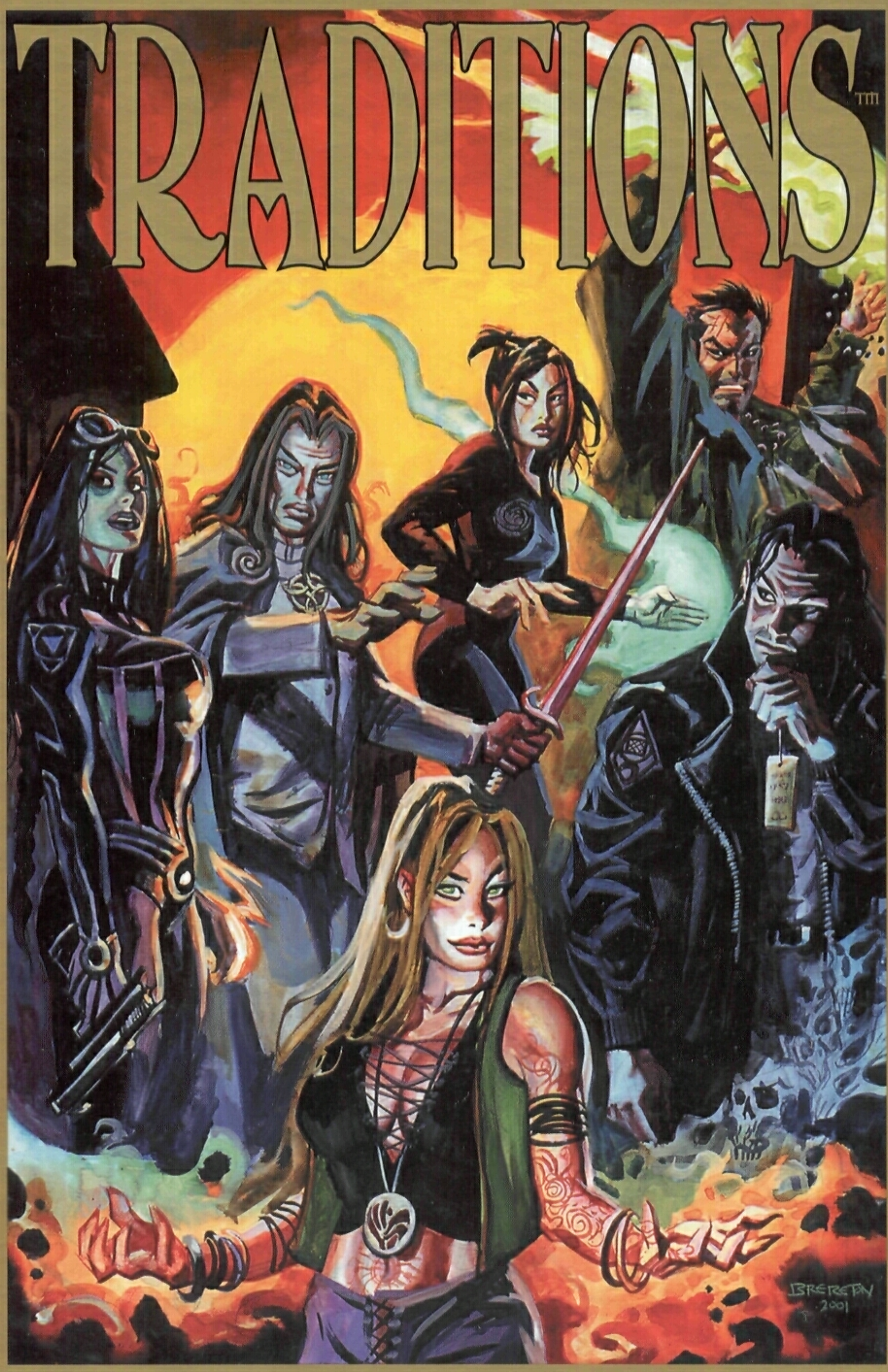
GUIDE TO THE TRADITIONS™



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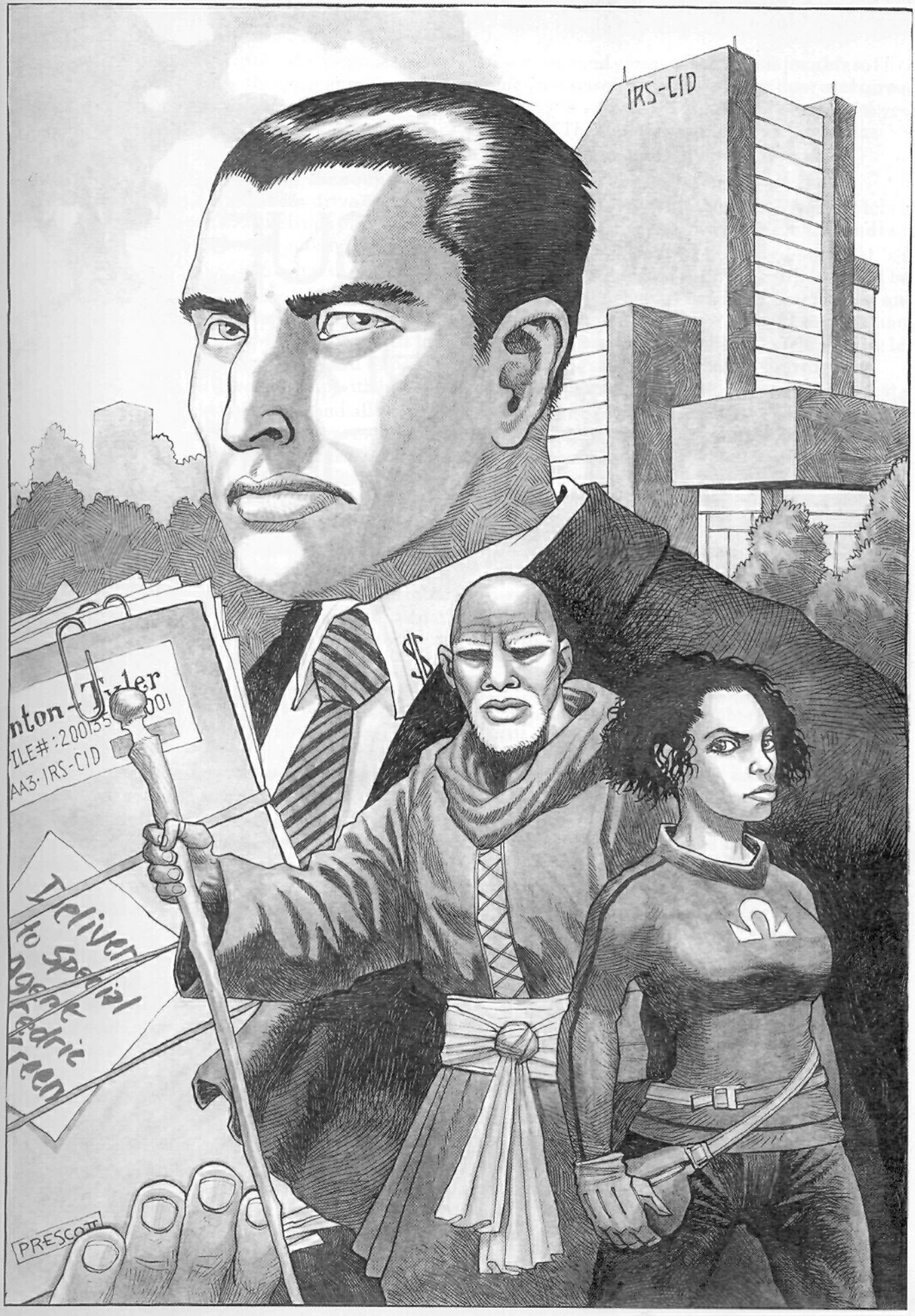
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Deliver to Special Agent Cedric Green
PRESCOTT

PROLOGUE: EUROPA DESCENDING

"Witless turncoats! Petulant children! Treacherous simpletons!"

Ignatius Canticori paced briskly about the small office, his face nearly as dark as his robes, his bristling eyebrows pumping up and down like a seagull's wings. His mouth chewed as-of-yet unformed words into shape, face clenching at their bitter taste. He whirled, a sleeve flowing and flapping along outstretched arm, and thundered, "Fools! Fools, all of you!"

The woman behind the desk sighed. "Yes, of course we are — yet you remind us so often, it becomes difficult to keep track of every infraction. What is the latest indication of our mental deficiency?"

His eyes flared wider. "Constance, do you mock me?"

"Of course not, Ignatius." She adjusted her dark glasses and pointed to the empty spot at the table. "Now please continue your most eloquent tirade from the comfort of your chair."

He stiffened. "This plan carries with it the stench of desperation. The drowning man clings to everything he can, even dragging saviors to the depths in his blind panic. I, however, refuse to be company to your misery. I shan't condone nor consent to this course of action."

Constance tilted her head. "I don't recall requesting either from you."

Meghan tried clapping both hands over her own mouth, but couldn't hide her chortle. Hugh suddenly seemed interested in the intricacy of the ceiling tile. Sunil simply glared at him.

"I shall not stand for this," Ignatius murmured in a low tone.

"Then sit down, asshole," muttered Sunil.

Ignatius quivered. "What did the witch utter?"

"I told you to get back into your damn seat so we can get this meeting over with, you pompous cock."

"Sunil," warned Constance.

"Come on, Connie, it's not like the rest of us aren't thinking it. He's like this every time we want to do anything: always talking to hear the sound of his voice, trying to carve out alliances, drive wedges between us.... He plays politics like Hugh plays women, which is to say he's only good at making enemies."

Hugh frowned. "That's rather harsh of—"

Sunil's mouth tightened. "Look, he mixes with this group like a bullet to the back of the head. He wants to return to Horizon? Fine, I say we let him try his luck with the Storm. With any luck he'll dash himself to pieces and nobody will have to put up with his —"

"Silence," whispered Constance, and all sound in the room ceased to be. Sunil's mouth kept moving, but almost immediately the anger in the man's face turned to surprise and he paused mid-sentence. Ignatius noted with alarm that he couldn't even hear the sound of his own heartbeat, or the rush of breath into his lungs.

Calm. Be calm, pulsed a voice at the core of his mind, and he knew it was not his own thought. He saw Constance nod and somehow he knew it was her mind speaking inside him. Sound returned with a dull roar, and he heard himself gasp, reassured at the noise of his own breath.

"It is quite obvious that this discussion has become unproductive," Constance murmured. "I think that all of us need to be elsewhere for a while. Take the rest of the night off. We'll meet again, same time tomorrow. I expect our next meeting to go smoothly and without unnecessary conflict. There is a difference between speaking your mind and minding what you speak. I encourage all of you to determine the difference between the two." She stood and grasped the harness on Clay, her German Shepard, who helped her navigate out of the room.

Sunil glanced at Hugh and Meghan. "I'll be at the range. Need to work off a little steam," he muttered, standing abruptly and passing Ignatius without looking at him.

"I'm off to a singles' bar to buy alcohol for uninterested women," Hugh called after him. "Truthfully, I'll be at my laboratory analyzing all sorts of transfer methods for a glucose substitute that will either help speed the healing process or make a delightful cereal topping. We'll see by the morrow." He winked and slipped out the door.

"I...I have to go...um, I have to..." stumbled Meghan, before sighing and heading to the door. "I can't even come up with a lame excuse. Fact is that this is awkward and you need to be alone for a bit, so I'll go somewhere else." She paused at the door and turned abruptly in a flash of red hair. "We don't hate you, Ignatius." The smile she wore was an honest one.

Then she was gone, and he was alone.

• • •

Ignatius was enjoying the warm Virginia night in the field behind the chantry when Meghan found him.

"You're lucky we don't cut the grass at night," she laughed, squatting beside him. He stiffened and began to rise, but she put her hand on his chest and pushed firmly down. "Stay," she said, and the hard edge to her eyes convinced him not to argue. He lay back, hoping she wouldn't bother him for long.

"I've been wandering," she began, her voice full of caution, "and attempting to divine where I was most needed. The Wheel stopped its turn when I stepped on your elbow, so I'm going to stay whether you like it or not." The smile reached her eyes. He ignored it and looked beyond her to the stars.

"'Or not,' it would seem." She frowned and looked up. "Cloud-busting at night, huh?"

Ignatius felt her lay beside him, a presence of warmth just to his left. He shifted awkwardly and brushed a bug from his hair.

"What do you see?" she asked. "Up there, I mean."

"Truth," he said, his voice guarded. "I see the pattern of the universe laid out like a surgeon's map. I see the veins of gods, pumping light rather than blood. I see all answers and know that I need only find the proper questions."

She whistled, long and low. "That's beautiful."

They both fell quiet. Only the night sounds and the faint roar of the highway broke the silence. "What do you see?" he asked, awkwardly.

"Lies," she whispered. "I see a warm delusion to keep the Sleepers quiescent and wrapped in a blanket of superstition."

Ignatius looked at her, aghast. "How can you —"

"It's what I think, that's all," she cut him off. "Maybe I'm wrong, but I won't know that until I have a greater perspective. That's the whole point of the plan, Ignatius. We need to broaden our perspective. That's the strength of the Traditions: nine factions, each with opposing viewpoints, all joined together to create something better than the sum of the parts. On paper, we're a bucketful of gasoline looking for a match. In practice, we've lasted for centuries."

"It is impossible to simplify —"

"Sharing perspectives is our strength. Look at me: a Euthanatos taking orders from an Akashic. History says we're supposed to literally be at each other's throats night and day, yet Connie and I get along fine because we're both working toward the same goal. We choose to keep that in perspective, rather than fighting to the death over the sins of ancestors hundreds of generations past.

"Ignatius, things have changed and we must adapt. We don't know how long before we hear from anybody beyond the Veil. How long do we carry out the wishes of the absentee parent before we realize that we've been abandoned? When do we make our own decisions?"

Ignatius sighed. "You're correct. We *don't* know. The Storm could end next week or next century. I agree that a certain degree of autonomy is prudent, but how much is too much? What comes to pass when the Storm ceases and our estranged leaders return to find us in bed with the Technocracy?"

Meghan smiled. "Ours is not to question why, Ignatius. I absolutely hate sounding like the perfect little soldier here, but the Deacon has asked this be done, and now we have to carry out the chantry's wishes."

"Then why not use the others?"

Meghan arched her eyebrow. "Hugh is better in the lab than the field. We found that out last year when he nearly lost his leg below the knee. Sunil? He gets trigger-happy when he's nervous, which we don't want here. Connie wouldn't go without Clay, and that dog isn't exactly capable of knowing a thing about covert operations."

"Quinn would never have allowed this."

"Quinn's gone," Meghan murmured. "Constance is acting Deacon until we hear from him or can confirm his death. I know he was a friend, and I think it's a damn shame you were here when the Storm hit. And don't give me that look; I meant that it's obvious you want to be back in Horizon, not stuck with four strangers in a world you left behind years ago."

"You seem to have omniscient insight in regards to my life."

"No, but I'm good at recognizing irrationality. How's this for insight: You take the role of the outsider because you're afraid to get close to any of us. You have the foolish idea that keeping your thoughts and hopes wrapped up with Horizon will help you return that much sooner. Through perseverance and devotion, you'll be rewarded with a trip home."

His silence was damning.

"Lucky guess," she whispered. He felt her hand clasp his own, fingers locking with his in a warm embrace. He turned to look at her. He could barely make out her freckled face in the darkness, but he could see the sadness in her gaze. He swallowed thickly and cleared his throat. "Please reiterate the specifics."

Meghan smiled faintly. "All right. The guy's name is Carl Tyler. He lives beyond Manassas, out in the boonies. His house is isolated on a large plot of wooded land — we don't need to worry about neighbors spotting us. He's reportedly out of town until next Monday. This leaves a three-day window. I have entry and egress plans worked out, so follow my lead, keep a low profile, use your mastery of the arcane to keep us unobserved; you know the drill. Oh, and wear your black robes."

Ignatius nodded absently. Meghan frowned and squeezed his hand. "What's wrong?"

He sought hard for words. "It's just... why were we selected for this petty thievery? Why us?"

Meghan laughed. "Me? I belong to the Lhaksmist sect of the Euthanatos. You might say I was typecast for breaking and entering. You?" She stared at him. "You're here at my request."

"Your pardon?"

"You're more competent than you would like to admit, and I'd be much more comfortable with you watching my back than going it alone. Watergate duty might be beneath you, but keeping me alive shouldn't be. Are we clear?"

"Yes."

"Good. Oh, and while we're on the subject of stealing, you need to remember that this Sleeper is dirtier than a pig in shit. When you steal from a thief, you're not breaking any laws. None of the important ones, at any rate. Now, let's get out of this grass before the bugs nest in our ears."

Meghan dragged Ignatius to his feet and led him back to the chantry.

• • •

"Was it absolutely necessary to kill the dog?" he hissed.

"It was just an animal."

Ignatius shook his head angrily. "It was a living creature."

Meghan cocked her head. "It was a living creature that would have torn your throat out had I not stopped its heart. Shut up and toss the study, all right?"

Ignatius took the closets and piles of paper while Meghan stuck to the two desks. Meghan snapped pic-

tures of the desk's contents with her digital camera. Ignatius let the power of the stars burn all he saw into the core of his mind. They finished their search before the pit bull's corpse had fully stiffened.

"Only thing left is the computer. You'd think a rich bastard like this would have something better than this relic," Meghan smirked, waiting patiently as Windows for Workgroups booted on the ancient machine.

"Maybe that's why he keeps it," pondered Ignatius. "He's grown familiar with it, and knows that others won't have the patience or the knowledge to deal with something so out of date. It does what he needs it to do, so he sticks with it."

"Or maybe he's just cheap. For a collector, he doesn't know anything about class. It looks like he picked up this furniture at a flea market. Probably — ah, shit," she frowned.

"What?"

"I think I found the files, but he's got them locked down pretty tight. We need to crack 'em to see if they're the right dirt. Impossible for a run-of-the-mill thief. Enough to keep your average NSA mouthbreather decrypting for a decade. Me? I get to cheat."

Meghan took a pale, tear-shaped object from her pocket. Made of cheap plastic and as big as her hand, a hole the size of a half-dollar pierced the thin face.

"What's that?"

"Ouija," she grinned.

"'Wee ja?'"

"Forget the name. I need your help. I'm going to place this over the keyboard. It will move of its own accord, stopping over the keys that spell out his password. You need to look through the hole and press those keys."

"That's it?"

"Yep. Make sure you remember what it spells so we don't have to go through this again," she warned.

"Understood."

Meghan grasped the *planchette* with both hands moved it above the keyboard. Her eyes fluttered shut and her teeth clenched. Ignatius moved next to her, close enough that he could hear the soft whisper of her breath. He forced himself to focus, leaning forward to line his eye up with the hole. Slowly at first, then with more assurance, her hands began to move.

• • •

"This suit is uncomfortable," complained Ignatius.

"You look nice," Meghan murmured.

"It impedes the circulation of blood to my chest and groin."

Meghan laughed. "Let's hope this goes quickly so you can get back into your robes."

The door opened and two men entered the office. The tall black man with the gray suit and glasses took a seat behind the desk and flipped through the contents of a manila folder. The short white man filled his tan security uniform rather completely, his hat unable to fully conceal wispy brown hair combed over a balding head. Ignatius noted with alarm that the man's hand hovered near the butt of the pistol slung at his waist.

"Chad? Please secure the room," said the man behind the desk, his eyes still on the file.

The security officer nodded and locked the door, removing what looked like a cell phone from his belt. He pushed some buttons, studied the readout and gave a satisfied nod when the object chirped twice.

The man behind the desk closed the file and took a long look at the two people sitting before him. "I'm Special Agent Cedric Green with the Criminal Investigation Division of the IRS. I'm also an Associate with the Syndicate. I understand you sought to speak with us through the proper channels. Though somewhat unorthodox, I have been assigned to hear your concerns.

"As per the Syndicate's Fairness In Reporting Act of October 1999, I must inform you that this conversation will be recorded for internal use. 'Internal use' includes, but is not limited to, voice/stress analysis, data corroboration, vocal patterning, full etymatic reconstruction, and storage for a minimum of 30 calendar years. Also note that Chad's job is to ensure that I leave this room in the same condition that I entered. He is much more capable than his physical appearance would lead you to believe."

Meghan nodded. "Understood," said Ignatius.

"Good." Cedric relaxed slightly. "What brings you folks to DC?"

"We would like to report a massive amount of fraud, possession of stolen artifacts, and corruption," Meghan began.

"Is this a confession?" Cedric asked, arching an eyebrow.

Ignatius snorted. "Hardly, Associate Green. Ms. Gibson and I wish to speak of a matter affecting your organization, not our own."

Cedric stiffened. "That isn't —"

"Possible, Associate Green? I assure you that not only can we expose possibility, but also that we can

verifiably demonstrate unarguable fact. We only ask for your time and an open mind."

After a pause, Cedric gave a slight nod. Meghan shifted uncomfortably in her chair and shot Ignatius a look of concern. He winked and turned to Cedric, the faint play of a smile on his lips.

"Allow me to present you with a theory. Four years prior, when our organizations were more directly engaged in their disagreements, an operator sympathetic to our cause managed to infiltrate this building and depart with a large amount of information sensitive to certain elements of the Syndicate."

"The St. Patrick's Day break-in. I remember that."

"Correct. Much of the data was seemingly worthless, but it was retained and distributed throughout our organization. The information was immediately slated for analysis using automated methods and was filed away for later use. Five weeks ago the process reached completion and came to our attention. Much was, of course, woefully out of date or inaccurate following the events of the past four years."

"Does this story have a point?" Cedric snapped. "So far I only hear gloating."

"Far from it," Ignatius cautioned. "Most interesting to us were a few anomalies that presented themselves upon corroboration with information of our own. One such anomaly we wish to bring to your attention concerns a Manager named Alfred Trenton."

Ignatius watched Cedric grow very still as he continued, "It seems that Trenton has held a close friendship with a Sleeper named Carl Tyler for many of his fifty years. Trenton's inculcation with the Syndicate in 1987 has not affected this friendship, for Trenton and Tyler remain in contact to this day. Not altogether uncommon amongst those of our kind, but you will find most interesting the lengths to which dear friends go to protect each other.

"I speak of activities perpetrated by Tyler, including theft of art and artifacts most valuable, the laundering of funds and the failure to report his illegal property as taxable assets. It seems Tyler has such an appreciation for works of art that he has taken to hoarding them for his own personal use. This predilection doesn't limit itself to paintings or fine vases, for Tyler has authorized the larceny of museum pieces, items of historical significance, and even gone so far as to fund — through intermediaries — the 1997 theft of relics from the Vatican. Current market value of Tyler's known acquisitions exceeds $700 million in U.S. currency.

"Trenton knows of Tyler's questionable habits and does all within his power to keep them concealed from the IRS and the Syndicate. We are not clear whether Trenton is behind any extortion of his own, but we have irrefutable proof of his inveiglement within your organization. He has 'worked the books,' so to speak. He has kept you blind from the inside to a flagrant violator of your own precepts."

Cedric removed his glasses. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and slowly wiped his glasses clean. His expression remained blank as he polished the lenses with great care. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Another one of those pesky anomalies," Meghan piped up. "Five years ago, an Associate Cedric Jerold Green was assigned to look through Manager Alfred Trenton's laundry and see if any of it came out dirty. He failed to find anything valid and afterwards suffered a series of setbacks in his career. Though we could only extrapolate, the setbacks seemed to come at the behest of somebody in upper management. It almost seemed as though somebody was punishing Associate Green."

"What do you want?" snapped Cedric.

Ignatius cleared his throat. "Our wants are many, but we ask nothing. We are prepared to hand over enough evidence to damn Tyler and Trenton. What you do with it we leave up to you, for this is clearly an internal matter that doesn't require our attention."

Cedric replaced his glasses and stared at him. "What's the catch?"

"No catch, Associate Green. By all accounts — particularly those of your superiors, as we learned from the files — you are a moral man. The cynic within says such a thing is impossible amidst either the Syndicate or the Union, but we are hard-pressed to find any mention of you that excises a reference of your tendency to — well, to be quaint: 'to do what you feel is right.' We would only feel confident leaving our findings in the hands of one such as yourself."

"Bullshit. You want something."

"And I maintain that we shan't force you into a position of chasing a carrot on a stick. Meghan? The evidence."

Meghan removed a thick manila folder from her briefcase, five thick rubber bands barely able to keep it closed. Various shades of paper poked from the sides, and multiple bulges betrayed the presence of computer storage media. It fell to the desk with a satisfying thump. She smiled at Cedric and leaned back in her chair.

"All yours," she said. "No blackmail, no bribe. Concerned citizens bringing this to your attention."

"Right," mumbled Cedric. "Is that all?"

Ignatius turned to Meghan. "Our business here is complete, I believe."

"That's it," she nodded.

"Where's the violin?" mumbled Cedric.

"Your pardon?"

Cedric leaned forward, hands clasped, eyes bitter. "If this is all for my benefit, why do I feel like I've just made a deal with the devil?"

Ignatius bristled. He bit back the first three comments that came to mind, and the fourth for good measure. When he spoke, it was with the measured intensity of a frustrated parent.

"I have been to times and places you could neither imagine nor comprehend. I have seen things you would never believe plausible: sin given form, unrequited love, the brilliant sadness of a star bisected at the whim of dancing gods. I slew the spawn of a Nephandic siltwhore and watched the Umbral landscape brighten noticeably as their death rattles filled the air. I spent thirty of this world's years fighting against the widespread standardization perpetrated by the Technocracy, all to have efforts — my efforts — proven for naught in the span of months.

"Now you sit here in a gray suit, filed away in a gray building at the heart of this gray city, and after I swallow thirty years of wounded pride to present you with a gesture of peace and cooperation, you presume to liken me to a vile creature of darkness intent on taking your advantage and offering nothing more than empty deception in return. I assure you, Associate Green, that our feelings in this matter are mutual."

Ignatius watched Cedric flinch and felt Meghan's alarmed stare. He heard Chad move behind him and was reasonably certain the man's hand now rested on the pistol. He forced his body to relax.

"I can also assure you," he continued calmly, "that neither of us is correct. We simply can't conceive a world without attempts at reciprocal destruction. We receive an olive branch and spend weeks looking for thorns. By the time we conclude it's simply an olive branch, the sprig has long since grown dry and desiccated. Our paranoia leads us to believe the gesture was a diversion, intended to distract us from secretive manipulations. Soon there comes preemptive retaliation and fighting begins anew.

"This is the foundation of our history, but history is not why Meghan and I sit before you. We came here to lay the groundwork to our future. We came with pure intentions, playing by the rules you set, working within a system you helped develop. Take this branch, Cedric. It bears no thorns and we intend no distraction. We *want* you to give us a chance, but we will not *ask*. We leave everything in your hands."

Cedric's eyes fell from Ignatius to the large stack of folders before him. He sat immobile for a long moment, staring at the bulge of papers and disks. Meghan's quiet cough and the clicking of the old-fashioned wall clock were the only sounds in the room. He slowly unclenched his hands and reached forward, quaking slightly, brow beading with a small amount of sweat. He hesitantly placed them on the manila bundle, nearly flinching at the touch, before he grasped the package firmly and pulled it toward him. Then he removed the rubber band, flipped open the top folder and began to read.

***

They slipped into the rear of the Metro car, backs pressed to orange plastic seats. Meghan socked Ignatius in the arm, her smile contagious. "Great job in there. You really caught me by surprise. I had no idea where you were going."

"I offer contrition."

"Don't apologize, Ignatius. You knew what you were doing, and more importantly, it worked. I'm impressed."

"'Ours is not to question why,'" he stammered, and was rewarded with the warm sound of her laugh.

"So now we wait," she said, sobering rapidly. "We wait for federal agents to kick down Tyler's door and confiscate his collection, or for Cedric's body to wind up in a ditch by early next week."

"Or for Cedric to blackmail Trenton," Ignatius added, "and leapfrog his own career."

"Unlikely, but two of three options work to his advantage and to ours."

"We have no assurances that he will find us favorable," cautioned Ignatius. "No matter what happens, no matter that we presented this information as a gift with no strings attached, he is a moral man. He already feels indebted to us. It will eat away at him until guilt overtakes his suspicion, leaving him to provide a favor in return, thinking that will discharge his perceived obligation to us."

Meghan studied him. "And how do you feel about doing that to the guy?"

Ignatius frowned. "It's a shame he'll think we're trying to manipulate him, but if we meet each favor repaid with another favor of our own, perhaps he will eventually come around to understanding that we were entirely truthful with him today."

Meghan's smile was slow in coming. "I think you're getting the hang of things," she murmured.

Ignatius slipped his hand around hers. "I have an excellent teacher."

She stared in mock surprise. "Oh, so I'm the teacher now? Whatever happened to the great Ignatius, who deigned come to earth to tell us all what we were doing wrong?" The soft squeeze of her hand drained the venom from her words.

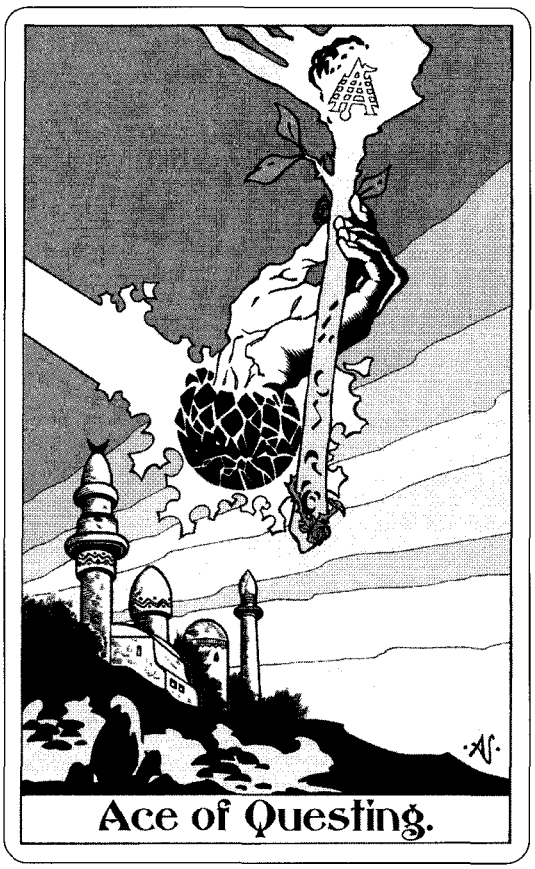
"He stopped staring at the stars," said Ignatius. "He finally took a look around and noticed where he was, rather than stumbling blindly about with his nose in the clouds."

"Wonderful," she grinned. "We've civilized you. Any chance you'll start wearing pants on a regular basis?"

"Not bloody likely," he snorted. "You can teach me new tricks, but you'd damn well better stay away from my wardrobe."

They shared a moment of introspection as the train pulled away from the station.

GUIDE TO THE TRADITIONS™



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PRESCOTT

INTRODUCTION

YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN READY

Do you remember?

Do you remember the sense of wonder at the vibrant colors of your early youth, when discovery still meant dabbing your fingers in the paint and spreading your vision across lines and pictures?

Do you remember the depth of your first love, the one you'd love forever, the one you'd always go back to?

Do you remember the fascination of the first movie you saw? The first faerie tale you heard while being tucked into bed?

Do you remember all of these things?

Because somewhere, down inside of you, there's a part of you that still yearns for them. It's the part that shivers with anticipation when you just *know* that something will never happen, yet you expect it anyway. It's the bit that gazes in wonder when you see something new and magnificent for the first time. It's where you go when stark terror takes away your breath and makes you look inside yourself at the truth, too.

It's not always comfortable or nice. Sometimes it's downright scary. But it's something *bigger*, something you can't ignore; it touches something primal. It's in everyone, and that's why we're all part of it.

You probably go to a regular job, drive a somewhat used car and watch recycled sitcoms on TV. You eat at fast-food restaurants or occasionally grab something at the grocery store. Maybe you play some computer games, and you pay your taxes and have a driver's license.

All in all, a very *normal* life. Normal. Boring. Mundane.

So what's the point? Are you content to live as a slave to the same culture and technology that's perpetuated itself for a thousand years now? Do you really find satisfaction in following all the laws, filling out all the forms, paying the same bills month to month and drowning in the stifling conformity and bureaucracy?

Oh. You rooted for the underdog on *Survivor*. You watched *Babylon 5*. You read a couple Tolkien books. Good for you.

What happened to the faerie tales and ghost stories? Where did the sense of wonder go? Did you ever even *bother* to look back and think, "Fuck, why is my life so goddamn pathetic? How come there's nothing special? Why aren't there any heroes any more?" Or do you even *care* enough to think about it? Are you so content that you'll sit on your ass and not even wonder about it?

Because there is something more. Those people out there who believe in aliens, crystals, God, reincarnation, spirits, spells and spooks may be whacked, but they aren't necessarily *wrong*. What's something you believed that you never told anyone? Did you think you saw something not quite human out of the corner of your eye once? Could you swear that sometimes you dream things and they happen later? Do you ever get that chill that just runs down your spine for no reason and turn around to see someone watching you? Ever listen to some people talking and think how odd that they have voices just like your friends? Did you look up at the stars and *swear* you saw something moving that wasn't just a plane? Yeah, everyone's done it. And you never tell anyone, because you're afraid that it'll sound stupid or crazy. But it's not. It's all true.

A Wider World

It's time to break out of that shell of mediocrity. The world bombards you with messages telling you about the horrors of starvation and barbarism, instructing you in how good your life is and how much better this modern age of technology is than the so-called "Dark Ages." What's the point in a boring, semi-comfortable life of bleary oblivion?

Yes, there are risks. There really *are* terrible things waiting in the shadows, ready to eat you and turn your world on its head. You also take a risk every time you cross the street, or get on an airplane, or go to the bank where a whacko with a gun might shoot you. So what would you rather do — live and die in mediocrity, or take charge of your own life, make your own decisions, decide on the risks you want, and see what the world *really* has to offer?

You never took that trip to Europe because you were afraid you couldn't afford it. You didn't ask out that sweet little number at the bar, because you were afraid of rejection. You never tried that joint your friends were passing around because you were afraid of getting caught or hooked. Are you gonna go to your grave with the comment "Here lies a boring person who was afraid to live?" Maybe you will.

But maybe you won't. Maybe, just maybe, you will find the courage to take that plunge and to do something a little differently. Break a few rules. Walk on the edge. Believe in something better than this gray homogenous crap that the world — and the Technocracy — keeps trying to shovel at you.

That's why we're here. We've taken that step, and we'll help you to take it, too. We don't promise that it will be safe, comfortable or easy. But if you make the most of it, it will be more than worth it. Together with us, you can make the world something better.

A Life of Wonder

Hundreds of years of patience, reverence, mysticism and wisdom — but for what? The Traditions are desperate remnants of other ages, barely confident of their own crusade. Hiding among the cracks of humanity they strive for truth, imagination, expression and power.

To the average person, the mages of the Traditions might seem incomprehensible. Why would anyone want to live in a world with demons and horrors, walking nightmares and fell curses? Why go back to an age of eccentric wizards in crumbling towers when shining skyscrapers and glamorous entertainers beckon? Truly, the Traditionalists are outcasts and threats to the common man. And yet....

At heart, some spark cries out for wonder. "Isn't there more to the world than this?" the working man asks as he goes about his banal job and his mundane life. "Don't my dreams mean anything?" questions the woman who imagines a brighter, more vibrant world. The Traditions answer that spark. For every strange, bizarre or fantastic possibility, the Traditions open a door. *Yes, the Traditions say, there is more to the world than this.*

So it is that nine Traditions come together in common cause. While these mages may be outcasts and rogues hunted by mankind's self-appointed defenders who risk humanity in their quest for enlightenment, they also set aside ages of differences, gather collected ideologies and dream of making a world together where all of the participants bring something of value. Just as the Traditions form a greater council that owes its strength to the diversity of the members, so too do they hope to awaken the imaginations of every human and to turn those divergent dreams into a brighter combined world.

This, then, is the Guide to the Traditions.

Mood: Contention and Construction

The Traditions will never accomplish anything meaningful, some nay-sayers claim. The War is over. The Technocracy's too strong. People don't give a damn.

Except, of course, the mages of the Traditions. Regardless of what the Sleepers have thought, these visionaries have always gone their own way. The Traditions may well be scattered and bruised, but each individual mage still has potential to effect great change. This isn't simply a matter of world-crashing spells — it's a battle of ideology and education, as well. Great leaders and thinkers don't have to be Awakened to change the world. Mages have an extra advantage, because not only can they too be revolutionaries and visionaries, but because they have the weight of magic backing them up.

Sadly, just as everyday people rarely agree one hundred percent on issues of politics, religion or morality, so too do most mages dispute and debate over the proper course of the world. Some small groups may work together for unified goals, but they quickly turn on one another once a problem rears its head or the goal nears completion. Ideological gulfs give rise to the schisms between Technocracy and Tradition, but what about the problems between the Traditions themselves?

For now, the Traditions remain together. Certainly, the world's too dangerous for them to go it alone — by sharing their strengths, they forge a greater chance at guiding a better tomorrow. So who decides what makes a "better" tomorrow? Who's in charge of the committee that tells which plan to use and which goals are most valid? Of such debates have come tears in the fabric of the Traditions.

Even so, the Traditions hold strong. Perhaps their unified purpose is so strong that it defies the vagaries of individual members — each time one mage tries to tear something down, three others shore it up. The Council as a whole has a momentum that won't stop, even with the loss of important members, the failure of major goals and the continued pressures of a world that doesn't accept it. While Tradition mages still bicker and fight over their perceived goals, they're also out there getting things done — especially now that the pressures of recent losses have forced new alliances, dashed old politics and made mages take a stand. Tradition mages may be scattered and desperate, but there's also hope for a better future. There's room to clear away debris and carve out new niches.

