way few are conscious of). For instance, a feeling of wariness about a person probably means that the person secretly wants to hurt the PC. Difficulty is based on how obscure the human emotions in the equation are.

Easy (1): Have a gut feeling about a person the PC just had a conversation with.

Moderate (3): Have a gut feeling about a person the PC just saw.

Hard (5): Have a gut feeling about an inanimate object.

Legendary (7): Have a gut feeling about something or someone the PC has only heard about third-hand.

Overpower Emotion: The PC can cancel out an unwanted emotion by allowing another emotion to take precedence in his or her conscious mind. This can eliminate the need for a save vs. emotion roll. However, the PC must act upon the new emotion as if he or she just failed a save against it. Example: *A huge bear is rushing at the PC, roaring, and the GM requests a save vs. fear. The PC uses this ability to cancel the fear by supplanting it with anger. Yet the PC must now act as if he or she has failed a save vs. anger.*

At +Feeling (1): Cancel up to 3 difficulty save vs. emotion

At +Feeling (2): Cancel up to 6 difficulty save vs. emotion

At +Feeling (3): Cancel any save vs. emotion

Profile Feeling Strengths: The PC can sense when a person has emotions and feelings that can provide him or her with useful insights or can give them the energy and willpower necessary to accomplish difficult goals. The PC can sense, for example, that a person has a gut feeling about a situation that they should be listening to, or that a person's anger could be harnessed as a useful element for change. Once an emotional strength is sensed the PC can try to distract the person from noticing and using the strength or can try to make the person aware of the strength so he or she can take advantage of it. The difficulty is based on how much contact the PC has had with the person.

Easy (1): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has known for a few hours.

Moderate (3): Sense the strengths of someone the PC has talked to for 5 minutes.

Hard (5): Sense the strengths of someone by observing them for 5 minutes or rifling through their belongings.

Legendary (7): Sense the strengths of someone upon first seeing them.

A young brunette woman in an orange jumpsuit, her hands handcuffed in front of her, ran low through the woods at night, heading towards the town of Bremerton Falls. The next day a middle aged woman with long hair, an undyed cotton dress and no shoes came walking up the road toward Bremerton Falls, a peaceful and happy expression on her face. Later that day, a long haul trucker stopped at the Bremerton Falls gas station and let out a handsome African American man with his hair cut short and wearing an army jacket.

Two nights later, the three walked out of Bremerton Falls together. The young woman's handcuffs and orange jumpsuit had been replaced with ill-fitting pants and a black hoodie with the hood up.

The morning after they left, the leader of the local Aryan Pride gang was found naked and hog-tied outside of the local grocery store. The words "ignorant hate monger" were written on his belly with magic marker. Several embarrassed young white men were seen around town trying to hide black eyes, missing teeth, arms in slings or limps.

A young woman in a hoodie with her hair freshly dyed red, a woman in a cotton dress with no shoes, and a young man with any army jacket and walking stick walked into the town of Baines.

When the three left the town of Baines, their clothes were dirty, they had various scrapes and bruises, the barefoot woman had a limp, and the man in the army jacket needed a shave.

In their wake, the kids who had gotten lost in the old coal mines had been returned to their parents. They were dirty, bruised and exhausted but otherwise unharmed. The town council voted to put up a plaque to commemorate and thank the mysterious rescuers. A few in the town held the belief that the rescuers were not humans but three angels.

A barefoot woman, a young woman with a hoodie and a man with an army jacket were dropped off at the Golden Way Ashram by an elderly couple in an RV. Later that same day, a pudgy Hispanic

man with a polka-dot bow-tie came bicycling up to the Ashram. His bicycle had hundreds of toys glued to it and a sleeping bag in its basket.

Five days later, the four left the ashram together. The man with the bow tie was walking his bicycle. The young woman with the hoodie and the man with the army jacket were holding hands. The barefoot woman's hair had been crudely hacked off and an old blue snow jacket covered her torn dress. There was a deep scowl on her face.

After they left, Guru Marakani left the Ashram in disgrace. Many of the residents of the Ashram dialed phone numbers of people they had not spoken to in years, tearfully asking for rides home. A minority decided they would stay, that they could avoid Guru Marakani's mistakes while keeping the Ashram's goals alive.

Four strangers walked into the town of Pine Creek: a man walking his bicycle with a mangy brown dog in the basket, a young woman in a hoodie holding hands with a man in an army jacket and a middle-aged woman with a fresh crew-cut and a brand-new, finely tailored black suit, indigo blue undershirt, silver earrings in the shape of Chinese dragons, and a suave, self-confident smile.

Only three left Pine Creek. The man with the bike and dog had a sad, downcast expression. The woman with the black suit had blood-soaked bandages covering her left eye-socket and had her teeth gritted in pain. The young woman with the hoodie walked ahead of the rest, not looking back to see if they were following, a look of rage on her face and a salty crust from dried tears on her cheeks. Smoke rose up behind them.

When the fires were finally extinguished, more than half the town had been burned down, including the cannery. Word leaked out that the cannery's owners were declaring bankruptcy and would not be rebuilding. Most left the town, going elsewhere to find work. Years later those ex-Pine Creek residents would look back on their years in Pine Creek as the worst of their lives and would feel thankful that they were over.

continued next page

Chapter Six

ADVENTURES

Typical Seeker Adventure

In Brief: PCs come to town, help people, leave town.

A prototypical Seeker adventure goes something like this: A small group of Seekers, who have decided to share the road with each other for a while, are walking, hitchhiking, driving, etc. and come across a small town that none of them are familiar with. The first challenge in the town is to ensure their immediate physical needs (food, drink, a safe place to stay) are met. The second challenge is to figure out that someone (or everyone) in the town needs their help. The third challenge is to convince the people that need their help to accept it. The fourth is to fix the problem, whatever that is. An optional fifth goal is to find some piece of wisdom hidden in the town that can give extra XP to the finder.

For example: four wandering Seekers come to Bloomgarden, a small remote mountain town. They busy themselves trying to find odd jobs to earn money for food at the town's only restaurant and to pay someone to give them a room for the night. While eating at the restaurant, a clue (the waitress sitting on the floor behind the counter weeping) leads them to discover what is going on in the town. The restaurant is owned by a gay couple and lately a local KKK group has been terrorizing them: vandalizing their property and threatening to commit arson or kill them if they don't leave town.

"If you want to learn something, go on a journey."

-old German saying

continued from previous page

Four people drove into the town of Lincoln Pass. A young woman with a hoodie sat in the back of the truck next to a man with a bow tie who was holding a dog. In the passenger seat was a woman with a black suit and dragon earrings and a black eye patch. The driver was a woman dressed in the attire of a cowgirl. In the corners of the windows of the truck one could see remains of intricate mathematical equations, written in black grease pencil, that had survived a cursory wiping of the windows.

Three people drove out of Lincoln Pass in a truck: The cowgirl driving, and singing along with a country music song on the radio, the young woman with the hoodie sitting next to her, clutching a reproduction samurai sword, and the man with the polka-dot bow-tie sitting in the back of the truck with his bicycle and dog, chewing on a grey-green peyote button.

In their wake, an FBI crime scene team came to Lincoln Pass and ended up exhuming 13 bodies from the McKittricks' basement. After them the reporters came, TV trucks parked all around town and reporters holding microphones prowled the town looking for anyone willing to say something like "they seemed like a normal family to me." The town had gained a new citizen: a middle-aged woman with short hair, only one eye and a snappy fashion sense, who could occasionally be seen wandering through the woods without shoes on. She would marry the town sheriff and would eventually become the town's mayor, remembered long afterwards as the wisest and best mayor the town ever had.

Somewhere, on some seemingly endless highway, a truck drives on, its three riders scanning the road ahead for a hitchhiker in need of a ride or a good place to stop and stretch their legs.

The Seekers must convince the couple to let them help, and specifically that the PCs' intervention won't just make things worse. Once they have convinced the couple to let them help, the Seekers must find a way to make the KKK members stop. Also, any Seeker on the Path of -Self who speaks to the elderly mother of one of the restaraunt owners will discover she has some interesting ideas about self-hood that could inspire that PC, giving an extra ½ point of XP. Their work done, the PCs leave.

This formula works well because coming to a new town each adventure makes it possible for the GM to easily introduce any new plot element. Having the PCs leave town at the end of the adventure means that the PCs cannot rely on whatever friendship, fame or worship they have earned. The PCs are always around new people and thus have to repeatedly convince those around them that they have the wisdom and ability to help. And, finally, having it be a small town means a limited number of actors, a small system where the PC's actions can have immediate and strong effects.

How You Got Here: Backstory

Rather than feeling they are being "railroaded" into this particular plot (being given an illusion of free will, while in reality the GM will do anything necessary to make sure the PCs get to a given plot point), most players prefer to be dropped right into the action and told how they got there. For example: "You're all in a booth at the back of a dive bar in the Bowery. A professional criminal named Lefty has a map of Manhattan spread out in front of you and is pointing out mansions he wants to you break into and steal diamonds from. What follows is how you got here and why, for the moment at least, you are willing to go along with his plan..." Players' complaints of "my character wouldn't have done that" should be taken in stride. A back story can be altered on the fly to deal with those sort of objections, and players are usually happy to help GMs come up with a character-consistent change to a back story that still reaches the same objective.

NPC Write-Up Elements

	Seeker	Trapped Seeker	Prodigies	Sorcerers	Mundane Humans	Advanced Practitioners
Path Levels	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Path Specialties	Yes	Yes	Sometimes	Yes	No	Usually
Path Focuses	Yes	Yes	Sometimes	Rarely	No	Sometimes
Eccentricities	Yes	Yes but*	Sometimes	No	No	No
Psychological Strengths & Weaknesses	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Attributes, Skills, Equipment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*An eccentricity is, by definition, something that the Seeker can change at will. For a trapped Seeker, however, eccentricities often become laws that they live by.

NPC Personality Strengths and Weaknesses

The following system is be used to rate the personalities of non-Seeker NPCs in this book. This system is used primarily because it makes it easy for GMs to identify possible strengths and weaknesses that Seekers might find using the various "Profile" Path abilities.

Each rating is on a scale of 1 to 5, with the average person being 2 to 3.

Having 1 in a weakness or 5 in a strength means the NPC is very close (about as close as a normal person can get) to having a dot in either a -Path or +Path. For instance, an NPC with 5 dots in Feeling Strengths is close to having 1 level in the Path of +Feeling.

On an NPC profile, each strength and weakness rating should be followed by a brief phrase describing that part of the personality. E.g. an NPC with Feeling Weaknesses OOO and Feeling Strengths OOO could have "Grumpy and doesn't take shit," describing those stats.

A mentally ill person may potentially go below one on Strengths or over 5 on Weaknesses. E.g. a paranoid schizophrenic may have Thought Weaknesses of 6 and Feeling Weaknesses of 6.

Thought Strengths- A low rating means the NPC is not good at using his or her mental resources, does not have many ideas and does not try to use thoughts to solve problems. A high rating means the NPC uses his or her mind a lot, actively cultivates ideas and tries to use them to solve problems.

Thought Weaknesses- A low rating means the NPC does not let ideas drown out feelings, intuition and common sense. A high rating means the NPC is prone to over thinking things, holding on to flawed ideas and ignoring common sense and intuition.

Self Strengths- A low rating means the NPC doesn't have much he or she feels proud of or good about. A high rating means the NPC is self-confident.

Self Weaknesses- A low rating means the NPC has few false or self-reinforcing beliefs about himself or herself. A high rating means the PC has many false beliefs about self or that his or her identity gets in the way of rationality (e.g. a white supremacist whose identity as 'white' causes him to adopt ridiculous beliefs).

Harmony Strengths- A low rating means the NPC's relationships with nature, community and with his or her own body are not strong and do not contribute much to the NPC's well being. A high rating means the NPC has strong, mutually beneficial relationships with his or her community, natural surroundings and body.

Harmony Weaknesses- A low rating means the NPC is skeptical of the beliefs of those around them and is not prone to giving in to peer pressure. A high rating means the NPC believes whatever the general consensus is and is very likely to give in to peer pressure.

Feeling Strengths- A low rating means the NPC has few emotions that motivate him or her to achieve good things. A high rating means that joy, curiosity, love, righteous indignation, etc. motivate the NPC to be a better person and do great things.

Feeling Weaknesses- A low rating means the NPC is not often troubled by harmful emotions. A high rating means that the NPC's thinking and behavior is often skewed in self-destructive ways by anger, fear, sadness or desire.

The Personality Strengths and Weaknesses system is not appropriate to use to describe Seekers because Seekers are "off the map": so far beyond the normal bounds of these measures that this system can't accurately describe them.

To create a random NPC, just use random dice rolls (e.g. roll 1d6 and re-roll all sixes) to fill in the personally strengths and weaknesses for an NPC).

Other Adventure Types

In Brief: Seekers could end up in virtually any situation.

Although the prototypical adventure type described previously is easy to script and works well, there is no reason not to do other types of adventures, except for the limits of the GM's imagination and the types of back-stories the players will accept as having gotten them to this point. If a GM want to have the PCs taking up the job of cat-burglars stealing diamonds from the mansions of 5th Avenue Manhattan billionaires, the GM merely has to come up with a backstory where doing so makes sense to the players.

GMs should feel free to put a group of Seekers in any situation the GM thinks might be interesting: lost in the wilderness, pursued by a hungry man-eating bear; solving a murder mystery at a medieval reenactment group's weekend camping event; dealing with a hostage crisis where columbine-style shooters have taken over a high school; in a cutting-edge multiplayer virtual reality game trying to find a secret left there by the game's late head-designer, etc. Even those plots that have become cliché in other genres can become interesting in Seeker because of the non-cliché ways Seekers can come up with to deal with these scenarios based on their philosophical viewpoints.

Communities

What follows are the types of communities that Seekers are likely to find in their travels and what they are likely to find there.