Theme: Hope Amid the Ruins

With the Traditions in their reorganizing position, many of their old ways come under scrutiny. Is it really worthwhile to expend effort to brand someone magically because he said something insulting to an older mage? Is there really a point to establishing Umbral bases and hoarding magical resources while everyday people suffer under the problems of very real poverty, warfare and hatred? Perhaps — but, for the first time in a *long* time, the Traditions are looking around and seeing not only how they can advance themselves, but what they can do to help other people as well.

Despite the many setbacks thrown against the Traditions, hope remains. Mages still might not agree on what's the right thing to do or how to do it, but they entertain the notion that everyone has a say and that these issues should be explored. Instead of automatically learning set responses to the Technocracy, inherited strictures and enforced structures, the mages of the modern Traditions have flexibility. They can decide that the Traditions just aren't working for them, or that important issues merit their attention first. Where before this might have garnered scorn or ostracism, the younger Traditionalists recognize the validity of personal agendas. After all, if the Traditions wanted to allow all people to express their own magical beliefs, how could they hypocritically label some goals or methods as "more correct" than others?

While the Traditions may still have problems, their long-time adversaries aren't all entering the new millennium painlessly, either. The self-same apathy that dulls humanity and the frenetic destruction levied by the Reckoning have kept the Technocratic Union fighting internal problems. While Technocrats may still rain down destruction on unsubtle Traditionalists, they're apt to leave low-key cabals alone. Without the threat of imminent hunting over their heads, Tradition mages have a better chance to fit in to local communi-

ties and organizations, there to spread hope and healing, or just to promote their own agendas. The pressure of the prophesied Armageddon even brings long-time enemies together for reconciliation or just for a moment of peaceful coexistence. The Traditions have re-embraced their ideological roots, opening the doors to diversity and to cooperation.

Some Tradition mages still fight against the Technocracy or stake out valuable territory in the Umbra. These pursuits remain as valid as ever. Now, though, the Traditions recognize more than before the validity of other forms of service — of working in communities, trading knowledge, forging peace and bridging the gulfs between different ideas. Where before an old mage might count his success by the Nodes he could control, the Chantries he numbered as allies and the Umbral Realms he'd explored, a modern Traditionalist may eschew such magical heights entirely for the more concrete rewards of making a difference to the things that mattered to him even before he ever Awakened.

There's still hope for a better future. The Tradition mages have come to realize that fighting to own pieces of that better future isn't the same as making the future come to pass.

Of course, the Traditions have many hurdles to clear if they're to prosper — or even to survive another century.

How To Use This Book

The **Guide to the Traditions** offers an exploration of why the Traditions do what they do, how they remain together and how they manage to communicate when they're really nine disparate groups of magical practices with divergent philosophies. This isn't to say that the Traditions are wholly unified and lockstep, but with this resource, you should have a better understanding of what motivates the Traditions — or how to rebuild the assumptions that underlie the Council in order to make the Traditions reflect what you want in your game of **Mage**.

While the Technocracy might use fact-sheets and no-nonsense presentations of objective data, the Traditions are an organization of fantasy, whimsy, legend and myth. As such, many of the lessons to be learned here are told from the perspective of Traditionalists or passed on as cautionary tales. Some may be biased, others a little inaccurate — but in the interests of giving you useful information, you'll also find commentary to help Storytellers and players alike in the integration of this new material.

Instead of seeing the Traditions as a bunch of esoteric and loosely allied groups, you'll see how to fuse Tradition cabals into smoothly-integrated units — or not! Just because *some* Tradition mages might be able to get along together and cooperate with their magical skills doesn't mean that *all* of them do. From stereotypes to shattered lenses you'll see the wondrous variety that the Traditions embrace in their attempts to broaden the horizons of all humanity.

Chapter One: Heritage presents a brief examination of the Tradition stance. Here you'll see why Tradition mages bother fighting at all. You'll also start to learn about why the Traditions are even worthwhile, and why they must remain together. Plus, you'll find a glossary of terminology often used by modern Traditionalists.

Chapter Two: Mysticism pulls apart the Tradition way of looking at things. Instead of cataloguing and categorizing the whole world, Tradition mages see it as a combination of intuition, divine grace and marvelous splendor. Here you'll find comments and stories from Tradition mages explaining how they see a magical world and reconcile it with the science with which they grew up. You'll also discover a look at Paradox, a discussion of metaphysics and an examination of the many tools that the Traditions have fostered among one another. Plus, a few hints at things to come: The ways that the Traditions change to adapt to the modern age, and the proto-Traditions that form when science and magic fuse into something new.

Chapter Three: Traditional History presents a timeline of the major achievements of the Tradition Council (and some of its forebears). You'll also find some of the, er, setbacks that've hampered the Council. No standardized tests on this one, but you might learn a few darkly hidden secrets that the Traditions found too embarrassing (or too well hidden) to reveal until now.

Chapter Four: Pathways examines where the Traditions head for the future. Follow the adventures of some Tradition mages and see how they get the job done for the Council. Explore the goals of the Traditions, their means of execution, and also the standards, procedures and ranks that the Council uses to recognize achievement, reward innovation and discipline those who threaten all magical society.

Chapter Five: The Traditions covers our heroes themselves. From individual contributions to the mixing of various different elements, the Traditions form a painting made from a palette of wildly different

colors. See what combinations you can discover, or pick out the brilliant brush-strokes that illuminate individual accomplishment.

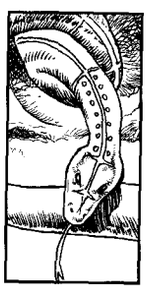
Chapter Six: Building Character will help you to look deeper into your Tradition mage, and also gives some ideas on how to integrate your mage into the larger Tradition culture. No mage is an island, so your mage might very well have influence over a Chantry or hold a potent Familiar. Plus, the new Adversarial Backgrounds: How to turn Backgrounds against your character — for points, of course.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling delves into the craft of weaving a Tradition tale. Here you'll find permutations like Traditions as bad guys (gasp!) or long-running games that follow entire lives or lineages of mages.

Chapter Eight: Treasures examines potent rotes, places of mystery and tools that just might turn the tide in your mage's battles.

PRESCOTT

Chapter One: Heritage



It's 4 AM. I've been tracking down leads for several days, sleeping on the road (as it were) and avoiding the Euthanatos like the plague they are. Seems I have a knack for getting prices put on my head.

The Umbra's particularly unfriendly these days. The trip over hurt quite a bit, but I didn't have time to wait for all of the burns to heal. Funny, really, that something important would wind up in the Umbra. Here we've been going on about the Umbra being the dead-letter office that's so far removed from Earth that it doesn't matter... now two Traditions are trying to kill each other over something found there.

Don't know all of what, of course. Euthanatos "diplomats" suddenly pulling out knives and killing off three Hermetic Janissaries... then dying in the ensuing firestorm. And, of course, backtracking with divination shows one of them arriving at a little-known library reflection in the Umbra, and then nothing.

Which means that I have to go there myself, so that I can know what they knew and see why it's tearing the Traditions apart.

Yesterday I finally found that mountain in the Web. A sphinx there riddled me before she'd let me in, but after I plied her with some home cooking in addition to the answers she was happy enough to point me along. I spent six hours going through hoary old books and wishing that someone would update the damn "ancient library" motifs into something searchable on CD.

I made it to a small, hidden niche deep in the Umbra, where reams of scrolls had waited, stored for five hundred years. The guardians had been very carefully dispatched, the traps circumvented: the Euthanatos are very clever about these sorts of things. I was surprised that they hadn't burned the place down, but I suppose they're kind of touchy about that. It was clear that quite a few protections had been put in place, and just finding the locale had been a nightmare — I'd never have known to go looking if it weren't for the Euthanatos who'd done the killing. Yet for all of its clever

protections and concealment, it seemed that it had fallen victim to the worst of fates — chance.

Took another two hours to decipher enough of the language to get a gist of what I'd found. Had to call on the aid of a spirit of knowledge, and that's dodgy (at best) in their home turf — Umbral libraries. But I got it.

Five hundred years ago, the Order of Reason formed out of various cabals of scientists, merchants, travelers and craftsmen. They'd conducted a bloody crusade to wipe out sorcerers, demons, witches and spirits. They succeeded: Their enemies fell, their plots became legion, and they became the Technocracy.

Five hundred years ago the Order of Reason not only used cannons and crusaders, but also clever operatives who worked behind the scenes. While other members of the Order created and expounded theories or marched armies against the early Traditions, these facilitators worked as spies and enforcers. They assassinated difficult politicians, made sure that people and materiel made it to the right place at the right time, and stole intelligence information from the enemy. They worked with knives and relics and channeled power through the Enochian names of angels. They were called the Ksirafai.

Today, the Order of Hermes uses not only spells and rituals, but also clever operatives who police from behind the scenes. They enforce Hermetic policy, root out plots and traitors and carry out sudden justice when the Quaesitors can't be involved. They became a political power based solely on their maneuverings at Doissetep. They assassinate rivals of the Order, make sure that plans don't encounter snags and spy on the enemies of the Traditions. They work with knives and relics and channel power through the Enochian names of angels. They are called the Janissaries.

So, on the one hand, we have some Euthanatos would-be Tradition police and, on the other, we have some dead Hermetics who bear a suspicious resemblance to an ancient faction of the Order of Reason.

I hate it when guys on my team kill each other.

Now, my big trick will be to get back and figure out how to break the news. Okay, so some Euthanatos get a little overzealous — it's happened before. Okay, some Hermetics wound up dead — nothing new there.

The hysteria that surrounds this whole Ksirafai issue amazes me. Out here someone shunted off a whole library of stuff and left nobody knowing a goddamn thing about it. Then they stuck some guards up and figured it would be safe for... whatever. I bet there's a half-dozen Technocrats out there who've heard of the Ksirafai, but they probably don't even know where the damn library is.

We've got Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether on our council. So how come we're killing each other over goddamn fifteenth-century angelic assassins?

The Big Conspiracy

The Traditions are a fractious bunch of has-beens — they can't agree on a core principle, they certainly don't have a shot at changing the world and they refuse to get with the times. Self-evident. Of course!

Yes, the stereotype fits. That's why it's a stereotype: because there's truth to it.

But if being a mage teaches you anything, it ought to teach you that just because there's truth to one thing, doesn't mean that other things aren't true, too — including, perhaps, a few opposites.

Let's uncover a few truths. Some of them may be contradictory. That's fine — magic is full of paradoxes, eh?

Making Consensus Out of the Fringes

In what some historically-minded mages may consider irony, the Traditions are really bastions of personal accountability and advancement. It's an interesting twist. On the one side, we have the Technocratic Union, which began as an attempt to empower the masses and turned into a fascist control-obsessive organization. On the other side, we have the Tradition Council, which started as a bunch of elitist mages and turned into a crusade for individual freedoms of magic. Strange tricks that fate plays....

Regardless of what it comes down to, the Traditions are bigger than any one person. The founders of the Council had a vision that spanned many different lines of magical practice. Traditionalists today hunt for the Awakened among all walks of society. We preach that everyone should have a chance at a better life with the magic we offer.

Now, this wasn't always so — in fact, only a few short years ago, the heads of the Traditions were still a bunch of old guys with ancient agendas and vendettas. Now many of them were quite enlightened, but just as many were set in their ways and convinced of the essential "correctness" of their ideas. Heck, the Order of Hermes' claim to fame was that, if you spent enough time as an apprentice in their hierarchical system and you survived the politicking, you'd eventually get to use

the politics in your own favor. Influence peddling and favor trading were, and are, rampant.

But the Traditions have an agenda as a whole that won't stop for a personal issue. Somehow, out of a group of misfits and malcontents, the Traditions forge a greater order. Hackers and mad scientists stand next to ancient wizards and martial artists. All of them contribute. All of them have a valid set of views. It's a tremendous effort. Maybe they don't always agree, or understand one another, or get along — but they all recognize the value of each other, the need to open the doors to different practices and the desire to empower humanity like themselves. They realize that they must accept people who're different, because every one of them is different to someone on the outside.

Give that some thought. What would the world be like if you couldn't be different? I'm sure you've experienced it before. You didn't dress like the fads indicated. You didn't have the right job. Your ass wasn't the right size or maybe you just had an accent that set you apart. How'd you feel? Alienated? Disempowered? Cheapened? Maybe... just maybe... a little less than human?

Take this to the next level. Imagine if *every* difference were stamped out. All good little clones, marching in order, waiting for the inevitable destruction of the universe. Somewhere out there, whirling madly, chaos and rampant energy swirl in a primordial dance, ready to devour the world... which ticks on, heedless, to an appointed, precise, calculated end. No room for your individual expression — it's suppressed in favor of the mass ideal. No choices to make — they're made for you, designed to maximize your benefit and minimize your risk, no matter what you may think or feel. Every meal is as bland and inoffensive as possible, made to cater to the lowest common denominator. Every person lives on the edge of dull hysteria, somewhere realizing that they've lost the ability to be unique yet so perfectly slotted into the marching order that they robotically walk straight into the maw of Armageddon at the end.

Depressing? Demonic? You bet. That's the world without the Traditions. That's a world without change, innovation, free will and expression, a world overtaken by hellish conformity and clockwork precision, where the individual no longer matters and anyone different is crushed under the heel of logical expedience.

Perhaps you think it's a contradiction in terms. "How can *Traditions*, a group that stands for old ways, represent change?" Because these are old ways that have been put aside in favor of a New Order. These are ways that things were and could be again. They're the magic that's gone out of the world, waiting to be reborn.

They believe that you have the right to make your own life. Maybe better, maybe worse — but it's *your* choice to make.

That's what the Traditions are about.

And Slipping Through the Cracks

Of course, freedom isn't without its price. It seems that many people today believe that they should be guaranteed certain rights and freedoms. They feel that regardless of their stupidity, ignorance, amorality or just plain bull-headedness, they still have the right to do whatever the hell they want, heedless of the consequences.

A pretty apt description for those who literally twist and tear reality to suit their whims, don't you think?

At their heart, the Traditions represent an old way. Not necessarily a better way, mind you, but one that was tried and true before. It's handed down from generation to generation. It passes through word of mouth and practice. It's just the *way things are*. It's Tradition.

The Traditions can't bring the best to everyone. Unlimited personal freedom means unlimited freedom to impact everyone else's rights. So who comes out on top? Those with the will and vision to wrest the future from the world. Maybe not necessarily rule by the strongest, but certainly some level of rule by the quickest, meanest, cleverest, most astute sons of bitches. What keeps them honest? Only the fact that each of them knows that somewhere, out there, is another meaner, faster son of a bitch.

Therein lies the rub. The Traditions have a strong heritage from the way things were done before. They just can't get it into their heads, though, that the world's changing and leaving them behind. So, kicking and clawing, they keep trying to push people back into their way of thinking — without ever thinking that perhaps that's not what those other people want. All good to promote personal freedoms so long as they're *our* personal freedoms, eh?

Take the most powerful egos in the world, and give them the ability to do anything they want. Force them to work together even if they don't agree, in a world that doesn't accept them. What ends will they use? Watch as they fight and squabble, both against the world without and against one another. Give them a hope for an eventual better end, but see how they turn it into a fractured set of individual visions — none compatible. The world just isn't big enough for that many demigods.

The Traditions have their human failings, too.

Myths and Whimsies

"We're all the wonderful things that you dreamed of as a child. We're all the terrible things that frightened you, too." — Xoca

Flights of fancy and fantasy in an age long since gone — winged sprites, storm-summoners, terrible dragons and magical swords... these live on in the Traditions. Strictly speaking, the Traditions keep the heritage of many different cultures and practices. Chief among these, though, are the magical styles and legends from around the world. A Tradition is essentially a way of doing things so ingrained that it defies explanation. Magic, too, is something that defies easy explanation; the two go hand-in-hand — Tradition is the expression of actions that lead to magic.

While the Traditions have long since lost their war for the world, they're far from powerless. Griffins and phoenixes may no longer inhabit the Earth, but the mystics who consorted with them have left lineages of power. Every person who believes in a faerie tale or ancient story of magic gives strength to the Traditions. The spark of imagination cannot die, because every human is a child once — and all the things that children believe, the Traditions know. These people have the will to ensure that the world never forgets, and the dedication to slip a little magic into every day life. Myths aren't true or false; they simply are.

Now picture these mystics slipping quietly, unseen, through every level of human society. There, at the corner drugstore, that man sells herbal remedies based on the medicines of his ancestors. Up in the skyscraper, the investment broker chooses her stocks with bone rattles and divinations. The woman crossing the street — she knows the secrets of seduction that will bend any man to her will, without ever touching one of them. They're all around; anyone could be one. Mysterious and enticing, isn't it? Like that perfume that you catch a whiff of, exotic and unseen, never meeting its wearer. You can't tell them apart... maybe I'm one. Maybe *you're* one.

The Traditions aren't some great conglomerate of mighty wizards bending the elements to their will, nor are they a collection of terrorists bent on world domination and the total extermination of their foes. They're people, just a little different from everyone else. They aren't necessarily a heroic group that will save all humanity, nor are they a group of selfish villains all determined to reshape the world to their whims. Like the myths from which they spring, they simply are.

Many Sides, Many Faces

In any group with so many different people and beliefs, differences are inevitable. Such divisions have existed from the start. For years, the Traditions couldn't agree on ways to even talk about magic, much less common goals or eventual ends. Now, centuries later... well, they have a common means of talking about magic. They're working on the rest.

Too much disconnection hampers the Traditions — disconnection between desire and reality, between Masters and Apprentices, between Earth and the Umbra. The Traditions want a better world but can't decide on what makes a better world for all of them. The elderly Adepts and Masters pursue hundred-year-old personal feuds, squandering their power and leaving the Initiates and Disciples to battle for issues of significance. At the highest levels, the Tradition Council fled to the Umbra, there to make judgments and pronouncements to the rest of the Traditions on Earth — about matters they didn't understand, in places they hadn't seen in centuries. The Traditions, living up to their name, were too hidebound: old ways and old mages ruled the day with their ancient agendas. Young mages could still accomplish their aims, but always there lurked the shadow of intervention from some older magician with an obfuscated goal from decades back — perhaps some crazed quest or a vendetta against a foe of no consequence in the greater scheme of the Ascension War.

Well, the Ascension War's over. The Traditions can't turn back the clock and make the world magical again. The Technocracy isn't quite the foe it always seemed to be — perhaps, in believing that the Technocracy was a monolithic, indestructible organization, the Traditions gave power to that form. What's the fight now? That's a mighty good question. That's *the* question. Some mages want to continue the War. Others wish to pursue personal interests. Some hope to use magic to fix problems in the mundane world, like hunger or disease. A few just want out entirely, to retreat to some other reality. Nobody can agree on what the Traditions should be doing.

Meanwhile, in the Umbra, the stronghold of the Traditions... chaos. Destruction. The realm of Horizon is wreckage; when the ambassador of the Hollow Ones had enough, he let the Technocracy in and they threw Concordia down. Doissetep, too, disintegrated — victim of internal strife, finally blown apart in an archmage conflagration. The Digital Web crashed and reset. Minor Horizon realms drop each month, as they're cut off from sources of power. Balador, famed pleasure-garden of the Cult of Ecstasy, is torn apart in a storm of meteoric vengeance. There's no leadership forthcoming from the spirit world, because there are few leaders left there. It's up to the Tradition mages on Earth, now.

Individual cabals and chantries are left to their own devices. Leadership is scattered, fragmented at best. Disciples must take up the reins and go from there. It's a trying time to be a Tradition mage... but also an exciting one. New opportunities arise. Clearing away the debris means that now the youth have the opportunity to build the future and to shape it as they desire, unfettered by their elders. The only problem? Figuring out where to go from here.

Problems, Problems Everywhere

The Tradition weaknesses are many: They're broken and disorganized. Communication is sporadic. Many Tradition members cannot easily share their magical knowledge, and some even refuse to work with certain other Traditions. Leadership is either gone or inexperienced. Old spells function less reliably and magical items fail outright. Bleak times, indeed.

Not all hope is gone, though. The Technocracy, long the stalwart adversary of the Traditions, has its own share of troubles and so often leaves Tradition mages to their own devices. The Nephandi, potent corrupters, have lost much of their power in the aftermath of the Reckoning. And among the mad Marauders, the most crazed and dangerous have fled to the deeps of the spirit world, never to return and trouble the Earth.

So what do Tradition mages do and feel in this chaotic world? A sense of loss, perhaps, buoyed by an appreciation for the future. While mages recognize the problems all around, many see a brighter horizon, where they have the ability to make real progress and overcome the mistakes of generations. Tradition mages are no longer fettered to the whims of a distant Council that exhorts them to wage bloody, secret warfare. Instead, they're builders and dreamers again. They make new structures to meet, develop magic that functions in this new age, reveal plans to aid their friends, revitalize their communities, influence politics and change their world for the better. They're a generation taking responsibility into their own hands.

The future isn't necessarily bright, but it's not too bleak, either. With time and effort, any Tradition mage can become a Master. Now everyone has the potential to teach, to build a chantry, to found a cabal, to do all sorts of things that in the past were the province of the powerful and influential. Or, they can eschew these activities and do whatever they please — visit the beach, hold down a job, take care of a family. All this,

plus magic. Right there in the corner of your eye, waiting for you to reach out and touch it; you get all the best out of life, and then some.

Naturally, this disorganization hurts the Traditions to some degree. Powerful mages have abandoned the opportunity to train successors or quash opponents so that they might retreat to obscurity. The Traditions need everyone they can get, so new recruits aren't always... stable. Once-proud orders can't afford to take only the cream of the crop. On one hand, every mage now joins the Traditions specifically to get something out of them and only needs to stay as long as the deal's good. On the other hand, this means that the Traditions house, more than ever, a multitude of conflicting viewpoints, including some that might be downright cynical, destructive or even criminal.

A Time to Rebuild

It's time to forge that all-too-necessary new direction. Time to pick up the pieces, quit moaning about better days and lost chances and make something new. To do that, the Traditions need to pull together, reforge their alliance and become a united whole once more. They need to communicate, coordinate and get with the program. Someone has to take up that job. Someone's got to pave the way, show people how it's done, collect the stragglers and keep everyone on schedule. That someone might as well be you.

There's nobody else to do it, really. You could wait for someone else to take up the Tradition mantle, but who's to say they have the best interests of the Traditions at heart? Or even that they're competent? No, as the saying goes, if you want something done, you'd better do it yourself.

So it's time for all the Apprentices and Initiates and Disciples — all those Earth-bound, energetic movers-and-shakers — to put their heads together and come up with the Traditions of tomorrow. Otherwise, they might be the last ones, ever.

You might think this is all about some other chantries and cabals and conspiracies. It's not. It's *you*. It's all in what you make it. You can be the ones to form the new shape of the Traditions. You could decide to tear them all down and start again, even. There's nobody to stop you; the Traditions always said that you could make your world the way you wanted to. Now you can.

You might be reformationists. Maybe you think that the Traditions are a good idea, but plagued with too much internal politicking and corruption. Hit the road to root out influence-mongers and power-squanderers. Find those squeaky, whiny, profit-driven mages who're all assholes abusing their bureaucratic powers. Kick their asses. Then move on to the suave, debonair, self-absorbed ones who advance through treachery. Shove 'em in the trashcan. You're on a righteous crusade to clean up the Traditions!

Or perhaps you're good old Ascension Warriors. The Technocracy has slackened off and it's suffering internal problems — why rest now? Strike while they're weak! Defeat the Technocracy and there's nobody to stop you from establishing your beliefs across the world. Wipe them out... all of them.

Maybe you want to make something utterly new and modern. You're syncretists — you blend the modern ideologies and technologies that you grew up with, with the Tradition teachings. You incorporate science into shamanism and accept the Hermetic mysteries side-by-side with particle physics. Why do these have to be disparate ideas? There's room for both. Show other mages that they, too, can adapt to the modern world. Modern conveniences have given people a lot; it would be selfish and stupid to throw all of that away. Try working with it instead.

What if you're one of the new heralds? You take to the road to establish ties between chantries. Maybe you don't make the big decisions yourself, but you sure as heck hear everything that goes on and you sit in on the important meetings. Since you get to hear everything, everybody wants your opinion. You have input at the highest levels and diplomatic immunity as you travel from chantry to chantry. You're a peacemaker and deal-broker among mages of real consequence. Not a bad life.

Could be you're one of the Reckoning researchers. A lot of things have changed — a Storm of Avatar-shards has made the spirit worlds more dangerous than ever to enter, and magic itself is changing. Resonance creeps up on people more quickly and prophecies race to come true. There's room for a lot of work in researching these new phenomena. What does the Red Star mean? How can mages cross into the Otherworlds safely once more? What's signaled by the Prophecy of the Phoenix? These questions press desperately on the here and now of what's going on in mage society. Perhaps you'll be the first one with the answers.

The Modern Mystic

Consider for a moment the dilemma of the individual Traditionalist. At some level, individuals form the Traditions, after all. The mage grew up in a technological world, surrounded by the tools of reason and ensconced in a society that wants to scoff at the super-

natural. Suddenly, the mage Awakened to magic. A thousand years ago, that mage would've just apprenticed to a sorcerer or priest and lived out a mystical existence. Five hundred years ago, that mage would've been at the crux of the war between magic and reason, trying to reconcile the two or promote one side or the other. Today, that mage has no choice: The whole preconceived package of a scientific world came with the twenty-some-odd years of normal, everyday life before the Awakening, and that baggage can't and won't go away just because the mage suddenly learns to feel magic. These aren't the mages of yesteryear — they're something new.

The Traditions often made the claim that the world would've been better without the Technocratic Union. Given their way, the Traditions would release magic back into the world so that everyone would have a little more risk and a little more wonder in everyday life. Now, though, the mystics — the visionaries and trailblazers who form new ways of doing things — have turned even the Tradition mindset on its head. *What if,* they say, *we take the best of both worlds?* These modern mystics don't want to get rid of the artifacts of the scientific world; rather, they keep all of the elements that make life easier, more rewarding and more expansive while at the same time adding the dash of magic that they all share.

At the same time, the modern mystic looks for ways to apply technological tools to magical practices. The significance of various technologies applies just as much as their scientific use. The television, for example, is more than just a box of electron guns. It's a form of communication and a way to build communities out of people with shared stories or experiences. The gun isn't just a set of finely-machined parts that launches a high-speed projectile — it's a symbol of power and authority. Based on the feelings that these and other technologies invoke, modern mages work miracles that move hand-in-hand with equal parts gadgetry and geasa.

Paradoxically, not all visionaries feel ready to accept the combination of principles. Die-hard Traditionalists stress the importance of "pure" magic, arguing that giving even more power to technology simply weakens what little magic remains. Some technomages refuse to dirty their hands with "cheap mysticism." Even so, the mages of this millennium cannot escape this phenomenon. Movies, telephones and cars are just as firmly ingrained among mages as among the Masses.

The Last Heroes?

While mages often have goals or means of questionable ethics — from terrorism to tyranny — they also have all the best strengths of humanity. Their struggles are microcosms of the human race's struggle to understand and better itself. To that end, each mage is in some sense a rebel and outcast from the rest of human society, but each also has the potential to be a heroic figure. Gifted as they are with supernatural awareness and power, mages have the rare opportunity to take up a burden of responsibility. Too many fall into the trap of selfishness or inaction. The Traditions must and do push for mages not only to learn and grow, but also to involve themselves in their world. The only way to truly discover the world is to experience it first-hand. While the temptation is always great to use one's power to avoid problems or to bring personal wealth and aggrandizement, the Traditions challenge the mage to take up a cause greater than the individual. Sometimes, a rare mage rises to that challenge and changes the world for the better — in ways subtle or vast.

Still, much work remains to be done. The Traditions need unity in order to gather their strength. Tradition mages must learn to live with the world in which they're thrust, and to work for the betterment of that world, instead of trying to dodge their responsibilities or flee to a fantasy. Most importantly of all, if the Traditions are to prosper, the mages of the Traditions must once again become the heroes that they were in legend — larger-than-life figures striding across the landscape to perform deeds of greatness that raise up and exalt humanity through their dedication, compassion and very existence.

Jargon

Even though Tradition tutors often stress an education in formal terms for apprentices, young mages invariably develop their own jargon. Most especially, such terms appear in cabals of the newly Awakened, who bond through common experiences. Doubtless over the next decade popular jargon will continue to evolve.

Agent Smith: Generic Technocrat.

Appo: A mage who tries to smooth matters between Traditions and work for the unity of the Council as a whole. Abbreviation of "apologist."

Arcanopath: One who eschews morality in the pursuit of magical knowledge and/ or power. (Technically incorrect usage, but considered acceptable slang.)

Boom Stick: A wand or staff used for vulgar magic.

Casa de (Tradition): A chantry predominantly of a given Tradition.

Chippies: Friends and associates in magical circles. ("I went clubbing with the boys from work, then later met up with my chippies for drinks and debate.")

Choaded: Torn apart or otherwise incapacitated by Paradox. ("Winston got the fireball off, but casting it choaded him.")

Crash (a Node): To steal Quintessence from a Node in a crude fashion that damages said Node.

Cryptofascist Conspiracy: The Technocracy. Usually a sarcastic reference, denoting unwieldiness.

Cyberdork: A computer-using mage who constantly references '80s and early '90s cyberpunk fiction.

Disco Warrior: A mage who insists on continuing the Ascension War — disco is dead, and so is the War (presumably).

Disney Kidz: Young mages who still think that magic is solely about fun and whimsy. Generally, a derogatory term used by older cynical mages.

Dreamspeaker with a Mallet: A mage who, for some reason, can no longer perform magic in the preferred fashion and must rely on additional tools or overkill. Refers to Dreamspeaker difficulties with spirit-binding in the wake of the Avatar Storm.

Fac: Faction.

Formulaic Trash: The reduction of a magical process to a vague description based upon the Council's system of Spheres. ("Basically, this complex Hermetic spell is, in terms of formulaic trash, just another big application of Forces.")

Fuckdox: A persistent (although not necessarily permanent) Paradox Effect that interferes with the mage's ability to socialize normally.

Glow: Quintessence.

Glowhead: A mage who relies heavily on the use of Quintessence.

Glowstick: Tass.

Headjob: A Seeking.

Hellganked: Turned into an infernalist or Nephandus.

Home Turf: A Horizon realm sympathetic to Tradition magic.

House for Wayward Boys: A chantry.

House of Cheddar: A chantry where the mages typically rely on certamen to settle all disputes, regardless of merit.

Law of Ass: Murphy's Law. Corollary to the laws of Sympathy and Contagion.

Light Up: To spend Quintessence. ("He lit up and fired off a tremendous curse.")

Magical Esperanto: The Council's system of the nine Spheres.

Moving Mundane: Dwelling and working in a normal, mundane life and avoiding magical exposure. ("Seeing as how he got choaded, Winston decided he's gonna be moving mundane for a while.")

Mystic Republican: A mage who inherits magic from a family line.

Navel-gazer: Mage who relies on meditation and introspection to the exclusion of any sort of active pursuit of enlightenment.

Old Man Dox: Paradox. Often used as "I had a visit from Old Man Dox today...".

Past Sign: An Avatar lineage. A lingual drift from the comment "What's your past life sign?"

Pixie Dust: Powdered Tass, especially if it's also a drug.

Potter: Same as a "Disney Kid" (q.v.). ("Maelwyn, he's such a Potter, he really needs to grow up.")

Slideways: Airts; Umbral pathways.

Slipstream: A Shallowing.

Spike (a Node): To leave behind a trap on the Quintessence stream of a Node.

Steel: A cyborg — usually Technocratic, but could include a technomagical cyborg as well. Also, Technocracy enforcers. ("Time to bail out, the steel's arrived.")

Substitute Penis: Derogatory form of "Boom Stick," for a mage who relies too much on vulgar magic with a wand or staff as a focus or Wonder. ("Oh look, it's Watford and his substitute penis.")

Three-Assed Monkey: A failed experiment or useless magical device or creature.

TING: "This is no game" — tongue-in-cheek reference for a job that's stupidly simple. Used simply as a remark of satisfaction at the situation. ("We just walk out with the Tass and nobody even looks at us? TING.")

Tree-Hugging Hippy Neopagan: Derogatory term for any mage who uses diluted versions of cultures or religions without bothering to research their roots. Sometimes "Dancing Hippy Neopagan."

Twist: Resonance.

Vampire Bait: Mages who became involved in the Second *Massasa* War.

Vetvet: A veteran of the Ascension War. Came about as a double abbreviation of "veteran," on the presumption that being a veteran of the Ascension War is somehow more noteworthy than being a veteran of a mundane war. Refers to a mage who actually fought Technocrats, raided their bases and so on.

Voices in My Head: The Avatar.

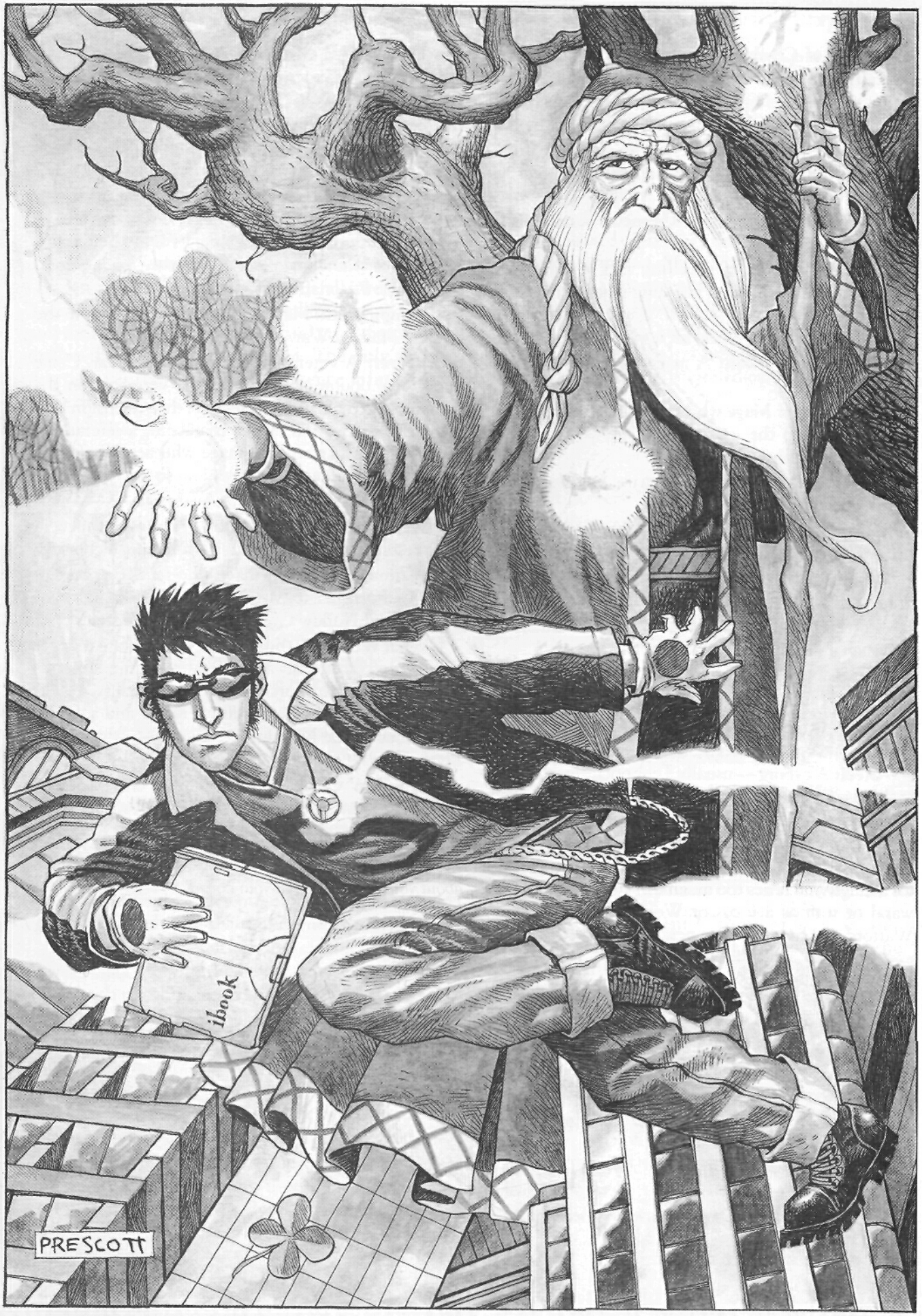
Waffle Hoes: Itinerant cabal of mages who meet in bars, restaurants or clubs instead of having a chantry.

Wannabe Jedi: Any mage who relies on pop culture to perform magic. Most commonly used to describe orphans and Hollow Ones with composite styles.

What Would Porthos Do?: In-joke among younger mages, used facetiously as a sarcastic examination of a situation. Tends to infuriate older Traditionalists. ("Let's see, he killed two of his chantry mates and sold the others out to the Nephandi. I dunno — what would Porthos do?")

Whips 'n' Chains: Mages who rely on sexual foci, typically Cultists of Ecstasy and Verbena ("I suppose we'll have to talk to the whips 'n' chains about this mess.")

Zanger: A mage who studies a Traditional style and culture wildly divergent from the individual's native culture, such as a Middle American Caucasian engineer who winds up in the Akashic Brotherhood.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PRESCOTT

Chapter Two: Mysticism

Dear Anya,

Welcome to the Traditions! I trust that your integration proceeds smoothly. Many of my companions bemoan that our numbers are smaller than they once were, but I must confess how delightful it is to personally welcome you amongst us rather than mailing you a form letter and a membership card. We had grown entirely too impersonal. I expect that by now you have read all sorts of confusing literature regarding a multitude of topics — our structure, your newfound connection to the mystic world, that which threatens us and other wordy documentation that has set your head to spin.