Agricultural Towns

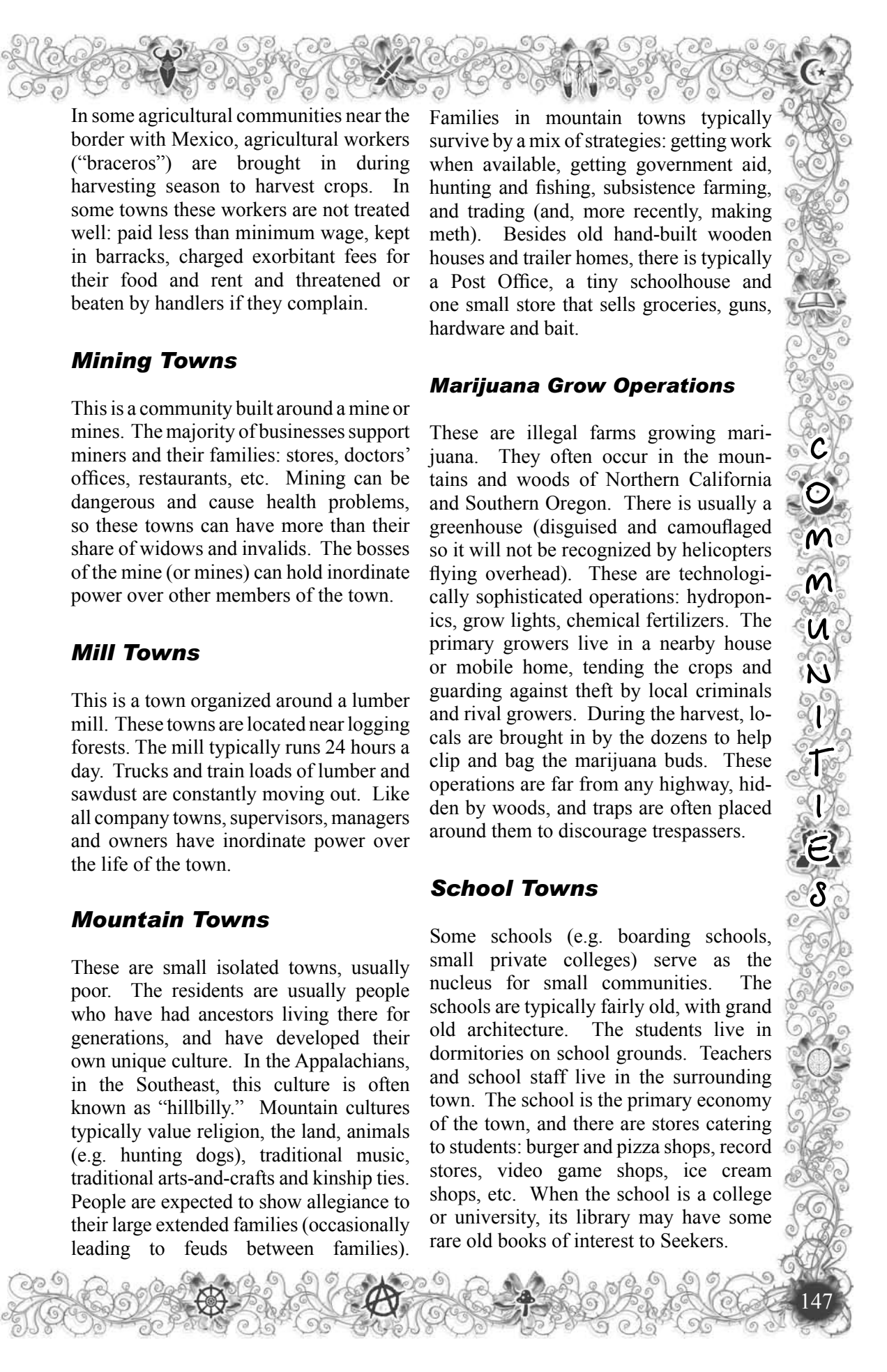
These are towns where the economy is driven by farms and/or ranches. Most people live in farmhouse or ranchhouses outside of town, but drive into town for shopping or entertainment. The town likely has a restaurant, a grocery, a sheriff's office, a vet's office, an auto-shop and several feed and agricultural supply stores.

Community Personality Strengths and Weaknesses

A community can have a psychological strengths and weaknesses profile just like a person can. In the case of a community, the ratings don't represent what goes on in any one person's head, but the common motivations (or lack of motivations) that dominate the community and the common ideas (or lack of ideas) that dominate discourse, decision making and the shared culture of the community.

Imagine sitting in on a town council meeting as the town gathers to make some decision important to the community: what voices dominate the meeting, and what do they advocate? If the majority of the speakers advocate thinking through issues, and the decisions made benefit from such thought, the community would have a high Thought Strengths rating.

For a community, Thought Strengths and Weaknesses represent the positive and negative role that ideas play in the community. Self Strengths and Weaknesses represent the positive and negative effects of identity, either community identity (e.g. "this is a well-mannered town") or the individual identities of community members. Harmony strengths and weaknesses represent how strong the bonds of community and and community-culture are and how this helps (strengths) or hurts (weaknesses) community members. A town where everyone helps out their neighbors, for instance, would have high Harmony Strengths. A community dominated by a cult, where everyone is brainwashed to act, think and feel the same way would have high Harmony Weakness. Feeling Strengths and Weaknesses represent the positive and negative effects of emotion on the community.



In some agricultural communities near the border with Mexico, agricultural workers (“braceros”) are brought in during harvesting season to harvest crops. In some towns these workers are not treated well: paid less than minimum wage, kept in barracks, charged exorbitant fees for their food and rent and threatened or beaten by handlers if they complain.

Mining Towns

This is a community built around a mine or mines. The majority of businesses support miners and their families: stores, doctors’ offices, restaurants, etc. Mining can be dangerous and cause health problems, so these towns can have more than their share of widows and invalids. The bosses of the mine (or mines) can hold inordinate power over other members of the town.

Mill Towns

This is a town organized around a lumber mill. These towns are located near logging forests. The mill typically runs 24 hours a day. Trucks and train loads of lumber and sawdust are constantly moving out. Like all company towns, supervisors, managers and owners have inordinate power over the life of the town.

Mountain Towns

These are small isolated towns, usually poor. The residents are usually people who have had ancestors living there for generations, and have developed their own unique culture. In the Appalachians, in the Southeast, this culture is often known as “hillbilly.” Mountain cultures typically value religion, the land, animals (e.g. hunting dogs), traditional music, traditional arts-and-crafts and kinship ties. People are expected to show allegiance to their large extended families (occasionally leading to feuds between families).

Families in mountain towns typically survive by a mix of strategies: getting work when available, getting government aid, hunting and fishing, subsistence farming, and trading (and, more recently, making meth). Besides old hand-built wooden houses and trailer homes, there is typically a Post Office, a tiny schoolhouse and one small store that sells groceries, guns, hardware and bait.

Marijuana Grow Operations

These are illegal farms growing marijuana. They often occur in the mountains and woods of Northern California and Southern Oregon. There is usually a greenhouse (disguised and camouflaged so it will not be recognized by helicopters flying overhead). These are technologically sophisticated operations: hydroponics, grow lights, chemical fertilizers. The primary growers live in a nearby house or mobile home, tending the crops and guarding against theft by local criminals and rival growers. During the harvest, locals are brought in by the dozens to help clip and bag the marijuana buds. These operations are far from any highway, hidden by woods, and traps are often placed around them to discourage trespassers.

School Towns

Some schools (e.g. boarding schools, small private colleges) serve as the nucleus for small communities. The schools are typically fairly old, with grand old architecture. The students live in dormitories on school grounds. Teachers and school staff live in the surrounding town. The school is the primary economy of the town, and there are stores catering to students: burger and pizza shops, record stores, video game shops, ice cream shops, etc. When the school is a college or university, its library may have some rare old books of interest to Seekers.

Reservations/Rancherias

These are places where the US government put Native Americans after displacing them from their land. They are usually on land that nobody else wanted: remote and with few exploitable natural resources to serve as economic engines for the communities. These communities often suffer from high unemployment, high rates of alcoholism and suicide, corrupt tribal governments, substandard housing and a trickle of Federal money financing bare-bones social services. In recent years, however, many tribes have won the right to open casinos. The casino is typically a large, new, brightly decorated building fronting the highway, containing a hotel, casino, restaurant, offices, sometimes even a convention center. Casino-owning tribes have had an influx of money, often used for housing, social services, hospitals, community centers, schools, college scholarships and native culture museums. Although reservations generally benefit from casinos, tribes may have skeletons in their closet from the measures they had to take (e.g. deals made with mafia-connected gaming interests) to get their casinos.

Communes

During the 1960s, many young people left their urban lives to try to start isolated, self-sufficient communities based on peace, love, cooperative living and being in harmony with nature. Various waves of environmentalism in the ensuing decades (including “off the grid” in the 90s, “zero carbon footprint” in the 00s) have led to the creation of new communes. Most communes disband within a few years after their founding (usually from internal political struggles, or from people becoming disenchanted or burned out on the lifestyle), but some last longer and there are still communes scattered through the countryside. These communes usually have a democratic or consensus government, shared housing and other

resources, organic farming, home schooling and the production of hand-made crafts that are sold in nearby stores. Most in the communes are friendly and altruistic. Yet, as in any small community, one person with a strong personality can accumulate power and authority and then come to abuse that power and authority.

Monasteries/Nunneries

Some monasteries and nunneries have been built in remote places so the monks and nuns can take advantage of peaceful, simple living to better meditate on God or enlightenment. Most monasteries and nunneries in the US belong to Catholic orders (Franciscan, Benedictine, Dominican, Augustinian, etc.), yet there are also small Buddhist monasteries (especially in the countryside of California, Oregon and Washington, states with relatively high Asian populations). Life in monasteries and nunneries is usually a quiet daily routine of praying, reading, contemplation, gardening, cleaning and eating communal meals. Some monks and nuns take up periods of silence or solitude, yet this is typically optional. Some monasteries and nunneries have a craft, handed down through generations, that they use to support themselves, e.g. bookbinding, furniture making, wine making. Many monasteries and nunneries have guest houses or guest quarters that they rent out (although monasteries only allow male guests and nunneries only allow females).

Resort Towns

These are towns located in idyllic places (by a lake or bay, by a beach, on an island, by a ski slope, etc.) where the primary economy is tourism. There are quaint hotels and bed-and-breakfasts, restaurants and gift shops. These towns usually have a busy season, when the weather is nice and the main street is bustling with tourists, and an off season, when the streets are quiet.

Random Community

Population

01-08: 50-200
09-33: 200-500
34-68: 500-1,000
69-93: 1,000-5,000
94-00: 5,000-20,000

Community Type

01-18: Agricultural Town
19-25: Mining Town
26-32: Mill Town
33-44: Mountain Town
45-52: School Town
53-60: Reservation/Rancheria
61-62: Commune
63-64: Monastery
65-66: Nunnery
67-77: Resort Town
78-79: Simple Living Community
80-89: Bedroom Town
90-92: National/State Park
93-97: Military Base
98-98: Cult Compound
99-00: Prison Town

Community Advantages

01-05: Kind Sheriff/Police Chief
05-10: Wise Sheriff/Police Chief
11-16: Competent Sheriff/Police Chief
17-21: Kind Rich Person/Business Leader
25-26: Wise Rich Person/Business Leader
27-32: Competent Rich Person/Business Leader
32-37: Prodigy
(2 levels in a random Path)
38-42: Benevolent Ex-Seeker
(2 levels in random Paths)
43-47: Tradition Teacher
(random tradition)
48-52: Wise Elder(s)
53-58: Kind Doctor
59-63: Wise Doctor
64-68: Competent Doctor
69-74: Booming Economy
75-79: Wise Religious Leader
80-84: Kind Religious Leader
85-89: Competent Religious Leader
90-95: Natural Beauty
96-00: Seeker-Crafted Item

Community Disadvantages

01-03: Trapped Seeker (3 levels in random Paths)
04-07: Sorcerer (2 Specialties in a random Path)
08-12: Prejudiced/Xenophobic Sheriff/Police Chief
13-16: Corrupt/Greedy Sheriff/Police Chief
17-21: Megalomaniacal/Power-Mad Sheriff/Police Chief
22-25: Incompetent Sheriff/Police Chief
26-29: Prejudiced/Xenophobic Doctor
30-33: Corrupt/Greedy Doctor
34-37: Megalomaniacal/Power-Mad Doctor
38-41: Incompetent Doctor
41-45: Prejudiced/Xenophobic Rich Person/Business Leader
46-49: Corrupt/Greedy Rich Person/Business Leader
50-53: Megalomaniacal/Power-Mad Religious Leader
54-56: Prejudiced/Xenophobic Religious Leader
57-58: Corrupt/Greedy Religious Leader
59-62: Stagnant Economy
63-65: Failing Economy
66-69: Endemic Health Problems
70-73: Demon: Nemesis
74-77: Demon: Feud
78-81: Demon: Xenophobia
82-85: Demon: Poverty
86-89: Hate Group
90-93: Racial Strife
94-97: Meth Lab
98-00: Marijuana Grow Operation

Random Path

01-12: +Thought
12-25: -Thought
26-37: +Harmony
38-50: -Harmony
51-62: +Self
63-75: -Self
76-87: +Feeling
88-00: -Feeling

Random Tradition

00-03: African American Culture
04-04: African Syncretisms
05-07: Alternative Medicine
08-09: Anthropology/Sociology
09-15: Art
16-17: Athletics
18-18: Body Modification
19-19: Brujeria
20-22: Buddhism
23-24: Clowning
25-25: Computer Science
26-27: Curanderismo
28-29: Existentialism
30-31: Feminism/Ethnic Studies/Queer Studies
32-33: Fictional Tradition
34-35: Freemasonry
36-40: Hippies
41-42: Kabbalah
43-44: Occultism/Magick
45-46: Martial Arts
47-47: Mathematics
48-48: Military
49-57: Monotheism: Christianity
58-62: Monotheism: Judaism
63-67: Monotheism: Islam
68-69: Monotheism: Other
70-71: Mysticism
72-74: Native American Spirituality
75-76: Neo-Paganism/Wicca
77-77: New Thought
78-80: Ordinary Life
81-83: Western Philosophy
84-84: Politics
85-87: Psychology
88-89: Science
90-90: Self-Help
91-92: Sex
93-95: Shamanism
96-97: Sufism
98-99: Taoism
00-00: Transcendentalism

Bedroom Towns

These are places within a few hours drive of a major urban area, populated mostly by upper-middle and upper-class professionals (and their spouses) willing to endure a long commute in exchange for country living. The houses are usually large and overlook scenic views. There are large wooden decks, pools, hot tubs, long driveways and other trappings of expensive homes. There is usually a small town center with a drug store, an upscale grocery store, a restaurant and a gas station.

National/State Parks

These are large parks with lakes, mountains and forests (including some of the few old-growth forests left in the country) maintained by State or Federal governments. They have many of the country's most amazing natural wonders: caves, hot spring, geysers, waterfalls, etc. There is a steady influx of campers, hikers, climbers and sightseers. Most parks have campgrounds, hiking trails, several park-ranger posts and sometimes lodges within the park, as well as restaurants, gas stations, gift shops and sprawling hotels outside the park. Park rangers have a fair amount to deal with, including lost or injured hikers, animal attacks (including bears lured into camps by the smell of food), poaching, robbery (mostly from parked cars) and sometimes even assaults (serial rapists or murderers have decided that secluded hiking trails are good places to grab victims). Some State and National Parks were, and still are, holy places to Native Americans, who sometimes come to the parks for ceremonies or to protest profane uses of sacred places (e.g. climbing a sacred mountain).

Military Bases

Some military bases and training camps are located in the countryside. The bases are typically surrounded by barbed-wire fences

and visitors must be checked in. Military personnel live together in barracks or with their families in on-base housing. Near to the base are restaurants and stores that cater to the military personnel and their families.

Cult Compounds

Many cult leaders move their cults to the countryside, seeking to isolate their members and keep cult activities away from the prying eyes of outsiders. Depending on the size of the cult, there may be one large building (e.g. an old farmhouse) or a compound of buildings surrounded by chain-link fences and razor wire. Most members "donate" their property and life savings on joining the cult, providing for much of the cult's expenses. Often, cult members engage in some craft to make extra money for the cult. Cult leaders are paranoid (often with good reason) and instill paranoia in their people, meaning security is always high in these compounds and everyone is on the lookout for people who don't belong. On the other hand, cults usually want new members, and will invite in visitors if when they think those visitors can be inducted into the cult.

Prison Towns

Most prisons are located far from any urban area. Small towns grow up around prisons: housing for prison guards and staff and their families, then stores, schools, hospitals, etc. There is usually at least one cheap hotel catering to people who have travelled long distances to visit loved ones in the prison. Prison breaks do happen occasionally, and there is usually alarm in the town until escapees are caught. Although most prison guards are good people, a few are sadists (drawn to the job by the promise of power to hurt people) and a few are turned mean by the stresses of the job. These bad guards are not just a danger to prisoners but to community members as well.

Community by Population

Population 50-200

This is the smallest population that can support anything that might be called “a town.”