I assure you that I do not care to add to this laundry list of books and papers, whatever your trepidations are about this bulging stack of articles I have delivered you. Rather than introduce all sorts of words and terms that will confuse you even more, I wish to revisit that which you already know. Clarity is a virtue, and our long history means that we can present some rather dry text on occasion. I have tried to add a modern touch to the dusty tomes and high concepts, of which I shall re-examine near the close of this missive. Prior to that, an introduction is in order. It is unfair for us to know so much about you without you having the opportunity to meet us in return.

As Lucille no doubt mentioned, my name is Cam Trinh. I count myself amongst the Celestial Chorus. I confess the prospect of my delight at your decision to choose the Chorus, but understand your encounters with religion to date have rarely been positive. While we are certainly happy to bring you into the fold, so to speak, my concern is that you belong where you are most comfortable. Keep your sense about you and realize that your options remain open. I have taken the liberty of contacting Delasantos of the Verbena and Lee Ann with the Cult of Ecstasy. Each expressed interest in presenting to you the intricacies of their Traditions, should you desire an alternative. Simply contact me by means of the courier and I shall endeavor to arrange a meeting within the week.

Lucille informs me that your thirst for knowledge is matched solely by the worry that you have made the wrong decision in absolving your former life. I can't possibly presume to know the thoughts and feelings you hold, nor allude that I once felt the same, for my doing so would be a great disservice. I shall simply share with you the words that were sent to me twelve years ago, written by the late

Kimberlee Standt, the person who introduced me to the Awakened world:

You remember how everything used to be, before.

Each time you woke, you were torn from dreams so real that you could only half remember them. You remained disoriented for that split second before you recalled your own name and remembered who you thought you were supposed to be:

Perhaps you bought into the non-culture of the corporation, relegating yourself to tasks that in the long run seem meaningless, surrounding yourself with people who weren't exactly friends or enemies, but were instead a mixture of the two.

Maybe you only knew a life of squalor — working a job that others called "menial" but you called "an honest living," always sure that you would have had it better if you were only given the chance to prove yourself.

Possibly you buried yourself in academia— finding in books what you could not in people, preferring tales of doing to the doing itself, convinced that you could learn about life through accounts of it rather than by living it yourself.

Yet I do not doubt that your ultimate escape was religion — finding comfort in a god you only half believed in, using this flight from society to identify and commiserate with others who need the pretext of a deity to meet those like themselves, damning loneliness with ritual and communion.

Perhaps you truly believe in your god. This must make things all the more frightening to you, now. I do not envy what must be a horrifying time for you, as reality and faith turn to you and express dissatisfaction with what you think them to be.

Certainly the core of your faith does not waver; within you, your conviction must be as strong as the day you first knew that a god existed and looked upon you with a kind eye. The extremity of your faith is what now comes to question, for you look about and see that the world you took for granted, the reality you thought created by your god, is not at all what it seems. You have peeled back the world and now you see its inner workings, exposed to you like the muscle and blood of the universe. That difference — of comprehending that you have gained a greater understanding only to realize how little you actually know — gives you pause. That is what makes you question. That is why you ask your god "why me?" or "what did I do?" or even "why did you lie to me?"

You remember how everything used to be. You wish to return to a time, place, and structure in which everything makes sense. You wish to forsake the gift that has been shared with you out of the fear that quakes you to sleep these past few nights.

How can you forsake your god when he has given you so much? Why do you see this as a destruction of your belief, rather than an affirmation? If your god bestowed sight to a blind woman, would she then pluck out her eyes and return to a life of tentative, stumbling steps through the void? If your god gave strength to a weak man, would he then sever his ligaments in an effort to revisit his life of dependent frailty? If your god raised a dead child to new life, would it gladly suicide to return to the dark comfort of oblivion?

Do not begrudge your god of this gift, for it is the greatest reward bestowed upon a mortal. In sharing this reward of erudition, your god commends you for your faith, your strength of mind and your conviction of worldly morals. You are now called to a duty far greater than what you knew. What you feel is not the loss of faith, but fear: of the unknown, of what has happened to you and of what you will become.

You are not sick. Your sanity is not in question. What you encounter is by no means normal for the average man or woman, yet approached in context, is entirely mundane. I underwent the same transition twenty years ago. I thought that the drugs of my youth had finally torn through my brain and left me little more than a fool unhinged by self-denial. I feared the loss of my mind until I realized my altered perceptions weren't what separated me from reality: they were what brought me closer to it.

We must meet, you and I. You have questions. I have answers. I feel the need for absolution, father. Perform your duties as normal and we shall meet in your booths. You will know me when I enter, for it has been more than two decades since my last confession.

Personally, I thought it all rather overdramatic and flowery. Perhaps that's why I find myself amongst the Celestial Chorus today, rather than the Cult of Ecstasy.

Every year, upon the anniversary of my own Awakening, I reread her words in the hope of gaining a greater understanding of where I am and where I head. At the time, her words only managed to provoke more questions, yet they gave me a thread of understanding that I grasped with the strength of a man passing from this world to the next. It is my hope today, Anya, to give you a thread of understanding. The more you understand, the less you shall fear. One hopes, at the least.

Do Kimberlee's words strike a chord with you? Do mine begin to do so? Your first step into this Awakened world is one filled with trepidation, for you can already see it. It exists

around you, this greater truth of all reality, and you can't help but notice it wherever you look. The world that lies beneath cannot hide from your eyes. The dreams you've had for the past year — or perhaps for your whole life — suddenly make all kinds of sense, for you now spend your days walking through them.

Now I'm the one who is guilty of over-dramatics, but it is impossible to describe these feelings you have without a certain excitement. The Awakening bestows a sense of wonder to life. It is an impetus for personal and worldly marvel. It is a reminder of the first time you saw something so beautiful that it hurt you inside. Now you see this all around you, revisited twofold; you remember what it is to love when you gaze upon something so magnificent.

This feeling will not go away. That is the work of your Avatar: it cannot let you forget that sense of wonder, for the instant you do, you no longer have the incentive to care. Without that, you have no place amongst the Awakened. There must be a reason for you to go on; there must be a cause for you to fight; there must be a motive to excel in the face of an uncompromising universe.

I fear I speak in boundless generalities when I should instead share specifics. I feel it necessary to impart myself, to examine my perceptions in regards to my own Awakening.

I used to be a priest at a small Catholic church in eastern Michigan. My congregation was a small one, for the 1980s were a different time, and many of the town's populace had a long memory of the Vietnam War. I did not begrudge their insults to my heritage, for they were filled with fear and blame of a time that was better forgotten. I was simply a reminder to them — a sharp memory that would not go away. Yet the animosity was the quiet, unfriendly kind, rather than the cartoonish racism so often depicted on film and television. I endured the exclusion of many, yet gained strength through the kinship of my parishioners. I still remember their faces, their worries and the secret hopes they shared.

As ridiculous as it sounds, my Awakening occurred in the confessional. I was listening to a young man divulge his sins. He sought penance for many things, and he shared his quiet shame in the halting, mumbling monotone of a young boy admitting guilt to his parents. Amidst his monologue, the words he spoke seemed to take on more and more importance, as though each syllable were a proclamation, each sentence a manifesto. I felt their impact hammering through my very being, a keen sense growing within me to weigh his words with the utmost of importance. I heard the truth below his self-deception; I tasted the torment within him; I immediately grasped his fear below the anger and disgust.

In my revelation, I was quick to judge and did not stop to think of consequence. I confronted him about the dalliance with kin that words concealed but his soul could not. His naked fear at my insight washed over me with such strength that I grew suddenly ill and could not contain my last meal. The man flew from the confessional. Only as his fear subsided with distance could I regain control of my stomach. Certainly not the most gracious of exposures to higher celestial truth.

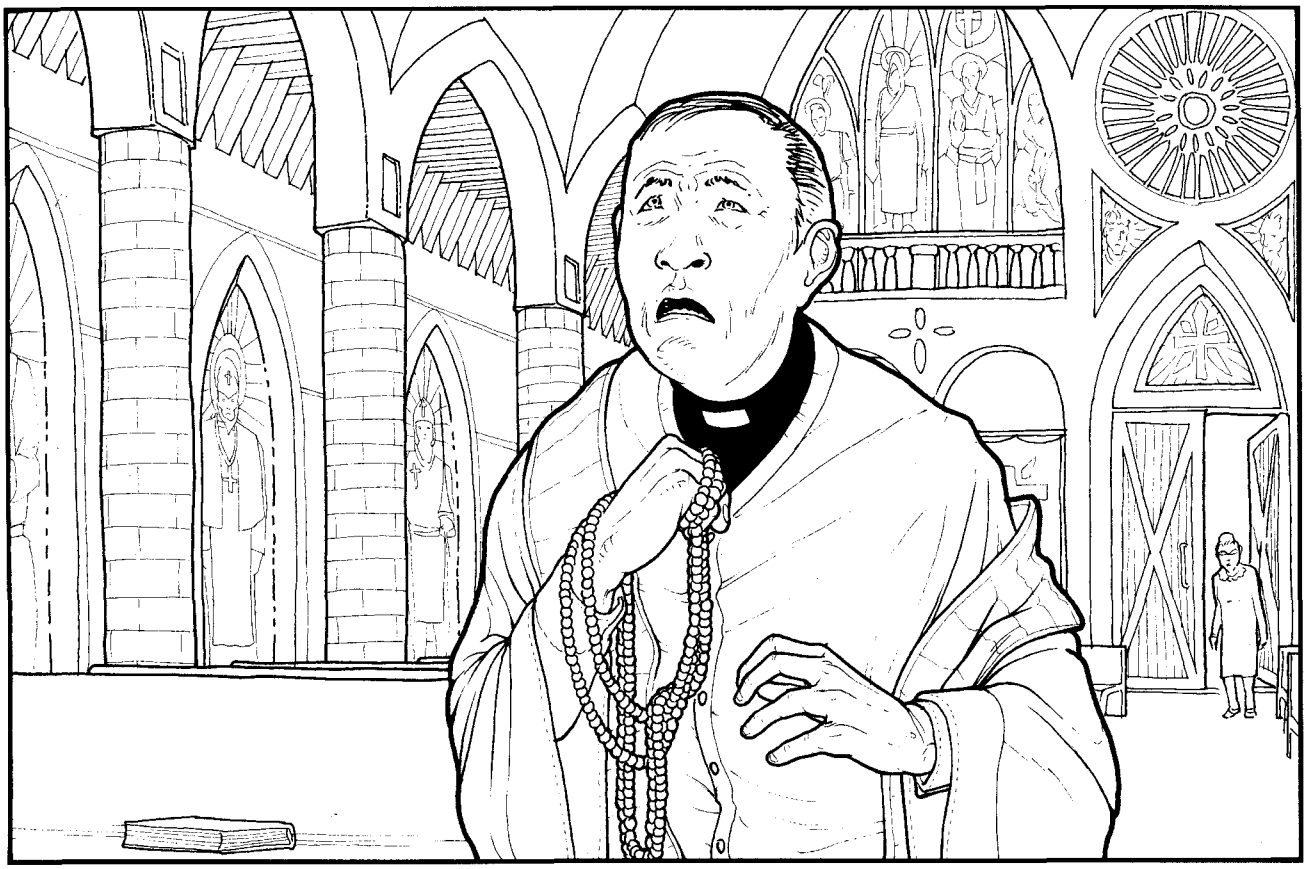
I did not move for quite a time. I sat in the darkness of the booth, the sharp tang of my insides the only thing convincing me that I was still human. I should not have known his thoughts, I should not have reacted as I did and most of all, I should not have been right. For you see, I knew that I was right. I did not doubt. I could not. It was a knowledge stronger than faith, which in itself raised my own fear. After all, what could be stronger than faith? Only the love of God could eclipse belief, yet God's love could not come from within me, a simple man. These thoughts churned through my mind until I found the booth's door and stumbled out.

I was not prepared for what met me beyond the darkness. The memory still carries with it my first glimpse at true wonder, and I confess that even as I put it to paper twelve years hence, I must pause to collect my thoughts.

The world I'd left when I entered the confessional was not the one to which I'd returned. There was a discernable twist to everything I saw. Light was brighter, shadows were darker, but there was more definition — it felt as though the spectrum had gained breadth. Sound was more precise. I became aware of the intimate passage of air through my lungs. Everything was sharp, and I had the strange thought that I could cut myself on the world if I wasn't careful.

The interior of the church seemed different. The late afternoon light was a palpable thing, the sunbeams slowly dancing through the air — and by that I mean they seemed a living thing. The stained glass faces of the saints gazed down at me with a knowing expression, as if to say, "Now you finally understand." Though they did nothing so clichéd as to blink, I was convinced that should I look away, they would. I noticed something else then that I have never since. I can only explain it as being absolutely certain that the crisp feel of the air carried the weight of many souls.

The bright glow near the altar called my attention. Specifically, that there was a bright glow. No lamp should illuminate the tabernacle at this time of day, I thought. I stumbled forward to explore this idiosyncrasy, only to freeze as I saw the glow came not from a man-made light, but the consecrated host and blood of Christ. The glow pulsed slowly, and for an instant I thought myself looking upon the heartbeat of the Savior.



At an earlier point in my life, I remember wondering what my behavior would be should I find definitive proof of God. I told myself then that I would feel love and adulation at an affirmation of faith. I am ashamed to admit that my first reaction twelve years prior was terror. I became acutely aware of myself and ashamed of my filthiness in such a holy presence.

"Father, are you alright?" asked a voice, and I whirled to face the speaker. It was one of my parishioners, a woman who lived just outside of town with her mother and spent time each evening at the church. She was kind, if a bit quiet, and always made a point to speak to me after services. Rather than relief at her presence, that moment brought only more terror, for I could taste her shock, concern and confusion at the back of my throat. I recoiled from her as though she were a serpent. I regret that after this day the words we exchanged were few, and rarely more than mutual acknowledgement.

I hurried to the rectory, taking care to avoid contact with any other people. Along the way I noticed more and more oddities — a soft ambient light around certain objects of faith, an odd sense of indeterminate familiarity in my route and a harsh, grating undertone to the distant sound of a car with a poor muffler. Even when I stepped into my modest bedroom, I felt a great sense of belonging that was more than just a feeling, but rather a comfortable presence. I can only describe it as a sharp, pleasant smell. I rushed to the bathroom, stripped out of my soiled clothes and stepped into the shower.

The thrumming of warm water returned me to as much a state of calm as was possible. I closed my eyes and stood in the shower for an eternity, letting the water wash away my terror. I began to drowse where I stood. My thoughts wandered. I reflected on what had happened to me in the confessional: how it must have been a stress reaction of some sort, that my vision in the church was a panic attack. Yet even as I idly attempted to convince myself that I was not losing my mind, I slowly grew cognizant of an abnormality with the water that pounded against me. This niggling sense of discrepancy grew and I opened my eyes.

It is a peculiar moment indeed when you realize that you are acutely aware of every single drop of water in the room. I speak not in generalities; my words are indicative of each specific drop at any one point between emergence from faucet and impact with tub, tile, curtain, and flesh. I recognized that the inconsistency was my internal accounting of each drop from its spigot-borne birth through spherical descent to formless death below. I could not count these drops, yet I had a sense of their completeness, their belonging in each moment. Should the flow of time suddenly stop and each drop be counted, the number reached would exactly match what I felt was correct. I simply knew, and my lingering fear rekindled itself in a cascade of fright.

I fell into what can only be described as focused panic. My mind closed its doors, while my body moved purely through instinct. I do not recall emerging from the shower, drying myself and dressing. I only know that when I regained awareness of my surroundings, I was clothed and in the study: tearing through the drawers of my desk, tossing papers and files about, muttering softly in Latin. To this day, I do not know what I was looking for.

My ransacking halted as I uncovered a plaque that an old friend had bestowed upon me in my seminary days. It was the motto I'd come to live by years and years ago, and as I was rather vocal in my youth, he was all too aware of it. He gave it to me as somewhat of a joke and told me that if I hung it on my wall, I would no longer have to speak the words. I could simply "point to the sign."

I held that plaque in my hands and stared at my old motto, the one I'd hidden from sight due to the worry that I would offend my visitors. I slowly ran my fingers over the words — "Faith unquestioned is faith untested." It grounded me; reminded me of who I was and how I'd arrived there. That old plaque pulled me back together and strengthened both my rational mind and my spirituality. I experienced a personal refocusing, and much seemed to snap into place with an abnormal sense of clarity. I had many questions, but I no longer had fear, for I knew that there were answers, somewhere.

Shortly after was when I received Kimberlee's letter. We talked for quite a while in that confession booth, and she helped me find the answers I sought. She gave me perspective of the things I had seen, felt, and heard. She told me that the whispers at my perception were an early expression of my mystical predilections, as were the glimpses into the hearts of my flock. She informed me that the pulsing of the host and blood of Christ was not a heartbeat, but the natural flow of Quintessence through a physical symbol of the Almighty. She taught me that my faith was not incorrect; I simply needed to revisit the details within the framework of my newfound awareness.

What I learned then was that no matter how much I tried to fight, my discernment of a mystic world is not something that will ever go away. I could struggle against my new sense, or I could learn to use it for the good of others. I chose the latter those many years ago and do not regret my decision. I've encountered many strange things since that time, but rather than think of them as new elements of a different reality, I see them as old ones that I can only now perceive. This knowledge of world and self is dangerous, for it can provoke a hasty reaction to the strangeness inherent to your surroundings, but it can also expose to you the true beauty of life. I cannot stress enough that your outlook in this regard is key, for if you expect the terrible, that is what you are most likely to find.

Kimberlee gave me context, and I hope to do the same for you. I am currently working to obtain a collection of documents. I hope to compile these into a short book for the edification of newly Awakened mages. Until such a time as I complete this undertaking, I can but share that which I currently have. In all cases, my own comments precede the content of the included essays.

I know that your indoctrination has made you aware of what is considered "normal" amongst our ranks. When selecting essays, I sought out variant, insightful views specifically to show how broadly the Traditions can diverge from the expected norm. I ask that you read these, for your own sake, as they clarify some of our more esoteric concepts.

I look forward to meeting you in person. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or doubts.

Yours in faith,
— Cam Trinh
June 8th, 2001
Grand Rapids, MI

The Mystic's View

Be the mage Chorister or Cultist, the common thread of Awakening leads to the mystic's view — the perspective of seeing the world as malleable and far stranger than the eye alone sees. In years long past this gave rise to shaman and wise man, who had insight beyond that of the common man. Each suffered under some unique touch of the strange, be it deformity, madness or clarity of vision unknown to other people. Due to this difference, the community regarded the mage as an individual apart. The mage possessed a special wisdom but also did not live in the same world-experience as the mundane man. From this wisdom and difference, the mage garnered respect, but also fear.

Old habits die hard, it seems. Even today, those with talents little understood to the common man find themselves put in a class apart. Compare the skilled computer programmer with the computer illiterate; those able to manipulate programs with facility find themselves labeled: "geek," "hacker," "subversive" (depending upon whom you ask). The same is true of multiple other subcultures. Humanity easily puts those with special talents and learning into subcategories, neatly labeled and classified; at

once derided for their uniqueness yet secretly revered for their capabilities.

It's perhaps because of this subcategorizing that mages often cluster together. Normal people can't understand the mage's insight. This isn't simply a matter of trading rotes or swapping magical knowledge; it's a need to seek out others like the individual mage who can understand the mage's special experience. This, in part, leads to the formation of magical societies — and explains as well why mage groups often include people who argue vociferously about individual tenets of mystic belief, yet quickly close ranks to defend one another against outsiders.

For their part, mages all find themselves immersed in a world different from that explored by everyone around them. In some ways this might be akin to schizophrenia (and, perhaps, that could be one reason that the Technocracy is often leery of Tradition mages)... the mage's senses gather truths that other people simply don't recognize. Since the senses and the mind are the primary tools through which the individual gathers *weltanshaung* (the "arising of experience"), the mage can only assume that these phenomena are true, or that they are the result of madness. Compound this with the fact that other mages experience very different things, and mages quickly adopt the idea that perhaps more truths exist for reality than they experience personally... but the personal truth is always the nearest and dearest, and the hardest to discard or overcome.

Even with all that in mind, it's important to realize that most mages not only experience different forms of the magical world but also different intensities. Sure, your mage character can use sensory magics to change the view of the world and can feel the flow of Quintessence. Does your mage talk regularly to his Avatar, or is it never felt? Does your mage feel the weight of *Past Lives* or the universal *Dream*? Different mages have unique takes on just how magical the world feels. Some mages stumble through the world barely aware of the magic in their lives, desperate to find *something* that vindicates their faith. Others have a headache of constant bother and nuisance from magical problems or threats. Some live in between, with the occasional weird magical phenomenon rearing its ugly head (perhaps every week or so, whenever your troupe meets for a game...) but otherwise having a fairly "normal" life.

The difference of intensity in a mage's worldview can influence how mages cooperate, as well. Mages who live in a world full of magic may not consider the Technocracy as much of a threat; to them, magic is always there. Mages who exist in a world with a dearth of magic (a growing faction in this age) are more desperate to bring back the magic that they feel is missing from the world. Sometimes, a mage suffers from a world with *too much* magic; the mage grows fearful and paranoid, seeking to stamp out the constant threats — from such seeds grew elements of the Technocracy's pogrom. Mages who agree that the world has a dearth of magic will be quicker to cooperate in search of epic quests or ways to fight the Technocracy than mages who constantly experience magic around every corner.

While there's no single trait that determines how much of the world is mystical for your character, you can often judge this through a combination of various Abilities and Advantages. Mages with a strong Avatar, especially with Merits like *Manifest Avatar*, live in a decidedly more magical world than mages who rarely have spiritual inspiration. Mages connected to *Dream* and *Past Life*, or who have a strong sense of Awareness, often subconsciously feel the "vibe" of magic in the world around them. Mages who spend a lot of time in the Umbra, or in a Node, find themselves surrounded in magical energies. Those mages who regularly deal with supernatural phenomena, such as faeries, spirits and vampires, also have a decidedly more off-kilter worldview. On the flip side, many mages live in a very mundane world, with only the occasional glimpse of magic, no sense of a cosmic memory or mystical thread and only the rarest contact with supernatural creatures.

Before you play a mage character, imagine for a moment that your world includes something totally alien to everyone else. Heck, don't just imagine it; find something that you have that makes you special and different compared to "normal" people. Perhaps you have a phenomenal amount of martial arts training and meditation practice. Maybe you have an incredible knack for pulling apart old electronics and fiddling with them, just for fun. A mage does exactly the same thing — only it really *is* magic. Other people may shake their heads, make jokes or rude comments or even view the hobby as weird or dangerous, but to the mage, it's just a way of life, something enthralling that the mage can do (and often feels driven to do). This doesn't mean it's always pleasant; perhaps the mage really despises some of the things he does. Regardless, it's true, it's different from the norm and it really *does* allow the mage to do something that normal people just can't do.

Paradox

Ziggy Pulanski was an irascible Chicago cop known more for his sharp tongue than his police work. Never anything less than brutal with suspects he felt were guilty, his fast temper made him a regular inhabitant of Internal Affairs' shit list. After his Awakening and inception with the Euthanatos, he learned why his hunches about guilty suspects were always right: his Avatar's whispers pointed out the truly guilty and let his temper do the rest.

Now retired from police work and living in Chicago's South Side, Ziggy faces constant harassment by the ACLU and Amnesty International for a number of brutality cases that never saw the inside of a courtroom. Controversy followed from Sleeper past to Awakened present. Ziggy has spent the past 18 years as a radical and rather vocal theorist of paradox. His views are based more on intuition than fact, but functionally match up with long-held Tradition paradox theory.

I asked a colleague's apprentice to transcribe a series of conversations about paradox with Ziggy and the results are shown below. Try to separate the entirely valid basics of his core belief from the more contentious reasoning. Use his words to incite discussion of your own. Above all, if you are ever in Chicago when the Cubs aren't in season, look him up and share your views over vodka. He enjoys arguing paradox nearly as much as he enjoys destroying his liver.

—Cam Trinh

The Object Lesson

Sal's (South Side pub), Chicago, 10/31/00.

Speaking: Bob Templeton (Celestial Chorus), Ziggy Pulanski (Euthanatos)

Conversation four minutes in progress.

ZP: So why'd you drag me down here on Halloween? Any significance?

BT: Coincidence.

ZP: Coincidence my hemorrhoidal ass. You lie like a dead dog.

BT: Coincidence in the paradoxical sense, Ziggy.

ZP: Fuck off. Drag me out when I could be home drinking and snarling at kids knocking on my door. Which reminds me; I'm not drinking.

[ART NOTES: Stick in the bar scene: The young, fresh-faced Chorister looking doubtful at the shot in front of him, while the chunky, older cop leans back in his chair with a grin, waiting for the poor schmuck to down it.]

BT: I'll buy in return for your time.

ZP: This all for Bob's book?

BT: Yes, I was thinking —

ZP: Lou! Two double-shots of Ketel One, on this guy.

BT: Both for you?

ZP: One of them, yeah.

BT: I can't drink that.

ZP: I know you don't want to, but that doesn't mean you can't.

BT: Ziggy —

ZP: First lesson of paradox: You don't get a freebie. Once you play, you have *got* to pay; no exceptions. It's the piper come for payment. It's the scorpion's bargain. It's a sucker punch to the gut you can't dodge, because you just busted that guy in the chops and left yourself open.

BT: This isn't —

ZP: You're goddamn right it isn't something you want to do. That's the point. You're going to drink it or I'm going to get up and walk out the door.

BT: Please, Ziggy.

ZP: Tough nuts, Bob. That's the price. You swallow every drop in that glass while I watch you like a hawk, or I'm out the door and I don't say word one to you for a year.

BT: (coughing)

ZP: There you go, like that. Get it all down in one gulp if you can. How is it?

BT: I thought it would burn more. Even so, it was rather atrocious.

ZP: Second lesson of paradox: It's never something you want. It's never something you like. And it's never, ever something you're expecting.

BT: The things I do for my research.

ZP: Now drink the other one.

BT: What?

ZP: You heard me.

BT: This isn't fair.

ZP: Third lesson of paradox: It's never fair. Now quit glaring at me and drink your fucking vodka.

BT: You owe me for this, Ziggy.

ZP: Fourth lesson of paradox: You aren't owed shit. Now I'm going to go home and enjoy my Halloween. Lou! Get this guy a cab.

BT: (coughing) You said —

ZP: Since you had the bright of idea of meeting on a holiday, let's make it a tradition. You come back here on the eve of Thanksgiving. You spend the next three weeks thinking long and hard about what happened here tonight. And if you make any attempt to contact me before then, I don't say word one to you for a year.

BT: But —

ZP: Later, Bob. And don't forget to pay Lou for your vodka.

Theory and Practice

Sal's (South Side pub), Chicago, 11/23/00.

Speaking: Bob Templeton (Celestial Chorus), Ziggy Pulanski (Euthanatos)

ZP: I wasn't sure you'd come.

BT: I almost didn't.

ZP: Ah-ha, you're still pissed. Good.

BT: I want you to know that I really don't fathom the point; I don't appreciate being led around by the nose —

ZP: You shouldn't.

BT: — and I really don't appreciate you forcing me to swallow four shots of vodka when you know I don't drink.

ZP: Stop right there and think about what you just said.

BT: What?

ZP: How did I force you?

BT: You said that if I didn't then you wouldn't talk to me about what I need to hear.

ZP: So I held open your mouth and poured it down your throat?

BT: No, but you manipulated the situation.

ZP: Come off it, Bob. Of course I manipulated the situation, but it was *you* who knocked the drinks back.

BT: You sound like a Nephandus.

ZP: And you sound like every punk mage who gets bitten in the ass by paradox and then can't take responsibility for his own actions. You stuck the dagger in your own back and now you're surprised to find out that you're bleeding. Hear that, Bob? It's the world's tiniest violin, and it's playing just for you.

BT: What are you talking about?

ZP: You're having the same paradox reaction that the typical mage gets when reality catches his hand in the cookie jar. You aren't making sad puppy-dog eyes at me, but you do have the chin-thing going.

BT: "Chin-thing?"

ZP: Yeah, the chin-thing. Like little kids get when their folks yell at them for eating worms, or reaching into the toilet to play with their poo, or whatever it is little kids do that gets them yelled at. Like I have any idea about that family crap.

BT: Ah.

ZP: We don't like to admit it, but paradox is *always* our own damn fault. It's not some sort of great cosmic smackdown to teach us a lesson for daring to push the bounds of established reality. It's the hammer of justice smashing down on yuppie scumbags who think they can rape the system and get away clean. It's the bar full of off-duty cops when a clueless punk wanders in and tries to stick the place up. It's Lady Reality's older brother, stomping the shit out of jagoffs who try to get into her pants on the first date.

BT: How delightfully metaphorical. I still don't see what this has to do with Halloween.

ZP: Why don't you drink, Bob?

BT: It's not something a man of faith should be doing.

ZP: Yeah, that's the rote response you toss up when people bring up the subject, but that's not why you stay off the sauce. Remember what I did for two decades. Remember that I got paid to know when people were lying to me. The truth, pal. Don't sit there and lie to my fucking face again. What you say won't go any farther than you, me and the lamppost, but tell me the God's honest truth.

BT: No, I don't mind. It just sounds silly.

ZP: All good reasons are silly. The Trojans went to war for years over a woman. Marie Curie killed herself with radiation because she wanted to know how it worked. I remain convinced that the Cubs will win a World Series within my lifetime. I bet those reasons are all sillier than yours.

BT: I guess I just hate the idea of losing control. I want to be at the utmost of my faculties. This became more important after my Awakening. With the power that flows through me, I don't ever want to be in a state of mind where I can't contain it or direct it as precisely as I should.

ZP: That's interesting.

BT: I told you it was silly.

ZP: No, that's a damn good reason. If you really think you'd lose control enough to mess up, then it's probably best you don't. But think back to Halloween for a second. What happened? Why did you break this lifelong code of yours? Why did you willingly lose control, even knowing that you might accidentally zap some poor shlub?

BT: Because I needed to know what you know.

ZP: Ah-ha. There's that "needed" again. Keep going. Why even consider it?

BT: At first I thought it was just one drink, and on a purely physical level, I know that a single drink isn't going to affect me much. It was a calculated risk.

ZP: What happened when you took that risk?

BT: You changed the rules on me. You made me drink another.

ZP: "Made?"

BT: Okay, you didn't make me. You defined an additional requirement I had to fulfill before you —

ZP: Why drink the second one immediately after I burned you on that first one? Why risk loss of control with that second drink? You knew that slamming four shots of vodka in under a minute would put you well on the way to shit-faced. So why do it?

BT: I thought it was another hoop to jump through.

ZP: You took another calculated risk.

BT: Yes.

ZP: After the first one backfired in your face.

BT: Yes.

ZP: You realize that's just like getting schooled by a shyster at craps, then withdrawing your life savings and going back to the same guy because you *know* you'll win this time around. Don't ever go to Vegas, Bob.

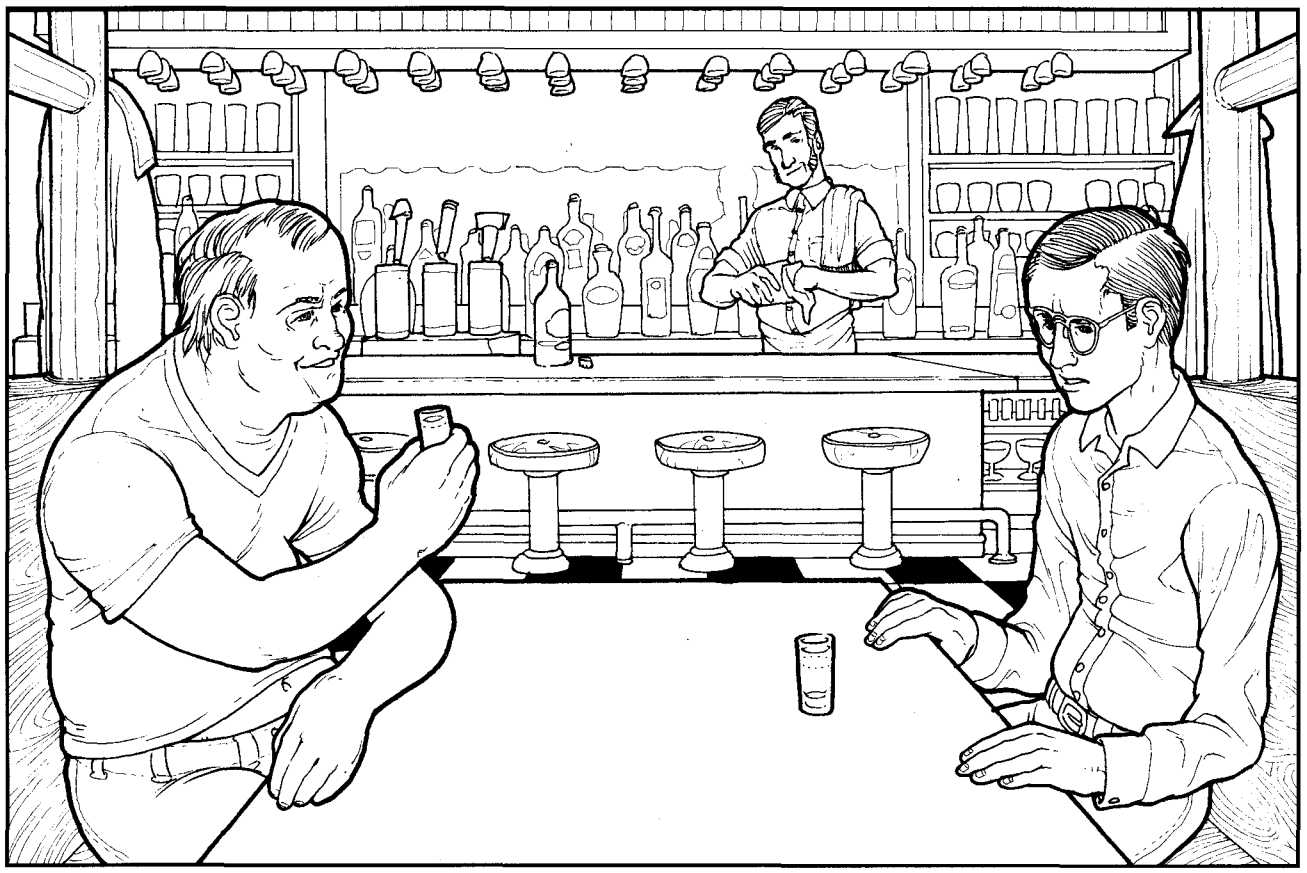
BT: Is there a point to all of this?

ZP: My point is that you should be goddamn happy the worst thing that happened was you puking your guts out. If this were the real deal, you'd be lucky to still have your guts. Never forget that when you tear reality, reality tears back. That's paradox. *That*, my friend, is the price of absolute power.

BT: I know that, but what does it have to do —

ZP: Let's look at what happened in a different context. You meet me at this bar on Halloween. You want something. You might have convinced yourself you need it. Uh...you remember what lesson I was up to, last time?

BT: Lesson four. "You aren't owed anything," or something to that effect.



ZP: Right, right. I lied. I was just saying that to sound cold. The actual fourth lesson of paradox: You don't need it that bad. You never, ever need it that bad. Lou! Two double-shots of Ketel One, on me.

BT: I'm not falling for this again.

ZP: Don't worry; I'm doing the vodka drinking tonight. Now, you crave this information something fierce. You know I'm a loud-mouthed hump, so you come in here expecting to put up with my shit. You ask me to tell you about paradox: that's your goal. I come back with a condition. I tell you that you have to break your personal code against drinking if you want to hear about paradox. But I keep you off guard, I make you think fast; I tell you that I'll get up and walk away if you don't drink it. I force you into a situation you don't want to be in. You have to make a fast decision or you risk losing what you feel you absolutely need to have. You with me so far?

BT: Yes.

ZP: Good, because this is where you made your first mistake. You took the situation I presented as the Bible truth, pardon the expression, and followed the rules I set. This brings us to the fifth lesson of paradox: There's always another way to get what you want. Always.

BT: You made it clear that argument was not an option, and that if I didn't drink you would leave. I don't see what I could have done.

ZP: I'll show you what you could have done. Take this glass. Now, what'd I tell you last time?

BT: I had to drink it while you watched.

ZP: I said you had to drink everything in that glass, yeah. So what's in the glass?

BT: Vodka.

ZP: But it didn't have to be vodka, did it?

BT: Pardon?

ZP: Cam tells me you've turned water into wine. Don't tell me you can't make it go the other way.

BT: I can, but isn't that cheating?

ZP: Sixth lesson of paradox: If you get away without getting caught, you weren't cheating. So how about it, Bob? That stuff's completely clear. There's no way I can tell if it's vodka or water. Let's try this again. I want you to drink up every drop in that glass while I'm watching.

BT: Huh. Okay.

ZP: There you go. By turning the contents of the glass to water, you just satisfied the conditions I set without breaking your own personal code. Either that

or it was actually vodka. All I know is that you fiddled with your rosary beads. It was water, right?

BT: Yes.

ZP: Good. You got away with it, and you didn't break your own rules. Pretend your code is the sum total force of reality. Last time, you went against your code — you blatantly defied reality. That's no different than a vulgar effect. You saw the carrot and decided to leap for it, knowing you would likely get hit with a big fucking stick. This time, you satisfied the conditions to get what you "needed," but you stuck to your guns and didn't break your code — you worked within the bounds of reality. And that, my friend, is a coincidental effect.

BT: Interesting point. I do wish it hadn't cost me additional plane and hotel fare.

ZP: The lessons that stick with you are the ones that hurt the most, pal. Vulgar magic is always a lady-or-the-tiger proposition: you get hurt bad either way, but if you're lucky you get some nookie out of it.

BT: Quaint.

ZP: Hey, you had to spend three weeks thinking I was going to stiff you the next time around, or wonder if I was playing with your head the whole time to make the little preacher boy drink, and all kinds of other unsavory stuff. You thought you were seriously fucked. Seventh lesson of paradox: You're always seriously fucked. Like I said, you should be glad this was just a simulation.

BT: I can't say I'm grateful, but I do appreciate the perspective.

ZP: You'd better. Now, enough shop talk. Lou! Double-shot of Ketel One and a Shirley Temple, on me.

BT: There's still much I need to know.

ZP: Then we'll do it again on Christmas Day. I might even give you specifics.

BT: Oh, for the love of....

ZP: If you can get a flight in, I can put you up for the week.

BT: I don't seem to have a choice.

ZP: Thought you'd see it my way. Now let's toast the memory of Harry Carey, God rest his soul.

Non-applicable conversation follows

Tradition Theory

Sal's (South Side pub), Chicago, 12/25/00.

Speaking: Bob Templeton (Celestial Chorus), Ziggy Pulanski (Euthanatos)

Conversation seventeen minutes in progress.

ZP: I started out in '68, just three weeks before the Democratic National Convention went all to shit and the city nearly tore itself apart. Daley was a fool to send us after those kids. He lost touch with the modern day. He didn't understand how it would look to the country because he didn't know what the country was anymore. Instead of us restoring order from a rowdy bunch of miscreants, we were jackbooted thugs hitting children in the head with sticks. He might as well have put us all in brown shirts and cut our moustaches into squares.

BT: How awful.

ZP: Yeah, tell me about it. Cops in this country are hated to this day because Daley wanted to impress upon the visiting royalty that he had an iron grip on the city. Blew up in his face, blew up in ours. You think we'd get shit like Cop Killer in a world where people still respected us?

BT: You're hardly unbiased. Besides, wasn't that nearly a decade ago?

ZP: Ten years don't mean the pain's gone. Awful fucking song. But I'm forgetting about the paradox.

BT: Paradox?

ZP: Perspective on paradox. That's what I wanted to talk about. See, most of us assume the Technocracy is responsible for the state of paradox today. Much of our theory regarding paradox takes it as a given that things would be dandy if the Technocracy weren't around. I'm amazed that the Traditions are full of whining babies who think the Technocracy is at fault for their own greed.

BT: I imagine you're not winning any friends.

ZP: I don't want morons for friends. Think about it: if the Technocracy has control of paradox itself, something that might as well be a fundamental aspect of the Tellurian, do you really think we'd have lasted this long? If reality is a blackboard and paradox is an eraser, wouldn't they just wipe us away at the first opportunity?

BT: I suppose so.

ZP: That's why the theory is bullshit. Sleepers form the Consensus; the Consensus creates paradox; paradox beats stupid mages like redheaded stepchildren. You can try to nudge the Sleepers to alter the Consensus, but with the multiple layers involved, direct control of paradox is impossible.

BT: Impossible?

ZP: Yeah, impossible. You think I need to return my secret Euthanatos decoder ring because I said the I-word? Hell no. Even I know when it's time to break out the absolutes.

BT: Even if the Technocracy doesn't control paradox, it seems they aren't affected by it.

ZP: That's not true. They're affected by paradox, but rarely as much as we are.

BT: That doesn't seem fair.

ZP: Fair doesn't enter into it. They've done their homework. Their biggest asset is an understanding of the Consensus. They know what the rules are and set things up so that their willworking doesn't break them. They take their time to inject plausibility into the public consciousness before trying to get away with something.

BT: Does that mean that the Technocracy is right? If paradox doesn't affect them much, is their position more valid?

ZP: If they were right, then I'd be on their side. What they're doing is hedging their bets. The Technocracy plays it safe. They take no chances and reduce everything to a function of minimum effort for marginal gain. They reduce everything to metaphysical calculus in order to get the results they expect, and if there are any surprises, then they rework everything to match their theoretical results. They manufacture coincidence and avoid backlash through an ethos of mediocrity. I'd rather paradox turned my colon into crystal than live like that.

BT: What makes our views different from theirs? Don't we try to submit reality to our will?

ZP: It's all perspective. From what I've seen, Technocrats get written up by their bosses and docked pay if they provoke paradox. This is a very centralized take on it. In contrast, Traditionalists ultimately see it as punishment for hubris, and take a more personal approach. When paradox clips Tradition mages, the rest of us shake our heads, chuckle, and say "serves him right." We rarely show up at his house to give him a paradox intervention. Most of us assume that mages who get fucked by paradox deserve it. Even our theories support paradox as a form of personal, metaphysical punishment for disrespecting reality.

BT: For example?

ZP: Ah hell, it's story time with Uncle Ziggy, is it? Right. Keep in mind that these aren't Tradition-held views, just stuff I've heard from specific people.

BT: Understood.

ZP: A lot of theories, particularly amongst younger mages, are pretty goddamn stupid. No offense.

BT: None taken.

ZP: So I get this young buck Euthanatos who has this real "paradox is the man trying to keep us down" thing going. I'll call him "N. Clay" for purposes of anonymity. Wait, that could give him away. I'll call him "Nick C." instead.

BT: You're a cruel man.

ZP: Thank you, sir. So this Nick C. character is doing his best to deal with his Awakening. He's one of those upper-middle class kids who's had it easy all his life but gets it in his head that he hasn't, and this bleeds over into his mystical views. He ends up incorporating these bullshit, nihilistic, I'm-so-oppressed views into his paradigm and gets the idea that the Traditions are righteous rebels fighting against the forces of corporate expansion or some crap like that. I have to babysit him for a week in Joliet as a favor to his master.

BT: Sounds familiar.

ZP: Laugh it up, kid. So we're shooting the shit about nothing in particular and end up getting around to paradox. He goes into this godawful view of how it's the work of spirits he calls "reality cops" that "delegate their continuity oppression" out to those of us who "dare to think outside the box." Pure hokum.

BT: Why are his views "hokum?"

ZP: The way he talked, every expression of paradox is the cause of these little invisible hobgoblins that you can't see or hear unless they want you to know they're around. I mean, I've heard mages talk about paradox spirits before, and I think I may have encountered one myself a few years ago, but to say that every instance of paradox is caused by malevolent spirits goes a bit far, I think.

BT: Are there any theories you don't hold in such disdain?

ZP: A few. I met a Hermetic in Raleigh last year. I thought he'd lapse into their standard rhetoric on the subject, but he said that as a kid he'd been fascinated with the body and how folks were put together. He sees mages as viruses and paradox as the white blood cells assigned to protect reality. He thinks that when we use magic, we're injecting viral information that contradicts the way reality is supposed to work. If we use a little at a time, it doesn't notice. If we use too much too fast, it's actively harmed. That's when the white blood cells show up to correct the problem. If the virus is too harmful, the white blood cells get rid of it.

BT: That's rather interesting. What's the best understanding you've heard?

ZP: This is a good one. I talked to this Chorister with a group called the Majestic Kings in Greenland two years ago. She told me that paradox is a small child outside on a dark night, while mages are fireflies. A mage using his powers is the firefly's glow: he risks being seen by the child. If the firefly is smart, he won't light up until the child has turned his back. But if the firefly is stupid, he'll shine while the child is watching and get chased through the yard, tossed about as he tries his

hardest to escape the child's grasping hands. If he's especially stupid he'll brighten while he's directly in front of the child. That's when the child's hands smash together in a clumsy attempt to catch him and accidentally smear his glowing guts all over the place. The child doesn't mean to kill it, but in the excitement of the moment the firefly is turned to paste.

BT: That's rather illuminating.

ZP: Jesus, Bob. That joke's staler than these beer nuts.

BT: I'll concede that point. What's your theory?

ZP: It's the backlash that causes magic to go haywire. Sometimes it's punishment for hubris. Sometimes it's chaos incarnate. Sometimes it's a mage overstepping his abilities and exploding. It's a natural force that's encountered when we screw up. Now, that's all you're getting from me today. I hate stories, because I can't tell them as good as Royko.

BT: Who?

ZP: Mike Royko? Wrote an article for the Tribune every week? Died a few years ago? Funniest guy in the world?

BT: I've never heard of him.

ZP: Christ. Lou, another round. I need to educate this kid about Royko.

Non-applicable conversation follows

Tricking Paradox

Sal's (South Side pub), Chicago, 12/31/00.

Speaking: Bob Templeton (Celestial Chorus), Ziggy Pulanski (Euthanatos)

Conversation one hour, fourteen minutes in progress.

ZP: I hate that damn apple, and I hate that it has to be in New York. Why not Chicago? Why can't they drop the Cubs logo from the top of the Sears Tower?

BT: Tradition, I guess.

ZP: Tradition is stupid.

BT: You realize what you —

ZP: Shaddap, I'm eight shots into the evening. Cut me some slack.

BT: Lou, a glass of champagne and a club soda, on me.

ZP: Thanks, pal. I appreciate it.

BT: Don't mention it. Least I can do for your help.

ZP: Hey, I can do you one better. Let me give you a few dirty tricks on ducking paradox.

BT: I'm listening.

ZP: Avoiding paradox is simple: don't use magic. Quit laughing, I'm serious. That's the only true way, and it's an important distinction to make. Think of magic as the easy way out; the shortcut you can take to win the race; the cheap shot you can take when your opponent is off his guard. We use magic to enforce the way we think the world should be. When we don't like the hand reality dealt us, we reach into our sleeve for that hidden ace to settle the score. Don't ever forget that magic is cheating, and if the house catches you, you should be so happy that it's only your thumbs they cut off.

BT: What's the alternative?

ZP: Suck it up and don't take the shortcut. Do what you'd do if you were still a Sleeper and couldn't twist the situation to your liking through force of will. Rely on your own knowledge and skills to see you through the situation. Look for any reasonable alternative. Failing that, stare hard at the slightly unreasonable ones before you make any kind of decision. Find another way. There's always another way.

BT: But doesn't that seriously downplay our gift?

ZP: That's rich. You make it sound like what we do is a toy. Magic is a gun, Bob. You never want to brandish it unless it's your last possible option. You don't use it to light your cigarettes or wash your car. It's not something you use to make your life easier. It only comes out when absolutely necessary. Limiting its use minimizes the chance of paradox smacking your ass across the Tellurian.

BT: How do you ensure that you use it responsibly?

ZP: Easy. You sit down, give yourself rules and then you follow them. Your conditions specify what kind of magic you'll use and when, what you'll do if there are Sleepers around, and under what conditions you'll break the rules you set.

BT: When do you break your own rules, Ziggy?

ZP: When my lack of doing so will result in the death of somebody who's not ready for it, and I include myself in that assessment. Then there's the flipside — if it's someone's time to die and they won't, for whatever reason, I give them a mystical "push." The Wheel has to turn.

BT: Have you ever been affected by paradox?

ZP: Hell yes. Paradox hits the greedy, the desperate, and the colossally unlucky. I've been all three at one time or another. That's what got me interested in paradox: I was sick of taking it in the nuts. I spent a few years trying to work an angle on the Tellurian before I came to the conclusion that a "paradox code" is the second-best way to avoid it, but I did find all kinds of shortcuts along the way.

BT: Such as?

ZP: I'll tell on one condition, and this applies both to you and any mages you share this with: before you try

any of this, you realize that none of it is guaranteed to work. These are ways to lower your chances of paradox, not to get rid of it. This is like playing Russian Roulette with one less bullet in the gun: you can still blow your brains out if you aren't careful.

BT: Done.

ZP: Good. Now, certain kinds of Familiars are supposed to eat paradox. I don't know much about it; that frou-frou shit's just not my style, so you'll need to ask somebody who cares. What's more interesting is the link between mage and Familiar. I first clued into that when talking to a guy named Hal in rural Minnesota. (I don't know his last name, so you'll need to ask the local Verbena to put you in touch with him.) He tells me that he knows of an interesting way to duck paradox. The first step is to get a Familiar, he says. It has to be fairly powerful Familiar for this to work — you try this with a weak one and not only will the backlash tear you apart, but you'll be washing charred cat guts from your hair for months. There's an elaborate ritual you can perform that has some pretty steep requirements both for resources and time: a dried tear from an ancestor five generations past, a month of dancing naked under the night sky in winter; that kind of stuff. Hal knows the specifics. He says you end up fooling the Tellurian into thinking your Familiar is actually you, but only for a short period of time — a few hours, at most. It's only supposed to work once for any one person, but during this period you can be as vulgar as you want, even with Sleepers around, and any paradox accrued goes right to your Familiar.

BT: Wow.

ZP: That's when Hal tells me the catch. Now, you can't treat Familiars like mindless extensions of your being. Not only do they have their own limited understanding of things, they have to trust you unquestioningly to be put in this position. This ritual doesn't work unless the Familiar trusts you without question. Earning that trust can be difficult as it is. Not to knock Hal, but what he told me seems like way too much work for such a minor payoff.

BT: That does sound complicated.

ZP: It gets better. A Familiar, even a powerful one, can't hold nearly as much paradox as a mage; something to do with its lack of Avatar. If you toss too many fireballs down Main Street, the Familiar "fills up" and suffers an instant backlash. Hal said that in all recorded cases, this kills the Familiar and usually bleeds the backlash effects over to the mage. Even if this doesn't happen, the Familiar is still going to store lots of paradox, and could possibly die if you aren't careful.

BT: Wonderful.

ZP: All this talk got me thinking: if there's a way to sucker reality into thinking your Familiar is really you, then the Familiar bond has to be strong enough to fool paradox.

BT: I don't understand.

ZP: Think about it. Paradox is a personal thing — that's why it's so terrifying. The universe singles you out for a swift kick to the ass. When paradox spirits and (God forbid) paradox realms get involved, the universe is wearing steel-capped boots. But if you have your Familiar around, you might have an ally to help you through the struggle. Of course, if the Familiar can see what's happening to you, then paradox is likely aware of your Familiar. That could put it in as much risk as you. Hal had no idea if that'd work, but said it made sense on paper.

BT: Sounds like something to explore. What's next?

ZP: I've just told you a way to be vulgar in public, but that's not likely as useful to most of us as being vulgar in the comfort of your own home. One way to do this is to take advantage of a Shallowing.

BT: What's that?

ZP: The short of it is that they're Nodes or other places of power where the Umbra and our physical world collide. The Gauntlet is weaker there, enough so that even a Sleeper can use certain rituals or pathways to access it. I hear that Shallowings bypass the Avatar Storm, which is its own little bonus, but the important part is they often take a relaxed view of reality. You have to do your research so that you know what the Shallowing will put up with, but once you grasp what it's all about, you'll notice that what is vulgar elsewhere becomes coincidental within the bounds of the Shallowing. You can even pop into the Umbra, where most magic is coincidental.

BT: What's the catch?

ZP: They're either hard to find or are already controlled by somebody else, be it another Tradition, the Technocracy, a Sleeper landowner, or the National Park Service. Even then, they're difficult to maintain without a concerted effort. Plus, these things are open gateways between our world and the Umbra. You never know when something's going to come through from the other side.

BT: Sounds like a lot of work.

ZP: Exactly. That's why the most accessible way to dodge paradox is through sancta, which are places in which magic is coincidental as long as it conforms to your paradigm. Every Tradition has instructions or

guidelines on how to create them, but typically they're personal retreats where you do much of your work, meditation, or what have you. They're usually no bigger than a couple rooms, at most. For example, my sancta—

BT: Sanctum.

ZP: What?

BT: Sancta is plural of sanctum. You mean your "sanctum."

ZP: Jesus, Bob. Here I go thinking you're a decent guy and then you have to go and say something like that. I meant "sancta" because I'm talking about two of them.

BT: Oh. I, um —

ZP: Take it easy, Bob. I'm just giving you shit.

BT: Ah.

ZP: My sancta are a small workshop in a garage and a large basement with a pool table, three dartboards, a pinball machine and a mini-bar. When I need to work things out I'll go to either sanctum, because I often feel closer to the Wheel when I'm there and find my mystical dickering simply makes more sense while I'm there. Besides, I think much more clearly while I'm shooting pool or cutting wood. It's big on personal comfort, which is what sancta are supposed to be.

BT: Of course, there must be a down side.

ZP: There always is. The problem with sancta is that they're often restricted to a single location, and they can take a decent amount of work to set up. Also, they're ultimately personal — the rest of your cabal can't let fly in your sanctum the same way they could in a Shallowing, as this is ultimately your house with your rules. Getting your sancta raided isn't a pleasant experience, and in my experience it happens every so often. Whether this is poor security on my part or reality's subtle way of expressing displeasure, I doubt I'll ever know. I'll say that if you're going to be in one place for a while and can spare the expense, sancta are likely the best way to go. Hey, I wonder if you could turn a conversion van or a motor home into a sanctum. But that's likely talk for another day, because this stool is doing nothing good to my hemorrhoids. I hope that's enough for Cam.

BT: It should be. Thanks, Ziggy. You've been a great help.

ZP: Good to hear it. Now pay the tab, my good man, and let's get out of this dump.

Conversation ends

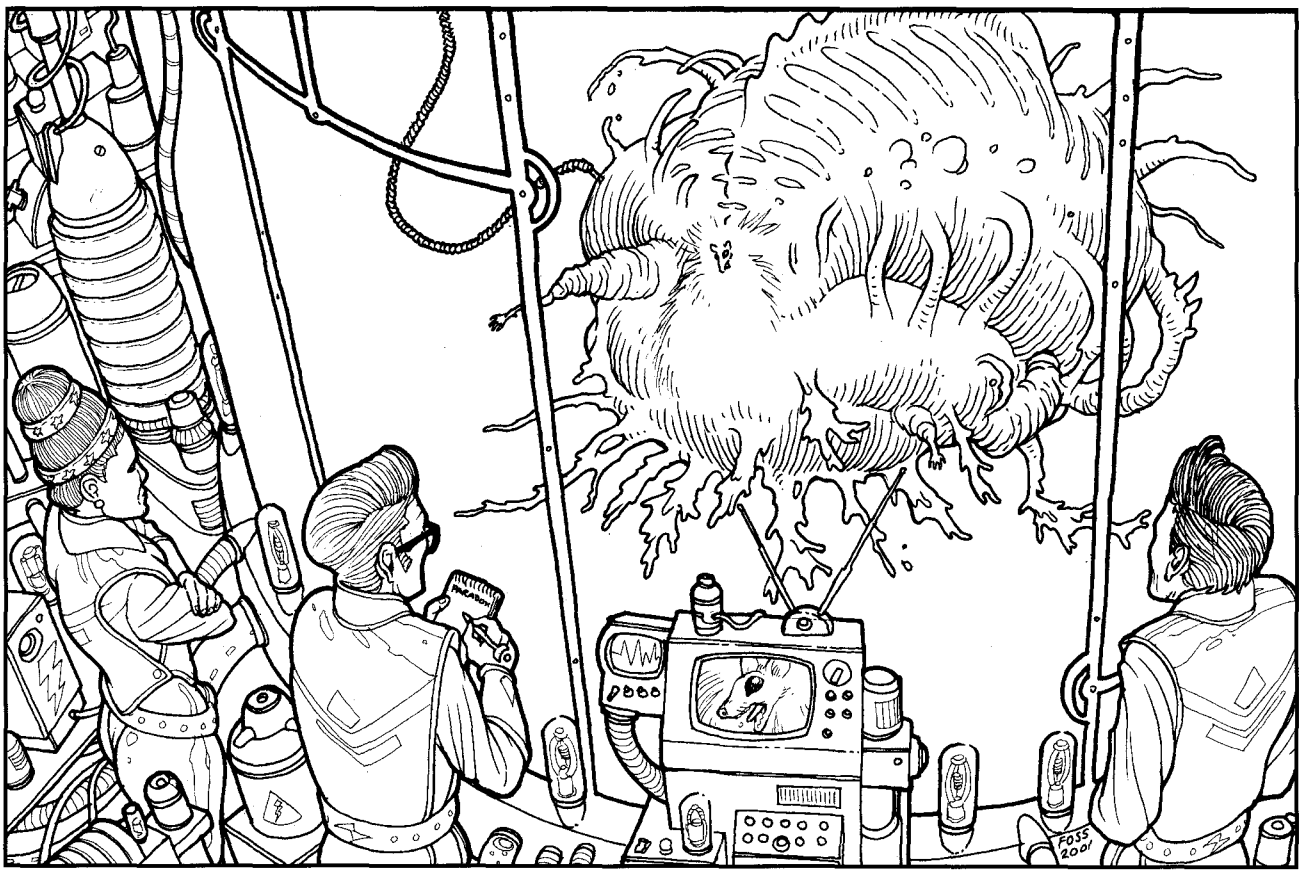
Paradox Theory

The study of Paradox itself occupies the mind of nearly every Tradition mage at some point, but Paradox Theory hit its high point by the end of the 19th century and then declined after the Reckoning. In brief, Paradox Theory tries to identify exactly what Paradox is, why, when and how it strikes, and what can be done to control or mitigate it. Before the modern era, the analytical tools to examine Paradox were limited; with the advent of the Reckoning, highly-experienced and knowledgeable mages are few and far between. This, of course, leaves a large gap for young mages to study and fill in.

While many mages believe Paradox to be a universal and constant (if fickle) force, careful examination shows that this view isn't quite true. Old records show that Paradox didn't always behave the way it does in the modern age — the Renaissance era Scourge seemed more a response from Heaven to a mage's choice of vice or virtue, and some spirits of Scourge even brought benefits with their presence. Modern Paradox has teeth; it doesn't offer any discounts and it never seems to manifest in a helpful, positive way (although the side effects of some backlashes are occasionally inadvertently useful).

Paradox theorists posit that Paradox obeys, in some measure, the Consensus. The global "standard" contributes to the tone of Paradox. Paradox responds when a mage stretches the Tapestry out of shape: When the mage's workings exceed the bounds of plausibility, Paradox results as the Tapestry warps and snaps back. Similarly, excessively powerful workings, even ones that fit into the Consensus, cause such monumental changes that the Tapestry bends in response. For this reason, even an otherwise rational and scientific working of the Technocracy, if too ambitious, may well fail and cause a backlash.

While Paradox often responds to massive changes in the Tapestry, it also results in some degree from a mage's own view of the Consensus. Many mages experience Paradox that conforms to individual standards of magic. Highly religious mages often report experiences with chastising angels or gloating demons, while technologically-oriented mages usually suffer Paradox in the form of cata-



strophic system failures and exploding high-tech machinery. This suggests that Paradox has something to do with individual beliefs... which in turn would suggest that Paradox itself is either a product of the mage, or malleable.

Ultimately, Paradox works as an interaction of multiple different factors. The mage's beliefs play a small part in shaping Paradox — a mage whose workings stem from humble origins might not garner as much personally dangerous and self-defeating Paradox, while a mage's beliefs about the Powers That Be may shape the forms of Paradox intervention (by casting spirits into certain roles or making specific traits, like stigmata or withering, especially common). Paradox also stems from the strength of the Tapestry rebounding on a mage when it's twisted in unfamiliar or tremendously different shapes. To some degree, Paradox might even manifest as a punishment from the Avatar, or from the mage's own conscience. It's the interaction of all of these factors that makes up Paradox, and that's one reason it's so dangerous to the Traditions. Tradition mages work against the Consensus, which means that one factor in the "Paradox equation" works much more ruthlessly against them than it does against the Technocracy. The other elements — personal belief and internal conflict — still hamper all mages; Technocrats, for instance, are just as likely to suffer from madness, explosions, shunting into different dimensions and other catastrophes that accompany tremendous Paradox...just in different forms (a Technocrat might fall through a wormhole, but is unlikely to be carried off by a demon, due to Paradox).

However, the way that Paradox works ultimately must bow to its utility to the game. For **Mage**, Paradox serves two important purposes: thematically, it shows the failure of hubris; mechanically, it serves as a check and counterweight to powerful magic. It's for both of these reasons that Paradox, as experienced by the Traditions, happens the way it does. To be a good thematic tool, it needs to showcase the theme element — that is, it's stronger and meaner when the mage indulges too much in powerful, world-changing activities. To work as a balance, it must become a greater risk at higher levels of magical strength, and it needs to be a threat across the board. Paradox represents, in many ways, the mage reaping the fruits of what he sows, and it's not so easy to dodge responsibility.

The mechanical repercussions of Paradox as a game tool are discussed in **Mage: The Ascension**. The thematic importance of Paradox to the Traditions in the course of the game will ultimately bow in some degree to this. If you decide, for instance, that there's a reliable, set way around Paradox, then Tradition theorists will work to uncover that method, reproduce it, improve it and spread it around — that's one reason for the widespread use of sancta and familiars; they work. If some rote commonly works on Paradox, you can bet that it'll be important enough to hide and perhaps even to kill for. For this reason, few "sure tricks" exist to get around Paradox. The Taftani know how to bend Paradox with Time so as to delay its effects briefly, and the Dreamspeaker rote nullifying Paradox with the strength of Quintessence is widely shared among the Traditions, but there's no secret backdoor that lets a mage escape the consequences of his actions.

Metaphysics, the Tapestry, and the Tellurian

The following exchange between a Virtual Adept and his young prospect serves to illustrate much of Tradition philosophies towards reality and all that pertains to it. Her response, while blunt, is quite astute. It is also devoid of the dissimulation that comes with internal politics of Tradition life, allowing her to say exactly what she thinks. Her fresh look at concepts that many Traditionalists take for granted provides the reader with remarkable insight into the perspective of a newly Awakened mage and the influences of her Avatar. Interesting as always is a glimpse at a burgeoning paradigm, and I leave the identification of such as an exercise for the reader.

—Cam Trinh

Practical Apprentice

From: "Catherine Calvert" <blackcat@dartmouth.edu>
To: "Lars Anywhere" <larcenyware@fungible.org>
Subject: Re: Pulling the curtain back
Date: Mon, 23 Oct 2000 18:37:15 -0400

Lars,

I read through the files you sent. At first, a lot of it seemed like the flaky New Age crap spouted by the girl two dorm rooms down. There's a reason I'm not majoring in philosophy – too much pot-induced wankery that ultimately comes down to nobody really knowing anything about anything. I mean, why the hell do I need to get mystical if all I want to do is code?

Then I thought back to what you showed me last week. Back to *flying* through the pipeline, circling the entirety of this country in three heartbeats, flowing through the guts of that backbone like a plate of bad tacos. I could feel it around us, this all-encompassing, boundless expanse of everything, and I had trouble focusing on anything but the awareness of that feeling.

Yeah, yeah. Too much information. Turnabout's fair play – those files were *long*. Still, I thought I'd give you the benefit and actually parse through them.

Here's the thing. I can buy this whole Tradition/Technocracy thing: how we help little old ladies cross the street, and they smash puppies for fun, yadda yadda yadda. Not that it doesn't sound like slobbering propaganda, but I'll take that as given for now. I can buy this secret war being fought for hundreds of years, in a cosmic struggle to control the minds of the general public. I've seen enough movies that I can grasp the concept with little trouble, even if it does sound like something Keanu Reeves should be starring in. After last week, I can even buy magic, or magyyck, or whatever the hell it's actually called.

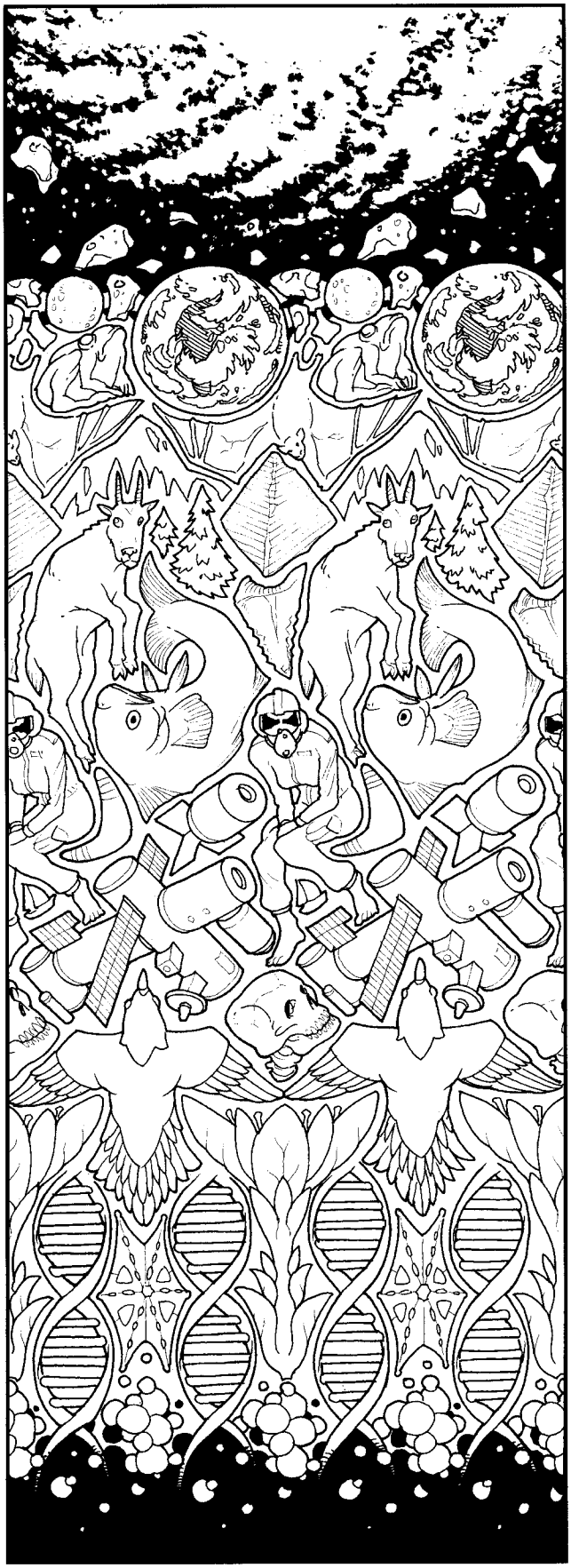
What I'm blanking on is this whole interconnected reality notion. I don't understand how all of this is supposed to fit together. You dropped a lot of definitions and terminology on me, but this stuff reads like bad documentation: incomplete, poorly related, and written with the assumption that I already know what's going on.

When you're handed shitty docs, you have to dive into a language until you figure out how it works. I spent last night poring through those files doing some documentation of my own, and I've attached my thoughts. Note that I'm basing this on everything that you sent me and then extrapolating from there. When appropriate, I'll quote from the original text.

Ten bucks and a pizza says I'm mostly right.

Cat

^-x-^



PS: Does the Tradition have some sort of daily rag with Tradition-related news items? Preferably online; I don't have much to do with paper if I can help it. I'd call it "Magedot" but I don't know how to abbreviate "Mage." (That and I'd be breaking all kinds of copyrights, even though they *are* all about open source…)

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Reality According to Cat

> Reality is the sum total of everything. >Reality is all that exists, has existed and >will exist. Reality lacks boundaries. Reality >includes that which is possible but does not >exist, for if a thing can be conceived then >it is already a thing. Reality includes the >absence of a thing, for nothing is, in and of >itself, something. By extension, reality >includes that which isn't possible.

This seems pretty self-explanatory. Reality is the basic instance from which everything derives, or perhaps the container in which everything resides. Everything is a subset of reality: you, me, this computer, the toast I had this morning, the Yankees, cancer, love, *Cryptonomicon*, Madagascar, and even the bee that stung my thumb when I was a kid.

This definition seems to remove the concept of time from the equation. Upon consideration this simplifies the definition immensely. Simply put, if something can exist (or might have once existed), then it is a part of reality. This leaves room for possibility — what might exist if the future is variable, or what will exist if it isn't. Simultaneously, all of the possibilities from times past are accounted for, as opposed to "what actually happened" being the only thing that is real. For example, it was once possible that I die in a boating accident at the age of nine. I didn't, yet that still doesn't invalidate the possibility that I could have.

The reality of something that is absent makes sense. I think you're saying that if something could exist in reality at large if it were ever conceived of, but for whatever reason isn't, then there is a "placeholder" that exists for that thing — sort of a cosmic "null set" identifier. Even if all of reality occurs without that particular thing ever existing, there's still the null state placeholder for that thing: your fire-breathing cows, cars that run on Jell-O, and so on.

Coupled with the concept of infinity, there must be an infinite number of null sets as well. In English, there's no way that reality can ever "fill up."

Regarding impossibility, I thought the whole point of what you're telling me is that *anything* is possible. If you bring the concept of impossibility into the mix, most of what you told me becomes suspect. It is possible that I will explode in a shower of confetti; it is merely unlikely. It was left in there for a reason, but how can there be a classification for impossibility? Why is the definition of the null state vital before you can say reality includes the impossible? Under what circumstances is it impossible for any one set of results occur? Beyond this, how can you *know* that something is impossible?

Wait, I get it. You can't know. Not for certain, I mean. I'm guessing that you've yet to encounter anything that's impossible. That doesn't mean it doesn't exist, for if anything is possible then there must exist the possibility of the impossible. You've defined it with the thought that you may one day encounter it.

I did mention how much I hate philosophy, right?

> The Tellurian is the Tradition's defini-
>tion for all of reality. It is our own name
>for a concept that already exists, but only
>by defining the formless and conceptual into
>a resolute thing can our kind affect it. The
>Tellurian could not exist without reality,
>yet it is our long-held goal for the Tellurian
>to supplant reality. Our Ascension will be
>complete when reality is a creation of the
>Tellurian.

Redefining reality as the Tellurian is simple recursion, but when you're playing with recursion you need to be careful with what you're doing. According to the dictionary, "Tellurian" is a Latin word for "of, relating to, or inhabiting Earth," presumably borrowed when the Traditions formed however many centuries ago. This reads like propaganda right down to the very definition itself. Which faction is it that slathers the Latin onto everything? The Hermetics? For a group of people that supposedly wants to figure out everything to do with reality, this seems a little shortsighted. Maybe the Traditions didn't lose the war with the Technocracy. Maybe they won, and this redefinition of reality as the Tellurian is what's giving you all these problems with the "Avatar Storm" and that related stuff.

I see this all the time amongst freshman programmers. First they define a function as incredibly narrow and then they try to work within their own constraints to produce the results their professor expects. Three hundred lines of code later and they've managed to do something I can do in 15. The problem is that they mistake conservatism with blinders they've fashioned for themselves and then charge towards their goal. They don't understand why they're trying to attain these results, they're convinced there's only one way to do it, and yet they end up pulling an all-nighter to produce a bloated monstrosity that completely misses the point of the assignment in the first place.

Why must the Tellurian "supplant reality?" Is anybody still aware of the reason behind the goal, rather than merely the goal itself? To me it sounds like the Traditions are trying to come out on top and this is a way for them to do it. That's all well and good, but if this will in some way turn all of reality into a tool for dominance, won't the attainment of this goal cause more problems than it solves? How is this any different from what the Technocracy has already done?

Or maybe it's your personal interpretation, rather than what every Tradition thinks? No offense, but it seems too contentious for multiple thousands of people to unquestionably agree with.

> While the Tellurian is the conception of
>reality, the Tapestry is reality given form.
>Whereas the Tellurian is infinite, mercurial,
>and macrocosmic, the Tapestry is the discrete
>metaphorical lens slipped around it to
>provide definition to the murky chaos beyond.
>Everything given form is a part of the
>Tapestry. The Tapestry is not any more "real"
>than the Tellurian; it is simply an expression
>of inherent connections between the Tellurian's
>elements. The Tapestry is not static. Ele-
>ments of the Tellurian slip into the Tapestry
>on some occasions and out upon others.

Sounds like real fabric-of-the-universe, creation myth stuff. Once again, I'm sure it made a lot of sense to use the word "Tapestry" in the 15th century. Now that we live in a world where knitting isn't the be-all and end-all of the average person's existence, I wonder how valid it still is. It must really suck for you guys to know that most of the knitting is done by machines these days.

If I'm getting this right then the Tellurian is all that is possible, whereas the Tapestry is all that actually occurs. It also sounds like the Tapestry is mostly physical, leaving abstract concepts and possibility to the Tellurian. The Tapestry is all that *is*, while the Tellurian is all that *is* and that *could be*. Creating the smaller

subset makes sense in the context of getting hierarchical on the universe's ass.

Defining the Tapestry as an inherently mutable thing was a good move. An image leapt to mind when I read that, and it may be stupid, but it feels like a good example: I went to a Sox game at Fenway this past August. The place was packed with tens of thousands of people. I hear that's normal, but I'd never encountered that many people in that small of a space. It's one thing to see multicolored pixels shifting back and forth on television, but it's quite another to see people spill out from around you in a roiling mass and loop around in the distance until you realize you're in this thick ribbon of humanity that's turned their focus on two handfuls of people.

It being a baseball game, somebody started a wave. Thousands of people started it in the center field bleachers and it went all the way around to the Monster. It started up two or three more times before enough people got sick of it and it lost cohesion. To completely trivialize what I'm sure is centuries of your terminology, all the people at Fenway were the Tellurian and the wave was the Tapestry. The wave was an identifiable element, even though the things that made it up altered as it continued along.

An obvious oversimplification but a good one, I think. Here's another one: the Tapestry is the object-oriented programming language to the Tellurian's machine language. Essentially, the Tapestry is much more easily comprehensible and recognizable to the human eye, yet is itself composed of the Tellurian. Or how about this? The Tapestry is to sweater as the Tellurian is to an endless amount of yarn, to keeping the knitting angle.