Commercial: No stores, offices or other commercial properties. Residents must travel to other communities or use mail order for shopping. If any commercial activity is going on, it is out of people’s homes.

Government: This is typically an unincorporated area without its own government. The town is ruled by the county government. There is usually no Post Office, but there is rural mail delivery from a nearby Post Office. There may be a tiny school, or kids may have to be bussed long distances to a larger community to go to school. Law enforcement is by county sheriffs whose offices are in distant towns. Firefighters are volunteers with no firehouse.

Population 200-500

Commercial: There is likely a general store that sells groceries, sundries and hardware. There are probably one or two small churches. If an agricultural town, there will be a feed store.

Government: An unincorporated area ruled by the county. There is a small school. County sheriffs act as law enforcement. Volunteer firefighters may or may not have a small firehouse.

Population 500-1,000

Commercial: A market, gas station, two churches, a school, a gift or antique shop, a coffee shop or small restaurant, a bar, a laundromat and RV park.

Government: An unincorporated area. Has a Post Office and a volunteer fire department with a firehouse. There is an elementary school and/or a high school. There may or may not be a small sheriff’s substation (little more than a small shack that county sheriffs use when they visit the area). There is likely some sort of community center used for parties, meetings, etc. (perhaps a Grange Hall or Elks Lodge).

Population 1,000-5,000

Commercial: Grocery store, drug store, a few restaurants, one or two bars, a doctor’s office, and some small stores including a clothing store.

Government: Likely this is an incorporated township with an (unpaid) town council. It has a small police station with two or three officers. There is a Post Office and a firehouse with one full time fire chief and several part-time firefighters. There is an elementary school and high school. There is probably a small library.

Population 5,000-20,000

This is about as big as a community can get and still have a “small town feel.” These are communities with significant economic engines (a resort town, prison town, school town, etc.). For some rural counties, a town of this size would be the county seat.

Commercial: At least two grocery stores (a normal one, and an upscale one with organic products for wealthier residents), a drug store, a movie theater, a handful of bars (catering to different clientele, including one which is popular with, although not exclusive to, gays and lesbians), a small retail district with several small shops of different kinds (clothing, antiques, gifts, appliances), a record store, a video rental store, an auto-parts store, an automotive shop, several restaurants (ranging from fairly fancy sit-down restaurants, to diners, to popular fast-food franchises), a hotel and bed-and-breakfast (or several, if this is a tourist destination). There are offices, such as for realtors, attorneys, and medical offices. There may even be a small urgent-care hospital. There is a retirement home and a mortician. There is a local internet service provider that also sells and repairs computers. Nearby the town may be a winery, a historic ranch or farm (now turned into a tourist attraction), an Indian casino, a small airfield or an “interpretive center” for whatever the local wilderness or nature preserve is.

Government: This is likely an incorporated city with a city government and a full-time mayor. There are several full-time police officers and fire fighters. There is a chamber of commerce and an office of social services. The town is not large enough to have a courthouse (instead, trials take place at the county courthouse).

Simple Living Communities

There are several Christian sects whose members believe in simple, communal living, with restricted contact with the outside world and restricted use of technology. These sects are the Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, Moravians and a few small sects of Quakers. These communities can be found all over the rural US, but are most commonly found in the northern prairies of the US and Canada (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ohio, South Dakota, Montana and especially Pennsylvania). The members of these sects are mostly descended from German or Swiss-German immigrants and many speak unique dialects of German (although English is the most common language spoken in the home).

Simple living communities typically have 10-40 families and a population between 60 to 500 people. There are about a quarter-million Mennonites and a quarter-million Amish in North America. Moravian, Hutterite and Simple Quaker populations are each at less than 100,000.

The relationship of these communities to technology is often misunderstood by outsiders. They do not indiscriminately hate or fear technology. Instead, they evaluate technology for the potential effect it might have on their communities and family lives. Technologies that might serve as status symbols or cause pride or vanity (e.g. hair dye) are not allowed. Technologies that expose people to potentially "harmful" influences from the outside world (e.g. TV, radio) are not allowed. Labor saving devices (e.g. washing machines, tractors) are generally not allowed because labor is seen as a good thing (both because it is a humble, honest use of one's time, and because it makes people dependent on the help of their families and neighbors). Other technologies are allowed if they are useful, and each community makes its own decisions along those lines. Take phones, for instance: some communities have a single communal phone for the community, others keep cell phones in barns for calling veterinarians in emergencies, in others

young people have cell phones and spend their days text-messaging each other. Most members of these communities will avail themselves of modern medicine. Most in these groups are not educated past the 8th grade.

Their religions stress humility and so members of these communities wear simple, conservative clothes: black button-up shirts and black pants held up by suspenders and straw hats for men, plain dresses, black aprons and bonnets for women, no makeup or jewelry. They typically use horses and buggies for transportation. Their homes are simple and low-tech. Some meet in a small, plain church, or else hold church services in the houses of sect members. They operate their own schools in one-room school houses. Most property is owned communally and shared.

Most of these communities are agricultural or have small manufacturing operations (run as small, community-owned businesses). These communities have gained special legal status. They are exempt from any draft, as their religions forbid them from serving in any military in any capacity. They often do not have to pay social security taxes (as their religions forbid them from collecting social security) although they do pay other taxes.

Each community has its rules of behavior, of what is not allowed in the community. Those who break minor rules are typically just reprimanded. Those who break major rules (e.g. murder) are typically excommunicated from the church, forced to leave the community and then completely shunned. Most times a person can come back if they sincerely repent.

Most of the simple-living sects are Anabaptists. They believe in an adult conversion to Christianity and an adult baptism. One is not a real member of the church until one's adulthood baptism. Nobody is forced to join the church, but those who do join the church and then "fall away" from it can, in some communities, face excommunication and shunning.

Some simple-living communities are tolerant of some rule-breaking by young people in the period between adolescence and being baptized. They Amish call this period “rumspringa” (“running around”). Many young people find their mates during this period. Different levels of misbehavior are expected and tolerated in each community. In the most extreme cases, young people may leave their communities during rumspringa, wear normal clothes, drink, use drugs, have premarital sex, etc.

All romantic notions aside, the simple living communities are not immune from the problems of the modern world. There is crime in these communities, and there have been a few instances of drugs being sold by and to members of these communities. There have also been instances of members of these communities selling illegal agricultural products (e.g. selling whole unpasteurized milk in states where such milk is illegal and where a black market has formed to get such milk to the city dwellers who crave it).

Sincere Seekers of religious enlightenment are welcomed in most of these communities. These communities can be a good place for Seekers to find teachers of -Self or +Harmony.

Ghost Towns

Some towns are abandoned when the primary source of money for the town (e.g. a gold mine) dries up. Poorly maintained country roads lead there. They are filled mostly with abandoned buildings in varying states of disrepair. Most “ghost towns” are only partially abandoned. They have a few people who refused to leave, primarily retirees, who must drive long distances to get things like groceries and who have to fight to keep their basic utilities going. Many young people from surrounding communities travel to ghost towns in order to explore, party and vandalize.

Mundane Antagonists

Normal people are the most common type of antagonist for a Seeker adventure. Some common antagonists in small town America would be:

Bad sheriffs, those who are corrupt, racist or xenophobic. They will look suspiciously on anyone new in town and react violently to any threat to their power.

The rich **owners** of mines, lumber mills, farms, etc. who have inordinate power as the only employer in town. They fear anyone who might encourage workers to organize and demand fairer treatment.

KKK members, or members of other hate groups (p.155), who will target non-whites, Jews, homosexuals and anyone else who challenges them.

Rural **meth manufacturers**, who operate dangerous and toxic meth labs out of shacks, trailers and mobile homes. They work long hours, fueled by their own product, manufacturing methamphetamine from over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, guarding their product and selling it. They, and their helpers and suppliers in the community who they pay with meth, can become violent and paranoid from prolonged meth use.

“The Roots of Violence: Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice, Politics without principles.”

-Mohandas Gahndi

Biker gangs, who traffic meth from the rural labs where it is manufactured to the various urban sites where it is sold. Biker gangs often have corrupt law enforcement in their pocket, and are also often aligned with hate groups. They use intimidation and violence to eliminate any perceived threat to their highly-profitable operations.

Cult leaders, who have moved their followers to remote mountain or countryside compounds to be away from real or imagined enemies. Cult leaders feel threatened by any interlopers in their communities who do not recognize their spiritual authority.

Criminals who seek the countryside for a secluded spot to commit crimes, including: poaching, dumping of pollution, hunting and fishing where it is illegal or by means that are illegal. There are also serial killers who take victims to secluded cabins to toy with them before killing them.

Any **megalomaniacal leader** of a community. Having unquestioned power over a group of people has turned many previously good people into cruel and amoral dictators who lash out against any perceived threat to their power. This can happen even in communities as benign as a hippie commune or a monastery.

The State of Racism in America Today

Overt racism, practiced openly, has become a rare thing in most of the United States, even in isolated rural communities. Yet prejudice need not be practiced openly to effect people's lives and racism still exists in America. Some people practice secret racism, treating non-whites unfairly (denying them jobs, ruling against them in court cases, etc.) without ever admitting that they are racist. There are also many who, without meaning to be racist, have come to believe racial stereotypes and let these stereotypes influence their understanding of people. They think Hispanics are lazy, African Americans are ignorant and criminal, Native Americans are drunkards, and they treat these groups according to those stereotypes.

The effect of this racism, both knowingly and unknowingly practiced, is that non-Whites are at a significant disadvantage in economic, educational and legal arenas. This helps keep poor non-white communities poor, and keeps the upper reaches of wealth and power a domain inhabited primarily by white males.

There are many hate groups whose members will openly, proudly, admit to being racist. Although they are only a very small minority, they can have a big effect. Hate groups will commit vandalism, arson, assault, even murder when they think they can get away with it. See next page for a list of current hate groups. Many hate groups believe they are persecuted or that a race war is coming and have isolated, heavily-armed camps and compounds.

Significant instances of prejudice other than racism can also be found in communities throughout the US. This includes prejudice against homosexuals. It includes prejudice against Muslims (or, more generally, against any non-Christians). In some communities, teens are assumed to all be criminals and vandals and are harassed by the police and others.

Undocumented immigrants, most of whom are from Mexico, can face hatred and discrimination in many parts of the US. This is most often found in the states abutting Mexico. Many fear that undocumented immigrants will take jobs away from American citizens or that an uncontrolled influx of Mexicans will damage American culture or sovereignty. Some anti-illegal-immigrant groups even form militias to patrol the border and try to catch those sneaking across, using force if necessary.

Other Hate Groups

Although the KKK are the prototypical hate group in rural America, they are only a minority of hate groups today. Other popular types of hate groups include:

White Nationalists: Use pseudo-scholarly arguments to say that America can only protect its identity and culture by protecting its position as a White, Anglo, English-speaking nation.

Neo-Nazis: Have a youthful base and mostly espouse the ideologies of the original Nazis: Aryan supremacy, anti-Semitism, fascism and violent conquest.

Christian Identity: Believe that White Europeans, not Jews, are the Israelites identified in the Bible as God's chosen people, and that the Armageddon prophesied in the Bible will be a race war.

Neo-Confederate Groups: Mostly found in the South, generally think that the South was in the right and should have won the Civil War.

Racist Skinheads: Owe much of their popularity to White prison gangs. Have a relatively young base and are more likely to be violent.

Supernormal Antagonists

Other Seekers

NPC Seekers can come into conflict with PCs for a number of reasons: Some don't have the same moral standards as PCs and so will do things that the PCs will feel compelled to oppose (see Evil Seekers, p.54). Some NPC Seekers think (either correctly or mistakenly) that the PCs are doing things that need to be opposed. Some Seekers may be dangerous when in the grips of a Demon that has grown particularly powerful. Some Seekers may try to challenge PCs in an attempt to teach the PCs or give the PCs an opportunity for growth. Such challenges can be asked for or unasked for, expected or unexpected. Or NPC Seekers may create a challenge for the PCs to test them, with the hopes of becoming a student or just of learning more about the PCs.

Trapped Seekers

These can be very dangerous, especially those who have fallen into the trap of believing they know everything. Such Seekers have usually installed themselves as gurus and have a community of loyal followers to enforce their wills. Since they think they know everything, they have no problem making decisions for other

people, including PCs. For example: a megalomaniacal trapped Seeker may decide that a PC needs to go meditate in a cave for a year in order to reach the next step in enlightenment, whether the PC wants to or not. Defeating a trapped Seeker can help that Seeker escape that trap and can leave the PCs with a valuable ally. See p.62 for more.

Sorcerers

These are often dangerous because they combine the abilities of Seekers with the petty motives (greed, prejudice, anger, fanaticism, sadism) of non-Seekers. A Seeker may be encountered at the center of a lineage of sorcerers. PCs may, for instance, encounter a group of sorcerers and trace them back to a trapped Seeker who trains and controls them. Yet because sorcerous skills are learned by rote, and do not require wisdom or philosophical insight, sorcerers can teach others and create more sorcerers. Thus, sorcerers can be dangerous because of their sheer numbers. The only limit to the size of sorcerous groups is that learning sorcerous skills is difficult and often painful and not everyone is willing to do what it takes to gain that power. See p.66 for more.

The Iglesias Family

The Iglesias family are an eccentric, wealthy and powerful family in Southern Texas, near the border with Mexico. The family owns farm and ranchlands that support a moderate sized town (Rancho Vilegua). Those living in the town (and the migrant workers from Mexico, “braceros” that come to work during harvest season) are extremely careful to never displease nor offend members of the Iglesias family. This deference is because townspeople believe members of the Iglesias family are brujos: practitioners of evil or harmful magic. This is close to being true: the family has sorcerous skills which it passes down from generation to generation. The Iglesias family is also in the grips of a Demon that dooms each generation to incest, madness, murder and suicide.

Rancho Vilegua- This is an unincorporated township with a normal population of a little more than a thousand. The population doubles during harvest season when migrant workers from Mexico harvest fruit during the day and sleep in simple wooden barracks at night.

The town is located on a bend of a small river that winds its way through local foothills. The river provides water to the town’s two main industries: a huge cattle ranch and large fruit fields, all owned by the Iglesias family. The town has a small town center with a Post Office, elementary school (high schoolers are bussed to another town 20 miles away), doctor’s office, fire house, grocery and sundries store, library and a Catholic church. The town is serviced by the county sheriff’s office, who do not have a permanent substation here.

The town’s population is primarily of Mexican origin, although most have lived in the US for generations and are thoroughly bilingual. Most every one in the town works for the Iglesias family, owes money to the Iglesias family or is a family member of someone who does.

The town is close enough to the border with Mexico that illegal immigrants who have crossed the border in the middle of the night often show up here.

Despite having no permanent law enforcement presence, the rate of violent crime and theft in Rancho Vilegua is very low. Most avoid committing crimes because they are afraid to do anything that might anger the Iglesias family. Those who can’t help but make trouble (drunks, mentally ill people, etc.) eventually come to the attention of the Iglesias family who order them to leave town. Mexican gangs sometimes use Rancho Vilegua as a waypoint for smuggling drugs (heroin, meth, marijuana) into the United States, but they are under strict orders not to sell to anyone in the town. The only illicit substance in the town is a small amount of locally grown marijuana, but it doesn’t seem to cause any harm.

The town’s major disadvantage is its poverty. Ranch and agricultural workers work long hours for very little pay, and most of what they earn goes towards high rents at Iglesias-owned apartments and expensive groceries from the Iglesias-owned store. There is no real chance to start a business or make a profit in the town without a large amount of money (either rent, for legal businesses, or kickbacks for less legal ones) going to the Iglesias family. Most everyone in the town is just barely making ends meet. Outside organizers have found the townsfolk too frightened to try to start a union.

Family History- The Iglesias family was originally a Jewish family living in Spain. When the Spanish Inquisition began, the family pretended to convert to Catholicism, becoming what religious historians call “Crypto-Jews.” In public they acted like good Catholics: attending mass, baptizing their children, giving money to the Catholic church, but in private they learned Hebrew, studied the Torah and performed abbreviated versions of the rituals of Jewish life. Members of the family were taught to think to themselves “I do not believe” whenever they performed a Catholic ritual.

The well-educated men of the Iglesias family became architects and master masons, designing and building many of Spain's churches and cathedrals (thus the name Iglesias, meaning church). In the 18th Century, a branch of the family moved to Mexico, seeking wealth, power and independence in the new world. They soon became a prominent and powerful Mexican family. It was their status as crypto-Jews that made them more open than Catholic families to learning from the natives who worked their lands. From native shamans they learned herb and medicine lore and -Harmony sorcerous skills. These helped cement their power in the New World. When the United States took control of Texas, they were one of the few Mexican families able to bargain with American authorities to keep their lands.

The Iglesias Demon- In the mid-19th century, a Demon infected the Iglesias family, one that would cause the same tragedy to play out in the Iglesias family generation after generation.

Both physical deformities (albinism, congenital insensitivity to pain, reproductive difficulties) and mental problems (propensity to paranoia, depression, problems with addiction) run in the Iglesias family. In addition, Iglesias family members grow up knowing they are fundamentally different from, feared by and often despised by people outside the family. Family members are wealthy enough and powerful enough to indulge their personal vices or eccentricities. All of this tends to turn them into dysfunctional eccentrics who don't know how to get along with normal people and thus spend most of their time alone or in the company of family members. Most either die early (health problems or reckless behavior) or live until old age as childless bachelors and spinsters. The Iglesias family tree thus looks more like a vine than a tree, with many stubby offshoots but one primary stalk leading from one generation to the next.

In each generation, there is at least one male who is born without any immediately obvious physical or mental flaws and who grows up knowing that he will be responsible for

taking care of, and eventually leading and propagating the family. This responsibility prompts the young man to find in himself courage, charm and leadership abilities. Even from a young age the young man ends up having to take care of his siblings, especially one brother or sister who has more severe problems than the rest of the family.

Then, as the young man destined to lead the family is around adulthood, something happens to his father: perhaps he is murdered, commits a murder and is sent to prison, perhaps he commits suicide or accidentally ODs on drugs. The young man must suddenly take over as head of the family, becoming the new patriarch of the family. There is no consideration of choice in the matter: everyone in the family believes that it is the young man's duty to take over and run the family empire.

The other duty of the young man is to continue the family tree, so he feels compelled to go out and find a wife, one cultured and beautiful and strong of character enough to fulfill her role as matriarch of the family, but also one capable of understanding (or at least adapting to) the family's eccentric ways. The Patriarch thus selects a mate not for their personal compatibility with the Patriarch in mind, but with compatibility with the family in mind.

Being the Patriarch, especially starting at such a young age, puts a tremendous amount of stress on the young man. There are family members having legal, psychological, financial or health problems. There is running the family business. There is the task of keeping the family's secrets and upholding its reputation. There are terrible things the Patriarch finds himself doing to protect the family's power (e.g. having people killed). There is a marriage that, loveless or not, is rife with problems. And, perhaps worst of all, there is the expectation that the Patriarch never show weakness, never ask for help, never falter.

continued next page

The Iglesias Family (continued)

Altogether, these pressures tend to drive the Patriarch into well-hidden self-destructive behaviors: alcoholism, drug abuse, compulsive gambling, compulsive risk taking, even self-mutilation. The Patriarch is also troubled by a feeling that his wife can never truly understand what it means to be an Iglesias, and this idea prevents any true intimacy from forming between the couple. Seeking the comfort of true intimacy, as a relief from the pressures he is under, the Patriarch seeks a secret sexual liaison with a member of the Iglesias family, usually a cousin, aunt or sister. The female relative gives birth to a baby with severe developmental problems. This becomes yet another skeleton in the family closet that the Patriarch feels compelled to keep hidden.

Somewhere around his forties, the constant stress and self-abuse finally does too much damage to the Patriarch's psyche and he begins to seriously self-destruct. The relationship between the Patriarch and his wife is a common flash-point and most generations of the family in the 19th and 20th centuries have had the Patriarch kill the wife (and later be executed by the state), the wife kill the husband, or some sort of murder/suicide. Thus the next cycle begins again with the next young man taking over as Patriarch.

The Iglesias family do not know that there is something Seekers would call a "Demon" infecting them. They do know that the family is rife with problems and some even call it cursed. Yet each new Patriarch thinks he can avoid the mistakes made by his father and grandfather (even if some other part of him fears he cannot). Only the eldest in the family (usually old aunts) have seen the cycle happen enough to know the eerie repetition of events, and this they tend to keep to themselves (out of a fatalistic belief that there is no way to change things) except for the occasional "prophecy."

Family Customs and Skills-

Although once sincere (yet secret) Jews, the elements of Judaism in the family have since been relegated to being just one of the many unusual beliefs and customs of the family. They do not keep kosher. Some believe

in a vague and distant "higher power" and others are atheists. They do try to keep the Sabbath (avoiding work or use of technology from Friday evening to Saturday evening). They learn to read Hebrew, at least enough to read and recite Torah passages. They hold bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs (celebrations of reaching adulthood), although in private rather than public ceremonies. They observe, although in an abbreviated or eccentric form, major Jewish holidays and Jewish observances for birth, marriage and death.

For the most part they live the lifestyle of upper class Texans. Inasmuch as they associate with people outside the family it is with these wealthy Texans: at country clubs, at ski lodges, at governor's dinners, at gala charity events, etc. Members of the family do their best to act the part of elite Texans, even if they feel no kinship with them.

Iglesias family members also have a penchant for long, exotic voyages. So long as they must be alien to the people around them, they want to be places where they can be alien openly. This might mean a voyage down the Amazon, an extended "sex tour" of southeast Asia, a safari in Africa with nothing but African porters for company, etc.

Iglesias family members amuse themselves with a variety of interests and hobbies, mostly tending towards the unorthodox, dangerous or legally questionable. Taxidermy, homemade fireworks, lion taming, making absinthe, collecting antique pornography, corresponding with imprisoned serial killers, tattooing, cock fighting and illegal drag racing are all hobbies that members of the family have recently engaged in, some at as young an age as 13.

Then there are what are usually referred to as "the family arts": those traditions and skills the family can trace back to their contact with native shamans centuries ago. These are things that family members

are taught as soon as they are old enough to keep a secret. First among the family arts is an extensive knowledge of native poisons, both plant based and animal based (including rattlesnake venom and fire ant toxin). Family members learn to grow, cultivate and concentrate poisons, how to handle them safely, how to apply them and what their effects are. The remaining family arts are what -Harmony Seekers would recognize as sorcerous skills. Iglesias family members learn how to resist exposure to and effects from toxins (+2 to save vs. toxins), to intimidate others by expressing the alien elements of their psyches (+1 to intimidation rolls), to disregard that which normal people find creepy or disgusting (+1 vs. creepiness/disgust), to make surprise attacks that disregard rules of fair play or human empathy (+1 to surprise attacks using Kill or Ruin) and to make small changes to people's lives that end up destabilizing the lives of them and everyone around them (the -Harmony ability called Sabotage Harmony, p.126). Iglesias family members are taught to ingest live Fire Ants. The toxin they produce when they bite a person's insides cause an altered state of consciousness which helps the Iglesias clan focus on their -Harmony abilities.

Family Methods- For the most part, the Iglesias clan avoids dealing with outsiders. It is the family Patriarch who does most of the interaction with outsiders, mostly meeting with the supervisors who run the ranch and fruit growing operations, business contacts who buy meat and fruit, community business owners and political leaders. In most cases, the family's reputation is enough to keep people in-line. When it isn't, a person is summoned to the Iglesias mansion to meet with the patriarch in his study. Coffee is offered and the transgressor's cup has a small amount of poison in it, not enough to make the person seriously ill, but enough to cause confusion, anxiety, constricted breathing and rapid heartbeat. The Patriarch calmly explains the problem, all the while using his -Harmony sorcerous ability to intimidate the person with his alien-ness. Most come away from such a meeting too frightened to dare disobey the Patriarch.

In those rare cases where a person has been met with, intimidated, but still goes against the wishes of the Patriarch, the family endeavors to make an example of the person by ruining his or her life. If an employee, the person is transferred to a dangerous or unpleasant duty. Strange artifacts indicative of brujeria (e.g. a dead bird stuffed with rattlesnake heads and broken glass) are left on the person's doorstep in the middle of the night. The family gathers information about the victim (through interviews with acquaintances and surveillance) trying to gain a picture of how the person's life works and what can be changed to disrupt that life (the Sabotage Harmony ability). Poison is applied to a person's clothes or food (the family have access to employee lockers and, since they are landlords to most town residents, most apartments). The poison is not meant to kill but to cause health problems and psychological disturbances. The victim gets sick and goes crazy, and nobody in the community doubts why.

Pleas for mercy are ignored. The family feels it must make an example, if only to prevent the next instance of disobedience. If the victim does not flee town, he or she will be picked up on some dark night, driven out into the desert, stripped of identification and fed drugs that will cause the victim to wander in a psychotic daze and then die. Most victims die alone in the desert and are never found.

The Iglesias Mansion- The Iglesias mansion sits on a hilltop overlooking the town. It was originally built in a Spanish colonial style, built by the experienced cathedral architects of the family. It has high walls made of whitewashed adobe bricks, large ornately carved wooden doors, intricate masonry over the windows and a large interior courtyard garden. Later, the house was expanded with several tall wooden Victorian-style towers with pointed roofs. More recently, a garage, a large back porch and a backyard pool have been added.

continued next page

The Iglesias Family (continued)

The mansion was built with a large basement with heavy wooden doors that can be barred from within. Originally, family rituals were held here, now it is mostly just storage for more than a century of family artifacts.

At any given time there are around 10 to 15 Iglesias family members living the the house. Others live elsewhere but come for visits, staying in guest rooms (often with spouses).

The Iglesias Family Today- The current Patriarch of the family is **Emiliano** Iglesias, a handsome, intense and notoriously serious man in his late thirties. His wife is **Miriam** Bechtel-Iglesias, a tall, beautiful, brilliant botanist who, more than any other Matriarch in living memory, has adapted to the eccentric ways of the Iglesias clan. They have three children (and another one on the way). **Carmine** (15), **Javier** (12) and **Lilith** (5) are famous as troublemakers and pranksters. They are home-schooled (as most Iglesias kids are) by their mother. They spend most of the their days exploring the house, exploring the grounds and performing experiments. Javier, who is a healthy and bright child, is assumed by most to be next in line as leader of the family. Yet some have noticed that Carmine is the natural leader of the group and have wondered if she would not be the best to take over.

Emiliano's mother is in a mental institution, where she has been since she murdered Emiliano's father. Emiliano has two older brothers: **Felipe** spends most of his time in prison (a consequence of using any drug he can get a hold of and scamming people out of money). **Pedro** lives in the Iglesias mansion. He has congenital alopecia (lack of hair), a stutter, has panic attacks at the idea of interacting with non-Iglesias family members, and likes to build bombs and blow things up in the back yard.

Emiliano also has a younger sister, **Carla**, who recently moved back to the house after a long and traumatic divorce. She is shorter than her siblings, slightly plump with a lazy eye. She is known for her kindness and gentle nature,

but also for engaging in long campaigns of passive-aggressiveness, rumor starting and metaphorical backstabbing against anyone who angers her.

Emiliano also had a young half-brother, **Rafael**, euphemistically called his cousin, who is the result of an incestuous affair his father had. Rafael is short, fat, has a bushy beard and large underbite and moves with a clumsy, shuffling limp. He is of subnormal intelligence and when he gets stressed, scared or overstimulated he is prone to fits: screaming, throwing things, locking himself in his room. Rafael and Emiliano have always been very close. Emiliano has been Rafael's protector, teacher and best friend since a very young age. Emiliano is the only one who can calm down Rafael when he goes into a fit.

The eldest in the house is **Estarla** (79), Emiliano's grandmother. Estarla, although quite physically healthy, has been growing senile and often mistakes people for people from her past. She mostly putters around the house, rearranging things (she thinks she is cleaning, but really is causing clutter). When company is over, someone is usually given the job of watching Estarla and escorting her out of the room if she mistakes the guest for family and starts blurting out family secrets. For the most part she is grumpy and cynical and not afraid to tell off any member of the family. She has seen the Demon run its course in three generations and has taken to claiming she can see the future and blurting out prophecies at random moments.

Hestia (62) is Estarla's daughter and Emiliano's aunt. She has digestive problems which make her unable to eat anything except the plainest food (she usually takes meals in her room) and she is very thin. Her hair is dyed black and kept in a tight bun, she wears bright red lipstick, dark eyeshadow, black dresses and tights. Hestia's main hobby, at the moment, is picking up teenage boys from the town.

She especially enjoys helping boys lose their virginity. She often gives the teens wine or marijuana. She proffers these intoxicants not with the goal of lowering their inhibitions or buying their affections (as many would suppose), but with the hope of enhancing their experiences.

The final family member living full-time in the house is **Armando** (19), a cousin of Emiliano, who came to live at the Iglesias house at age 13 after his parents' death. Emiliano is an albino, is painfully shy, and is taking classes online, working towards a degree in military history and tactics. His other hobby, also online, is to pose as a doctor and give medical advice on internet message boards.

There are other family members who do not live in the Iglesias house, but come to visit often. **Dante** is an antiquities dealer who travels all over the world and maintains apartments in London and Hong Kong. He often brings boyfriends when he comes to visit, which everyone takes in stride except for grandma Estarla.

Tessa is a cousin of Emiliano's who is married and has two children. She comes to visit often, her family sleeping in guest rooms. Her husband, **Robert**, who thinks the family is "creepy," is miserable for the entirety of the visit and isn't afraid to let his wife know.

Another cousin, **Isabela**, is a schoolteacher on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. Her husband is a Navajo medicine man. She has summers off and she comes alone, spending most of her time drinking cocktails and lounging in and by the pool.

PCs and the Iglesias Family- There are several ways the Iglesias family could be used in an adventure. PCs venturing into Rancho Vilegua and talking to residents there may see the Iglesias family as a villain. PCs would perceive a family of sorcerers keeping townspeople in fear and poverty and destroying the lives of innocents. Such an adventure might lead the PCs to confront the family.

Or, the PCs might meet and befriend a member of the family. The less shy among Iglesias family members enjoy meeting other eccentrics. This has been how much new blood has been brought into the family. A Seeker would be perceived as a homeless eccentric with unusual beliefs and skills and the impulse would be to invite them to the Iglesias mansion to stay.

Enemies of the Iglesias Family

Potential enemies that may endanger the Iglesias family include:

- Crossborder drug smugglers who become dissatisfied with their restrictive agreement with the Iglesias family.

- Labor organizers who are trying to organize the Rancho Vilegua agricultural workers to stand up to the family.

- County sheriffs who are tired of people from Rancho Vilegua going missing and being found later as nothing but bleached bones in the desert.

- Elite Texans, especially those prejudiced against Mexicans, who don't think the Iglesias family belongs in the circles of Texas' wealthy and powerful families.

- Seekers who have perceived the use of sorcerous abilities by the family and have decided to put a stop to it.