> The Tapestry's interconnections form Pat-
>terns. Patterns are the conjoining of the
>threads of reality. Each is composed of
>smaller Patterns and each in turn creates
>greater ones. Patterns bring context to the
>disparate elements of the Tapestry. They are
>not intrinsically static and can be altered by
>external or internal influences. Each Pattern
>is unique.

Finally, we're getting down to the code.

If I'm reading this correctly, Patterns are the world's functions, variables and instances. There are no true duplicates, as each Pattern has its own memory allocation, its own unique identifier. Patterns are the Lego bricks of the universe. They can be as simple as a "Hello, world!" application or as complex as the millions of lines that control the space shuttle's attitude adjustment thrusters.

A human being is a Pattern, and is composed of a liver Pattern, a heart Pattern, a brain Pattern, and even a useless appendix Pattern, amongst all other kinds of Patterns. Human Patterns form country Patterns, which are on continent Patterns, which exist within a world Pattern. There's a definite Pattern pecking order, it seems.

The more that I thinking about it, the more it seems that Patterns can be general or specific, right? I mean, the Pattern for "human being," in a general sense, comprises the entirety of humanity. However, a *specific* human being, such as myself, is a wholly separate Pattern. I suspect that the Catherine Calvert Pattern is similar to the human being Pattern, but that the human being Pattern isn't as specific as the Catherine Calvert Pattern. I wonder if there's a true link between Patterns in this sense. For instance, if I fundamentally altered the human being Pattern to say that human beings have gills, would each specific human get gills? Or would only the new humans grow gills, while the rest of us remain without them? What's to slap me down from fundamentally changing how the universe works?

Why does this thought sound like the coolest thing in the world at the same time that it scares the crap out of me?

> Certain Patterns in the Tapestry have a
>direct connection to the Tellurian itself.
>Called Avatars, they are what bring structure
>to the Tellurian. Avatars grant existence to
>that which was once only possible. Each human
>Pattern connects to an Avatar. They have only
>been encountered woven to human Patterns. The
>majority of Avatars remain dormant, in a state
>of perpetual sleep. The dormant Avatar and
>human Pattern together is a Sleeper. The
>human's philosophy affects the Avatar's
>dreams and vice versa. The totality of the
>Sleepers' thoughts and dreams form a consen-
>sual model of reality. Everything conforms to
>this model of reality. This weight of Sleeper
>abstraction and belief is known as the
>Consensus.

You're telling me that there's a Document Object Model of the universe? I guess that figures. Reality *would* be Windows-based, wouldn't it?

If humanity controls the Tellurian, what controlled the Tellurian before humanity existed? Using standard notions of forward-moving time, what was around before we were anything more than single-celled organisms flagellating to our cytoplasm's content? Were the dinosaurs once the core of the Tellurian or have humans always been on top?

This is the perfect opportunity to tell me that all of history is a lie perpetuated by the Technocracy, that dinosaur bones were seeded into the ground back in the early part of this

century, and that the world as we know it is only tens of millennia old rather than the few billions that most of science agrees upon. Whatever line you feed me, you'd better not tell me that Erich Von Daniken is one of your guys.

> Certain Sleepers, called Mages, become >aware of the Tapestry itself. This Awakening >of the Avatar peels away the layer of >consensual reality to reveal the threads for >what they are. The Avatar becomes a filter >through which the Tellurian and Tapestry are >perceived, for to comprehend the entirety of >the Tapestry is beyond the capability of any >one Pattern. This creates an envelope of >individual reality around the Awakened that >overrides the Consensus and allows for the re->purposing of the Tapestry. Subtle changes go >unnoticed by the Consensus and are woven into >the Tapestry without conflict. Blatant changes >threaten to tear the tapestry and cause >Paradox. The weight of the Consensus rushes >to mend the Tapestry, often expunging the >rogue reality from existence. This direct >erasure of the Mage's reality often causes >metaphysical and occasionally physical harm.

I dig this. Sounds like mages have super-user access to the universe. You guys sure do get a kick out of capitalization, don't you? Doing so must lend Credence to your Position amongst the Hierarchy of All Things.

Paradox seems to be a metaphysical compiler error, with knives. Big fucking knives that cut off your fingers for pushing the bounds of the system. Paradox is the Feds raiding your house for posting thousands of classified documents on your website.

That's a great analogy: Mages are reality hackers. Hackers in the true sense, not the watered-down evening news definition that anchors use because they need to explain "socially maladjusted shit-for-brains script kiddie 3l33t h@><0r fuckwit" to the elderly in a neat, tidy package with substantially less cursing. Hackers who want to learn more about the system they're in, who fiddle with things to see how they work, who want to know *what makes things go* just for the sake of knowing it. Mages work the Tellurian simply because they can. It's not like you need to use these gifts, but why turn? Paradox makes sure you do everything within the rules. If you do whatever you want without discretion, it's on you like a drunken fratboy who won't let go until he gets what he wants. You need to be quiet and leave no trace and work within the system, even if it's not the quickest way.

Discretion is the key, right? That's the whole point of magic, right? Don't stand out or you'll get squashed like a bug.

> Many theories exist as to the creation of >the Tellurian. Though each Tradition typi->cally teaches a different origin story, I've >found that every mage has a theory. Talking to >any Tradition mage can get you that group's >"party line," so you should do that when you >have the chance. I've included three rather >atypical theories to show how far from the norm >these things can get. After each excerpt I've >provided a glimpse at the background of the >author.

Metaphysical Hierarchy

> You ask what the Tellurian is, Madame? I >maintain it is our chance to assemble a god >in our own image. Ask a Sleeper where he comes >from and you will receive thousands of >variations to the same response: that he was >created by something more powerful than >himself. The specifics of creation vary >amongst them, but the Sleepers near-univer->sally believe that a deity, a spirit, or their >environment itself spawned them – usually for >some higher purpose they are unable to grasp >until after their deaths – be it God, Gaia, >Yahweh, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, or "mom and >dad," *in the case of atheists*.

> I submit that the Sleepers – and those of >us who were once Sleepers ourselves, with >Sleeper religions and Sleeper philosophies – >have confused the true order of the Tellurian. >Creation comes not from a greater being but >from lesser ones: the "celestial hierarchy" >runs in the opposite direction. The most >miniscule of particles form the next level of >complexity, which then form the next…from the >least complex to the most. This formation of >*increased complexity typically originates* >with the infinite and evolves to the finite, >working its way down to a handful that create >the next order of magnitude. From natural >evolution to Sleeper innovation, this process >of advancement has followed suit since the >beginning of time: From the Sleepers came the >Awakened.

> Set aside for a moment the notion that the >atom and related theories conform to the >Technocratic ideal. This postulate must not >be discounted entirely for this reason. It is >foolish to categorically reject everything >that the Union believes, much as we cannot >blindly support everything the Traditions >follow. Within our own dogma we imagine a >"Tapestry" composed of "threads of the >Tellurian." Patterns occur only when *the >appropriate threads intersect one another*. >The most complex Patterns are formed of lesser >Patterns, and these form their own with the >onslaught of time.

> Though both the Iterators and, to some >extent, the Progenitors are focusing on a >similar goal, an examination of your own >Celestial Chorus' philosophy shows a certain >similarity: while you no doubt have faith in >the existence of the One, many of your members >spend their time looking for this godlike >being. Some might call it a reassurance of >faith, yet faith by definition needs no >guarantee. Is your faith a "celestial blue->print" for the formation of the One? Were the >Consensus to share this belief and the One to >spring forth from the æther, would this >confirm your faith or shatter it? Is the >creation of your own god invalidated because >the Technocracy tries to create theirs? Or >does it merely underscore the need to build >your own god ever faster?

> —Rev. Gordon Masterson

> Response to Mme. Béatrice Trudeau

> 52nd Tellurian Concord

> *Masterson was a Catholic priest from >Pittsburgh who Awakened in the late 1970s. His >personal philosophies jarred heavily with >those of the Celestial Choristers who ini->tially tried to recruit him, and he eventually >found a home with the Sons of Ether.*

Closed System

> The Tellurian was never created. The >Tellurian simply is. Time is a ribbon, not a >race. There was no beginning so there will be >no end.

> Our true beginning was when the Tellurian >dreamed us into existence. We will remain of >passing interest until the Tellurian dreams >us out again.

> —Chen Leng

> From conversation with an apprentice, May 1996

> Translated by Kaley Hutchence

> *Chen was an Akashic brother who spent much >of three decades observing and contemplating >the perspectives of the Euthanatos to prepare >for a possible conflict between these Tradi->tions. Thankfully his accumulated knowledge >was only ever necessary for academic pur->poses, though his focus of study quite >obviously tinged his viewpoint.*

> *Chen died of age-related illnesses in early >1997. As to which Tradition's views he most >ascribed, we shall likely never know.*

Borne of Spirit

> Grandmother gnawed the world from the bones >of a dying star. She worried at them until they >took a form that pleased her, suckling sweet >marrow amongst bitter tendons and oily >gristle, nibbling insistently, working the >fading skeleton into a shape that pleased her.

> "Grandmother," pleaded the star, "why do >you cause me such pain? Your teeth are a fire >I knew not in life. I do not desire their >accompaniment unto the long sleep of death."

> Grandmother cocked her head to one side, >her ears perked. "You are dying," she said. >"I do not wish your body to go to waste."

> "But Grandmother," moaned the star, "can >you not wait until after I expire?"

> Grandmother's snort was indignant. "Once >you fade I shall have no light by which to see. >Would you have me work in darkness?"

> The star groaned but fell silent. >Grandmother's nips continued. Her unyielding >teeth rent cartilage and slivers of bone that >collected before her. Pain faded, too slowly, >to a dull sense of pressure.

> The star grew tired and lonely. "What will >become of my body," it asked, "after I'm gone?"

> Grandmother touched her cold nose to its >skull. "It will be a home," she said. "It will >be a wonderful home."

> "For you, Grandmother?" asked the star, >incredulous. "Will you live in me?"

> Grandmother's laughter filled the star >with shame and warmth. "No child," she said, >"but your cooled corpse will house as many >creatures as there are stars themselves. They >will walk on your bones and swim in your blood. >They will survive on your tears that fall upon >them. They will build vast, implicate empires >and feed upon each other to thrive."

> "How terrifying," whispered the star. "I >wish I could see what I look like, now."

> Grandmother plucked out the star's eye and >placed it on her shoulder. The star saw itself >and was overcome by beauty.

> "How sad," it wept, "that I will never see >the wonder of what you speak. Look at how dim >I grow!"

> Grandmother whuffled softly. "I will make >these creatures from the bone shavings and >gristle before me. They will remain a part of >you, and you a part of them. They will never >know that they came from you."

> "How sad," murmured the star.

> "Do you want to know true sadness?" asked >Grandmother, her eyes burning brighter than >the star. "Do you want to know what I will do >with your mind?"

> "What?" gasped the star.

> "I will curse your mind with sleep, and then >shatter it to pieces. I will tie these pieces >to one manner of creature. Your sleeping mind >will dream, but small pieces of it will wake. >Each of these pieces will struggle to remember >what you once were. Each of these pieces will >come ever closer to understanding. But the

>creatures to which they are tied will live >short lives and die long before this happens. >The pieces will fall asleep once more and >forget everything they know. They will then >tie themselves to new creatures with short >lives and begin the cycle anew. Yet they will >never truly know."

> "That is true sadness," lamented the star. >And then it slept.

> The star still sleeps.

> —Sigmund Forsythe

> Campfire tale shared with Sleeper children >and their parents

> Yellowstone National Park, August 2000

> *Forsythe was a medical student on holiday >in Australia when his contact with elements >of Aboriginal culture seems to have provoked >his Awakening. This is not to suggest that >Aboriginals are the key to the Awakening, >merely that his encounter with ideas and >ideals foreign yet appealing served as a >trigger. Whatever the true cause, Forsythe >opted to join the ranks of the Dreamspeakers >rather than complete his studies. He can be >found wandering the world: sleeping in the bed >of his pickup truck, working when he needs >money, and sharing stories that Sleepers find >imaginative and that his fellow Dreamspeakers >find insightful.*

Lars, that stuff was mind-numbingly fascinating, but they've got it all wrong. Here's my take on it:

```
#define reality

#include <perception>
#include <person>
#include <universe>

class reality {
    public:
    reality::reality (person you, perception
p, universe cosmos) {
        setUniverse(cosmos);
        setPerson(you);
    }
    reality::getReality() {
        worldview = you.getPerception();
        reality = worldview + cosmos;
        reality.alter = checkFeasible(reality);
        if (reality.alter) {
                return personal_reality;
        }
        else {
                return consensual_reality;
                Paradox();
        }
    }

private:
    person you;
    }

for person in universe.getPeople() {
        reality = new reality(person, uni-
verse);
    }
```

Hey, you knew I was a smartass going into this. ^-x-^

Reality: Assumptions and Conclusions

The understanding of the Tellurian, Tapestry and fabric of reality varies from mage to mage, naturally. Some mages have very little knowledge of the overall picture (little Cosmology Knowledge). Those mages who do study reality systems intensively often come to wildly differing conclusions. Since years of experience with Paradox, Sphere magic and the gradual change of belief systems have given the Traditions at least a little understanding, most neophyte mages hear a few terms from their tutors — enough knowledge to be dangerous, to paraphrase a saying.

Most Tradition mages accept that the reality of the world stems from the Consensus — the combined will of all thinking, sapient beings. The Consensus works like an outside observer that determines what's acceptable in reality and what's not. In turn, the Consensus directs the shape of the Tapestry out of the Tellurian. So it is that when a mage works magic, he's rebuilding the Tapestry; works that fit the Consensus picture of the Tapestry are coincidence, while those that violate the rule of the Consensus are not.

However, mages rarely agree on what constitutes the Consensus, or why certain feats are vulgar or coincidental at different times and places. Most mages agree that the Consensus seems to flex a bit in specific locales. Some places might have a sort of mini-Consensus, where the Tapestry shows a different picture of reality and thus finds specific acts more acceptable: A mage might get away with more spectacular feats involving charms and sigils in a remote, superstitious village, or find better use of Awakened martial skills in an area influenced by mythic Asiatic mores. However, areas that vary wildly from the general Consensus tear away from the Tapestry as a

whole. In such places, Shallowings tend to occur; the dynamic magical paradigm opens a tear that leaks part of the Umbra into the physical world, making magic easier there — or, as Tradition historians might point out, the Shallowing returns an area of the world to the dynamic, open state from before the creation of the Gauntlet. By the same token, arcane scholars don't always agree upon the nature of the minds that form the Consensus. Some mages believe that only humans affect the Consensus. Other mages include all supernatural entities that have a tie to humanity, and a few argue that even animals have a weight on the Consensus, though perhaps their threshold of effect is lesser because of their lower degree of self- and cosmic awareness.

Tradition mages often recognize that they change reality through will, but the degree to which they do so is also a subject of debate. Non-Awakened magicians don't seem to disrupt the Tapestry too keenly, so their magic rarely suffers the backlash of Paradox. Awakened mages have more flexibility but suffer the consequences of their own rashness. In Tradition terms, simple magics (coincidental and static) slide easily into the existing Tapestry, while outré effects violate the Consensus. When a sapient observer (a disbelieving Sleeper) isn't present to reinforce the Consensus, effects tend to slide in a little more easily, which is why linear magicians can work reality-bending effects in private and Awakened mages suffer less Paradox in such situations.

This does mean that Tradition mages do talk about the Consensus of reality, about bending the Tapestry and even (occasionally) about "willworking." However, Tradition mages also tend to agree that such feats function because the tools that they have passed down for generations rely on mythic threads that have historical inertia in the Consensus. It's for this reason that mages fight to make their tools and paradigms accepted: With enough time, even the historical inertia of the Traditions' foci might be written out of the Consensus. The average mage believes that this would mean the death of magic. In truth, magic stems more from will than from any mundane tool, but most Tradition mages don't recognize that until they become highly enlightened. Even those mages who begin to realize the ability to discard their foci often don't make the connection of magic with pure will; magic remains easier with the foci, so *obviously* they play some part in the working (of course, the part they play is in strengthening the mage's will with belief).

So it is that mages can discuss willworking, the Consensus, Paradox, Spheres and the Tapestry, and yet still have fundamental misunderstandings of the underpinnings of magic.

Tradition Tools

I would be remiss were I not to thank Safia Phiri for this excerpt from her forthcoming paper on the conceptualization of artifacts and tools. Safia is a professor of anthropology at American University recognized amongst her peers for her outstanding work in the field. She is also known for her inception of a school of thought known as "polycultural reconceptualist indivism" amongst her Dreamspeaker peers, causing much controversy even amongst the Baruti sect to which she belongs. Much of her time is spent lecturing, writing papers and unraveling the mysteries of other cultures, but she does manage to spare her limited free time for matters Traditional in nature. Her analysis of the basic tools we use provides an insight as to why they work the way they do. She graciously allowed the inclusion of her section on foci and ritual in this collection. If you enjoy this piece, look for her forthcoming paper, "An Examination of Modern Mysticism," to be published in late 2001 by Baruti Press.

—Cam Trinh

An Analysis of the Importance of Foci and Ritual

All Tradition mages rely on varying foci and rituals. The type and degree is nearly staggering: tools of personal importance; rituals handed down through a Tradition; items given power in folklore; concepts that have gained so much mistaken authority that they garner validity. Nevertheless, all tools and rituals — collectively, foci — share common roots. They are tools of empowerment.

An individual who wants to smoke a cigarette relies on his cigarette lighter. He flicks the lighter and produces a flame. Without the lighter, he might use a match or a hot piece of metal. Shorn of these tools, the man may have to go to great lengths to produce fire. He does not simply cause fire to spring from nothing; he

must seek it out or use a tool that produces it through its action. At the same time, the tool itself does not create fire without the intervention of the man. It is the man's knowledge of the proper use of the tool, combined with the decision to make it work — the exercise of will — that brings the fire into being.

So it is with the foci found throughout the Traditions. While diverse, these foci all share a common origin. They are the tools that empower the mage. With the knowledge of how to use the tool (taught by the Tradition) and the will to make it function (through the command of magic), the mage causes a focus to actualize a desire — or, in simple terms, the mage uses the focus to make something happen.

Most foci are specific expressions of a more general concept. It's for this reason that many Traditions rely on a bewildering array of foci. A given focus may be of use for specific applications, but it serves a general purpose to which it may be applied. Conversely, a related focus might work in similar circumstances, but it is always the focus with the closest relation to the goal that forms the best circumstances.

The man with the cigarette lighter has a tool designed to create fire. Used properly, it creates fire reliably and consistently. However, it is also, in a broader sense, a tool to do all the things associated with the action of creating fire. It creates, although it generally only creates fire. It gives off light, although not as effectively as a flashlight. It can be put to the use of other "small physical tools" that are like it: It can function as a small mallet, a wedge or a clumsy lever. It is not as effective in any of these roles as a tool dedicated to that purpose, though, nor would any such tool be as effective in the creation of fire.

The tool thus exists both as a specific implement and as a piece of a greater concept. A magic word is a specific application of the greater concept of language, which in turn is a specific application of communication.

When a mage relies on a tool, then, it is both as a concept and an object. The concept of the cigarette lighter as an object that creates fire is just as important as the function. Without the conception of the object, it is simply an inert lump of materials that serves no purpose to the user. Consider for a moment the man presented with an oval piece of transparent, flexible material with a small metal patch on it. Flexing the patch causes the material to heat and allows the metal patch to focus heat that will light a cigarette, but bereft of the notion of the item as a cigarette lighter, the man might never use it as such.

More important to note is that conceptualization takes precedence over actuality. The Consensus incorporates both truth and widespread misinterpretation. This allows otherwise invalid tools to gain widespread use as items of mystical power. The belief of who killed Kennedy means that the Single Bullet takes on mystical importance, even if that's not what actually happened. Theory, speculation and urban legend become as valid as tested esoteric wisdom. This forms the basis of tradition: The unusual or arcane passes into common use, even if not understood, while the common theory gains power because it is the easy conclusion to which the average thinker arrives. Both have strength through their repetition in the minds of everyman.

This begs the question of objective truth within the context of the mystical implement — that is, the idea of "absolute truth" and "the truth that is believed." A focus might function on the basis of gravity — an apparent absolute truth — or on the basis that spiritual energy favors the metal silver, a truth that is believed. An absolute truth is naturally the most elusive of the two: With the Consensus forming the Tapestry, and the Consensus itself subject to change, it would seem impossible for a truth to remain absolute. Yet at the same time some elements of reality are, as far as can be discerned, constant without the intervention of the Consensus: Only humans have Avatars; only human thought can guide magic; only with the intervention of the flow of the Prime can any thought be given true substance and form.

In her essay "Consensual Outlook: Sleeper Perception and the Awakened World," Lila Takashi posits the theory that truth itself is a concept vital to the outlook of the Consensus, and that metaphysical "allowances" are often made to allow multiple definitions of truth. Takashi defines two concepts that she labels **consensual** and **actual** truth.

Consensual truth is that which the Consensus perceives to be absolute truth for one or more concepts. As each Sleeper has a unique perception and outlook of reality, consensual truth is rarely, if ever, cohesive. There are often multiple consensual truths for any one concept, though only the greatest ones often have any true power. For example, most people erroneously believe that Einstein's theory of relativity prohibited any object from moving at the speed of light. Those more knowledgeable about general and special relativity recognize it as an application of the exchange of time and gravity, with an accelerating object essentially traveling through space-time in a fashion that causes it to be perceived as moving at an altered time frame and with a different mass. The consensual truth varies from Sleeper to Sleeper — or, as relativity would put it, each observer has a different viewpoint of the object. Much of reality *seems* to comply with the complex notion of relativity, but for general purposes the misunderstood notion may be reasonably accurate. It is rare for consensual truth to match up with actual truth. Actual truths tend to be so sublime or complex that the average Sleeper does not have enough familiarity with their concepts or possess the insight to overcome the built-in inertia of assumptions.

Actual truth is the ultimate, universal, objective truth for a concept. This can be decidedly difficult to actualize. What might at first seem an actual truth can, through a different lens, be seen as a subjective truth. For example, most mages accept as actual truth the belief that only with Quintessence can a Pattern achieve real, physical form. However, the very existence of Quintessence predicates upon the notion of the Spheres codified by the Council a mere five hundred years ago. Before that time, mages worked creation and destruction without the intervention of any universal "Prime Sphere." Quite possibly, Quintessence itself was not directly involved — but it is possible that it was, even unnamed, an important element; simply because something is undiscovered does not mean that it cannot be true. Thus the use of Quintessence in formation of creation may be an actual truth, but it is difficult to prove as such.

Building on Takashi's theories, a focus acts as a conduit for a concept. As such, it's most powerful if it draws upon both absolute and consensual truths. A focus that relies only on absolute truths taps into some principle of the cosmos that remains constant, but still works against the belief of the Consensus. It functions in spite of human thought. A focus that relies on consensual truth may function on an erroneous concept or one that is only transitory, but still with the support of the Tapestry. A focus that manages to align both ties into a truth that is not only universal, but which is also realized by humanity — an essential truth. It is these essential truths that represent the alignment of human experience with the universal existence, and thus hold the greatest power.

The Spheres

The dirty little war between the Traditions and Technocracy produced entirely too many casualties. One of the many to die was Mikhail Kamov, a Son of Ether hailing from Chechnya. His inventions were social theories; his greatest tool was the written word. He stressed the importance of amicable contact between each Tradition and spoke of attempting to open diplomatic relations with the Technocracy. Though our more vocal members rejected these ideas, he never wavered in his convictions.

I was fortunate to meet Mikhail in the summer of 1996. We spent much of a week sailing on Lake Michigan and discussing the intricacies of social context, magical theory and saltwater fishing. Though witness to a world filled with pain and suffering, he remained optimistic that humanity would one day transcend these ills. He was a kind man with a gentle heart and often spoke of his hope for a peaceful future.

His mutilated body was found in the basement of his Brooklyn home on October 14, 1996. All of his writings on mystical matters were stolen or burned, save for a few old notes. What follows is the draft of a treatise about the Spheres and our understanding of them. I include it as both a unique grasp of the Spheres and a tribute to his memory.

—Cam Trinh

It was the Tradition Council that first formalized the Spheres of magic that we use today. Some mages mistake the Spheres for universal understanding of magic, or explain loudly that the Spheres delineate all possible magic and thus represent true reality. Like any other model proposed by man, the Spheres are merely an abstraction. They are a means to explain "magic" in theories and terms that cross the boundaries of practice and Tradition. In a sense, they are the compromise of ideas in an agglomeration that allows us to speak plainly about matters of magic. Like any compromise, they are also very general and subject to misinterpretation.

The Cosmic Cycle

Mind to Matter to Entropy to Mind once more — this is the cosmic cycle we study. The mind gives rise to thoughts and patterns that, energized with Quintessence, become real structures of matter or force. Over the passage of space and time these disintegrate and change until they are recycled for use in making something new that arises once more from the mind.

And yet, we believe in certain constants of history and of the Tellurian, do we not? We recognize the "truth" that all things spring from the mind. Why is the mind a constant, outside of this progress? What makes it an exception? Masters of Entropy tell us that even thought is subject to change. Perhaps the mind is not always the source, but sometimes the ending. Some things may finish as little more than ideas — memories, if you will, fleeting ghosts of half-remembered feelings.

Entropy works change upon all things, so we would be foolish to assume that the cycle itself is immune. If there is a rule, there may — must — be exceptions! What of the world before human thought? Did the world exist before humanity? Most would agree that it did. But then matter was created without the intervention of the mind! Again, the cycle does not hold.

The assignment of Spheres to the cycle is a convenience, nothing more. We make generalities, but it is foolish to expect the universe to cleave constantly to them!

A Tenth Sphere?

We have argued often over the idea of a "Tenth Sphere." The very seats of the Spheres at Concordia held sigils of the nine Spheres, with a new and unique sigil appearing mystically on the tenth seat. What brings this about? A real tenth Sphere? Or our own need to believe in one?

If there is a "Tenth Sphere," it must perforce be all of the missing elements that have fallen through the cracks in our theories. It is the sum that is greater than the parts. It is the unification of all our other Spheres, with their modeled flaws and exceptions.

Every Tradition has its own vision of the Tenth Sphere, I am told. What utter rot! The Traditions made up the Spheres. Yes, made as models of a greater reality, perhaps, but even so — to then claim a Tenth Sphere is somehow a greater truth of that model? Flawed reasoning! The Spheres were artifacts of the nine Traditions. A Tenth Sphere would be an artifact of those Traditions as well, simply recognizing a truth not told in the other nine Spheres. This is nothing that generates out of a mystical imperative of the universe. If the universe has mystical imperatives, it keeps them regardless of the beliefs and boundaries of our Traditions.

Paradigm

At the time of this book's writing, **Mage** has been around for nearly eight years. It has received three editions and more than thirty products. It sees publication worldwide in dozens of languages. Yet for all these years, editions and supplements, people still have a hard time wrapping their minds around paradigm. This concept has the dubious honor of being considered one of the most abstract elements of Mage. In some cases, it has the unfortunate stigma of being considered something that either the average player "gets," or "doesn't get," and those who don't grasp it fully "shouldn't be playing the game." Even after reading this book, some people may still feel that way. It's a tough perception to shake; paradigms are pretty deep, so naturally they can be daunting.

It's a shame that this perception exists. Within the basis of **Mage**'s setting, clashing ideals and character misinterpretation makes for good stories. However, a question of clarity amongst the players themselves produces frustrating sessions. The importance of player understanding, particularly in a game that deals with such high concepts as the fundamental composition of reality itself, is quite obviously of great importance. We hope to clear up this confusion so that you can use paradigm without wondering whether you're one of the folks who are "using it right."

Revisiting Paradigm

The real world definition of paradigm is "an example that serves as a pattern or a model." In practice, it is an ideal which a person or group aspires to embody — the most preferable method of operation. Within recent years, many companies have adopted "paradigm" to refer to the way that their business is currently operating. To these organizations, paradigm is seen as a way to meet goals and maintain a company's perceived self-image: a way to succeed by exemplifying an ideal. Taken in this context, paradigm is what one considers the best way to go about doing something.

The supernatural flavor of **Mage** adds a level of complication to this, but at its core is identical to the real world explanation. The only aspect that changes is the narrowing of focus in definition. A mage's paradigm is what she considers the best way to utilize her mystical powers. It is her way to achieve enlightenment by exemplifying a spiritual ideal. It is her metaphysical model for how, why, and when she uses her magic.

Whether you call it a "mystical agenda," a "metaphysical framework" or a "spiritual archetype," a mage's paradigm usually consists of a few key fundamentals:

- The mage's belief in her own magic and why it works
- The mage's thoughts on how all of reality is put together
- The mage's theory of how her magic is able to interact with reality

It is rare to find a mage with a paradigm as straightforward as this, but these three elements are central to every mage. These key ideas aren't always obvious, but even mages who haven't formally given voice to these thoughts have come to an internal conclusion on a subconscious level.

Paradigm and Belief

Belief is not the same as paradigm. While paradigm is the "mystical map" to which a mage will refer, belief is the fuel for her journey to enlightenment. Paradigm is merely the litmus. It is the cord that connects the mage's innermost beliefs to the all-encompassing truth of the Tellurian. It allows a mage to "test the waters" before using her magic. It lets her know whether or not her effect will be coincidental or vulgar. Without this crucial understanding of the Tellurian, the mage will soon gain a much greater understanding of paradox than she would like.

Paradigm's role is incredibly important, for personal belief and universal truth rarely intersect. For some mages, the desire to consolidate these two con-

No, Really!

Paradigm is not supposed to fill your **Mage** game with esoterica worthy of a graduate philosophy professor. It certainly can, if that's what you're looking for in your chronicle, but fundamentally it's intended as a game element that helps you gain greater understanding of your character. There isn't a "game effect" to having a paradigm beyond knowing how your character views magic, the Tellurian and everything else. If it helps you enjoy the game, then it's working.

For all its high concepts and funky words, **Mage** is a just a game and paradigm is just a roleplaying tool. The most important part of the game is to have fun, and if paradigm isn't fun, then junk it! It's that simple.

cepts into one is their drive to reach enlightenment. For others, the distinction is never made clear. Without care, these mages can approach the Quiet. After all, believing that the sun will explode sometime during the first day of the New Year doesn't mean that the sun will actually explode. Contrary to what is espoused by popular media, belief in yourself will only get you so far before reality takes pains to expose your misconceptions in the most brutal of possible ways. The mage shakes her tiny fist at the heavens, reality notices, and then it crushes her like a bug.

To emphasize this point, consider the popularly believed myth that human beings only use 10 percent of their brains. This misconception dates back to the 1920s when scientists assumed that the larger neurons they were able to study were the only cells involved in processing information. They thought that the numerous, much smaller neurons were undeveloped "baby neurons" that weren't yet used in cerebral activity. This belief became popular, presumably because people wanted to believe it. Even after neurologists gained a greater understanding of these cells, the belief perpetuated.

Regardless of this belief, if a person loses 90 percent of the brain, said individual will not behave as she did before. She will most likely die. Consider also a neurosurgeon who thinks that 90 percent of the brain is unimportant. As much as he *believes* this, the reality is that he will never be allowed to legally perform surgery, for he will never make it though medical school. In this instance, reality and belief simply don't coincide. This delicate balance is stabilized by paradigm, for belief alone simply can't reconcile with the cold details of the cosmos.

Paradigm and the Traditions

Traditionalists rarely get into conversations in which they blatantly say "it is my paradigm to think X, Y and Z about magic." To the mages themselves, the concept of paradigm isn't always an obvious one — they simply know what they believe, and why they think it works. They might not even recognize the term "paradigm" itself, depending on their background, although they would still have a theory as to why their magic works. Discussions revolve around the minor points of differing metaphysical beliefs, and can grow quite heated — nobody enjoys being told that they're fundamentally wrong, particularly when they *know* they're right. These types of discussions tend to be the metaphysical equivalents of real world arguments involving abortion, religion, gun control or race relations.

Nonetheless, a rather informal terminology for paradigm exists amongst Traditionalists, somewhat akin to the way the cross-Tradition concept of the Spheres. Individual mages are said to have a "surface," "shallow," "strong," or "deep" paradigm by their peers. These expressions exist as conventional wisdom, rather than anything codified and standardized over the course of several decades. A discussion of each type follows:

Surface

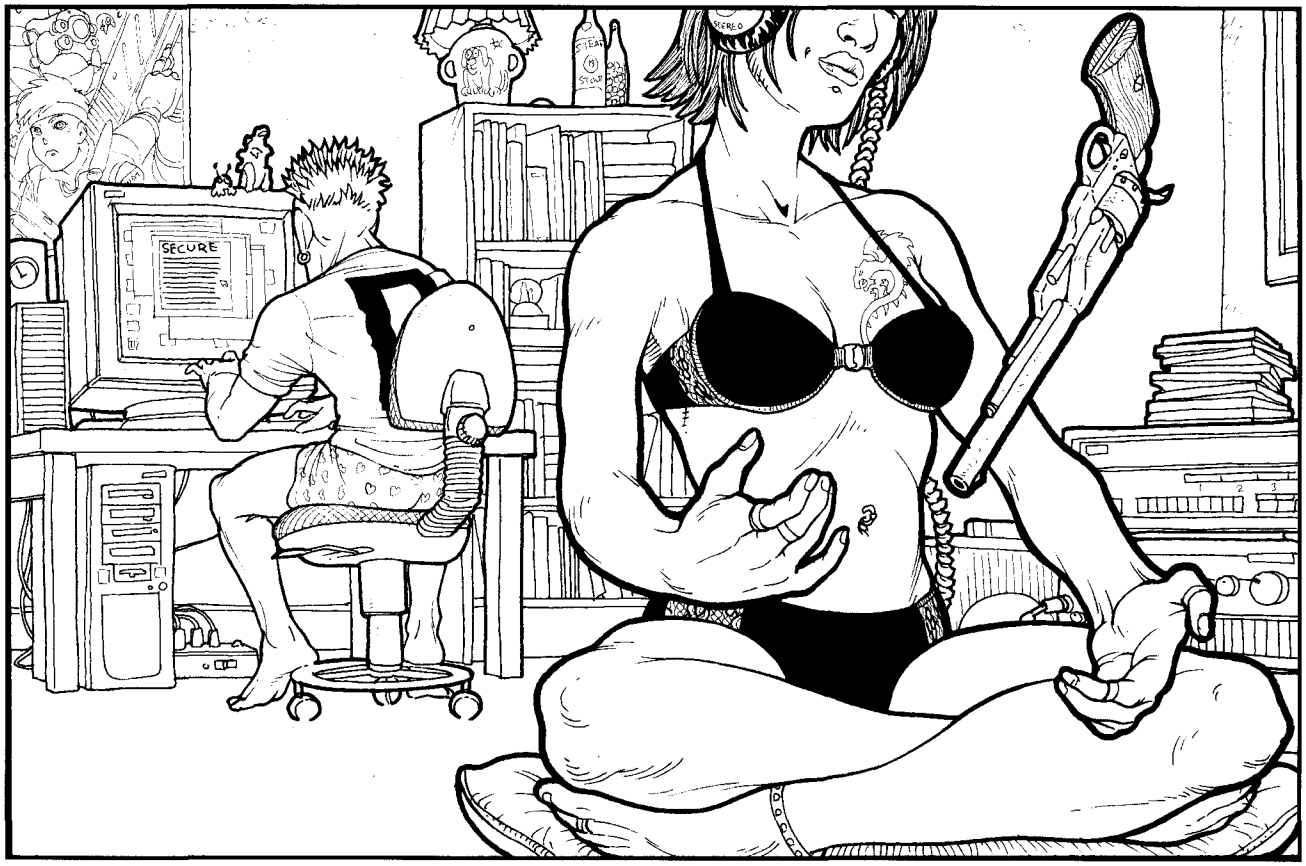
Paradigm is directly connected to the elements of the universe, and at this stage of paradigm development, this is all the more evident. With a surface paradigm, magic tends to be seen as little more than a tool to be used through application of the Spheres. There is little complication or secret to a mage's outlook — what you see is often what you get. This type of paradigm is most often found amongst newly Awakened mages and others without a developed understanding of mystical matters. It is also a common viewpoint for willworkers with a very black-and-white view of the world, those who have lost their conviction of universal purpose and mages with what some would call a naïvely optimistic view of the world. Elder Traditionalists often say that mages who use magic in such a way "haven't scratched the surface of enlightenment," which is the origin of the term.

Shallow

Some mages just haven't had a chance to put much thought into why they know what they know, or haven't bothered. These mages rely on certain tools and practices and might be able to give a pat explanation of them, but true depth of thought hasn't been put behind it yet. The mage is much like a beginning student of some science: Able to work a few equations, skilled in a couple manipulations, perhaps able to recite some laws, but still baffled by the proofs behind them or the deeper importance of the theories. The mage knows what he knows, but can't always explain why.

Strong

Most Tradition mages have a fair amount of metaphysical experience under their belt and a firm comprehension of the Awakened world's disparate elements. They are said to have a "strong paradigm" because they have spent at least some amount of time testing theories, pushing limits and finding their own limitations. Age and experience aren't necessarily required: a newly Awakened mage may have a strong insight into his connection with the Tellurian, though this is a very rare occurrence.