- Other eccentrics who the family have invited into their home, some of whom may be dangerously mentally ill.

- Carla's ex-husband, who has glimpsed some of the family's darkness and blamed the failure of his marriage on it.

Yet, in the end, the family's most dangerous enemy is the family itself and the self-destructive things the family Demon makes family members do.

continued next page

The Iglesias Family (continued)

Once there, PCs are likely to perceive the family as a group of interesting potential teachers, but also as people struggling and suffering under the grip of a powerful Demon. The Iglesias family has enemies and if the family comes under attack while PCs are guests the PCs may feel compelled to defend the family.

The truth is that the family are neither wholly evil nor wholly innocent. In some ways they are kind and try to make the world a better place. They certainly do a good job taking care of the mentally and physically handicapped among their family. They are also victims of a Demon that they do not understand, one that drives them to do self-destructive and harmful things they often do not want to do. And yet the family also uses its abilities to hurt innocents and enforce their economic dominance of and control over the lives of the townspeople. They do this not because they have chosen to be bad, but because they have not sought out other possible ways of living.

Once PCs come to see the Iglesias family as more than just villains to be fought or good people to be defended, the greatest challenge would be to help break the curse that has enslaved and defined the family for centuries.

Defeating the Demon- The Iglesias family is closer than it has been in known memory to defeating the Demon that has infected the family, mostly due to Miriam. She has not been fully infected by the Demon and has not accepted her role as suffering, neglected trophy wife. She knows bad things are happening to her husband's mental health, and to the health of her marriage, and she is willing to go to extreme ends to save both.

The problem is that Emiliano refuses to talk to her, even admit that there are issues. He also refuses to see any kind of mundane therapist or marriage counselor, saying that they wouldn't understand the family ways. She is not adept enough at human psychology to figure out what is going on in his head without his help. If she had a better knowledge of what happened to previous Patriarchs, this might enlighten her as to Emiliano's state, but the sins and self-destructive tendencies of previous Patriarchs are something nobody in the family will speak about, at least not with her.

Nobody in the family understands that they are in the grip of what a Seeker would call a Demon. They know the family has problems, or is perhaps 'cursed,' but do not realize it is in the grip of something that manipulates their behaviors and perceptions to perpetuate its own existence. If they understood that, they might have some hope of fighting back.

The Iglesias Demon

Abilities: Can make those it infects feel different from regular people, making them roll vs. social anxiety when dealing with non-family members. A failed save vs. anxiety means the character must flee the interaction or seek some anxiety reducer, e.g. drugs, illicit sex, gambling. The Demon can also roll to make others afraid of an infected character. The Demon can roll vs. the infected person's will to prevent that person from doing anything that would be contrary to the infected person's customary role in the family. The Demon can also roll to cause incestuous impulses in the infected.

Strengthened By: Family members making a conscious decision to avoid associating with or stop associating with non-family members. Also strengthened by self-destructive behaviors (e.g. gambling, drug use, reckless spending).

Weakened By: Being accepted as themselves by non-family members. Ending a self-destructive behavior.



I
G
L
E
S
I
A
S

F
A
M
I
L
Y

The Iglesias Family (continued)

Iglesias PCs

To create a PC who is a member of the Iglesias family, take the following advantage, costing 3 Bonus Points:

- PC can speak English and Spanish fluently.
- Free Poisons specialty of Traditional.
- Choose 4 of the following free skill specialties:
 Combat: Kill
 Combat: Ruin
 Criminal: Underworld
 Criminal: Trickery
 Criminal: Theft
 Tech: Hacking
 Inv/Espionage: Military
 Inv/Espionage: Crime Scene
 Traditional: Traditional Medicine
 Traditional: Tricks
- PC starts with 7 additional Equipment Points (due to family wealth).
- PC has the Iglesias family as a “contact.”
- PC starts with the Iglesias Family Demon (p.162) at 3 Power.
- Choose two of the following as free -Harmony specialties (as per Sorcerous Skills, p.66):
 Saving vs. toxins (+1)
 Intimidation by being mysterious/alien (+1)
 Dealing with creepy/disgusting (+1)
 Combat plusses
 Sabotage Harmony (p.126)
- When around fellow family members, the PC can buy additional specialties from this list at a cost of 3 skill points (1 XP) each.
- The PC also gains the free -Harmony Focus: Ingesting Fire Ants.

Emiliano Iglesias, Patriarch of the Iglesias Clan

History- Emiliano grew up being told he would someday be responsible for the family. This inspired him to study hard (both in school and the “family arts”) and find the courage to interact with people outside the family. He also felt responsibility, from a very young age, towards his “cousin” (secretly his half-brother) Rafael. Defending Rafael was the cause of many fights, which would have gotten him kicked out of school had he not been an Iglesias.

After high school, Emiliano went to a prestigious private university on the east coast. He studied history and joined the fencing team. He applied himself with intensity, studying or doing fencing drills while his friends were partying. He also met Miriam Bechtel, a brilliant science student from a middle class Jewish family, there on a scholarship. Emiliano immediately recognized in Miriam the qualities he had been trained to look for in a potential family Matriarch: beauty, social skills, loyalty and strength of will. He courted her with the same determination that he had for his schoolwork and fencing and soon they were lovers. She was two years his senior and graduated, moving on to a university in California to get her PhD in botany. They continued their relationship by remote, flying to visit with each other on holidays. Emiliano was nearing his graduation (in only three years, thanks to his heavy coursework) and planned to indulge himself by staying on to earn an advanced degree in history. Then, he got word that his mother had gone insane, killed Emiliano’s father and was in a mental hospital. Emiliano quit school and came home to take care of his family.

After a few years as Iglesias Patriarch, Emiliano convinced Miriam (who had just gotten her PhD) to marry him and live with him as Iglesias Matriarch. She soon became a valuable member of the family and they had three children who they both care about deeply.

Yet the stresses of the family have weighed heavily on Emiliano. He has started drinking heavily. He bought a sports car and lately he has been taking it into the foothills at night, speeding along the curving mountain roads at nearly 200 MPH with the lights off. Miriam has tried to get Emiliano to talk about the things that are bothering him, but he found himself unable to talk about them, no matter how hard he tried.

Most recently, Emiliano’s younger sister, Carla, has moved back into the household after a messy divorce. Emiliano and Carla were never especially close as children, but as adults they found themselves drawn together.

Where he cannot talk about his problems with his wife, he can with his sister. He has lately taken to working late in his study, refusing to come to bed when Miriam asks him to, and then going to Carla's room late at night to share a bottle of whiskey and talk. Several times he has woken up in her bed, having passed out fully clothed. He worries about the direction his relationship with his sister is taking, but cannot bring himself to stop.

Bonus Characteristics- Emiliano has the Iglesias Family Demon (p.162) at 5 Power.

Personality- Emiliano has always been relied on by his family to be strong. This has created a sense of strength and purpose within him, but also left him with a feeling that his life is out of control. His self-destructive behaviors, his inability to talk to his wife, his strange relationship with his sister all seem to him to be things he cannot change. He loves his family, but also feels burdened by them. Yet he also has a prideful, arrogant sense that Iglesias family members are better than "regular" people and that he would rather have a short, unhappy life as an Iglesias than live as a normal person. Emiliano has never been cruel and does not like to hurt people, but he feels intensely protective of his family and is willing to do terrible things to other people to protect them.

Appearance- A handsome Hispanic man, of medium build, appearing to be in his 40s. He has salt and pepper hair cut short and dark, intense eyes. When conducting business he tends to wear finely tailored suit jackets over purple or maroon silk shirts. When relaxing he likes to wear black t-shirts and blue jeans.

Attributes- AGY 0000, AWR 000, CHM 00000, END 000, INL 0000, SPD 00, STH 000, WIL 00000. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic 000 Specialties: Humanities, Business & Law

Athletic O	Specialties: Outdoors
Combat 0000	Specialty: Kill, Exhaust
Criminal O	Specialty: Underworld
Labor O	Specialty: Transport
People 00	Specialty: Social
Traditional O	Specialty: Traditional Medicine

Equipment- Smart Phone, Laptop, Heavily Upgraded Sports Car, Poison: Deadly, Poison: Debilitating, Poison: Knock Out, Hallucinogens, Deliriants.

Combat: Kill 000 (fencing sword with poisoned blade)

Academic: Humanities 000 (library)
Academic: Business & Law 000 (library)
People: Social O (tailored wardrobe)

Paths

-Harmony: Zero

Specialties: Intimidate by being strange (+1), combat plusses, Sabotage Harmony
Focuses: Ingesting fire ants

Personality Strengths & Weaknesses

Thought Strengths 0000 Weaknesses 000
(An academic over-achiever who often gets trapped in his own thoughts)

Self Strengths 0000 Weaknesses 00000
(His perception of his duty to lead the family gives him strength but also shackles him)

Harmony Strengths O Weaknesses 0000
(He feels responsibility for the many who depend on him, yet he feels there is nobody he can depend on)

Feeling Strengths 000 Weaknesses 0000
(An intense, passionate man, yet one plagued by stress, anxiety and loneliness)

Combat AVs

Kill 8*	Ruin 6*
Control 6	Exhaust 6

*+1 to no-holds-barred surprise attacks. +2 if Emiliano has ingested fire ants.

The Iglesias Family (continued)

Miriam Iglesias-Bechtel, Matriarch of the Iglesias Clan

History- Miriam grew up in an intelligent, well-educated Jewish family. From a young age, teachers remarked how brilliant she was and she knew her intelligence would someday take her great places. Although a popular girl (smart, attractive, outgoing, reasonably athletic) she never had long lasting relationships. The boys (and later young men) she met were either too stupid or too cowardly to hold her interest. In high school she focused on her studies and won a scholarship to a prestigious private university. After being there for a few years she met Emiliano. He was reasonably intelligent, attractive and he seemed to be interested in things different than the other college boys (although it was hard to tell what those things were). She allowed herself to be seduced by him. She found it a relief to be known as Emiliano's girlfriend: for the first time in many years she didn't have young men hitting on her all the time.

Miriam found she loved biology, and plants in particular, and she earned her undergraduate degree and then won a place in one of the country's best plant biology PhD programs in California. Although she didn't know if a long-range-relationship would work, she was willing to give it a try.

When Emiliano's mother murdered his father, Miriam was impressed, but also worried, by Emiliano's willingness to give up school and take over as head of the family. Even though they spent most of their time apart, she perceived strengths and deep motivations that had previously been hidden from her. She loved Emiliano, but he was also an interesting puzzle.

Upon receiving her doctorate, Miriam was all set to do post-doctoral work in a prestigious lab doing important research. Yet Emiliano begged her to marry him and come with him to the Iglesias mansion. He told her that he needed her, and also that he would build her a lab and that she could experiment on the Iglesias fruit crop. Reluctantly she agreed.

At first, Miriam was shocked by the family, but she viewed their strangeness as an intellectual puzzle. Soon she not only understood them, but came to care about them. She even undertook to learn the family arts and made significant progress. She thus adapted to the family faster than any other Matriarch in living history, and this was a cause for quiet optimism for some. Miriam gave birth to three children and, forsaking her plans to do research full time, endeavored to raise them to be the best Iglesias family members they could be.

Miriam knows enough about Iglesias family history to know that Patriarchs have severe personal problems and tend to die early. Although the family doesn't talk about it, Miriam's biological training has allowed her to discern the effects of several generations of inbreeding. Lately, Miriam has become concerned about the psychological state of her husband, the health of their marriage, and the strange looks that pass between Emiliano and his sister that seem to indicate a shared secret. Miriam has resolved not to let her marriage fail without a fight.

Personality- Miriam is intelligent, self-confident, a believer in the value of science and that any problem can be solved with careful thought and hard work. She is a little spoiled (having been doted on by her parents) but most of her achievements have been achieved through her own efforts. She is not naturally outgoing or socially facile, but has learned to do well in social situations by being sincere and attentive. She is an atheist. Her intelligence and her beliefs make her feel different from "normal" people. When dealing with unpleasant things (e.g. the thought of death) or gross things (e.g. digging through cattle feces looking for parasites) she goes into a clinical mode, seeing everything as cold facts. She likes nature because it is interesting and complex and she enjoys taking long walks in the desert, foothills or along the river, either by herself or with her children, observing nature.

Methods- Miriam has several duties in the family. Being a gracious wife at rich-people parties and when people are invited over for dinner is the least interesting of her duties. She home-schools her children, teaching them advanced scientific concepts. She tends to the greenhouse in the mansion's interior courtyard where (behind a locked door and frosted windows) all manner of poisonous plants are grown. She also advises the managers of the Iglesias fruit and cattle operations on anything to do with biology, often personally checking on sick animals, spliced trees, etc. She also provides emotional support to the less-stable members of the family, encouraging or comforting them in their various ups and downs. She knows that the Iglesias methods occasionally involve hurting people and she has accepted this dispassionately as a clinical fact. She is happy to leave such work to others in the family, but has also prepared herself for the possibility that she might someday have to use poison to debilitate or kill someone.

Appearance- Tall, broad shouldered woman, appearing to be in her mid-thirties, with straight black hair cut at mid-neck, slightly-tinted glasses, wearing no make-up, tending towards dark green dresses and sandals.

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OO, CHM OOO, END OO, INL OOOOO, SPD OO, STH OOO, WIL OOOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic OOOO Specialties: Sciences, Math
Athletic O Specialty: Outdoors
Tech O Specialty: Software

Equipment

Academic: Sciences OOO (science library and small lab)
Academic: Math OO (laptop with statistics software)
Athletic: Outdoors O (GPS, hiking boots, water bottle, binoculars)
Tech: Software O (laptop and software)

Paths

-Harmony: Zero
Specialties: save vs. toxins (+2), Sabotage Harmony
Focus: Ingesting fire ants

Bonus Characteristics- Miriam has the Iglesias Family Demon (p.162) at 1 Power. Physically Attractive (+1 to seduction rolls).

Psychological Strengths & Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOOOO	Weaknesses OOO
(A committed scientist and skeptic, sometimes too concerned with abstractions to notice what is happening around her)	
Self Strengths OOO	Weaknesses OO
(Reasonably self-confident in her intelligence and leadership abilities)	
Harmony Strengths OO	Weaknesses OOO
(Cares for her children deeply and feels responsible for her new extended family)	
Feeling Strengths OO	Weaknesses OO
(Tries to maintain a detached, clinical outlook)	

Combat AVs

Kill OOO Ruin OOOO
Exhaust OOO Control OO

Prodigies

Prodigies are not very likely to be dangerous, although they are not immune from personality flaws and circumstances that can pit them against PCs. A prodigy, especially a young one, who has never met anyone with Path abilities before may be frightened when they first encounter PCs and may think that they need to protect their communities from the PCs.

Personal Demons

PCs may find people who need help dealing with personal demons. A person may seem, at first, like the “enemy” but PCs may discover this person is driven to do things he or she doesn’t want to by a Demon. Most likely the person doesn’t think of the Demon in the same way a Seeker would understand it, instead thinking of it as a “mean streak,” a “mental illness” or “a run of rotten luck.” Helping the person involves making them understand the nature of their predicament, telling them how to starve the Demon and helping them resist as the Demon fights back.

Community Demons

It is not just individuals, but entire communities that can be infected with what some Seekers call Demons. These Demons live not just in the hearts and minds of community members, but in the relationships between community members. A powerful Demon in a community can mobilize large numbers of the population (through fear or anger) against PCs who threaten it. In other words, as soon as PCs start meddling in the Demon’s means of feeding itself, they are likely to have much of the community coming after them.

Some common Demons that affect communities include:

Nemesis: Wherein wealth and power in a community is concentrated into the hands of a few, and prejudice is used to keep people from demanding or getting more. A Seeker, any time he or she is recognized as a potential agent of change,

will threaten the nemesis who will lash out by causing fear and anger in the community. See p.70 for more.

Feud: The prototypical feud of this kind is the Hatfield-McCoy feud, where two West Virginia clans fought and killed each other for two decades. As a Demon, a feud feeds on anger and it creates more anger by making members of each group hurt members of the opposite group. Feuding parties could be extended families, ethnic groups, religious adherents, political supporters (e.g. liberals vs. conservatives), young residents of a community versus the older, poor versus wealthy, even a town’s law enforcement versus its criminal element. Even if the PCs can make peace between the feuding parties, there is likely to be some lone, angry combatant who will not live by a peace accord and will try to do something that would rekindle the feud.

Xenophobia: The community is afraid of outsiders and usually treats them in a paranoid, unfriendly (or outright violently hostile) manner. Thus, potentially helpful and friendly outsiders are either driven away or are turned malevolent by their treatment (“If the people in this town are going to treat me like a criminal then fuck them, maybe I should steal something.”). Thus the fear perpetuates itself. The Demon may have even caused community members to do things that they feel they need to hide, thus increasing their paranoia even more. For instance, if the people of a town once lynched a stranger, they will be extra-paranoid that any new visitor in town might discover their secret.

Poverty: The community has fallen into a cycle of poverty. Young people start work early, dropping out of school, working exhausting and dangerous jobs. Many workers are killed or disabled by the dangerous conditions in which they work, leaving families without income earners. Others are driven to drink or drugs by the stresses and hopelessness. The Demon of poverty pulls down anyone who is trying to pull themselves out of poverty by saving money or getting an education. It causes accidents, crime, violence and illnesses which cost money or derail educational plans.

Nature & Accidents

Any time people need help is an opportunity for Seekers to face challenges and use their abilities in creative new ways. The source of danger doesn't have to be a person or Demon. Many natural or accidental occurrences can threaten people:

Wild animals can threaten people, especially campers or hikers. Bears are the biggest threats to human life, but alligators, crocodiles, mountain lions, venomous snakes, feral or rabid dogs and wolves have been known to attack and kill humans. Animal attacks on people are fairly rare, and usually happen because of some sort of change (e.g. an animal's normal food source being taken away, or human encroachment into an animal's normal territory).

Typical Bear

STH 7, SPD 4,
AGY 2, AWR 3,
END 3.
15 Hit Points.
Kill AV 9.
+3 to smell AVs.

People can often get **lost or trapped** in remote places, including forests, caves, mountainsides and mines. Sometimes it is adult hikers or climbers who get lost or trapped, and sometimes it is exploring children. The challenge for PCs is to find the lost people, free them (if trapped) and get them back to civilization. An injury that prevents a person from walking can further complicate matters, especially in a place that vehicles cannot easily get to (e.g. the side of a mountain or a cave).

Various **accidents** can also put people at risk as well as isolate them from rescue services: a mine collapse, an avalanche that buries a town, a snowstorm that snaps power lines and cuts off roads, a dam that breaks and floods a town, etc.

Disease and toxins can also threaten people. An adventure may involve discovering the source of a toxin (e.g. leaking barrels of illegally dumped waste near a town's water reservoir) or finding treatments for disease outbreaks. Communities that live in close proximity to nature can be at risk for outbreaks of rare diseases that jump from animal to human populations. For instance, Bubonic Plague (the Black Death) occasionally pops up in rural west coast towns where it is spread from small mammals.

Traditional: Survival Skill Roll Difficulties by Wilderness

OOO Difficulty: Tropical Island, Forest in Summer

OOOO Difficulty: Forest in Winter, Brushland/Grassland, Marsh/Swamp, Mountainside Below the Snow-Line

OOOOO Difficulty: Desert, Mountainside Above the Snow-Line, Rainforest

OOOOOO Difficulty: Arctic in Winter

The Unexplained

In Brief: Seeker adventures should contain odd things that do not violate PCs' belief systems, but that cannot be explained.

As a space for players to play out various philosophies, the Seeker setting is one in which major cosmological questions, such as "is there a god" are left unanswered. This is so players can play atheists or believers and not be confronted with evidence that might prove their philosophies wrong. Thus many things

in the Seeker universe could be interpreted in more than one way. For instance, the coincidences that happen in the lives of Seekers could be interpreted as an intelligence guiding their fates, or could be seen as a rational mathematical and psychological consequence of Seekers and how they live.

Yet many of the things that happen to Seekers cannot be explained at all. They do not violate the basic tenets of any character's philosophy because the characters do not know how and why they occurred. That there are such occurrences means just about anything could happen to Seekers during gameplay. If anything, constant exposure to the unexplained makes the lives of Seekers much more exciting.

The unexplained helps Seekers remember that the universe is of infinite complexity and there is an endless amount to learn about how things work. Perhaps someday Seekers will learn things that will cause them to understand the unexplained things they have experienced. It's like seeing a stage magician perform some seemingly impossible trick: maybe there's a rational exploration, maybe it really was magic, maybe someday you'll find out one way or another, maybe you'll never know.

Nature Goes Wild

One phenomenon that Seekers commonly experience is that of nature acting out in extreme and unprecedented ways: hailstorms in the middle of a summer day, rats swarming by the hundreds, deer entering cities and bursting into stores and offices, thousands of mushrooms sprouting overnight, sinkholes suddenly swallowing up buildings, dozens of trees in a forest simultaneously falling for no apparent reason, etc. These events can be dangerous, but also awesome, for the people at the middle of them. Often, Seekers can trace events like these to things threatening the health of an ecosystem, what +Harmony Seekers would call a disharmony, although the mechanism by which this leads to the bizarre behaviors is unknown.

Strange Messages

Seekers often find themselves the recipients of mysterious, often impossible messages. For instance, a Seeker who is lost in a cave system, with nobody in the world knowing the Seeker is down there, may turn a corner and find a message scrawled on the wall advising her to look within herself for the strength to continue. Or, a Seeker who has been hunting for a rare, ancient book, and has finally found it in a box in a forgotten basement storage room of an old college library, may find a note inside saying "this book does not contain what you are looking for." The advice in these messages is potentially helpful, but never going so far as to make things easy for the PCs. In this way, they may seem designed with the goal of encouraging the PC's advancement along the Paths.


Visions

Waking hallucinations are a common part of shamanic and shamanism-influenced practices. Yet visions have been known to happen to Seekers whose traditions have nothing to do with shamanism, who have never wanted and have had no history of hallucinations. For instance, a mathematician Seeker who believes the world is ruled by rational physical laws, that there are no such things as God, souls or magic, may one day be passing by a small town and see a vision of a fence made of bones rising up to surround the town.

It is quite obvious, to those who experience visions, that they are not physical reality. Yet this does not make the experiences any less intense. Those who investigate the clues presented by visions find that the vision somehow pointed to some truth, a truth the PC's conscious mind had no way of knowing. For instance, the fence of bones may lead to a town where a leak from a nearby chemical plant has incapacitated and is slowly killing the residents.

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

-Hamlet



Powerful animals are a common motif for visions: bears, eagles, wolves, mountain lions, alligators, etc. They seem to be powerful, intelligent and fearless and seem to be trying to communicate some wordless message to the Seeker.

Houses in the Wilderness

Seekers occasionally find houses in otherwise uninhabited places, places not serviced by any roads. The houses range from tiny shacks to small manufactured homes. None are hooked up to power grids or municipal water supplies. Electricity, when it is present at all, comes from small gasoline powered generators. Some seem to have been abandoned for decades, some seem to have been recently inhabited. Although many Seekers tell tales of finding such dwellings, none speak of having met inhabitants.

It can be hard to read the person or people who lived there. There are no personal papers, no mail, no books, no art. There are the bare necessities of life: food, medicine, bedding, water, toiletries. Sometimes there are collections of strange and disjointed mementos. In metal tins or old rusty coffee cans, explorers have found stones, Polaroids of unknown people or places, scraps of cloth with dried blood on them, antique children's toys, feathers, animal teeth, spent shell casings, etc. These collections seem to hint at, but not quite tell, a story. There are also occasionally crafts and tools with abilities consistent with Seeker-made crafts (p.69).

These places have been built on or moved to their current locations without the knowledge of the owners of the land. Many are found on national park land or in protected nature preserves, unbeknownst to the rangers.

The discovery of these strange dwellings can be a boon to a Seeker. They can provide shelter from harsh weather. They can contain food, water, medicine (sometimes even weapons or tools) that

Seekers desperately need. They can be good places to hide (non-Seekers seem to have a hard time finding these places).

Yet these mysterious buildings can be hard ones to leave, perhaps it is because they seem to be a puzzle that is close to being unraveled. Hours can pass in what seems like only a few minutes to the explorers of these buildings. Explorers tend to forget about other obligations waiting for them outside. A Seeker may enter a shack in the middle of the day, and try to exit later only to find it pitch black. Visitors have even experienced sights and sounds (e.g. of a large wild animal prowling outside) that have made them reluctant to leave.

Elder Seekers

Seekers who are much more advanced along the Paths than PCs are can do things that PCs cannot understand or explain. Just as a normal person might think the things PCs do are impossible, and never fully understand the PC's attempt to explain them, so is the PC's understanding of the abilities of elder Seekers. Elder Seekers can do things that are not described anywhere in the Paths chapter and each Elder Seeker's abilities are unique. These powers tend to be subtle even while they are amazing: paralyzing someone with a touch on the wrist, predicting a future event with perfect accuracy, seeming to read a person's thoughts from miles away, causing a heavy padlock to fall apart by tapping it, living quite happily on a grain of rice a day, etc.

Yet just because elder Seekers can do things that younger Seekers do not understand does not mean elder Seekers have surpassed the basic limitations that are true for everyone in the Seeker universe. There is no one ultimate truth, nobody can know everything there is to know, and so even an elder Seeker can be mistaken, ignorant or have flaws. And even an elder Seeker is looking for anyone, even a younger Seeker, to give them the ideas which will spur their next revelation.

Psychological Challenges

In Brief: Impending Path advancement can prompt subconscious resistance, which can be battled on the plane of visions and journeying.

Being a Seeker means repeatedly admitting that you were wrong and giving up formerly held beliefs. For a Seeker, the entire basis of a person's understanding of and interaction with the environment, others and themselves can be destroyed in a single night. See the Black Gulf (p.56) for more.

The human subconsciousness often battles against devastating changes to worldview. The subconscious throws up barriers to try to prevent such changes, barriers that can mimic the symptoms of mental illness. These barriers can be emotions (e.g. a sense of dread), distracting thoughts or hallucinations, or psychosomatic complaints or loss of capabilities (e.g. sudden blindness or amnesia). These phenomena can happen to any Seeker about to advance along the Paths.

Some Seekers try their best to ignore these problems, working through their revelations despite the problems they cause. Others, especially those who have studied shamanism or shamanism-inspired traditions, seek to confront these psychological barriers head on through the use of visions or journeying. Visions are waking hallucinations where one sees not-physically-real things superimposed on physical reality. Journeying is a hallucination (or lucid dream) of traveling to a place beyond this physical reality and interacting with the beings there.

Practiced shamans can have visions or practice journeying with no external aid. Others can induce these experiences by inducing states of consciousness receptive to them via hallucinogens, sleep deprivation, intensive meditation, hypnosis or lucid dreaming. And, as noted on p.170, visions occasionally happen to Seekers for no traceable reason.

Within the space of visions and journeying, psychological issues can be interacted with as if they are physical entities. The psychological dread that is the subconscious resisting advancement along the Paths typically takes the form of a dreadful monster. The form and abilities of the monster are based on the unique background of the Seeker. Defeating the monster means that this psychological issue will no longer trouble the PC (not for this particular advancement along the Paths). Defeating a monster can mean engaging it in physical combat and slaying it, but can also mean trapping it, tricking it, subduing it, making deals with it, even befriending it.

When facing down a psychological issue in visions or journeying, a PC retains all the same attributes, skills, abilities and equipment the PC has in real life. The PC engaging in combat cannot have his or her physical body be actually harmed, but the PC's "imaginary" Hit Points or combat AVs can be lost as the PC hallucinates or imagines being hurt. If a PC hallucinates/imagines being killed, crippled or put in a hold, the PC is ejected from the state of consciousness in which visions or journeying are possible. Example: *As Tim nears advancement along the Paths, he starts to experience distracting, sometimes debilitating, psychological problems. He decides to confront these head-on and eats a peyote button. He has a vision of himself walking in the desert at night, stalked by a black, driverless car. As the car wins*

combat rounds using Kill and Ruin, Tim's imagined Hit Points and imagined combat AVs go down. Finally, his imaginary bones broken and imaginary joints dislocated, the car runs him over and Tim's imaginary Hit Points go to zero. He immediately finds himself back in his hotel room, still under the influence of a hallucinogen, but no longer in the right state of consciousness to try to confront his subconscious resistance to advancement.

Visions & Journeying Talent

This ability to have Visions or go on Journeys (without requiring the use of hallucinogens) can be purchased as a Talent (p.15) costing 1 skill point and giving an additional specialty of Traditional: Visions & Journeying.

Demons can also be encountered, interacted with or fought in visions or journeys. Defeating a Demon in combat does not destroy it, but does reduce its power (as described on p.42) by one point. However, if a Seeker loses a battle against a Demon, the Demon gains a point of power.

PCs can avoid being injured by the things they encounter in visions and journeys by making legendary (7 difficulty) saves vs. fear. When successful, this means the PC has simply refused to imagine/hallucinate being injured.

The monsters that represent unconscious resistance to advancement have little in the way of skills or equipment. They often have natural weapons, e.g. fangs, talons, armored plates, equal to a 1-2 point combat package. They also have awesome raw power, with most of their attributes in the range of 4-7.

A Seeker's subconscious seems to know when a major world-shattering revelation is coming near, even when the Seeker's conscious mind does not. Psychological phenomena can start days before the crisis that may end in Path advancement, growing stronger each passing day. In game mechanics terms, psychological problems should start when a PC has saved up 2 XP and should continue until the player spends the XP (either on a Path level or on something else).

The Black Bird

Appearance- A huge (8 ft. tall) jet black bird with huge wings and a roughly human-shaped head, torso and legs.

Attributes- AGY OOOOO, AWR OOO, CHM O, END 7, INL OOO, SPD 7 (flying), STH 7, WIL OOOOO. 10 Hit Points.

Behavior- The Black Bird is one possible embodiment of fear and existential dread. It perches in trees and on buildings, glowering silently at the Seeker and trying to scare the Seeker away from his or her current Path. It flies over the Seeker at opportune moments so that its shadow falls over the Seeker. If its first appearances do not work, it perches or flies closer. Finally, if the PC still doesn't relent, it attacks, swooping down on the Seeker, its wings beating violently all around while it stabs its beak into the Seeker's eyes, neck and guts.

Equipment- Wings, talons and beak act as a Ruin OO package.

Combat AVs- Ruin OOOOO, Kill OOOOO, Exhaust 6, Combat OOOO.

Visions vs. Hallucinations

Visions are generally wanted and sought after (or, at the least, allowed to happen) by the person experiencing them. They are always recognized as being not part of physical reality.

Hallucinations come unbidden and by surprise and may be mistaken for physical reality.

Either visions or hallucinations or both can happen to a Seeker who is in the midst of a psychological crisis.