Deep

At its most complex, paradigm is synonymous with the character itself. A highly developed paradigm is so intertwined with a character's perceptions that belief and reality begin to merge. Those few mages who have such a "deep connection to the universe" are few and far between, but are often spoken of in tones tinged with not the least amount of awe and jealousy. The tradeoff is that the deep connection works both ways. By so strongly identifying with their paradigm, it becomes possible to predict how such a character will react to any given situation.

Constructing Paradigm

Building a complete world-view for a fictional character can be a daunting task. In most other games you can fake it and figure out your character as the chronicle progresses, yet **Mage** requires you to figure out this elaborate stance on magic before you can even play the game. So what gives? It's great that paradigm is such an important part of the character, but how the heck do you *make* one?

By following a few quick steps, you'll have a functional paradigm in about five minutes. However, it's important to note that building a paradigm is not exactly like creating a character. As paradigm is your character's outlook on how magic interacts with the surrounding world, there simply isn't a way to add dots together and come up with a straightforward result. There are no direct game effects to having a developed paradigm beyond a greater understanding of your character.

As with any rule or game element, you should only use what you feel comfortable with. If the word "paradigm" makes you think of a pretentious nitwit arguing with the Storyteller that of *course* it's within his character's paradigm to turn the vampire NPC into lawn furniture, then paradigm is the last thing you want to think about when playing **Mage**. If you're a Storyteller who's desperate to elevate your **Mage** game from a bunch of walking Sphere-cannons, adding paradigm might get rid of all that hack-and-conjure and give you a glimpse of that elusive "roleplaying" thing you've heard so much about. Use what works for your game, your players, and yourself.

Sphere Association

The first step is to choose the Sphere that focuses most prominently in your mage's perceptions and magic use. Traditions often have Spheres associated with

them, after all. It should come as no surprise that this occurs with individual mages as well.

There are many ways to choose the appropriate Sphere. This is typically, but not always, the highest Sphere selected during character creation. Perhaps it's the specialty Sphere linked with the mage's Tradition. It could be the Sphere that the mage ends up using most. It might even be the Sphere that you, as a player, think sounds the coolest!

In almost all cases, the mage must have at least one dot in the Sphere to associate with it. This isn't set in stone, as it could be interesting to base a paradigm around a Sphere that you don't actually have — however, your Storyteller shouldn't feel obligated to allow such a case unless she is satisfied with your reasoning.

Example: *Rey is a new Mage player. After glancing through the Traditions, he creates a Virtual Adept who goes by the name "Flashmaster" until Rey can think of something better. Nick, the Storyteller, encourages Rey to think about Flashmaster's paradigm and how he'll use magic in play. Rey's first step is to figure out which Sphere factors most heavily into his magic use.*

Although Rey thinks that Correspondence is appealing, Spirit is the Sphere that most interests him — it's also his highest, at 3 dots. He reads through the description and decides that he wants to make Flashmaster a Virtual Adept who focuses mostly on conversing with spirits. He informs Nick of his decision and reads up on the Spirit Sphere, considering ways that he could use it in play.

Now that you've chosen an association, what does that mean, exactly? How can you use it in play?

The easiest way to do so is to incorporate this Sphere into your character's magical effects as often as possible. Don't be discouraged if your Storyteller says that your Sphere doesn't apply to a situation. Discovering the limits of your associated Sphere is just as important as determining how much it can affect your character's surroundings. As the chronicle progresses you'll have gained a greater understanding of the character's paradigm simply by using the associated Sphere.

Another method for using Sphere association is to thoroughly read through the Sphere and effect descriptions to plumb for ideas. This isn't limited to ways the Sphere can be used within the game, but instead to find interesting concepts that intrigue you. **Mage** is a game about contrasting realities and concepts, after all, and figuring out your own take on certain elements is half the fun. For example, if you disagree with the Dreamspeaker theory that tapping into the Earth Mother's dreams allows an expanded perception of Matter (**Mage Revised**, p. 173), explore how you think it *should* work with your character's paradigm. If you like the Entropic possibility of breaking down complex systems (**Mage Revised**, p. 161), incorporate those ideas into your character. Explore the Spheres chapter in **Mage Revised** for anything that gives you a neat idea. It takes a little more time to prepare, but can give you a clearer understanding of your character's paradigm.

Multiple Association

An easy way to add more depth to this step is to associate two Spheres with your character's paradigm. This adds a level of complexity to playing the character but can often produce some rather interesting results. The same combination can produce multiple outcomes limited only by your imagination. It's a simple matter to associate Matter and Entropy with a character and come up with multiple concepts of how he uses it and for what purpose. For example, a character can primarily associate Matter and Entropy to:

- Work to prevent the decay of the physical world or, alternately, to encourage it.
- Analyze patterns to find the perfect physical example of an abstract concept.
- Erode the concept of a specific, physical thing in order to replace it with a new concept of the character's devising.
- Create any combination of the above.

I'll Take Them All!

It is technically possible to associate more than two Spheres, but it's recommended that the maximum be three. Remember, mages don't associate every single Sphere that they can affect. They typically only do so with the ones that focus most prominently in their worldview. Each Sphere adds to the complexity of the concept, which in turn can make things very difficult to play. While a challenging concept can be rewarding if handled right, be careful that you don't add needless convolution to your game.

An exception is a character who is equally connected to all nine Spheres and adopts a pluralistic outlook to encompass a unified view of magic. Though an interesting concept, keeping a balanced perspective of all the Spheres can be incredibly difficult in play. It can also lead to confusion of purpose and perhaps the unintentional abuse of the concept. Remember to check with your Storyteller and make sure such a concept would work in her game.

Figuring out how two Spheres work together is more difficult than a single Sphere association, but that's part of the fun.

Essence

Every Avatar has a certain quality known as Essence that works to direct a mage's mystical efforts. Mages theorize that the Essence is an intrinsic predisposition, or perhaps even the "personality" of the Avatar. Regardless of interpretation, there is no question that the impact of Essence upon a mage's actions is both subtle and profound. Rather than direct the mage's day-to-day actions, the Avatar simply nudges her in a general direction.

The influences of Essence can be represented in a mage's paradigm. To do so, take a few moments to think about the Essence you selected during character creation. Perhaps re-read the description on p. 95 of **Mage Revised** if you don't remember what it means, exactly.

Next, think of your character's Sphere association. Consider how the two could interact. Essence directs mages in their overall sense of purpose, while a sphere association provides the mystical tools to achieve this purpose. What does it mean to be a Dynamic mage with Mind association? How does a Questing mage with Correspondence association look at the world? When do Primordial mages with Time association use their magic? Briefly reflect on their possible interrelations. Think of the Essence as providing the character with a general direction to travel, while the sphere association has the character follow a specific path.

With this in mind, write down a few short phrases describing the path your character typically takes in attaining this purpose. Start with a verb and keep it to a short, vague sentence fragment. Once you've written them down, circle the phrase you think best exemplifies the influence of Essence on your character's paradigm. Remember that there are no "right answers" to this exercise, so go with what you think is right.

The phrase you select is the cornerstone of your character's paradigm. Though only a small part of the greater whole, this aspect ties everything together. It provides a base direction that the mage's path to enlightenment will follow.

Example: During character creation, Rey gave Flashmaster a Pattern Essence. He likes the idea of perfecting techniques that other mages have already designed, and doesn't really see Flashmaster as any sort of innovator. After considering the ways that Pattern interacts with Spirit, he thinks of the overall direction and methods towards which Flashmaster typically directs his mystical efforts.

Rey comes up with two phrases: "conversing with spirits" and "exploiting universal secrets." He then debates which one makes the most sense for Flashmaster. Although "conversing with spirits" is certainly something that Flashmaster will do, Rey sees this as a means to accomplishing a goal rather than having any direct relation to the goal itself. He decides that "exploiting universal secrets" best describes the influence of Flashmaster's Essence, and that his conversations with spirits involve the utilization of these truths.

Paradigm Styles

The next step in creating a paradigm involves the use of Paradigm Styles, originally described on p. 93 of **Bitter Road**. These Styles express a mage's conception of how her paradigm relates to the rest of the universe. To summarize:

- **Rigid:** Your paradigm is the one true way. Others may use magic, but they're not using it *right*.
- **Closed:** Your paradigm fits a personal vision of truth. You might try to get others to see things your way: not because you think they're wrong, but because you know how things work for you.
- **Open:** Your paradigm is one truth amongst many. Each mage must figure out what's best for them, and then stick to it.
- **Liberal:** There is no "one great way to see things." You are always learning, and you incorporate what works for others into your own paradigm.

If you haven't done so, choose the Paradigm Style that best fits your character. Write a single sentence that focuses on an aspect of the Sphere: how the Sphere interacts with reality, conditions under which you will or won't use the Sphere, etc. This is to underscore the point that your style is based on your view of reality's composition, filtered through the lens of your associated Sphere.

Generally, characters with a more conservative style will have an equally conservative aspect of that style. The opposite also applies to tolerant styles, which themselves typically have tolerant aspects. However, this is not always the case. It is possible for a character to firmly believe in a liberal view. Conversely, a character can temporarily hold a rigidly conservative outlook until a better one comes along. It's completely valid to encounter this juxtaposition within a paradigm.

Example: Rey decides that Flashmaster has a Rigid paradigm. His conviction in his own abilities is so strong that he feels his way is simply the best way to use magic. Rey thinks for a minute and then writes down the following: "The spiritual world sleeps beneath our own." He can't put

his finger on why he likes it, but enjoys the thought of sleeping spirits hiding beneath the blanket of our reality.

Hooks

It's important to have an *interesting* twist to your character's paradigm. That may seem to go without saying, but your paradigm needs to be fun. Something clever and esoteric won't do a bit of good if you don't have any fun playing with it. With that in mind, you need to establish hooks that you not only can use, but that you'll *want* to use.

Find a neat idea. Write three sentences about that idea and squeeze it into the context of the **Mage** world. This may take a couple of tries. Not all clever ideas automatically fit the game world, and vice versa. Ideally, you'll have the chance to chat up your Storyteller over a mug of coffee, since the Storyteller's individual vision of the game will impact what you can and can't get away with. Make a basic outline of what you think is a handy paradigm element, and why it's so all-consumingly kick-ass.

Good hooks come from concepts that you find interesting. You can certainly find good hooks by following the news, watching television, going to the movies or reading books, but often the best way is to interact with people who hold different views than you do. Any ideas that inspire you can be incorporated into a paradigm, allowing you to explore them within the context of a game.

Final Assembly

Now that you have amassed all of these building blocks, it's time to finalize the paradigm. Take a look at the aspects of your character's Sphere Association, Essence, Paradigm Style, and Hooks. Figure out how they all interrelate. Once you have a clear picture of the paradigm, work at tying up the loose ends. Think of how your paradigm affects the character, particularly in regards to Resonance. Envision how your character's magic expresses itself: how does it look when cast? Finally, select a focus for your associated sphere.

That's all there is to it! You're ready to play **Mage** with a fully developed paradigm.

Example: Rey assembles the aspects he's already created and starts to envision Flashmaster's paradigm. Upon further reflection, he's a "casual spiritual fisherman." He traps spirits and makes them share their secrets with him; then he "throws them back into the water." He sees his magic as forcing lazy spirits to do his will. He chooses a bottle of spirit gum as his focus and is ready to play a character with a fleshed out paradigm.

Altering Paradigm

One of the most gratifying elements of a role-playing game is watching your character develop over the course of the chronicle, gradually altering both capability and personality. Abilities improve, allowing for greater chances of success. Perspectives change, sometimes enough that characters vehemently oppose outlooks they initially held dear. Characters alter as time goes by, both in raw faculty and behavior.

Paradigm is no different. As your character interacts with other mages, their beliefs and paradigms will influence her own. Plus, the development of new magical knowledge requires new paradigm additions. You can't just suddenly decide to work Forces magic because you spent some experience points — you have to realize how Forces fits into your worldview and what's required to pull upon Forces.

You can't just shift your paradigm at will. Changing your core beliefs isn't *simple*, after all. You don't wake up one day and decide you can fly! Something big generally has to influence you to make a radical change. While paradigm might change slowly with outside influences, there are two major circumstances under which you can change your paradigm radically — whenever your Arete goes up, and when you botch an Arete roll with no temporary Willpower remaining. The difference:

The former happens for free, as you can significantly alter your paradigm with an Arete increase. Your expanding enlightenment shows you new ways to view the universe. Maybe you become more close-minded about your foci, or maybe you expand to see an angle you hadn't viewed before. Either way, your enlightenment shows in a broad new application of knowledge, as you retool your underlying principles into a new vision of reality.

The latter happens by losing one permanent point of Willpower — reality bitchslapped you, and you learned from it, but it made you a little more humble. It leaves you a little broken. Something you always thought was true turns out to be wrong, and you have to adjust to deal with it. The world's a harsh mistress. Suck it up.

Optional: Paradigmatic Self-segregation

Some mages find themselves stuck with really weird paradigms — as in, the kind that get you in jail. Maybe they screw corpses for magical power. Maybe they skin children and wear their flesh. The sort of stuff that makes your skin crawl.

These mages set themselves apart from normal people, by dint of their practices. Their Resonance tends to reflect this: A mage with really whacked-out practices will also have equally strange core beliefs. This sets off people's "psycho alerts," for lack of a better term.

It can, of course, be really, *really* hard to work your magic around Sleepers when you have a paradigm like this. This can make for some desperate scenes as you try to pull out something totally wicked in order to make your magic go, but it can also be very restrictive. You're usually best off making sure that your character's paradigm relies on practices that might be a little weird, but won't draw undue negative attention.

Paradigm Samples

Here are some example aspects of paradigm. Each Sphere shown below contains sample Essences, Paradigm Styles, and Hooks for you to use as you will. Players or Storytellers in a hurry can use these examples to design a paradigm on the fly. Remember that the samples listed below are *not* the only way you can interpret each element. You're encouraged to use these as a jumping-off point and as fodder for your own ideas.

Correspondence

Essence: Dynamic (reducing the sense of distance), Pattern (protecting a place or region), Primordial (excising chunks of the universe), Questing (exploring places to define that which does not yet exist)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (All interrelated objects and places are aspects of a single, zero-dimensional position.), Closed (Reality contains a finite number of points that can be connected, meaning that location can be predicted through calculation.), Open (Everything has a place in the world; figuring out what belongs where is the challenge.), Liberal (The universe is boundless and expansive, growing and shrinking at will.)

Hooks: Interpersonal Connection (You want nothing more than to bring people together. When there are no more transmission delays, humanity can focus on the act of communication itself and transcend the limitations of technology. The only delay will be the speed of thought itself.), Road To Enlightenment (Life is a journey. The goal is not to reach the end, but instead to gain wisdom from the trip there. You must be certain that you always take the interesting path, for a remarkable life is more important than a safe one.), The Relatable World (Everything has a connection. You want nothing more than to puzzle out the intricate way the universe fits together. Once you do, there is nothing you can't control.)

Entropy

Essence: Dynamic (following the path of fate & fortune), Pattern (strengthening the bonds of destiny), Primordial (acting as an agent of decay), Questing (finding weaknesses in the world and either fixing or destroying them)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (There is a grand order to reality and a predictability to chaos.), Closed (Everything that occurs has a cosmological reason.), Open (Chaos throws change into the gears of reality, shaking up the status quo.), Liberal (Destiny is a lie to make us complacent; nothing is truly predictable.)

Hooks: Test Your Luck (You're the embodiment of risk and chance. Failure is as boon a companion as success, for only by failing can you truly know your limits. You live to act, and you act to feel all the more alive.), Skein of Dynasty (The web you weave is indeed a tangled one. You are intimately connected to the destiny and lineage of both people and things. Signs show you the zenith and nadir of possibility, and it's little effort to affect the threads of providence.), Arbitrary Mastermind (Your life is an improvised melody — the notes change without your attention, but they're always part of a larger tune. You float along, observing the random events that are your bread and butter, making note to remember everything. You use this knowledge to gain absolute control of a situation and bend it to your will. Then you relax your grip, lean back and appreciate the music.)

Forces

Essence: Dynamic (altering the predictable), Pattern (maintaining a closed system), Primordial (catering to the destructive), Questing (imposing a change of state)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (All elements of physical change are discrete and quantifiable.), Closed (Formulae can predict most expressions of the tangible forces, though occasional irregularities are expected.), Open (Predicting truly and vastly chaotic systems is impossible, making it necessary to embrace the grand disorder.), Liberal (The natural forces are vast, living creatures with their own goals and personalities.)

Hooks: Geocentricity (The stars and planets form the Tellurian through their combined focus and positions, and the world as we know it draws all power from

above. Their interest and attention cause change. Currying favor with celestial bodies yields their tacit approval.), Quantum Mechanic (You know enough about quantum forces to realize that you'll never fully understand them. By reaching into the guts of reality and twisting, you'll either accomplish something or accidentally lose your fingers. Figuratively speaking, of course.), The Great Equalizer (All forces desire a state of ultimate balance, yet remain in external and internal conflict. When a point of pressure is exceeded, a pressure bleed occurs. Altering the balance and points of pressure can cause or direct these bleeds.)

Life

Essence: Dynamic (leaving your mark upon the living), Pattern (sustaining life), Primordial (seeking birth and death), Questing (finding purpose for life)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (Consciousness is sacrosanct; great care must be taken with it.), Closed (Sentient beings can be affected if necessary, but the ends do not justify the means.), Open (The ends not only justify the means, but they require whatever means are necessary.), Liberal (Notions of individualism are beside the point; biomass is biomass.)

Hooks: Scales of Life (For everything gained, there must be sacrifice — not necessarily in the physical sense, but certainly not exclusive of that. There is a balance that must be maintained, particularly amongst the living. Finding what's worth the sacrificing is key.), Microscopic Macrotransformation (The Technomancers have nanites, but you know that idea came from bacteria. Life is always expressed as a massive conglomerate of smaller beings involved in a grand interaction. To affect the conglomerate, you must first affect the minute.), Life As Energy (The most complex form of energy is life, and the bionetwork is the grandest expression of a closed system. {Talk about Life as an expression of energy, and "tapping into life" to explore this biopower.})

Matter

Essence: Dynamic (altering and improving your surroundings), Pattern (making things that last), Primordial (recycling the ancient into the innovative), Questing (finding new uses for the old)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (Reality is only what you can touch.), Closed (Each physical element is ascribed a unique combination of properties.), Open (All matter is interchangeable, if you can find the appropriate conversion.), Liberal (Matter is energy given form.)

Hooks: Corporeal Calculus (The material world is the physical counterpart to mathematics, and its manipulation is akin to solving complex formulae and proofs. Before you can affect this world, you must discover the variables and then assemble a correct physical equation. The process is often more important than the result.), Socratic Uniquity (There only exists one perfect, material example of any concept at any one time. The closer something is to the concept, the stronger it is in relation to the Tellurian. Of course, before you can seek the perfect example, you must first comprehend the concept it represents.), Mount Babylon's Spire (An enormous reality needs big ideas to fill it. The grander the goal, the greater the triumph. The bar must be raised, and you're the one to do it — bigger, faster, sleeker, better!)

Mind

Essence: Dynamic (communicating high concepts with clarity), Pattern (correcting the mentally damaged), Primordial (censoring weak thoughts and broadcasting the strong ones), Questing (searching for truly original thought)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (A mind is a black box that must be opened by force.), Closed (Locked mental doors can be breached by those with the skeleton keys.), Open (A mind is a house that is accessed by invitation only.), Liberal (All minds broadcast thoughts like radio waves and can be listened to if you have the right frequency.)

Hooks: Stained Glass Psyche (There is only one great mind, for the Tellurian itself has a consciousness. However, this larger mind is sectioned into many smaller ones like a stained glass window, with each human representing a pane. To connect these minds, you must remove the barrier that separates the panes.), Scientia Humanitatis (History is the Tellurian's own memory, which is stored in the minds of humanity. This knowledge is the treasure of the past meant for those of the present. Acting on this knowledge breeds more wisdom, and wiser human minds produce a wiser Tellurian.), Travel Without Moving (Our perceptions are worn like formal clothing and can be cast off for something more comfortable. Eschewing the physical world is simply a matter of divorcing corporeal attentions. The naked truth of dream and desire is often purer than interactions with people.)

Prime

Essence: Dynamic (weaving the Tapestry in unique ways), Pattern (adding a lasting element to the world), Primordial (reducing the extraneous to concepts), Questing (discovering universal truths and secrets)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (Quintessence and Pattern are the blood and bones of the universe.), Closed (A greater understanding of reality's building blocks is key to unlocking Telluric secrets.), Open (Primal energies are important, but are merely one of many vital pieces to the cosmos.), Liberal (When you wield the dull scalpel of reality, you are limited to making clumsy, careless cuts.)

Hooks: The Avatar Prism (The Quintessential energies fueling reality remain in a state of perpetual action. Your Pattern is a lens, and by focusing it you can direct these energies as you desire. The power comes not from within, but through.), Peel The World Back (The Truth is hidden by physical perception. The Tellurian is a hodge-podge of intersecting, recursive Patterns tied together by Quintessence. Knowing Patterns for what they are allows for their direct manipulation.), Telluric Billiards (The Tapestry is a matrix of nodes and lines of power that hold everything together. Each point connects to many others, in a grand lattice of Pattern. Affecting one point causes ripples of change to spread to others, which are also affected.)

Spirit

Essence: Dynamic (affecting changes across the worlds), Pattern (consolidating various realities), Primordial (birthing concept in its rawest form), Questing (making sense of the nonsensical)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (Reality is the center of a much greater spiritual world that envelops our own.), Closed (The Tapestry is a port amidst the vast, deadly sea of the Tellurian.), Open (Various realities comprise the Tellurian in the same way that the Spheres comprise magic.), Liberal (Interacting with concepts given form is easier when you realize you're also a concept given form.)

Hooks: Holographic Totality (The Tapestry is the convergence of Umbral shadows, layered and reflected upon the canvas of the Tellurian. This reality is an echo of many others. To best affect the universe, one must find the right stratum.), At The Medium's Pace (The knowledge of our ancestors is a power greater than history, for the dead are a primary source. Much can be learned from them directly. This greater knowledge must be put to use amongst the living, or humanity will continue to make the same mistakes.), Walker of Worlds (You travel to differing realities the way that other people go to the store. Your experiences amongst various worlds show you how they interact with each other. Whether one reality takes precedence is a matter of opinion.)

Time

Essence: Dynamic (providing a second chance), Pattern (finding the importance of the moment), Primordial (preventing catastrophic futures), Questing (searching through the past)

Paradigm Style: Rigid (Reality has ceased, and the flow of time is the universe remembering its existence.), Closed (The past and future are crystalline, and their alteration requires the utmost of precision.), Open (All things flow through the stream of time.), Liberal (Time coils upon itself; to move about, one need only find the appropriate intersection with past or future events.)

Hooks: Red Pill (Time is a single point. Everything has already happened and has yet to happen. The Space-Time Continuum is a lie perpetuated by scientists and bad movies to reinforce the illusion of inability to be anywhere but "the present."), Temporal Vivisectionist (Time is a series of stop-motion slices. It is akin to a rapid succession of frozen images advanced rapidly to produce motion. Each fraction of time only allows slight alteration, but when many slices are altered in succession, the alteration becomes great.), A Steady Flow (Don't sweat the small stuff — to focus on details is to avoid the greater picture. Changes are studied over a period of time, producing noticeable and often predictable patterns. Forsaking minutiae is the first step to becoming an impetus of grand purpose.)

Single Sphere Association

Each paradigm has a single Essence, Paradigm Style, and Hook aspect. Find the character's associated Sphere and select one element from each aspect. Put these elements together and use this as a "mystical blueprint" for the character.

Example: *Asia wants to play a Euthanatos, but isn't too fond of the "death-mage" stereotype. Meghan Gibson, her new character, is an attempt to break that mold. Asia digs the idea of a woman who takes luck to an extreme, so she places Meghan amongst the Lhaksmists, a faction that relies heavily on chance and random occurrences both in life and magical expression. She chooses a Dynamic Essence and a Closed Style, and feels most comfortable with Test Your Luck as her hook.*

Asia determines that Meghan sees chance as a test of will. Everybody is meant to succeed or fail, yet if they do not risk, they will ultimately live a failed life. The goal is to collect as many successes and failures as she can. Her life has shown her exactly what unnecessary risk is, and she knows when she should or shouldn't take it. If things are going her way, she'll manage to just about break even.

Meghan's magic typically expresses itself as a collection of chance occurrences that leave her coming out ahead in a situation, but only marginally. To observers, she pulls through by the skin of her teeth — multiple successes at any given effect means she looks really impressive while doing it. Meghan carries an old Ouija planchette as her Entropy focus.

Multiple Sphere Association

To create a paradigm for a character with multiple sphere associations, select at least one aspect from each associated Sphere.

Example: *Jake's Virtual Adept character "Grep Foo" is a member of the Reality Hackers, a faction that strives to decode the mysteries of the cosmos with the desire to "reprogram" the universe. He decides that a Questing Essence (Prime) and an Open Style (Correspondence) best fit his character. Finally, he selects The Relatable World (Correspondence) as his hook. Now he works to put the pieces together.*

Jake decides that Grep perceives reality as a vast container full of a mind-boggling number of items and objects. He thinks that everything is connected and has a place where it ultimately fits, but until the pieces are found, they simply can't be used together. Grep sees himself as a crusader intent on discovering things the universe has forgotten or has deliberately hidden. He hopes that his compatriots in the Reality Hackers can use what he finds.

Jake also likes the idea of his magic expressing itself with the feel of a Rube Goldberg device in motion. He decides that Grep's magical effects will often appear as a series of fluke accidents that set off another series of fluke accidents until his desired effect is achieved. Jake chooses a single Lego brick as his Correspondence focus and a battered copy of the Principia Discordia as his Prime focus.

Twisted Traditions

While some Tradition elders would have everyone believe otherwise, the Traditions are not static. Even the magical practices and paradigms of ancient groups like the Dreamspeakers and the Akashic Brotherhood are not the same now as they were 1,000, or even 100, years ago. In addition to their numerous other roles, many mages are magical researchers who constantly seek new ways to expand and improve upon their Tradition's knowledge. Such additional information generally comes in one of two ways. Sometimes a brilliant or insightful mage develops a new theory or technique that is then incorporated into the Tradition's canon. Alternately, an open-minded mage borrows some idea or technique from some other magical group and adapts it for use in her Tradition. While the first of these two activities has been going on since the Paleolithic, such discoveries have always been quite rare. Borrowing and sharing of extant knowledge are both easier and far more common. However, many among the Traditions only now realize just how greatly their previous organization and structure inhibited such borrowing. All of the Traditions expected to refrain from borrowing from the Technocracy. Also, to allegedly maintain the purity of their various paradigms, the elders of many Traditions actively discouraged borrowing from other Traditions. Even Tradition elders who acknowledged that theirs was not the only truth were still reluctant to seek innovation from other Traditions for fear of diluting their own. Instead, many Tradition mages believed that only through keeping their respective Traditions strong and pure could they hope to win the struggle against the Technocracy.

Now that the Ascension War is effectively over and many of the various Tradition elders have died or departed from the Earth, a time of unprecedented borrowing and sharing between various Traditions has begun. With many of the wisest and most experienced members of every Tradition gone, everyone remaining on Earth seeks to make the most of their remaining knowledge. While some of the older and more conservative Tradition members have declared that the borrowing of rotes, foci, and other magical techniques from other Traditions will eventually dilute and destroy magic, most younger mages are excited by the possibility of greatly expanding both their magical knowledge and their magical practice. Amidst the various unique and idiosyncratic new styles of magic, several larger-scale trends have emerged. The two most important and obvious of these trends are the diffusion of shamanic techniques and the spread of technomagic.

Twisting Traditions

In this new era of sharing and blending magical knowledge, some mages have begun examining how Traditions change. Blending or altering Traditions can be accomplished in several different ways. Occasionally, as with The Fellowship of Dee and The Order of St. Albertus, a mage uncovers information about a style of

magic that worked in the past but has since been forgotten. However, more commonly, sub-Traditions evolve out of the workings of a highly successful cabal. Some cabals become exceedingly tightly knit groups. Over time, it is possible that such a group's members can learn to work with each other in a new and unique fashion. When cabals work successfully with each other for long enough they sometimes develop their own unique paradigm. While the members of most cabals are too wedded to their own training to be able to accept alternative viewpoints, not all mages are so conservative. In some cases, a new sub-Tradition or style of magic develops when mages from different Traditions work closely with each other, pooling their magical and intellectual faculties to attain a common goal.

The Traditions themselves formed out of mages who used similar methods to achieve a common goal. Over time, it is likely that new Traditions will form and old ones die out as new goals and methods bring together neophyte mages. While some dread the death of the Traditions, none can deny that the rise of factionalism is simply the process of magical change — the birth of what will be the Traditions of tomorrow.

The first step in this process usually involves establishing a common language. Having Sons of Ether talk about an entity as a set of semi-sentient weather-related morphogenic fields, while a member of the Order of Hermes refers to the same creature as a spirit of elemental air and a Dreamspeaker calls it a cloud spirit can be confusing, distracting, and occasionally even dangerous. Confusion about terminology can be deadly when engaging in a magical contest with a powerful enemy. As a result, many cabals adopt a common language that often consists of a mixture jargon from their various Traditions, occasionally intermixed with various shared cultural references. In most cases, this shared jargon is nothing more than a useful pidgin that allows clear communication between the members. However, on occasion, the particular temperaments of the mages and their personal relationship to their own Traditions is such that they find this new jargon more convenient than the ones they were trained with. In such cases, the jargon they learned from their Traditions is gradually abandoned and the members of the cabal all learn to think in this new language. Since the most important part of a mage's paradigm and the details of their magical practice are all determined by the practitioner's thoughts, expectations and beliefs, a significant change in how a mage thinks about magic can have profound effects on her magical techniques.

Other times, members of a single Tradition explore the boundaries of that Tradition's practices, or cooperate to study the theories and practices of a different Tradition or Convention. The recent rise in the study of advanced technology and technomagic is a highly visible example of this phenomenon. While this sort of study is quite distinct from multi-Tradition cooperation, the results are often quite similar. The mages involved learn to look at magic and the world in a fashion inconsistent with the Tradition's usual views.

A Virtual Adept who thinks of Umbral beings as various types of elemental spirits and who now conceives of Life magic as hacking a living being's acupuncture meridians to reroute its chi flows is no longer thinking like a Virtual Adept. However, she is also not thinking like a Verbena or an Akashic. Similarly, a member of the Akashic Brotherhood who hooks her mind up to a computer in her search for Zen consciousness is also thinking well beyond the bounds of typical Tradition dogma. Frequently, some of the members of a cabal are troubled by how far they have drifted from their prior modes of thought. Many cabals that research the far fringes of Tradition magic fall apart as the members grow to believe that they are in danger of losing touch with the Tradition that trained them. However, a few of the most close-knit cabals never notice their growing alienation from their Traditions. Instead, the cabal's members gain deep insight into one another's practices and learn to share and cooperate much more efficiently than most Traditionalists. Members of such cabals usually become extremely close and find that the magic they work together becomes increasingly easier even as their theories become more esoteric and complex. In the vast majority of cases, the magical theories and practices evolved from such rare and close-knit cabals are only useful and relevant to its members. When the cabal breaks up, the new gestalt they evolved breaks down. However, in a few rare cases the insight gained by these mages proves to be useful to others. As word of these new ideas spreads, a new sub-Tradition arises.

While most sub-Traditions are either recreations of earlier groups or evolve naturally from the efforts of a dedicated and skilled cabal of mages, there are also sub-Traditions that are consciously created. The Spirit Alliance (page 69-71) is an example of such a conscious creation. Instead of evolving from the workings of a single cabal, this sub-Tradition came about when three disparate groups of mages all decided that a retreat from the world could greatly aid each of their causes.

Generally, such deliberately created sub-Traditions fail. Attempts to deliberately alter an existing paradigm are always quite difficult. The strength of all of the existing Traditions comes largely from the organic

manner in which they evolved. Even careful planning and powerful ambition cannot create all of the factors required to allow a large group of mages to accept a new way of thought in the subconscious levels necessary to permit magical practice. Minor alterations in paradigm like the Tradition blending involved in the Spirit Alliance are far from easy, and more significant changes are usually impossible. No matter how much someone might like to accept a new world-view, or how useful such a world-view might be to hold, changing one's deeply-held opinions and prejudices is no easy matter. In general, developing a new style of magic is a long and difficult process that rarely produces rapid results. However, some changes are easier than others. Since most mages grew up being a part of an advanced technological civilization, adopting elements of the modern technocratic paradigm into their Tradition is far easier than adopting elements of ancient Aztec mysticism or some other spiritual system with which the mages are not already intimately familiar.

Shamanic Borrowings

The reasons for the new popularity of shamanic techniques are easy to see. With the great majority of the Masters now locked away from Earth by the Avatar Storm, many mages — especially the younger and less experienced ones —seek other means of obtaining magical knowledge and advice. The Dreamspeakers have had a long history of members mostly or solely trained by various powerful spirits, and most Dreamspeakers are allied with a Totem spirit that serves as both a mentor and an ally. Communication with most forms of Umbrood remains possible in spite of the Avatar Storm. As a result, a number of mages belonging to Traditions as diverse as the Celestial Chorus and the Sons of Ether have asked Dreamspeakers for assistance in contacting powerful spiritual allies. Today, a significant number of non-Dreamspeaker Tradition mages have Totems or other forms of spiritual allies or mentors.

Totem and allied spirits can provide a great deal of useful magical aid and advice and have helped many mages improve their magic. In addition to being invaluable sources of information about both spirits and the Umbra, many Totems can provide concrete aid in the mortal world. Also, a powerful Totem can help convince lesser spirits to aid the mage by empowering her Fetishes. As untainted and unwatched sources of Tass become increasingly difficult to find, a growing number of non-Dreamspeakers are learning that Fetishes have significant advantages when Tass is scarce.

However, spirits also have their own agendas. Some mages fear that many of these neophyte shamans will be tricked or corrupted by various Nephandic Lords. With the destruction of most earth-bound Nephandi, many mages fear that the Nephandi are actively seeking new recruits. Fortunately, while a few mages have become corrupted through contact with various spirits, the vast majority of mages can easily tell the difference between an ordinary Umbrood and a Malfean or a K'llashaa. With a few unfortunate exceptions, the only mages who have Fallen are those who have actively sought their own corruption. The search for spiritual allies has not lead to any significant increase in the number of Nephandi.

However, even relatively benign spirits can have goals and desires that radically differ from those of ordinary mortals, or even of mages. Almost every spirit that is willing to teach and assist mages requires some form of recompense for these services. Mages with such allies usually find themselves asked to perform a variety of tasks for the spirit. Frequently such tasks are relatively minor and often consist of some trivial effort such as burning a specific type of incense at a node or reciting a short poem at midnight every night the moon is full. However, spirits sometimes request more significant actions, especially if asked to perform important or difficult tasks. These requests can range from seemingly incomprehensible actions like insuring that a specific person always carries the tooth of a shark in her pocket, to removing a building or other structure that is currently occupying a powerful node.

Also, many spirits are not above taking advantage of a mage's need and lack of ability. Minor tasks like scrying are fairly trivial for most spirits. However, if the mage is unable to accomplish such a task for himself, and cannot find anyone else to perform it, many spirits will demand high prices simply because the mage has nowhere else to turn. Often, the greater the mage's need for such a service the higher the price asked by the Totem. While some mages resent such demands, many others accept that having such a ready source of magical aid is often worth the prices asked. In addition to many individuals who have sought aid by powerful spirits, the Traditions have also recently seen the rise of several larger groups who base their practice around the aid and guidance of powerful spirits.

The Order of Sophia

While many among the Celestial Chorus see any interactions with spirits as traffic with demons and similar unholy beings, other Choristers believe some of these spirits to be angels and similar divine beings. Using Dreamspeaker-derived techniques to open her mind to the voices of Heaven, Celestial Chorister Alexandra Martin contacted a powerful spirit that she

believes to be the essence of divine knowledge. From her revelations, she founded the Order of Sophia and has begun to spread her knowledge among both mages and Sleepers. In contrast to the recent behind-the-scenes policies of the Chorus, Ms. Martin has orchestrated a large series of public lectures and meditations designed to expose as many Sleepers as possible to Sophia's wisdom. Ms. Martin uses a combination of Mind and Spirit magic to allow all receptive listeners to directly experience the messages she received from Sophia. As a result, these services are quite popular and are likely to soon come under scrutiny from both the Technocracy and mortal hunters.

The members of the Order of Sophia believe that in these troubled times, direct communication with the primal godhead is difficult or impossible. However, instead of relying upon revelations written down and interpreted many years before, they believe that the most correct path to true spiritual understanding comes from communing directly with God's representatives. Sophia and various angels therefore garner their reverence. Since most religious Americans find communing with angelic beings to be much more comfortable than tropical hallucinogens that conjure visions of odd jungle spirits, Ms. Martin's teaching is far more popular than most similar spiritual experiences.

Although the movement is less than a year old, Ms. Martin has already managed to build an organization that consists of more than half a dozen mages and almost 5,000 Sleepers. Her public services and radio broadcasts reach tens of thousands more, many of whom donate money to the Order. Sometime next year, Ms. Martin hopes to show her services on a few select religious television channels. While many members of the Celestial Chorus regard her open use of magic as dangerous and likely to fail, many in other Traditions are eagerly watching her actions. A few members of the Dreamspeakers, Verbena and the Cult of Ecstasy plan to attempt to imitate her popular success. However, this interest and support could rapidly vanish if she encounters significant opposition from the Technocracy, mortal hunters, or any similar source.