Using Seeker With Other Vajra Games

Since Seeker is about wanderers, whose travels could conceivably take them anywhere, who have existed for all human existence and who will continue to exist in to the conceivable future, Seeker can be easily mixed with other settings. Seekers of the 1950s could have travelled to Tibet, or from Tibet, seeking wisdom. Seekers of the 2080s could travel to New York City for the same reasons.

Most of the character classes of Vajra games have some philosophy or discipline behind them, and could be

considered Traditions that could launch characters of each setting into Seekerdom. An Animalist from Fates Worse Than Death could become a Seeker on the Path of -Thought or +Feeling. A Yellow Hat Monk from Tibet could become a Seeker on the Path of +Thought or -Feeling. A Scribbler from In Dark Alleys could become a Seeker on the Path of -Harmony.

The various supernatural and high-tech arts that characters in Vajra games engage in are not precluded by Seekerdom. A Seeker can know these arts just as a Seeker in the modern-day setting can know computer programming or hypnosis.

Navajo Country

Seekers in Navajo Country- Navajo Country is an interesting place for Seekers to wander through and have adventures in. One reason is that it is rural: a scattering of isolated communities over a piece of land the size of Ireland. Even the biggest towns only have 4,000 to 8,000 people.

Another reason is that there are people in need of aid and many ways Seekers can help them. There is poverty, crime and government corruption. There are outside mining and gaming interests trying to exert influence on local governments. There are also deserts, canyons, caves and mines that people can be trapped or lost in. There is even a large group of native Sorcerers, the Skinwalkers (p.175).

Navajo Country also has a lot to teach Seekers. Navajo medicine workers can teach Seekers on the Path of +Harmony. Medicine Workers can also help Seekers, even those with no interest in +Harmony, to fight their personal Demons. Navajo witches, when they can be found, can teach about -Harmony. The beautiful landscape, with some of the country's most awe inspiring natural scenes, can be an inspiration for +Feeling Seekers.

Geography & Population- The Navajo Nation is the largest Native American territory in the United States. It is located in the "four corners" area, with pieces in Northeast Arizona, Southeast Utah and Northwest New Mexico. It is 26,000 mi² (67,000 km²), roughly the size of West Virginia. Yet it is sparsely populated, with only 174,000 Navajos and a tiny minority of whites, Hopis and Paiutes. Window Rock is the capitol and, at 4,000 people, one of the largest communities on the reservation. The only larger towns are Chinle (5,000 people), Kayentra (5,000), Shiprock (8,000) and Tuba City (8,000). The majority of the population can be found spread throughout the area in small, isolated rural communities. The Navajo Nation surrounds the smaller Hopi Indian Reservation (with only 7,000 people) and is adjacent to Ute and Jicarilla Apache land.

Natural Features- Navajo land is mostly desert with some mountains and canyons. When it rains, the canyons are prone to flash floods. These floods have drowned many, especially visitors who weren't expecting them. Water and wind has carved many unique features from the local sandstone, including tall spires, buttes (tall structures with steep sides and flat tops) and even natural bridges arching over canyons. The Canyon de Chelly National Monument has the ruins of dwellings built into the rock by the ancient Anasazi people. Shiprock is a huge (1,583 ft., 482 m. high) rock rising from the desert plain. Shiprock is managed by the Navajo government. As it is sacred to the Navajo, they do not allow climbing on it, although this doesn't stop some avid rock climbers from attempting to illegally mount it.

Lifeways- Unemployment is very high in Navajo country. For their livelihood, many Navajo herd sheep and cattle. Many young Navajo grow up caring for sheep and cattle and learn many useful skills, including horse riding, roping, knot tying and tracking. The Navajo also make rugs, yarn, blankets, rugs and jewelry. The Navajo have their own unique and popular style of jewelry, incorporating silver and turquoise.

There are also coal and uranium mines. Mining has contributed to health problems in Navajo country, including a high occurrence of cancer. Yet mining has slowed in recent times. Tourism is also an important source of income, and the Navajo Nation has recently (in 2004) decided to open a few casinos.

With a very low population, spread out over such a large area, Navajo communities have a very rural character. Long dirt roads connect distant communities. Many dwellings have no natural gas or electricity. The residents must burn wood or propane from tanks for their light and heat. Often residents must drive long distances in old beat-up trucks to fill containers with drinkable water.

Government- Although the federal government does exert some influence on Navajo land, mostly through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Navajo Nation is mostly autonomous and self-governing. There is an elected president and vice-president, a court system (with family law and trial courts) and a council of representatives. Corruption has plagued the Navajo government, with many government officials looting funds from tribal coffers.

The Navajo Nation has its own police force. It operates primary schools, high schools and Diné College, a two year community college with the primary campus in Tsaile and seven satellite campuses. Diné College has around two-thousand students.

Traditional Culture- For most of their recent history, the Navajo have been semi-nomadic herders. Silver-smithing and weaving are traditional Navajo Crafts. The Navajo are traditionally matrilineal (men move in with the wives' families, women have a lot of power) and exogamous (it is considered incest to have sex with someone from one of the clans of one's grandparents).

Dwellings- The traditional Navajo dwelling is a hogan, an 8-sided one-room building made of mud and wood. Although most Navajo now live in more modern housing, hogans are often used for ceremonies (see Healing Traditions below).

continued next page

Skinwalkers

This group originated long ago, possibly before the European discovery of America, and probably with some powerful Seeker. The group is centered around Navajo Country. There are small groups of Skinwalkers on every town on the reservation, and in some towns outside the reservation. The Skinwalkers organize themselves as a secret initiation society, carefully choosing the most willful, angry and amoral of their neighbors to be initiated. The initiation and training is long and difficult, making use of sleep deprivation, whipping with switches and dangerous and unpleasant deliriant drugs to induce altered states of consciousness. The goal is to make the initiate believe that he or she can don an animal skin (e.g. that of a wolf) and gain all the traits and powers of that animal. They believe they are animals and are often mistaken for animals. Initiates are actually gaining +Self specialties. Skinwalkers use these abilities to prowl their communities at night, robbing people, raping people and attacking their enemies. They often target, in animal guise, people who offended them in their mundane personas. Although most members commit crimes on their own, they do band together to eliminate anyone who is a threat to the secrecy of the group or its members.

Typical Skinwalker

Attributes (without using abilities): AGY OOO, AWR OO, CHM OO, INL OO, SPD OOO, STH OOO, WIL OOO. 10 Hit Points.

Attributes (after using the skin donning ritual Focus and a 3 difficulty Choose Identity roll): AGY OOOO, AWR OO, CHM OO, INL OO, SPD OOOO, STH OOO, WIL OOO. 12 Hit Points.

Skills:

Athletic O	Specialty: Outdoors
Combat OO	Specialty: Ruin
Traditional O	Specialty: Tricks

Paths:

+Self: None

Specialties: Choose Identity, persuade people to believe their identities (+2), attribute plusses.

Focuses: Skinwalker skin-donning ritual

Equipment:

Animal skin with claws (counts as a Combat: Ruin O package)

Combat AVs (with boosted attributes)

Kill OOOO	Ruin OOOO
Control OOO	Exhaust OOOO

Navajo Country (continued)

Navajo Language- The Navajo language has about 171,000 active speakers, making it the most spoken Native American language. The Navajo Nation has a Navajo language newspaper as well as several English-language media outlets (print, radio and TV).

Sacred Geography- Navajo creation stories take place in Navajo territory. Thus the Navajo can point to the real world places where their creation tales took place. This gives them, among other things, a strong sense of stewardship over their natural world and a desire to see Navajo land treated with respect.

Supernatural Dangers- In the traditional Navajo belief system, there are several supernatural misfortunes that can befall a person. One is contamination by the dead, or anything that has been in contact with death. Not properly burying or mourning the dead can cause a physical and psychological disease called Ghost Sickness. Other spiritual pollutants, such as lighting struck wood, can also cause illness. Evil spirits can also infest people.

There are also, in Navajo traditional belief, “witches” who use evil magic to hurt others. Some witches poison people with corpse powder (dried and powdered corpse flesh). Others can

covertly shoot small cursed objects into people. Others can steal something from someone (e.g. hair, fingernail clippings, clothing) and bury it with polluting things so that the person becomes ill. “Frenzy” witches use native deliriant plants to cause disease or dominate the wills of others. Skinwalkers are a type of witch who can turn into animals and move around covertly (see previous page).

Witches meet and initiate each other in secret. They engage in taboo activities such as incest, necrophilia, cannibalism and grave robbing. They even perform dark versions of Navajo healing ceremonials.

Healing Traditions- To heal, protect and cleanse people of physical, mental and spiritual illness, Navajo medicine workers engage in ceremonials. There are many ceremonials, each used for a different reason, with names such as Beauty Way, Enemy Way, Ghost Way, Frenzy Way, etc. They are typically four days long and involve chanting, dancing, praying, hand-trembling, making intricate and beautiful sand paintings, and the use of herbs and herb-smoke. The goal of these ceremonies is to restore to the patient what is translated into English as “beauty.” The Navajo concept of “beauty” is related to concepts of mental and physical health, harmony with the spirit world and harmony with the universe in general.

Index of NPCs

Colton Donaldson, Sorcerer, p.68

Coyote, “Evil” Seeker, p.65

Emiliano Iglesias, Patriarch of the Iglesias Clan, p.164

Flora “Escepticia” Gutierrez, Prodigy, p.67

Infinity, Trapped Seeker, p.63

Mariko “M” Yamamoto, Retired Seeker, p.58

Miriam Iglesias-Bechtel, Matriarch of the Iglesias Clan, p.166

Sam Downs, Seeker Aware FBI Agent, p.52

The Black Bird, p.173

Typical Finite, p.64

Typical Sheriff, p.54

Typical Skinwalker, p.175

Introductory Adventure: Weaponized Honeybees

In Brief: The PCs will enter a town where the locals are in fear of attacks by especially aggressive honeybees. The bees can be traced back to the home of Randolph Kent, known around town as a dangerous, paranoid madman. He will not allow anyone on his property to take care of the bees. A secret is behind both Randolph's and the bees' madness.

Lasky's Mill

Lasky's Mill is right off a two-lane road that follows the river through forested hills.

This town started its life in the last century as a lumbermill town. Logs were taken from the nearby forested foothills and floated down the river to the mill, which ran on water power. The mill closed in the 1930s, to be replaced with the Hansen Paint Plant up on the hill facing town. The Paint Plant was the town's biggest employer. It closed in the 1990s and the town's economy has stagnated ever since. Most of the young people have left and the majority of the town is now retirees. On Main Street, many of the stores have been vacant and boarded up for more than a decade. The town has gone from a peak population of 2,000 to a current population of around 500.

At the center of town, along the rural route that leads into and out of town, is the town's Main Street. Among the buildings that are not boarded up and abandoned are a diner, a sheriff's substation, a doctor's office, a small Methodist church, a grocery store, a hardware store and a gas station. The town's homes are mostly built at the base of the hills that are South of town. To the North is the River and a wooden bridge across the river. On the other side of the river is a road that leads up the hill to the old Paint Plant where it overlooks the town.

Entering Town

The PCs will most likely enter town from the rural route that acts as the town's Main Street. The first thing the PCs will probably notice is that there is nobody outside (although, if during the day, the few running businesses will have open signs in their windows). The next thing the PCs might notice is a truck up on the sidewalk, crashed into a telephone pole, steam rising from the dented hood. The passenger side door is open and there is nobody inside the vehicle.

Bee Attack Mechanics

Bee Attributes: AWR 2, END 2, SPD 5. Ruin: O per 5 bees.

Treat a swarm of bees attacking a PC as an opponent using Ruin. The Ruin AV of a swarm of bees is equal to 1 for every 5 bees attacking (round up to the nearest point of AV). Each one point of Hit Point or AV damage done to a swarm of bees kills 5 bees. It is impossible to put bees in a hold, so a successful round using Control does not have any effect beyond the canceling out of damage.

From the moment the first bee attacks, more are attracted by the pheromones released and the number of bees rises until the PC gets indoors or out of range of the bees.

The rate at which bees accrue depends on how close to the hive the PCs are when the attack happens. Within the backyard the bees live in, where their density is greatest, bees will accumulate at a rate of 10 per combat round until they reach a maximum of 200 bees altogether.

As one gets farther from the backyard, bees will accumulate at a slower rate and the maximum that will show up for an attack drops. At a range of a mile from the Kent backyard, both will drop to zero.

The PCs may also notice an unusually large number of bees zipping around in the air. Before the PCs have a chance to do much investigating, bees will attack. Any bee who gets near any person will try to sting that person. Upon stinging the bee will emit a pheromone that will attract other bees. The number of bees attacking will keep growing until the PC gets inside.

Getting inside may be difficult. Town residents are reluctant to open their doors for anyone being attacked by bees, fearing the bees will follow them in. Also, if PCs choose doors on Main Street at random, they are most likely to find doors that are locked, boarded up, even chained and padlocked.

State of Panic

Once the PCs get to speak to a townsperson, they will find out that the town has been in a state of fear for the last few days. Bee stings have been increasing over the last few months, with almost everyone in town having been stung at least once. In the last few days, however, the situation has worsened dramatically. The entire hive is apparently out and looking to sting any person or animal they can. Those who have ventured outside have been stung repeatedly. One resident even crashed his truck while trying to escape town when bees got into the truck and stung him as he tried to drive.

The town residents do not know where the bees are coming from or why they are in such a frenzy. The popular theory is that Africanized bees have invaded town, but this is just conjecture. The town Sheriff has tried calling county animal control to come deal with the bees, but the animal control offices are closed due to a budget-related furlough.

The locals have tried to wait out the bees, but their frenzy has not subsided. The situation is growing desperate. The town doctor has run out of the drugs used to treat

extreme allergic reactions in those allergic to bee stings. One of the town's elderly residents drives to a larger town 60 miles away twice a week for dialysis treatments, but she has been too scared to leave her house.

Investigating the Bees

The town does have a small public library which happens to have a book on beekeeping. Some town residents have internet access (either slow access via phone lines or satellite based internet) and PCs could look up information on bees there. Among the town's residents there are a few who have practiced beekeeping. Consulting any of these resources will tell the PCs that this is not normal behavior for any kind of bees, even Africanized ones. Bees will swarm and sting anyone around if their nest is attacked, but will eventually calm down. These bees seem to be in a state of perpetual swarm, which is not anything the PCs will be able to find precedence for.

A mapping of bee attacks will show the general bounds of bee activity and suggest a probable approximate center. Reviewing this part of the map with town residents will prompt one resident to remember that Randolph Kent, whose property is in the middle of the bee attack area, had been known to keep bees.

A naturist PC who can capture or examines bees and compares their behavior to regular bee behavior will see evidence of neurological damage: twitching, clumsiness, brief periods of paralysis. Examining the ground outside, one will also find a significant number of dead bees, with no visible signs as to what killed them.

If PCs can somehow create (or have with them) chemical analysis equipment, they will find unusual phosphate-based chemicals in the bodies of the bees. Such chemicals are likely man-made and likely biologically-active.

Venturing Outside

Other than the use of Path Abilities, the only way to travel safely outside is to create some sort of armor that will protect exposed skin from beestings. Creating a source of smoke will also make the bees more docile. Waiting until night will also help, as the bees will be colder, and thus less active, and also will not be able to see as easily.

Those who do venture outside and wander around looking for higher concentrations of bees will be able to track those bees to the backyard of Randolph Kent's property.

Randolph Kent

Randolph is known around town as a dangerous, paranoid madman. Randolph has outlived his wife and two children (all of whom, according to town gossip, were also insane). In the years since his son's death, he has become a recluse, living on his pension from the paint plant and venturing from his house only every few weeks for groceries. According to town rumors, Randolph won't even open his door to his neighbors, instead yelling through the door when they knock on it and threatening to either call the police, sick his guard dogs on them, or get his shotgun.

Interviewing elders will reveal that Randolph was once a kind and respected member of the community. He was a chemical engineer at the "paint plant" and was forced to retire when the plant closed in 1993. The whole family began to act oddly after that. First his adult daughter

Sheriff Redmond

Appearance- Middle-aged African-American male. Short, broad-shouldered, muscular. Short curly hair with a large bald spot, wears an olive-green county Sheriff's uniform.

Attributes- AGY OO, AWR OO, CHM OO, END O, INL OOO, SPD OO, STH OOO, WIL OOO. 10 Hit Points.

Skills

Combat O	Specialty: Kill
Investigation/Espionage O	Specialty: Military
Labor O	Specialty: Driving

Equipment- Handcuffs, GPS, Car

Ranged Combat: Kill OO (pistol)

Ranged Combat: Ruin OO (pepper spray)

Psychological Strengths and Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOO Weaknesses OO
(Tries to be "smarter than the bad guys.")

Self Strengths OOO Weaknesses OO
(A take-charge guy with the self-confidence benefiting an ex-military man)

Harmony Strengths OOO Weaknesses OOOO
(An important part of the community; loyal, sometimes to a fault)

Feeling Strengths OO Weaknesses O
(Tries to keep a level head at all times)

Personality- Phil is ex-military and values self-control, willingness to sacrifice and willingness to obey orders. He thinks of himself as very loyal, both to his country and his community. Most of the time he is easygoing and relaxed and likes to joke around with people. The current situation is making him feel frustrated, stressed out, and incompetent. His primary motives are to protect his town from the bees and (although he won't initially know this is an issue) to keep the secret of the "paint plant" from becoming public.

Combat AVs

Kill OOOO	Ruin OOOO
Control OOO	Exhaust OOO

Randolph Kent's Dogs

Appearance- Two large rottweilers.

Attributes- AGY OOO, AWR OOOO, END OOO, SPD OOOO, STH OOO, WIL O. 5 Hit Points. +3 to smell based AWR rolls. +2 to hearing based AWR rolls. Kill AV 3.

Randolph Kent

Appearance- Tall, thin elderly man with unkempt grey hair, dark bags under his eyes and a perpetual scowl. He wears a moth eaten sweater, powder-blue sweat pants and house slippers.

Attributes- AGY O, AWR OO, CHM O, END OO, INL OOOO, SPD O, STH OO, WIL OOOO. 8 Hit Points.

Skills

Academic OOO	Specialties: Sciences, Math
Combat O	Specialties: Kill

Equipment

Ranged Kill OO (Shotgun)

Psychological Strengths and Weaknesses

Thought Strengths OOO Weaknesses OOOOO
(Once a brilliant scientist, now a believer in improbable conspiracies)

Self Strengths OOO Weaknesses OOO
(Has learned to rely on himself.)

Harmony Strengths O Weaknesses O
(Lonely and purposefully isolated from others)

Feeling Strengths OO Weaknesses OOO
(Sad, paranoid and full of irrational rage)

Personality- Once a smart, reasonable, loving father and husband, the extensive neurological damage Randolph has suffered has left him angry, paranoid and confused. He no longer understands how the universe works and, since he cannot control his emotions, his feelings lead him to believe the worst. He probably would have committed suicide if he was not so stubborn.

Methods- Randolph only leaves the house for groceries, and since the bees have gone into a frenzy he had stayed inside, living on his voluminous stores of canned food and spending his waking hours watching TV. When anyone comes to the door he yells at them to leave his property. If he feels he has to, he will open the door a crack, leaving a security chain attached and making sure his shotgun is ready to fire. He is not afraid to point his shotgun at anyone who won't leave his front steps and he will shoot anyone who enters his house or backyard unbidden.

Combat

Kill OOOO	Ruin OOO
Control OO	Exhaust OO

ter, who lived with them, died in a car accident. Then his wife committed suicide. Then his son, who had been born "special," died of an unknown disease. Interviewing the town doctor will reveal that the son died of a neurological disease that was never properly diagnosed. If the doctor relays the symptoms to a PC with medical knowledge, the disease will sound like widespread damage to the entire nervous system, resulting in motor dysfunction and behavioral changes.

Interviewing the husband-and-wife owners of the town grocery store (the only people to see Randolph regularly since he became a recluse) will reveal that Randolph has had an odd shuffling walk, facial tics and has been clumsy.

If Phil Redmond, the town Sheriff, is told that Randolph Kent's property is the source of the bees, he will be oddly reluctant to confront Randolph.

If the PCs go to Randolph's door he will act just as town rumors say he will: He won't open the door, he will threaten the PCs to try to make them go away, he will refuse to talk about or admit that he has bees in his backyard, and will absolutely refuse to let anyone on his property.

The Truth

The town's "paint plant" was not actually a paint plant, but a government run chemical weapon's plant, although most employees were lied to, told they were making chemicals

used to create paint with. Real paint was occasionally moved into the plant, canned, and moved out of the plant just to keep up the illusion.

Randolph Kent, who was a chemical engineer, and Sheriff Phil Redmond, who was chief of security for the plant, are among the few still around who know the plant's secret. They are both under an agreement not to tell anyone the true nature of the plant, especially as the US government, who secretly ran the plant, ran it in direct violation of weapon treaties the US had signed.

Randolph Kent had suspected that the plant might have exposed its workers to toxic chemicals, and that this might be the cause behind various health problems experienced by workers. He even thought it explained why his own son was born "simple." When the plant closed, Randolph feared the government would erase all evidence of the plant's activities, destroying his ability to sue if he ever wanted to. So, Randolph smuggled out a small canister of one of the plant's products, a potent neurotoxin. He put this canister in a locked wooden shed in his backyard.

The canister corroded and developed a leak and the neurotoxin soaked into the ground. The family kept a vegetable garden in their backyard and the toxin contaminated the vegetables and began to destroy the nervous systems of the family. The brain damage Randolph has received made him clumsy, gave him ticks and tremors, made him forgetful, prone to rage, paranoid and damaged his self-control.

Sheriff Phil Redmond is still trying to keep the plant's secret (mostly because he fears the damage lawsuits would do to the community) and so he doesn't want strangers interviewing Randolph Kent. Sheriff Redmond knows Randolph Kent is crazy (although he doesn't know it is because of neurotoxin that Kent smuggled out) and is afraid that, in his state, he could reveal the plant's secrets to anyone.

Recently, the slowly leaking neurotoxins have reached the wildflowers growing in the backyard that feed the bees Randolph keeps there. The neurotoxin has damaged the bees' nervous systems in a way that has prompted an unending rage. If nothing is done, the bees will die within a few weeks, as their constant swarming has left them unable to gather food or care for larvae.

The Paint Plant

Although it isn't necessary to go to the paint plant to solve the town's problems, players may end up going there anyhow.

The plant has been thoroughly cleaned out, both to remove potential toxins and to remove evidence as to what the paint plant actually did. All the entrances are locked up with chains and wire mesh has been bolted over the windows. There is one place where teenagers pried away enough of the mesh to climb through, and there are a few beer cans and a smattering of graffiti inside, but for the most part the sheriff has done a good job keeping trespassers away from the plant.

The actual machinery of the plant has been hauled out and melted down, leaving only bare concrete with old bolt holes. Yet just from the layout a PC with strong chemical engineering skills (or +Thought abilities that allow them to fake having those skills) can figure out that this was not a paint plant. There is also enough evidence of left-over security (cameras, blast-proof doors, multiple security areas within the plant each with their own keycard-based locks) to figure out that this was something much more sensitive than a paint plant.

If the PCs are very lucky, they may find a torn scrap of paper that blew into an air duct in the floor of a vacant office and stuck there. The scrap of paper has only the following text:

*From
Colonel Simon Tashinger
Special Projects & Research Office
United States Department of Defense*

Dealing With Bees

The only way to stop the danger to the townspeople of bee stings is to either destroy the bees or take them out into the woods, far from human habitation. Doing either of these means getting into Randolph Kent's backyard, something he can not be easily convinced to let anyone do.

PCs may be able to subdue Randolph, but he keeps a loaded shotgun by the door and a loaded pistol under his pillow when he sleeps at night, and he is not afraid to shoot anyone who tries to force their way in.

The PCs may be able to sneak into the backyard, but this also will not be easy. The backyard is surrounded by a tall wooden fence. The wood is old and in need of repair and is likely to collapse when someone tries to climb it. The backyard is overgrown with waist-high weeds, making it difficult to move through. The two guard dogs, usually kept outside, have been moved inside by Randolph (they were getting stung by bees). If they hear anyone in the backyard, or see anyone through the sliding glass windows that connect the kitchen to the backyard, they will start barking. Randolph will shoot anyone he finds trespassing in his backyard.

Removing the bees will help the people in the town, but the toxin will still be a danger unless the PCs can discover the existence of the toxin and convince someone in authority to call in a toxic cleanup team.

Other Opportunities For Growth in Lasky's Mill

- Inside the paint plant, one of the teenagers who once broke in spraypainted a Nietzsche quote on the wall. This quote could provide inspiration (½ point XP) to a -Harmony Seeker.
- Sitting on a chair in the den of the Kent house is a book called "the Philosophy of Science." Reading the book could provide inspiration (½ point XP) to a +Thought Seeker.
- Marjorie, one of the husband and wife team that run the town's grocery store, is a long time devotee of New Thought (p.87) and is willing to train a PC or PCs in the power of positive thinking (good for a +Self Seeker).

Adventure Results

Extra Bad: Someone gets killed, either by bees or by Raymond Kent.

Bad: The bee attacks continue until the bees die of exhaustion and starvation.

Good: The PCs eliminate the threat of the bees, either by killing the bees or by moving them to an uninhabited area.

Extra Good: The threat of the bees is eliminated. Randolph Kent is diagnosed with neurological damage and gets medical and psychiatric help. The leaking container of neurotoxin is found and cleaned up. Employees of the plant who were damaged by chemical exposure are compensated.

Appendix

ORC-L TO ORC-R CONVERSION

Difficulties

	ORC-R	ORC-L
Easy	10	OO
Moderate	20	OOO
Hard	30	OOOOO
Legendary	40	(7)

Bonuses/Penalties:

Regular to Light: Divide by four, round down to the nearest one. E.g. a drug that gives +10 to save vs. unconsciousness would give +OO.

Light to Regular: Multiply by four.

Attributes

Regular to Light: Divide attribute by 4, round up to the nearest one.

Light to Regular: Multiply by four.

ORC-R	ORC-L
1-4	O
5-8	OO
9-12	OOO
13-16	OOOO
17-20	OOOOO

Skills

Several levels of ORC-R skills equal 1 level of an ORC-L skill. After converting, choose skills or specialties as appropriate.

Skill Category	ORC-R levels	ORC-L levels
Academic	12	1
Athletic	6	1
Combat	7	1
Creative	6	1
Criminal	9	1
Tech	9	1
Investigation/ Espionage	9	1
Labor	9	1
Medical	6	1
People	6	1
Traditional	9	1

Skill Points:

*10 ORC-R Skill Points =
1 ORC-L Skill Point*

Money/Equipment

Every \$2,000 in value equals 1 EP and vice versa.

Bonus Chars

Generally, throw out any advantage or disad costing or worth less than 4 BPs when converting to ORC-L.

*4 ORC-R Bonus Points =
1 ORC-L Bonus Point*

Experience Points

40 ORC-R XP = 1 ORC-L XP

SEEKER

Name _____

Appearance _____

Eccentricities _____

Attributes (24)

AWR 00000

AGY 00000

END 00000

INL 00000

SPD 00000

STH 00000

WIL 00000

Hit Points ____

Skills (10)

Academic 00000 (INL, 2)

Specialties _____

Combat 00000 (N/A, 4)

Specialties _____

Criminal 00000 (AGY, 4)

Specialties _____

Inves/Espionage 00000 (INL, 4)

Specialties _____

Medicine 00000 (INL, 3)

Specialties _____

Traditional 00000 (AWR, 1)

Specialties _____

Athletic 00000 (AGY, 3)

Specialties _____

Creative 00000 (AWR, 1)

Specialties _____

Tech 00000 (INL, 1)

Specialties _____

Labor 00000 (INL, 1)

Specialties _____

People 00000 (CHM, 1)

Specialties _____

Paths (4)

Specialties

Focuses

Specialties

Focuses

THOUGHT

00000 - + 00000

SELF

00000 - + 00000

HARMONY

00000 - + 00000

FEELING

00000 - + 00000

Equipment (5) _____

Advantages

Disads & Demons

KILL ____ (WIL + AGY) **Ruin** ____ (WIL + AGY) **CONTROL** ____ (WIL + AGY) **EXHAUST** ____ (WIL + AGY)

W: AV dmg to HP. L: AV/2 dmg to HP

W: AV dmg to AVs. L: AV/2 dmg to AVs

W: dmg -AV, hold. L: dmg -AV/2.

W: dmg -AV, AV dmg to HP, 1 dmg to AV.

L: dmg -AV/2, AV/2 dmg to HP

Unspent XP _____

1 XP = 1 BP = 1 EP = 1 Attribute Pt. = 3 Skill Pts. 2 XP = 1 Path Pt.

SEEKER NPC

Name _____

Appearance _____

Attributes

AWR 00000
SPD 00000

AGY 00000
STH 00000

END 00000
WIL 00000

INL 00000
Hit Points ____

Skills

Academic 00000 (INL)
Specialties _____

Combat 00000 (N/A)
Specialties _____

Criminal 00000 (AGY)
Specialties _____

Invest/Espionage 00000 (INL)
Specialties _____

Medicine 00000 (INL)
Specialties _____

Traditional 00000 (AWR)
Specialties _____

Athletic 00000 (AGY)
Specialties _____

Creative 00000 (AWR)
Specialties _____

Tech 00000 (INL)
Specialties _____

Labor 00000 (INL)
Specialties _____

People 00000 (CHM)
Specialties _____

SORCEROUS SKILLS

STRENGTHS

00000

00000

00000

00000

Psychological

THOUGHT

SELF

HARMONY

FEELING

WEAKNESSES

00000

00000

00000

00000

Equipment

Advantages

Disads & Demons

KILL ____ (WIL + AGY) **RUN** ____ (WIL + AGY) **CONTROL** ____ (WIL + AGY) **EXHAUST** ____ (WIL + AGY)

W: AV dmg to HP. L: AV/2 dmg to HP

W: AV dmg to AVs. L: AV/2 dmg to AVs

W: dmg -AV, hold. L: dmg -AV/2.

W: dmg -AV, AV dmg to HP, 1 dmg to AV
L: dmg -AV/2, AV/2 dmg to HP

COMMUNITY

Name _____
community type _____ population _____

STRENGTHS	Psychological	WEAKNESSES
00000	THOUGHT	00000
00000	SELF	00000
00000	HARMONY	00000
00000	FEELING	00000

Advantages _____
Disadvantages _____
Most Powerful Person _____
Opportunities For Advancement _____
Demons _____ 00000
_____ 00000

COMMUNITY

Name _____
community type _____ population _____

STRENGTHS	Psychological	WEAKNESSES
00000	THOUGHT	00000
00000	SELF	00000
00000	HARMONY	00000
00000	FEELING	00000

Advantages _____
Disadvantages _____
Most Powerful Person _____
Opportunities For Advancement _____
Demons _____ 00000
_____ 00000