The Fellowship of Dee

In the 17th century, the Hermetic John Dee and the spirit-trained Dreamspeaker Edward Kelly had a long and profitable partnership. In the centuries that followed, the Hermetics and the Dreamspeakers often found themselves separated by bonds of race and colonial oppression. Two years ago, Letisha Washington — a prominent young Hermetic — joined forces with an enigmatic Dreamspeaker known only as Backward. Backward claims to have had a spirit-inspired vision that called for the two of them to bring together Hermetics and Dreamspeakers to recreate Dee and Kelly's partnership on a larger and more productive scale.

The Dreamspeakers excel at the summoning of spirits and the awakening of the spirits within material objects. The Hermetics can control powerful elemental forces to help constrain potentially rebellious and dangerous spirits. In addition, the Hermetics bridge the gap between the otherworldliness typical of those who frequently interact with the spirit world and the realities of the mundane realm. Acting upon Backward's advice, members typically emulate Dee and Kelly, working in pairs that consist of one Hermetic and one Dreamspeaker. A number of Hermetics have joined the Fellowship in hopes of finding ways to contact their Tradition's elders who are trapped beyond the Gauntlet. Unfortunately, such efforts have met with mixed success, since messages from these Masters often come through the Gauntlet extremely garbled. However, most Hermetics who join do so in hopes of gaining greater access to the power and knowledge possessed by various powerful spirits.

While Dreamspeakers need little aid in summoning spirits, some find Hermetic mastery of elemental forces useful when dealing with particularly recalcitrant spirits. Also, the majority of the Dreamspeakers who join the Fellowship of Dee are relatively isolated members of this Tradition living in the First World. Spirits have primarily trained most of these Dreamspeakers, while the remainder have Mentors who are now trapped beyond the Gauntlet. A good number of these Dreamspeakers also have difficulties with the rigors of day-to-day living and frequently need someone to help them negotiate the complexities of modern life.

Few members of either Tradition have a problem with the essential nature of this alliance. However, since the members of the Fellowship of Dee often experiment with summoning and commanding extremely powerful and potentially dangerous spirits, some Hermetics and Dreamspeakers worry that the members of this alliance will either Fall and become Nephandi, or that they will loose dangerous, uncontrolled spirits into the world. Although fewer than two dozen mages belong to this alliance, at least one pair has already vanished. The members of the Fellowship of Dee deny all charges of consorting with malefic Umbrood and claim that a few of their number have even made initial contact with one of the mysterious and powerful Celestines.

Failings

The Fellowship of Dee seeks to use its members' combined abilities to gain greater power and knowl-

edge for everyone involved. Their methodology has two primary flaws. Unlike most other groups seeking to blend knowledge gained from multiple sources, the Fellowship of Dee is basically an alliance of convenience between Dreamspeakers and members of the Order of Hermes. Although there is some sharing of methods and techniques, both groups mostly practice their respective individual styles. When working in pairs, each mage performs those magical tasks at which he excels. While such a division of labor can be highly effective, it sometimes leads to over-specialization by the individuals involved. Also, by keeping their magical styles relatively separate, the individuals involved foster difficulty with communication about complex magical matters. Such misunderstandings can easily prove fatal when attempting to control a particularly powerful and dangerous spirit.

Another problem this sub-Tradition faces is its isolation from both of its parent Traditions. Backward is a spirit-trained Dreamspeaker who is shunned by most of his fellows for his erratic behavior and his total disregard for any authority other than his own rather chaotic vision. While Letisha Washington was previously a well-respected mage, her love of power is well known and many in the Order of Hermes suspect that she has either made some dark bargain with Backward or that she has been deluded by his promises. In either case, the leadership of both Traditions regards both Ms. Washington and Backward as problematic troublemakers. While none are ready to condemn them or their followers, any who join the Fellowship of Dee should recognize that they can expect little help from anyone outside of this sub-Tradition.

However, the Fellowship's greatest weakness is that one of its primary goals is the acquisition of greater magical power through the summoning of mighty spirits. Many members of the Fellowship of Dee constantly seek to summon ever more powerful spirits. In addition to the risk that botching a powerful summoning always entails, the summoners often use their magic to coerce or even threaten uncooperative spirits. Numerous observers have already commented that hubris is the Fellowship's greatest fault. As time goes on, many of the Fellowship's numbers could easily fall prey to false promises or the wrath of vengeful Umbrood.

The Spirit Alliance

Now that the Akashics, the Dreamspeakers, and the Verbena no longer devote the majority of their efforts to stymieing the Technocracy they have more effort to work on smaller-scale, but equally important, goals. Within the past year an alliance of members of these three groups has begun founding communities in several isolated wilderness areas. Working with various conservation groups, this coalition, known informally as the Spirit Alliance, has bought up moderate-sized tracks of wilderness land in the jungles of Brazil, a remote region of Montana, and in the sparsely populated portions of Canada. Their first step is building communities in these regions and settling them with a mixture of mages and interested Sleepers. The eventual goal is to create a large number of small communities which each possess their own local paradigms. Eventually the organizers plan to send some residents out to the rest of the world to share these settlements' wisdom and magic. So far, only two such communities exist. Shan-Lung Farm, in Saskatchewan Canada, near the town of Prince Albert, currently houses nine mages — equally split between the three founding groups — as well as more than 50 Sleepers. Freedom Estates, located near Sun Prairie, Montana, is currently inhabited by three mages and 24 Sleepers.

The mages involved agreed to downplay the differences between their three Traditions and to work together to attempt to build a new way that uses the best features of each Tradition. Although progress on this front is slow, the participants currently share their knowledge of herbal medicine, martial arts, meditation and trance work. Significant efforts are also underway to build alliances with several local spirits and, if possible, to bring each community under the protection of a single Incarna.

Unlike similar previous efforts, the individuals involved are well aware of the possibility of technocratic interference. In addition to performing organic farming and subsistence activities like weaving and dying, the inhabitants sell some of their produce to specialty markets and use these proceeds to pay for lawyers, Internet connections and other modern necessities. Shan Farm is doing well. However, a pack of werewolves has recently become aware of this community's existence and is far from pleased that humans have moved into a region that was previously completely wild and uninhabited. Preparations are currently underway to either negotiate with, or drive off, the shifters. Freedom Estates has no such problems, but the political views of the three mages there have begun attracting a number of well-armed, and somewhat unstable, Sleepers to this community.

Unlike many sub-Traditions, the Spirit Alliance plans for the long-term. Building the first three communities, each containing several hundred people, will take at least five years; creating a dozen such communities in Canada, Montana and Brazil will take a minimum

of several decades. Everyone involved has agreed to attempt to avoid any sort of high-profile activities to avoid drawing negative attention toward these settlements. As a result, some non-participatory mages aware of these efforts accuse those involved of hiding from the world and not being willing to do their fair share. However, the mages in the Spirit Alliance claim that in addition to offering a refuge for a few Sleepers, these communities will help a much larger proportion of the resident Sleepers Awaken. Also, all of the mages involved hope that they can create an environment where even Sleepers can more easily interact with spirits by working with the local spirits and inviting the attentions of a powerful Umbral ally.

In addition, once the communities succeed, the founders plan a media campaign to highlight the success those places have had and hope to draw attention to various programs and policies that can be derived from them. Those involved also claim that these communities will foster both tourism and workshops, and will help teach all visitors a greater respect for the Earth and for each other and a greater awareness of the spirit world. The leaders of the Spirit Alliance consider these long-term benefits to far outweigh any gain that they could possibly accomplish by being more active in the present day.

Unfortunately, the heads of both the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena believe that the members of Spirit Alliance are dodging their responsibilities to the outside world. However, some of the younger and more militant members of these two groups, as well as several senior members of the Akashic Brotherhood, support the efforts of the Spirit Alliance. Regrettably, while their allies would all love for the Spirit Alliance to succeed, most worry that it will self-destruct due to internal tensions. As a result, while the group enjoys a fair among of covert aid from these three Traditions, few outsiders will openly support the Alliance's policies and all of its allies are careful to have no formal ties to this group.

Failings

The Spirit Alliance consists of three small, mixed-Tradition groups of mages who all want to create refuges from the modern world. Unfortunately, this goal is practically all the mages involved have in common. Most of the Canadian contingent living in Shan Farm are ecologically concerned pacifists who wish to provide a place to escape from the troubles of the surrounding world. Others in the Spirit Alliance are considerably more militant. The South American contingent consists of several Dreamspeakers and Verbena who work with Brazilian rubber tappers and militant groups of Amazonian natives seeking to drive government and corporate forces from the jungle. Similarly,

Sally McDermott and Odin Seutter, two of the mages who live in Freedom Estates, have loose connections with several Pagan Neo-Nazi groups. McDermott and Seutter are also stockpiling arms and supplies at Freedom Estates in expectation of the collapse of the US government. The third member of Freedom Estates, Theresa Yellowhorse, has a some connection to survivalists groups, but has so far managed to act to moderate the actions and statements of McDermott, Seutter and their allies.

The primary reason these disparate groups are working together is that their numbers and resources are small enough that they all realize that working together is the only way any of them have a chance to succeed in their plans. Unfortunately, while they cooperate surprisingly well, their Sleeper associates are considerably less reliable. Many of the Sleepers living at Shan Farms are connected with outspoken Canadian anarchists groups. More than half of the Sleepers living in Freedom Estates are members of well-armed militant Neopagan organizations. Several of the Sleepers assisting the South American branch of the Spirit Alliance are wanted in connection with the murder of a group of Brazilian loggers.

While the Spirit Alliance has so far avoided media attention, outsiders in both the Akashic Brotherhood and the Verbena worry that serious infighting will soon occur. Also, everyone involved recognizes that if the Spirit Alliance's political connections become known, this group could easily be hounded by the government and the media. Other mages worry that some of the Sleeper members may use these isolated settlements as staging groups for various terrorist activities. If the mages of the Spirit Alliance can properly direct the energies of the Sleeper allies, this sub-Tradition may thrive. However, if they fail, their efforts could end spectacularly badly.

Technocratic Borrowing

Most members of the Traditions admit that the Ascension War is over and that the Technocracy won. In light of this victory, a large number of mages from traditionally anti-technomagical Traditions have adopted technological trappings, foci and even elements of various cybermantic paradigms. Today, Techno-shamanic Dreamspeakers summon up the spirits of automobiles and computers, Euthanatos explore the mysteries of the afterlife by creating controlled near-death experiences, and Hermetics etch their rotes on circuit boards and store their grimoires on CD-ROMs. A few years ago, most Tradition mages firmly believed that using any technocratic elements in either their magical practice or their daily life weakened their effort to overthrow the current paradigm. Today, many of these same mages recognize that overthrowing the technocratic paradigm is now essentially impossible. Instead, most have changed their goals so that they now seek to broaden the existing paradigm and to re-introduce Sleepers to magic, without weakening their faith in electricity or modern medicine. Of course, the best way to effectively broaden and alter an existing paradigm is to understand it and learn how to work within it. As a result, a number of Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether have found themselves almost overwhelmed with requests to explain the fundamentals of technomagic to mages who had previously sought to live lives completely divorced from the modern world. Mages who once lived in isolated cabins without electricity now read scientific journals and explore the intricacies of the Internet.

The spread of interest in technology and technomagic has made two primary differences in the lives of mages who belong to non-technomagical Traditions. On a mundane and practical level, the majority of mages now admit that the wonders of modern technology are exceptionally useful and that there is little virtue to be gained in eschewing the advantages this technology can provide. Currently many members of the Order of Hermes store their vast libraries on CD-ROM, while Verbena now regularly chat over the Internet and some members of the Cult of Ecstasy indulge in fast-paced psychedelic computer games.

On a more magical level, interest in the use of technomagical talismans, rotes and foci continues to grow in all Traditions. Among groups as diverse as House Thig, the Dreamspeaker's techno-shamans and the Disciples of the Omega Point, technomagic is becoming increasingly popular. Now that they are not blinded by a hopeless dedication to eradicate all vestiges of the technocratic paradigm, the members of every Tradition are able to see exactly how much iconic and magical power is inherent in the tools and devices of modern life.

For most people alive today — including most mages — there is nothing that symbolizes death quite as clearly as a large caliber handgun. Pointing even an unloaded gun at someone is as much a magical act as an Australian Dreamspeaker pointing a cursing bone at his victim. Similarly, with their seemingly mystical properties, the arcane knowledge necessary to operate them, and the vast amounts of data they hold, computers are widely seen as physical symbols of knowledge. Such beliefs are further aided by the Technocracy's continual effort to use movies, television and other forms of mass

media to bring increasing numbers of advanced technologies into popular consciousness.

Today, mages have a chance to learn to work within the existing paradigm rather than constantly fighting it at every turn. In addition to allowing them to perform magic in a far more coincidental fashion, embracing the magic inherent in modern technology also allows many mages to stop fighting their own upbringing. Almost every mage who belongs to a non-technomagical Tradition has had to attempt to unlearn the unconscious power that modern technology holds. Today many Tradition mages are beginning to understand that such efforts have stifled their magic. Admitting that many modern devices have great emotional power and resonance allows mages to use their magic in new and more powerful ways.

An increasing number of Tradition mages acknowledge that the first place the Ascension War was lost was in their own minds. Having grown up with images of deadly guns, speeding rockets, exciting computer games, and all of the other inescapable realities of modern technology, most younger mages could never truly abandon the power such images held for them. Now that they freely admit the existence of this power, many Tradition mages are learning both how to use it more effectively and how to subvert it when necessary.

Learning to use items of modern technology in magic is the first step in understanding that modern science and technology hold as much magic as any of the older paradigms. All magic is an act of will powered by emotion. Using magic to allow a car to behave like it was in an action movie car chase, or listening to late-night television static as a form of divination, demands that the mage truly believe in the power of modern technology. Almost all mages already have this belief, but until recently few were willing or even able to admit it. Now many Tradition mages working with this emotional power have found that their magic is both safer and somewhat more effective. Also, while vast ideological, religious and mystical differences separate the various Traditions, the modern paradigm is one that they all must live in. Paradoxically, the study of the works of the Technocracy has allowed members of many diverse Traditions to understand one another better, since they are all working on the edges of the same technocratic paradigm.

The new interest in technomagic is both a blessing and a curse for the Sons of Ether and the Virtual Adepts. Not only are some members of both Traditions now met with frequent requests for teaching and assistance, but many members of both groups now also encounter criticism of their methods and derisive commentary by members of various sub-Traditions who prefer to borrow their technomagic directly from the Technocracy. Also, a few groups like House Thig are intent on forging their own technomagical paradigm and have little use for any other forms of technomagic. A number of Etherites and Virtual Adepts resent the growing popularity of technomagic and regard many of the new technomagicians as little more than dabblers and dilettantes. However, other members of both houses are happy to welcome colleagues and allies in their efforts to subtly alter the technocratic paradigm.

Techno-Shamans

As expected, with both shamanism and technomagic becoming more popular, techno-shamanism is one of the fastest growing of the various sub-Traditions. First started by the Dreamspeakers, there are now techno-shamans among the ranks of the Verbena, the Sons of Ether, and .even the Virtual Adepts. The essential premise of techno-shamanism is that all matter contains spirit within, but highly complex matter — like living things and pieces of advanced technology — contain particularly complex and powerful spirits.

Since humans have created all of the advanced technologies that surround us in our daily lives, techno-shamans maintain that the spirits of such items are more closely associated with humanity than any other spirits. Learning to control the lesser of such spirits and make allies of the more powerful technological spirits allows techno-shamans to function exceptionally well in urban settings and to use the devices that surround most of humanity to great advantage. Essentially, technological items work exceptionally well in the hands of techno-shamans, and in some cases seem to actually "like" them better than anyone else. Although many people talk to their cars and computers, techno-shamans know how to listen for answers and are more than happy to cultivate these items' friendship and trust.

Techno-shamans tend to concentrate on Matter, Forces, and of course, Spirit magics. The central doctrine of techno-shamanism is that they must work with and awaken the spirits of the objects which humanity makes and works with. As a result, most techno-shamans do not consider one of their fellows to be a full shaman until she can awaken the spirits inside material objects without aid.

Many Sleepers and even a number of mages regard techno-shamans as somewhat odd. Not only do these mages frequently talk to the devices they use, some of them become quite upset if they see someone mistreating a device, and have been known to strongly rebuke

Awakened Possession for Techno-Shamans

At the heart of techno-shamanism is the belief that they should consciously interact with the spirits of all of their important possessions. Players who wish for their characters to begin play with Awakened items may purchase them as Wonders. One dot of Wonder gives the character one portable possession like a gun or a laptop computer. Two dots gives the character either two such possessions, one large possession like a car, motorcycle or it awakens all of the appliances in his apartment. With four dots in this background, the techno-shaman can have up to eight of his or her important portable personal possessions awakened. Five dots in Wonders allow the techno-shaman's house and all of its contents (but not large possessions like cars or motorcycles) to be Awakened.

You might also play with making one of your techno-toys a Familiar at the same time (see p. 217).

people for kicking their cars or slapping their computers. Also, as expected, almost every important object or device used by a techno-shaman will be fully awakened. Some mages have commented that they feel like they are being watched from all sides when they enter a techno-shaman's apartment.

Style of Magic

Techno-shamanic rotes typically involve personal communication with the spirits of the targeted objects and forces. Unlike some highly traditional shamans, Techno-shamans make little distinction between affecting targets which are natural or those that are human-made. As a result, techno-shamanic magic is exceptionally good at finding ways to work within the limitations of such objects and forces, since the techno-shaman usually has the cooperation of the her target's spirit. Many techno-shamans regard magic done without such communication to be at best inefficient, and at worst extremely rude.

When performing magic, techno-shamans use a wide range of foci. In the vast majority of cases, these foci consist of various artifacts of modern culture. Television remote controls, computers, handguns, and even electronic children's toys can also be used by techno-shamans to focus and control their magic.

The common perception is that techno-shamans are junk-mages, picking up discarded bits of various gadgets and devices and turning these broken or obsolete consumer goods to their own ends. While there are certainly a number of techno-shamans who fit this image, many of them do not fall into this mold.

The so-called junk-mages normally live in inner-city neighborhoods or in lower-middle-class suburbs. Here, they attempt the difficult task of infusing the empty lives of those around them with wonder and enchantment. Around such individuals, ATMs may suddenly spew great quantities of money for a person withdrawing their last $20 from the bank, and computer screens sometimes display cryptic and enticing messages to bored data-entry clerks.

However, not all techno-shamans are the champions of the poor and the working class. Some techno-shamans belong to various fringe sub-cultures like punks or hackers, and struggle to openly and obviously subvert the current system so that everyone can see its weakness and injustice. Others work within the system to change it. Among the ranks of such people are journalists, engineers, scientists, filmmakers, special effects technicians and similar, well-paid professionals. Many of these mages would be horrified by the idea of using broken or obsolete technology. They use the finest electronics and the most well-made vehicles for their foci and lovingly care for and upgrade these devices so that they can be as useful and long-lasting as possible.

Relations with the Werewolves

In a core **Mage** game, werewolves are little more than berserk monsters that rampage through the wilderness. However, players of various World of Darkness games may well be familiar with **Werewolf**, and its themes on urban spirituality among some werewolf types. This isn't meant to be a be-all end-all on werewolf spirituality, but a small primer in case you decide that you want to try to apply **Werewolf** to a **Mage** game. (Be aware that the **Mage** idea of consensual reality doesn't mesh well with **Werewolf** cosmology, so you'll need to do a lot more work than just this.)

As all techno-shamans are aware, they are not the only ones in the World of Darkness who blend shamanic spirituality with modern technology. Some urban-dwelling werewolves have similar methods and share similar habitats. The relationship between these two groups is complex and unstable. In some places, temporary alliances between the werewolves and the techno-shamans have allowed both groups to improve their city and drive out their common enemies. However, just as frequently the two groups find themselves in dire conflict with each other. Many werewolves feel that culling humanity is a viable solution to most of the world's

problems. Being human, all but the most misanthropic techno-shamans are naturally horrified by this idea.

The coming of the Avatar Storm cut off most techno-shamans from the Umbra, which has allowed the werewolves to expand their presence there. Since this time, many techno-shamans have begun to more thoroughly explore the Digital Web and have begun making alliances with numerous web-spirits, causing the more technologically inclined werewolves to lose ground in the Web. Previously, many urban werewolves were both upset and concerned that the growing number of techno-shamans were more adept at all forms of magic and spiritual power. However, now they see the urban Umbra as primarily their domain and are feeling considerably less threatened by the growing techno-shamanic presence in several large cities.

The one area where techno-shamans and werewolves frequently cooperate is in the field of technomagic. Like everyone enamored by the thrill of advanced cutting-edge technologies, members of both groups are more than happy to talk at great length about their latest expensive toys and the capabilities of various newly released items. Peaceful in-person communication between the members of these groups is fairly rare. However, various Internet chat-rooms and portions of the Digital Web frequently serve as neutral ground for techno-shamans and werewolves who wish to exchange information on advanced technologies, as well as discussing new techno-Fetishes, or Talens that they have created or found.

In many cases, such conversations have lead to lasting communication between techno-shamans and urban werewolves who live in cities separated by thousands of miles. Because they are unlikely to ever meet, and it is doubtful that their immediate goals will ever come into direct conflict, such individuals can freely exchange information and even build long-term (if somewhat guarded) friendships. It is not unknown for such individuals to exchanged Fetishes or other artifacts, by sending these powerful items through the mail in magically shielded packages or giving them to skilled couriers. Unfortunately, these friendships usually do not survive physical meetings. However, this type of cooperation has provided both groups with significantly greater knowledge of technologically-inclined fetishes and spirits.

Recently both groups have come under attack by a new group of mortal hunters with an uncanny ability to recognize both their magic and their unusual natures. While these hunters are more inclined to target werewolves than mages, both techno-shamans and werewolves have died in these attacks. This external and somewhat mysterious threat could easily upset the already delicate balance between these two groups. In some cases, techno-shamans and urban werewolves have banded together to eliminate or at least discourage the hunters, but equally often the werewolves feel that these hunters are yet another example of the innate corruption of humanity and so further distance themselves from the less-targeted mages.

Last night was rough. Rawlins assigned me to the robberies over on Pine Street. I'll never understand what kind of person mugs the homeless. They've gotten four people in the last week. Do those thugs think the street-Sleepers are hiding gold bars in their shopping carts? I looked around for a while and then sat down for some serious work. Hard stuff first, one old drunk named Suzie Hightower died from the beating she took. They got her in the back of an old warehouse. I got down there and there was no one around. I got out a bundle of Christmas lights to hold her spirit and set it right on top of the bloodstained chalk outline. Next came an electronic noisemaker to attract her ghost, and my electronic drum set to get me to the right mood. I'm damn glad that those things work with headphones, rocking the neighborhood would not do good things for my tough cop image.

I went to town for a bit and when I opened my eyes there was Suzie standing before me crying softly. She didn't know who had killed her, and it was dark enough that all she could tell me was that there were three of them and they all smelled pretty damn nasty.

Dead end there, so it was time to actually take a look myself.

My new web phone works much better than those pocket TVs ever did. I reset its electronic clock to her time of death, pointed the antenna at the spot where she died, tied the bit of Suzie's blanket that I'd snagged from the evidence room around the keyboard, and turned the web phone on. The picture was small, but once I boosted the brightness and contrast it was all pretty clear. Two of them had masks, but the third had either lost his or couldn't find one to fit around his bare skull. That boy was one foul-looking undead, and from the way the other two moved, I'd guess they weren't much prettier. Some kind of restless spirits or something. I still don't know why they're hunting down homeless folks, but with a bit of scanning, things that twisted should show up pretty clear. Hopefully I'll be able to get them before tomorrow night. I was hoping for someone I could haul in for the chief, but not those critters...

Failings

Most techno-shamans are urbanites who have little or no experience with non-urban regions or spirits. Some Dreamspeakers claim that this lack of connection to the natural world can easily lead to an acceptance of the most damaging and toxic features of the modern world. Techno-shamans who know nothing but the blight of urban decay have few tools for improving such places, since they are unaware of any more positive alternatives. Also, their current peace with the urban werewolves is inherently unstable. In regions where these werewolves are more established, the techno-shamans could easily end up as either pawns of the werewolves or as bitter enemies who these creatures hunt through the streets. Although neither situation has yet occurred, both easily could.

Unity of Thought

This group is a sub-Tradition of the Cult of Ecstasy that has recruited a number of similarly inclined Sons of Ether. While members from these two Traditions rarely interact in any serious or long-term fashion, these eccentric pioneers are interested in exploring the use of a wide range of drugs and other techniques for enhancing intelligence, expanding consciousness and potentially learning to work directly with Avatars. UoT members recognize that consciousness stems from both physical and spiritual factors. They use combinations of hormones, secretions and drugs to open doors to new thought patterns. By delving into unusual experiences, UoT members hope to push their minds into directions that human brains don't normally grow or think.

The initial impetus for the UoT came during discussions of the end of the Ascension War. A cabal of Cult of Ecstasy members lead by Samuel Vang, an erratic but brilliant biochemist, proclaimed that if sufficient work was put into intelligence and consciousness enhancement it should be possible to turn the tables on the Technocracy. After that, others joined and now the Unity of Thought is at the forefront of research into intelligence, emotions, thought, consciousness and Avatars.

While a number of their research techniques owe a great deal to the Sons of Ether, their kinship to the Cult of Ecstasy is made obvious by the fact that the members are always eager to try any promising new drug or technique upon themselves first. Almost all members of the Unity of Thought hold to the common Cult of Ecstasy ethic that it is wrong to give anyone anything you have not first tried yourself. In addition, most members of the UoT use their inventions to help their work. Their common belief is that they can succeed

even if ordinary humans' minds and spirits cannot develop anything but the most rudimentary techniques of intelligence and Avatar enhancement. Using such limited techniques, they hope to use their boosted minds to develop even better methods of enhancement and so begin a development spiral which will enable those involved to expand their minds and their magic to truly superhuman proportions.

Since they have been working seriously for less than two years, almost half of the UoT is still engaged in the process of testing and evaluating drugs and techniques borrowed or stolen from the Progenitors, Iteration X and various other organizations. Many mages know that they can obtain wealth and useful favors from the members of this sub-Tradition if they are able to acquire a mind-enhancing drug or device that the UoT does not already possess.

Although somewhat more isolated and solitary than the members of many of the newer sub-Traditions, the members of the UoT are all passionately devoted to sharing their research with each other. New drugs and information on existing drugs and devices are all exchanged on a regular basis, and members of the UoT communicate in a series of weekly meetings and Internet chats. The most difficult part of this communication is, of course, exchanging actual products. The UoT pays careful mages to act as secret couriers, to avoid alerting either governments or the Technocracy to the powerful substances and unlicensed technologies that they are regularly shipping to each other.

Currently the primary focus of the UoT's researches is intelligence enhancement. Although progress has been slow, they have already moved far beyond such minor mental aids like vasopressin or ginko biloba and have developed products with considerably more impressive effects. The UoT now has drugs that temporarily increase intelligence to a moderate degree. Unfortunately, drugs with permanent effects or chemicals that raise intelligence to superhuman levels are all still highly dangerous and experimental. Greater progress has been made with drugs and devices that enhance specific aspects of intelligence, like memory or mathematical ability.

Most members of UoT seek to enhance intelligence using drugs and retrovirus therapies. Samuel Vang is the head of this portion of their work and has tried all promising drugs they have developed. On a related front, Lynne Bronowski, a young cult of Ecstasy member, is head of a team currently working on implantable biochips. Although her team consists of several highly skilled Sons of Ether and one Virtual Adept, their progress so far has been slow. However, Bronowski's

work continues to break new ground and she has vowed to become the first truly post-human mind.

Members of the UoT hope that if they can give themselves IQs of 250 or above they will be able to solve all manner of otherwise intractable problems. Most also wish to make such techniques available to select groups of Sleepers so that they will be able to more clearly see and act on the many mundane problems which afflict the World of Darkness. One faction of the Unity of Thought eventually plans to dose a number of politicians, corporate heads and other world leaders with these drugs as well as other chemicals that prevent an individual from lying to himself. These mages hope that this program will force various world leaders to see the self-destructive nature of the policies they are pursuing. The UoT is still debating both the morality and practicality of this idea.

While intelligence enhancement remains the focus of much UoT effort, as this group has grown, newer members have begun following other directions of research. The most exciting possibility is the field of Avatar communication and enhancement. Drugs that can assist some mages in communicating more clearly with their Avatars have existed for millennia. The UoT hopes to develop improved versions that work on a wider range of subjects. In addition, while progress has so far been exceedingly limited, some of the most visionary mages believe that it may ultimately be possible to create drugs or devices that can temporarily or permanently boost an Avatar's power. Unfortunately, the primary result of such experimentation has been severe disorientation and sensory confusion from the subjects, and some participants worry about the risk of Avatar damage or Gilgul. While most Tradition mages would pay dearly for drugs or devices that actually produced such effects, few outside the UoT actually expect them to make any progress in this direction.

On a more practical level, the members of the Unity of Thought are also at the forefront of research into mood-altering drugs and devices. In addition to using various substances for their own pleasure and enlightenment, their techniques have also proven to be exceedingly useful tools for controlling or incapacitating the Traditions' enemies. Also, using data derived from stolen Technocracy research, a group of UoT members is preparing a plan to counteract the mind-numbing drugs that the Progenitors use on their enemies and test subjects.

Although small, UoT's work is supported by many of the younger and less conventional members of the Sons of Ether. Also, a number of members of the Virtual Adepts are happy to aid UoT in return for a chance to use some of their less risky techniques of mental enhancement. However, others outside the UoT fear that the members of this group may end up as inhuman as many of Iteration X's cyborgs. The leaders of the Cult of Ecstasy have refused to state any opinion on the UoT's activities, but have revealed that they are watching this group's activities quite closely. As a result, most Cultists who are not directly involved with the UoT are somewhat circumspect in their interactions with the members of this sub-Tradition.

Styles of Magic

As expected, drugs are one of UoT's most commonly used foci. In addition to various chemicals that expand the mage's mind, discrete aerosol sprays are often used to alter the minds and bodies of nearby targets. In addition, subsonics, flashing lights, electromagnetic fields and related techniques can all produce similar effects. With foci ranging from TV remote-shaped microwave emitters that cause anyone they are pointed at to fall asleep, to spray cans that allow anyone sprayed on to perceive and interact with the Umbral world, the members of the UoT have access to powerful and often highly discrete magic.

Failings

In addition to the obvious risk of catastrophes involving experimental pharmaceuticals or Avatar manipulation, the Unity of Thought runs a risk of distancing itself from both humanity and their fellow mages. Currently, no one knows if superhumanly intelligent mages would have any goals in common with the other Traditions or even the rest of the human species. A number of outsiders believe that if the UoT succeed in any of their goals, they will mostly likely vanish into the Umbra to pursue unknown and possibly unknowable projects.

Also, some members of the Cult of Ecstasy worry about the morality of the UoT. Although it is clear that the members of the UoT are not about to go around randomly dosing Sleepers with their latest creations, conservative members of the Cult of Ecstasy are concerned about the UoT's possible plans for social change by dosing unknowing subjects. If such objections are not dealt with in some fashion, the UoT may find its efforts directly opposed by some of the most powerful members of the Cult of Ecstasy. Since such a unified action by the Cult of Ecstasy has not been seen in almost 50 years, few younger mages are aware of such a possibility even exists.

House Thig

Although technically one of the sub-Traditions which is interested in technomagic, the Hermetic Cru-

cible of Thig approaches this question with a viewpoint that is radically different from most of the other new technomagicians. For the members of House Thig, advanced technology is a fascinating magical tool, and not an end in itself. The members of House Thig are not engineers or inventors like the Sons of Ether, nor are they interested in the innate spirituality of our technological world, like the techno-shamans. Instead, advanced technology is merely a new place to expand their Hermetic doctrines.

While magical swords, staves, herbs and gemstones formed the heart of Hermetic magic in pre-modern times, the members of House Thig claim that the Order must change with the times. Enchanted computers, thaumaturgically enhanced automobiles, and magical firearms form their modern arsenal of magic. Some of the Sons of Ether claim that House Thig's only interest in the use of modern technology is as a ruse to disguise their magic. Many among House Thig would agree with this assessment and would also note that the early 21st century's rapidly changing technologies forms a perfect cover for all manner of powerful magics.

Style of Magic

Like many members of the Order of Hermes, most members of House Thig care little about spirits sleeping inside mundane objects. If a member of this house wants a spiritually-awakened computer she will usually summon an appropriate spirit and bargain or coerce it into inhabiting the computer and doing her bidding. The members of House Thig tend to use any vaguely appropriate foci for their magic. When casting a martial rote, they typically employ guns or similar weapons. When they open locks and disarm alarms, they normally use devices that at least superficially resemble electronic lock picks. The actual function and capabilities of the chosen device is often irrelevant. All that matters is that the members of House Thig can use their magic to allow it to function in the desired fashion. Focusing their magic through conventional-seeming means allows them to avoid both Paradox and the attentions of dangerous outsiders.

Like everyone else of the Order of Hermes, the members of this house enchant items as a method of gaining status and prestige. Members of House Thig take great pride in displaying the Talismans they have created. Enchanted guns, computers, and cars are all quite common, as are enchanted cellular phones and credit cards. Marcus Jefferson of House Thig gained an impressive reputation by creating a credit card that was always approved, regardless of the amount of the purchase or the fact that no bills were ever paid by, or even mailed to, him.

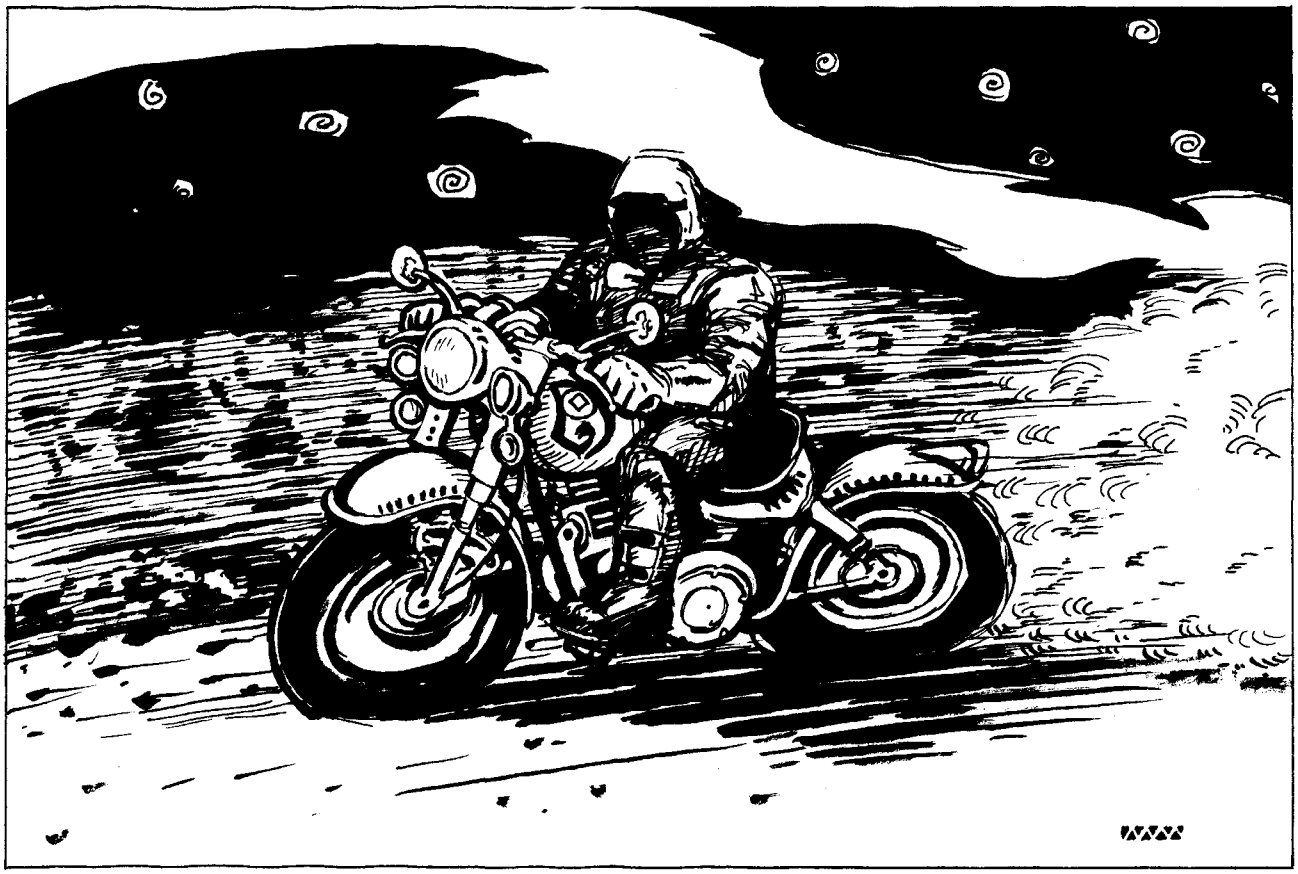
The most important fact about House Thig is that despite the frequent problems it has with the rest of the Order, it is still very much a Hermetic Tradition. The disputes it has with the other houses are based purely upon the fact that its members are willing to combine traditional Hermetic symbolism with modern technology and in some cases abandon this symbolism for more modern alternatives. Since Hermetic magic is at its heart based upon a special symbolic language, the leaders of House Thig claim that all they are doing is performing a much-needed modern translation of Hermetic symbols and procedures. However, some in the Order claim that like most efforts of translation, essential portions of the meaning of the original text are lost in this process.

Many elders of the Order of Hermes were both exceedingly old and quite conservative. The control they maintained over the Order greatly slowed the pace of innovation. However, with most of these elders either dead in the destruction of Doisstep or exiled beyond the Gauntlet by the Avatar Storm, the Order has entered a period of re-evaluation and change. House Thig is at the forefront of this movement and its membership has nearly doubled in the months since the Gauntlet closed.

Today, House Thig sees itself as the most lively and vital House in the Order, and its leaders hope to eventually convert the entire Order to its new version of Hermetic magic. Initially, the members hoped to gain allies and support outside of the Order of Hermes. However, they have so far been unsuccessful in this effort. The Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts see House Thig as magicians who play with technology rather than as proper technomancers and most other mages prefer to stay well out of Hermetic politics.

While the members of House Thig are usually more technically knowledgeable than most members of the Order of Hermes, they rarely possess the same fascination with advanced science and technology that characterizes the vast majority of technomagicians. As a result, when technomagically inclined members of various Traditions come together to discuss various issues, the members of House Thig often find themselves excluded and marginalized. Many other mages consider them to be nothing more than Hermetics using slightly different tools. Their somewhat dilettantish reputation has been further enhanced by the fact that most of House Thig's members are relatively young and are typically more daring and adventurous than most of the Order's members.

Many of these younger mages are excited by the possibilities inherent in modern technology but are not



interested in building their own devices, or even in fully understanding how such devices work. Instead, they purchase or otherwise acquire cutting edge technologies from others and use their magic to enhance these devices to truly cinematic levels. Typically such mages substitute their skill with magic for physical training or technical knowledge. Their understanding of the Sphere of Forces allows them to drive over nearly impassable obstacles, make elaborate trick shots, and defeat the most difficult locks and alarms, all with minimal training in any of the necessary technical skills. The popularity of action films like "The Matrix" has served to further inspire these daring mages, as well as allowing an even greater number of their efforts to be considered coincidental. A number of the older mages of the Order have stated that they expect at least half of the members of House Thig to get themselves killed within the next few years.

Failings

In addition to the fact that House Thig has many young and foolish members, it is also in a somewhat precarious political position. Although the origins of House Thig are based upon a sincere interest in reforming Hermetic Magic, its current growth comes largely from a political ploy by an ambitious cabal of young Hermetics. These mages, led by a mysterious individual known only as Lyta, are actively recruiting new members from other branches of the Order and are attempting to persuade all new recruits into the Order to join their House.

Although the top ranks of the Order's leadership are now either dead or isolated behind the Gauntlet, the Order still has a strong hierarchy, and its current leaders are not about to give House Thig control of the entire Order. Lyta and her allies within of House Thig are beginning to solidify their position. However, they will soon face serious political opposition by the more traditional members of the Order's current leadership. The outcome of these struggles could result in the ascendance of House Thig, but it could also end up disgraced — with its members fined, banished from the Order, or even dead.

Their position is further weakened by the fact that most of House Thig's members are new to the Order of Hermes. As a result, the majority of these mages are unaware of the true complexities and dangers of Hermetic politics. While the members of House Thig perform flashy feats designed to impress potential recruits, a number of older Hermetics are quietly gathering information on the House's leaders, examining its weaknesses and preparing for its downfall.

"Do you have the books?"

"Hold on there a minute. You asked me to break into the house of a blood-sucking vampire who's more than 300 years old, and make off with three of her most valuable occult books?"

"Do you have them? I need the merchandise before the 31st. Later than that and they are useless to me and far too valuable to her. I have your payment here."

"First you're going to listen to me, and then you are going to pay me double what I asked."

"We had an agreement, you would not be wise to cross me. You and the other members of House Thig would be well advised to avoid angering my allies."

"Do you make up those lines yourself? The house was just like you said. I plugged my cracker into the alarm box and got control of her alarms and her whole electrical system in 11 seconds. A power failure in the south wing got both guards in one room, and a head shot for each one took care of them. Then, I stuck the ultrasound box up to the window and detected nothing. Just like you said, she's out for the night and only had two guards. So, *snick* goes the window and I'm in. No need to worry about cameras, so I saunter into the library, certain that my trusted client has given me all of the information necessary to insure my complete safety.

"Well, as soon as I picked up the first book, the two creepy looking statues in the corner come to life. Out popped a nice pair of bat wings from each and they were both flying at me at full speed. If I hadn't had a Primed gun I'd have been dead. I'm blazing away with a 45 at a pair of animate gargoyles and making enough noise to wake folks five blocks away. Meanwhile both of them are eagerly trying to eat my face. That's a $1,000 coat and one of the damned things tore the entire front down to the Kevlar. I killed the second just before I ran out of ammo. Then I grabbed the books and ran.

"Of course, by this time the cops where headed right for the house, and they spotted my car leaving. I had to get it up to 120, and then pull that lane-hopping trick that got me munched on by a Paradox spirit last time I tried it. Fortunately, it worked this time, and I managed to get away."

"You are alive, unharmed, and you have my book, what is the problem?"

"The problem is that you said nothing about any damned animate gargoyles. An extra 10 pawns of Tass or I only give you two books and feed the third one to my shredder."

The Linguists

What happens when the Order of Hermes' linguistically-minded mages, with a focus on magical chants, cross-pollinate with Virtual Adepts and their code-languages for commanding the Web and the cosmos? Calling themselves the Linguists, the members of this faction claim that both Traditions share an underlying similarity: they both practice the magic of language. Whether using Latin, Aramaic, the esoteric script of advanced mathematics, or even C++, the Linguists maintain that both Traditions are searching for the true and ultimate language of magic, and that this search is best conducted by pooling their resources. Although few others in either Tradition would agree with their conclusions, the Linguists believe that only by combining esoteric scholarship and advanced electronics and number theory can the ultimate magical language be created or discovered. They are lead by Catherine Zhong, a highly skilled Virtual Adept who is believed to have purposely crashed several important Technocracy computers. Zhong works with Raymond Issander, a well-respected professor of linguistics who also holds several advanced degrees in mathematics. Dr. Issander is also a prominent member of the Order of Hermes who is known to be reasonably apolitical but passionately devoted to increasing magical knowledge among all of the Traditions. Dr. Issander personally screens all prospective members of the Linguists and spends many hours teaching new recruits. As a result, many Linguists are skilled mathematicians and expert cryptographers as well as being exceedingly knowledgeable about language.

The Linguists have developed numerous unique programming languages and have deciphered a number of previously mysterious languages and codes. Starting with magico-religious Mayan inscriptions and various military and intelligence community codes, the Linguists have learned a great deal in the course of their investigations. Unfortunately, their facility with language may ultimately prove to be their undoing. Under the direction of Catherine Zhong, several groups of Linguists are currently attempting to crack various Technocracy codes. One team is even working on deciphering Iteration X's programming language. Although the Technocracy does not yet know of the existence of the Linguists, they have begun to worry that some of their low-level codes may have been compromised. As the Linguists continue to work, they are likely to draw an increasing amount of attention and may well face outright extermination if any of their most sensitive work comes to light.

Although many in the Traditions would greatly love to have free access to the Technocracy's codes, the

risk attached to such work is usually considered to be far too great. Many Tradition mages would be horrified to discover the true extent of the Linguists' researches. Of course, not all of the Linguists' projects are so obviously dangerous. Other teams are attempting to decipher the language that spirits use when communicating with each other, and one group that works directly with Dr. Issander are even attempting to discover if Avatars have an innate language.

The Linguists attempt to fully integrate members of both of their founding Traditions. As a result, every research team must include members of both Traditions. Naturally, the Linguists have developed a variety of specialized languages for communicating about numerous magical and academic topics. Since the Linguists are a small and fairly isolated sub-Tradition with few allies, they have difficulty recruiting members from the Traditions. Except for a small group of mages who work directly with Catherine Zhong, the Linguists are primarily composed of scholars and mathematicians; few of them have any knowledge or interest in Tradition politics. Since the extent of Zhong's work is now unknown, the Linguists are largely regarded as harmless, but potentially brilliant, eccentrics by the members of most Traditions. Many Virtual Adepts and a few members of the Order of Hermes admire their work; most other mages lack the knowledge necessary to appreciate the Linguist's theoretical achievements.

Style of Magic

The essence of the Linguist's magic consists of mages creating highly detailed statements, which cause changes in the world. These statements can be shouted, written, drawn out on a magic square, embossed on a plaque made of gold or even compiled and run as a computer program. The key to success is using a language and grammatical structure that is best fitted to the desired result. Most Linguists use different languages and methods of producing the language, depending upon the particular type of magic being used. However, expanding upon Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar, many Linguists believe that there is some form of underlying universal structure to all magical language. Opinions differ on whether this language is in some way innate in the physical laws of the universe, or whether it is an artifact of human consciousness and brain structure.

A few Linguists have become adept at encoding magical statements within mundane-seeming communications. Several Linguists who work in advertising

recently managed to incorporate messages that have had a profound but subtle affect on the minds of everyone who saw or heard these advertisements. The recent popular opposition to electronic censorship has in part resulted from a series of such secretly coded ads influencing the minds of many people in the First World. However, most Linguists are not practicing magic on anywhere near that large or public a scale. Instead, they are performing a great deal of less obvious work, determining the most effective vocabulary and grammar to control the weather, summon ghosts or view the past.

Failings

While many Linguists are merely interested in language and its magical and mundane uses, some of them are also at the forefront of the Traditions' most direct efforts to subvert the Technocracy. With projects ranging from subliminal advertising to cracking technocratic codes, they are placing themselves in direct and obvious opposition to the Technocracy. In addition to setting themselves up for technocratic attack, this plan may also result in significant opposition by the Traditions. Now that the Technocracy has decided that the Traditions are finally defeated, many among the Traditions worry that if any of their efforts are too obvious, the Technocracy might decide to rethink its decision and vigorously renew the Pogrom.

Currently, the full scope of the Linguists' more practical efforts are unknown to either the Technocracy or to anyone else among the Traditions. If the Technocracy finds out about their efforts, everyone involved could find themselves hunted, with little assistance forthcoming from the Traditions. In contrast, if the Traditions uncover their efforts first, the Linguists will likely be asked to cease their most overt and dangerous programs. If they refuse, they will likely face censure and even possible expulsion or destruction. Only a series of impressive successes against the Technocracy, which do not result in any retribution against Traditions, have a chance of forestalling such a decision. Unless they are both highly skilled and very lucky, the Linguists are likely not to last particularly long.

The Lhaksmists

In a radical departure from the way that outsiders typically view them, one branch of the Euthanatos has largely embraced modern technology. While the members of most other Traditions see the Euthanatos as grim, hide-bound mystics, they forget the fact that the Euthanatos are fundamentally different from any of the other Traditions. While groups like the Dreamspeakers, the Sons of Ether and the Akashic Brotherhood are bound together by a cohesive magical paradigm, the Euthanatos are bound more by a unified set of ethics and goals than by their common style of magic.

While the majority of Euthanatos are content with traditional methods of magical practice, many in this Tradition attach no stigma to adopting more modern methods. Now that most Tradition mages have accepted the fact that some version of the modern technocratic paradigm is here to stay, membership in the Lhaksmists has expanded as more Euthanatos have begun looking more closely at this sub-Tradition.

The Lhaksmists are much more than merely Euthanatos who use advanced technologies. The essence of this sub-Tradition is a fascination with chance, chaos theory and probability. Many outside of House Euthanatos primarily think of Lhaksmists as Euthanatos who happily use advanced modern electronics and frequently visit the more unusual portion of the Digital Web. However more knowledgeable mages realize that the Lhaksmists can equally often be found in gambling casinos, racetracks or even on the floor of the New York stock exchange.

Lhaksmists have the typical Euthanatos devotion to encouraging change and finding appropriate endings for people and things whose time has past. However, unlike the somewhat heavy-handed tactics of groups like the Knights of Radamanthys, the Lhaksmists are cunning and subtle manipulators. More than a decade ago, they learned to make use of the portion of chaos theory known as "The Butterfly Effect." Just as one butterfly landing upon a leaf in Borneo can potentially affect the weather in London, a single phrase spoken at exactly the right time can change someone's life. Through a careful analysis of the probabilities and patterns of life, the Lhaksmists can use seemingly trivial events, like someone missing a train, or witnessing a random argument between two strangers as catalysts to change lives and potentially even alter the fate of nations. While most mages are far too aware of the coincidences that surround their lives to be vulnerable to such manipulations, the vast majority of Sleepers have no such resistance. Since the Technocracy has largely called off the Pogrom, Lhaksmists have been able to work more openly, staging small but important coincidences for the benefit of corporate heads and politicians as well as for ordinary people who desperately need to have their lives changed.

Unfortunately, while these manipulations sometimes work spectacularly well, they often fail and

occasionally even backfire. Calculating the multitude of probabilities involved is an immense task. Even mages skilled in the art of Entropy can easily become lost in these complexities. To further their ends, many Lhaksmists often work closely with like-minded Virtual Adepts. Even those who do not work directly with VAs frequently request their help in constructing ever more complicated computers. With sufficiently advanced computers, the Lhaksmists hope to be able to predict probabilities with sufficient accuracy to enable them to consistently perform successful manipulations.

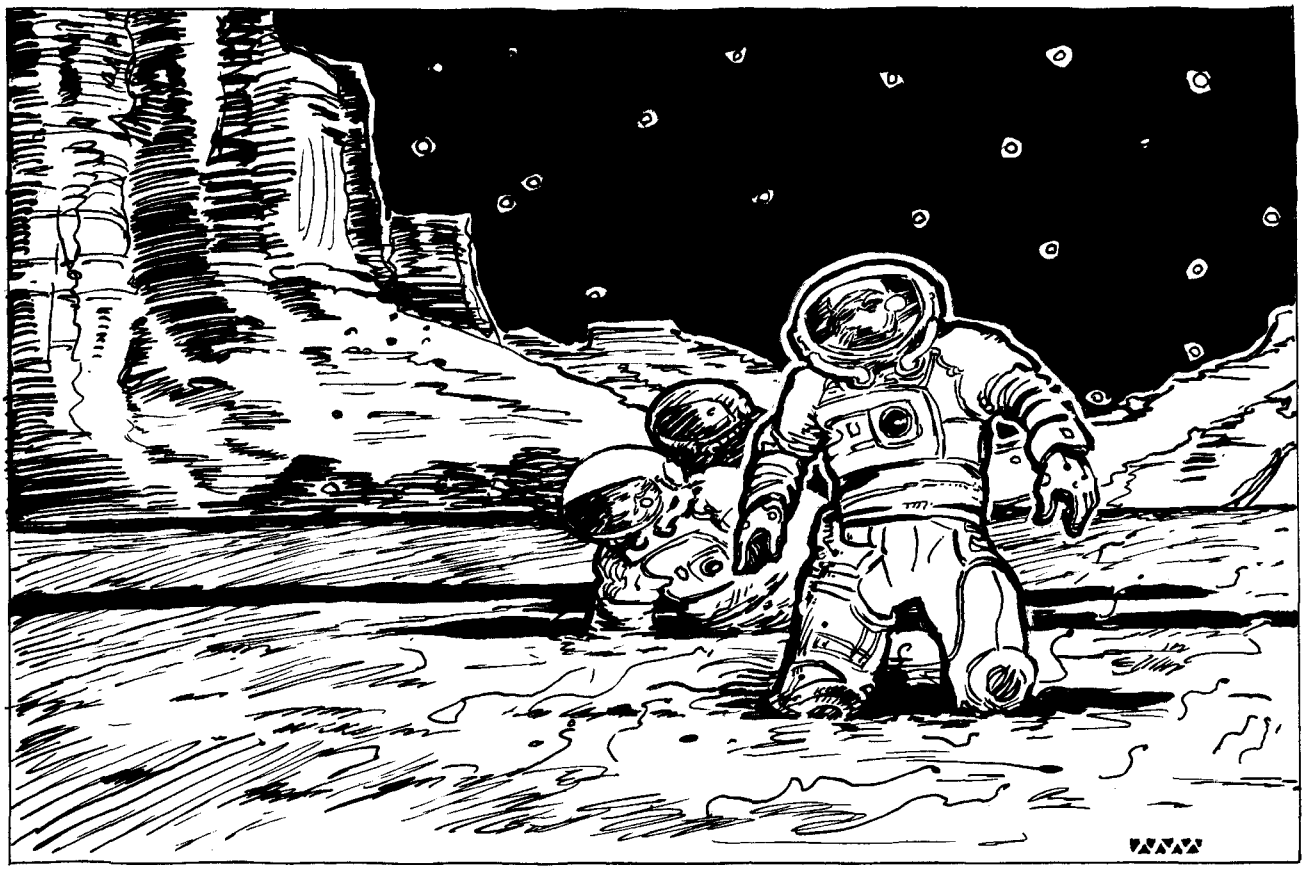
Their ability to attain great results through minor coincidences interests many in the Traditions, but it also has made a number of mages wary of them. While the unreliable nature of their work makes such labels premature, the Lhaksmists are referred to by some hostile mages as "Fates" or "Puppetmasters." Also, while many in The Order of Hermes, the Virtual Adepts and The Sons of Ether are anxious to learn more about their work, a number of Dreamspeakers, Verbena and most Akashics regard the Lhaksmists' manipulations as inherently dangerous and unreliable. According to the leaders of the Akashic Brotherhood, attempting to control the patterns of the world too exactly can warp the lines of Chi to the point that uncontrolled catastrophes become inevitable. The Lhaksmists and many of their allies dismiss such objections, but the Akashics continue their warnings.

However, while many non-Euthanatos grow worried, their popularity in their own Tradition is growing. One cause of this support is the fact that modern technology has provided the Lhaksmists with an answer to a very serious problem. Now that crossing the Gauntlet is fraught with danger, taking every prospective Euthanatos physically into the underworld is no longer practical. However, the rite of the Agama lies at the very heart of the Euthanatos path. Anyone who has not personally experienced death cannot be a Euthanatos. Technologically-knowledgeable Lhaksmists have helped members of the Euthanatos who possess medical training become adept at inducing controlled near-death experiences. Many Euthanatos who are not associated with the Lhaksmists claim that this sort of Agama is fundamentally different from rending the Gauntlet and walking into the underworld. However, some members of this Tradition see this newer form of Agama as more terrifying and therefore fundamentally more enlightening than merely setting foot in the land of the dead. Regardless of their feelings on the matter, an increasing number of Euthanatos are now choosing this new form of Agama for purely practical reasons.

Failings

As expected, one of the Lhaksmist's primary failings is pride. Many in this sub-Tradition speak highly of their previous successes, which have included aiding the peace talks between Britain and Ireland by subtle alterations in the lives of the negotiators and politicians involved in these talks. Unfortunately, most of these same mages neglect the fact that similar manipulations of various leaders in the Middle East resulted in utter failure. As a result, a few Lhaksmists are planning increasingly large-scale manipulations. Not only is the potential for disaster increasingly great, but such attempts could also draw the attention of both the Technocracy and powerful Vampires. Both groups could prove exceedingly formidable enemies, and the most daring Lhaksmists are far too confident of their ability to avoid both failure and detection to heed these dangers. A few of the older and more traditional members of the Euthanatos have begun to notice the Lhaksmists growing overconfident and have been considering the necessity of stepping in. While most Euthanatos support the Lhaksmists' efforts, the leaders of several other Traditions are also beginning to place pressure on the Euthanatos' leaders.

> From what I've heard, none of the Other Trads have anything like this. After we talked about everything for a few hours, the doctor I was interning with had me lie down on a gurney. The feeling of cold metal on my bare skin is one that's hard to forget. Although I'd been an intern for six months, this was the first time I'd ever had any of this equipment used on me. His team was pretty creepy looking, especially the woman in the skull mask, but the equipment was even worse. The cooling unit that was going to keep me from getting brain damage while I was dead and the IV which they were going to use to inject drugs to stop my heart both looked more terrifying that it's easy to explain. I was going to die here, and then, they were hopefully going to bring me back to life in 15 or 20 minutes. I'd helped revive several patients, but being the one on the gurney is a whole different trip. When Dr. Erikson asked me if I really was ready to die, I almost bolted. I gritted my teeth, said yes, and they started the IV. Dying is a part of the cycle and it needs to be done, but don't let anyone tell you that it's either fun or exciting. Thinking about the feeling of my last breath rattling in my throat still makes me shiver. Coming back is worse — cold, shocks and pain. As for being dead, if you thought I was going to tell you about that, think again. If you want to know, try it yourself .



The Disciples of the One Point

Dr. Maria Lockney, a highly religious astronomer working at Mount Wilson Observatory just north of Los Angeles, founded the Disciples of the One Point three years ago. Since light pollution from Los Angles and better telescopes elsewhere have greatly reduced Mt. Wilson's status and prestige, Dr. Lockney was able to use her connections to draw like-minded astronomers, and interested mages to this locale without objection or, even notice, from the Technocracy.

Dr. Lockney and her followers are devout pantheists who see God as a part of the entire universe. According to their beliefs, the "big bang," where the universe was born, and the "big crunch" which may occur billions of years from now are both part of the life cycle of God. God becomes distracted and diffuse as the universe expands, and is only directly approachable and knowable shortly after the big bang or just before the big crunch, when the universe that is God is a uniform whole contained in a small area.

The Disciples combine modern astronomy with sophisticated Time and Correspondence magics in an attempt to contact this distant and expansive God. Their projects range from searches for meaning in the cosmic background radiation to attempts to see further and further into the past with ever more powerful optical and radio telescopes. The Disciples of the One Point are confident that these investigations will soon reveal the ultimate answers they are avidly seeking.

The members of this sub-Tradition are also at the forefront of popular support for space exploration. For them, such explorations are a quest to know the mind of God. Also, most members of this sub-Tradition feel that humanity would be closer to God if we moved off of Earth and into space. Space colonization is seen as having both practical and spiritual benefits. The recent efforts by the Technocracy to pull back from space are being vigorously opposed by the Disciples, both in covert media actions and through subtle magical interventions.

In addition, the Disciples of the One Point are now building a small temple on the dark side of the moon. James Ortega, a Disciple who works for NASA supplied them with a small moon rock brought back by Apollo 16. With this rock, a group of Disciples skilled at Correspondence magic will soon open a Correspondence Portal to the moon. Once this portal is open they will send through a group of daring mages equipped for survival in this deadly environment to journey across the Lunar surface and acquire samples from the depths of a small crater on the dark side of the moon. They are

seeking a crater far from both earthly telescopes and the secret bases of the Void Engineers. The Disciples are offering substantial rewards to any outside mages who are willing to take part in this hazardous expedition. Using these samples, the Disciples plan to open a long-term portal to this isolated location and begin constructing their temple. While a lunar base will allow the members of this sub-Tradition to attain much greater knowledge of the Universe, the risk of discovery by the Void Engineers is substantial. The Disciples are also seeking help from outsiders to ensure that their new temple is secure and well hidden.

Style of Magic

While still members of the Celestial Chorus, these mages work magic in a manner very reminiscent of the Technocracy. With computers, advanced sensors, and many similarly complex devices, the Disciples of the One Point work miracles of modern science. However, their devotion to technology in no way interferes with their faith, and they regard the sketchy messages they have received from their deity as far more important than any mundane concerns.

The Disciples of the One Point are at the forefront of the Traditions' efforts to combat the Nephandi and their Umbral masters. These mages regard such hostile Umbrood as demons keeping humanity from space and so thwarting our reunion with God. As a result, some members of this sub-Tradition are seeking to make alliances with the Void Engineers and hope to help infuse the members of that Convention with their own spirituality. Others feel that members of the Technocracy are beyond all redemption and are instead seeking support among those Sleepers who still turn their eyes to the stars.

Failings

This sub-Tradition's primary fault is that it is both quite small and regarded as unimportant by most other mages. Few Sons of Ether care about spiritual matters, and most other mages have decided that ventures into space are less important than attempting to help the plight of their own world. Dr. Lockney hopes that successfully constructing a lunar base will impress the members of other Traditions sufficiently to convince them to give the Disciples the aid, support and respect they need to prosper and grow. While creating their astronomical temple will certainly put them on the map, this attempt could also easily draw the attention of the Void Engineers, and result in the capture or destruction of both the Disciple's base and their earthly headquarters at Mt. Wilson.

Other Variants

As the Traditions enter a time of flux and change, many mages are reevaluating ancient prejudices and considering alliances that their elders would have shunned. Although the spread of shamanic techniques and technomagic are the most obvious responses to this new era of magic, there are also a number of other more idiosyncratic reactions.

The Order of St. Albertus

The rivalry between the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes is both ancient and bitter. Not only were these two Traditions at each other's throats throughout most of the middle ages, but today each blames the other for allowing the Order of Reason to supplant them both. However, now that the leaders of both Traditions are mostly gone, a few the younger members have had a chance to re-evaluate their differences. While most members of both Traditions continue to blame the other for their own problems, a few mages have begun to look beyond past hostilities.

Both groups are based in Western magic and spirituality and both groups draw heavily from ancient Greco-Roman magic and philosophy. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the two Traditions actually have a great deal in common. Also, the members of both Traditions are inclined to be well read and scholarly. Open-minded researchers from both groups have found much evidence for past cooperation between these Traditions.

In the middle ages, while most Hermetics and Choristers were fighting each other, some of the more enlightened members of both groups allied together to fight demons and other common foes. Although their existence has been expunged from the official records of both Traditions and from most history books, there were once religious orders of knights who combined ceremonial magic and religious faith into a potent weapon that they used against the foes of humanity. Similarly several Chantries belonging to the Order of Hermes were granted status as monasteries because of the piety and devotion of their members.

Although their philosophies are often opposed, mixing the Choristers' religion with the Order's magic can work exceptionally well. As a result, some of the younger members of both Traditions claim that re-introducing portions of each group's paradigm into the modern world would be facilitated if both groups worked together to introduce elements of both Traditions together. In addition to seals of Solomon and angelic summonings, ceremonial magic that calls upon

the power of God is an important part of both Traditions' heritages.

Named for Albertus Magnus, a Bishop who was also a member of the Order of Hermes and who was eventually Sainted, the Order of St. Albertus was founded two years ago by Maria Alverado, member of the Order of Hermes, who teaches history in Mexico City. Working with Father Juan Pico, a Jesuit Priest who also belongs to the Celestial Chorus, Alverado uncovered the evidence of past cooperation and decided to openly revive it. This sub-Tradition is an open alliance between the Celestial Chorus and the Order of Hermes, based upon their prior alliances during the late Middle Ages. While still quite small and opposed by many of the less open-minded members of both Traditions, the Order of St. Albertus has already proven that magic combining the best of both groups can be highly effective. The future of this fledgling alliance is still in doubt, but its members are committed to making it work. Although based in Mexico City, this Tradition has members throughout Central America and, more recently, Southern California.

The members see themselves as modern crusading knights who are determined to perform good deeds, aid Sleepers in need and perform God's work in the modern world. For these individuals, the re-enchantment of the world is something that can only be done if it is performed in a way that brings hope and aid to the masses of Sleepers threatened by the impersonal dangers of the modern world.

The Order of St. Albertus is an explicitly martial sub-Tradition, and all members are expected to be able to fight for what they believe in. While a few traditionalists use swords or knives, most members are armed with guns. With a membership which consists of people ranging from Red Cross & UN relief workers to priests, historians and occult bookstore owners, the Order of St. Albertus is a new and vital sub-Tradition that is likely to make a significant impact. Currently, members of this Sub-Tradition primarily work in Central and South America, protecting villagers and religious officials from death squads and similar governmental and military excesses. They have also begun expanding their operations into Southern California and New Mexico where they are attempting to prevent mistreatment of illegal immigrants.

Failings

While the leadership of their two parent Traditions has not ordered this sub-Tradition's suppression, powerful mages in both Traditions feel that the Order of St. Albertus is both misguided and offensive. All who join this sub-Tradition completely cut themselves off from any aid by their parent Tradition. Also, while few mages in other Traditions care about ancient quarrels between the Hermetics and the Choristers, most outsiders view the members of the Order of St. Albertus as little more than eccentric religious fanatics. Although its members are loyal and devoted, this group will likely need some measure of outside support or recognition to continue to grow.

Making Your Own Twisted Traditions

The growth of factions and twisted Traditions is inevitable. The Traditions can't stay in the past forever. The difference between the two is blurry; a twisted Tradition is, in a sense, a faction.

For purposes of the examples in this chapter, a twisted Tradition is an example of what happens when a Tradition tries to modernize — the results of adding modern thinking and tools to the Tradition's practices. This means techno-shamanism, theoretical science combined with occultism or just plain modern mores and thoughts applied to a Tradition's practices.

A faction is basically any group that pursues its agenda through a specific, individual set of magical practices. Each faction borrows some magical identity from its parent Tradition but also incorporates its members' own unique beliefs. In this sense, a faction can easily cross Tradition lines, as members of various praxes compromise to follow some greater goal (like the Children's Crusade on p. 143).

Factions and twisted Traditions will grow naturally out of your game — as mages develop their own paradigms and work with other like-minded mages, they'll essentially become a minor faction of their own. This is fine; factions usually still seek to remain part of a given Tradition, just so they stay "authentic" within the Council. At the same time, it's possible to have many different factional allegiances. A member of the Children's Crusade cross-Tradition faction might also be (more formally) a Knight of St. George in the Celestial Chorus. Since a faction is just an allegiance to a certain goal, it's not impossible to have multiple loyalties — although some factions will fight with one another, making multiple memberships impossible in a few cases.

Build your own factions out of magical imperatives in your game. For instance, you might decide that in your game, a city has had massive problems with Junctures that release Jhor-tainted Quintessence. Since anyone less than a Master would have trouble fixing this, a local cabal might take it upon themselves to

police the places where this occurs, safely gathering the Quintessence and watching out for other mages who misuse it. In time, this shared purpose gives them their own identity, and others start to call them based on this. Eventually they spread to become a group of mages concerned with the proper storage and disposal of Quintessence across the world. Once they've spread from their initial place of operation as a cabal and recruited mages from all over the world, they've become a faction in their own right.

Check out also some of the cabals and groups that grew out of Tradition history in chapter three, and the cross-Traditional purposed factions (not twisted Traditions) in chapter five.

MATTER
DOMAIN
PRESCOT

Chapter Three: Traditional History

It is said that what is called "the spirit of an age" is something to which one cannot return. That this spirit gradually dissipates is due to the world's coming to an end. For this reason although one would like to change today's world back to the spirit of one hundred years or more ago, it cannot be done. Thus it is important to make the best of every generation.

— Tsunetomo Yamamoto, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*

The Time Has Come To Talk Of Many Things

So I guess they sent you to me to learn about the history of the Traditions. Well, sit down. This might take a while. I'm not much of a historian. In fact, I'm mainly just a bitter old cynic who's watched as generation after generation of young mages seemed to throw their lives away tilting at windmills.

First off, I don't care what Tradition you are, and it doesn't matter what mine is either. You said you wanted the history of the Traditions — plural — not a Tradition. If you want your own Tradition's spin on things, go ask someone else. Second, I am not here to make you feel good about yourself or your Tradition. We are not saints. Being wizards does not grant us some sort of moral or ethical superiority. We are still human beings and are just as capable of good and bad as everyone else. Every Tradition has its fair share of people and events they can be proud of. By the same token, they all have their share of things to be ashamed of, and glossing those things over doesn't do anyone any good. I've seen too many mages repeat the sins of the past simply out of ignorance that those sins ever occurred. To paraphrase Phil Ochs, I believe there is something inherent in the fiber of the Traditions worth saving and that the fortunes of the entire world may well ride on the ability of young mages to face the responsibilities of old mages gone mad. You are the future of the Traditions, and your generation is the one that will decide if we even have a future, or if we're destined to be thrown into the trash heap of history.

Since we've got that out of the way and you haven't run screaming, I guess you still want to listen to me. Good. Buy me dinner and we'll get started.

Don't Know Much About History

History is a funny thing. It changes as you look at it from different angles. No; simple things like dates and facts don't change. Columbus still lands in Hispaniola during 1492 regardless of whether you view him through the lens of daring explorer, mixed-up mapmaker or ruthless conqueror. What you see here is a look at **Mage**'s history from the point of view of the Traditions as a whole. It is built upon previously documented material (sometimes nudged to fit with historical fact) and is meant to provide an overview of how and why the game's setting reached its current state. It is not meant to be the final word in **Mage** history. Each Tradition — even each faction within each Tradition — has its own take on these events. If you prefer the historical lens found in another sourcebook or even one of your own devising, by all means use it. It's your game and no one is forcing you do use material you don't find interesting and fun.

The First Tradition

In truth, the oldest of the eleven factions that have claimed membership in the Council of Nine is the Akashayana Sangha — known to Westerners as the Akashic Brotherhood. Founded in Tibet, the Brotherhood has existed as a single, slowly growing sect for at least 6000 years. While various groups who would one day become part of the Euthanatoi, Cult of Ecstasy and Celestial Chorus were also formed at this time, these sects would remain isolated and independent until the Traditions were formalized in the 15th century. Only the Akashic Brotherhood has remained a single unified sect for its entire history.

For those that care about such things, the birth order of the remaining Traditions are: Ahl-i-Batin (500 BC); Order of Hermes (AD 767); Euthanatoi (1314); Solificati (1315); Verbena (1440); Cult of Ecstasy (1443); Celestial Chorus and Dreamspeakers (both approximately 1452); Sons of Ether (1806); Virtual Adepts (1823).

In the Beginning

Every culture and faith has its own myths and stories about how the world was created, where people came from, and who the first mage or mages were. And to be honest, none of that is really important. It doesn't matter if Adam or Lilith or Zog the Caveman was the first mage. Most of the Traditions have members who like to claim that their Tradition was first, with the unspoken implication that it means their clique is the most special and is obviously meant to tell the rest of us poor slobs what to do. The Etherites and the Virtual Adepts are the only ones who don't, but they get their own unique brand of jackoffs — the ones who look down on the rest of us as sad little primitive throwbacks — to make up for it.

The first mages were what we'd call Orphans. They didn't join big groups and mostly kept to themselves, working whatever style of magic they had a knack for. Shamans and priests who interpreted the will of the spirits and gods. Astrologers and soothsayers who tried to read the threads of Fate in the stars or in sheep entrails. Herbalists and medicine men who healed the sick with potions and prayers. Craftsmen and enchanters who built wondrous tools and talismans. Warriors who battled demons and monsters with divine gifts. These were the first willworkers.

Early Interactions

One of the first times disparate groups of mages attempted to form an organization was in Egypt. Thothmes III and his wife (or sister, or both; you can never tell with those Pharaohs), Hatshepsut, gathered together every mage they could from across Egypt, Babylon, Africa, the Mediterranean, and even China into two groups known as the Reed of Djehuty and the Cupbearers of Aset — although most people today know them by their Greek names, Thoth and Isis. The Reeds were early mathematicians, masons and artificers. The Cupbearers were healers, priests and mystics. Unfortunately, the groups fell apart rather quickly. About the only records left of the two sects are some old manuscripts kept by House Shaea of the Order of Hermes. It seems that the Egyptian mages assumed that they would be in charge and everyone else would defer to them. The ancient Egyptian mindset was a lot like the Chinese of the same era; the idea that anything worth knowing could come from outside of Egypt was completely alien to them: if it was worth knowing, well, they'd already discovered it. Needless to say, this attitude didn't endear the Egyptians to their Nubian, Libyan, Minoan, Babylonian and Iberian guests. But to their credit, Thothmes and Hatshepsut had tried something no one else had done before, bringing mages of diverse cultures and styles together and laying the groundwork for groups that would later form parts of the Order of Hermes and the Celestial Chorus.

The next time a large number of mages banded together was a few centuries later, when the Middle East was overrun with a horde of demons. Of course, nothing can get people to work together faster than a

common threat, and this was no exception. Most of the records of this period come from oral folklore, handed down among Arabian and Persian sorcerers, and a few cryptic Hebrew documents the Order of Hermes holds on to. Supposedly Shaitan — or Baal or Set, depending upon whom you ask — unleashed the 10,000 Djinni as a plague upon the Earth. The sheer magnitude of the problem led to an alliance among various Hebrew, Egyptian and Babylonian priests and demon hunters. Under the leadership of Suleiman the Wise, King of Israel; al-Ashrad the Mighty, a demon hunter from the Arabian deserts; and Abana-ta-sherit, leader of the Egyptian House of the Sestat, the alliance managed to bind or destroy the majority of the Djinni. However, this group was only an alliance of convenience and, once the threat had passed, the various sects went their separate ways. No group formed solely on the basis of a common enemy has any hope of holding together in the long run. Take away the threat and they fall apart.

Unfortunately, not every meeting went so well. When the Akashic Brotherhood finally met the early Thanatoic sects in India, a disagreement of some sort — I have no idea over what, exactly; any attempt to ask rapidly devolves into one of those pointless "he said, she said" fiascoes — caused the two groups to declare war on each other. Now, normally, something like this would last maybe a few decades and then die down as everyone forgot about it. But not with this bunch. You see, both sects had apparently mastered the arts of reincarnation (or had some sort of karmic destiny that insured it — again, hard to tell), so everyone who died in this silly little war — usually called the Himalayan Wars — came back a generation later and decided to get revenge. What makes this turn of events even stupider is when you look at it in the light of each group's beliefs. Both of them believe in learning from the mistakes in each life, so that in the next life they don't repeat the same mistakes and can get that much closer to personal enlightenment. So here they are, reincarnating and continuing the same pointless fight they fought in the last life. About the only thing most of them seemed interested in learning was which was less painful, being hacked to pieces or being burned alive. Eventually, enough people on each side were tired of the endless war that they were able to outnumber and restrain the fanatics. As they say, "what if they had a war and no one came?" Well, both sides just stopped showing up for the fights and the two sects started doing their best to ignore each other. Great note for Tradition relations to start off on, isn't it?

Luckily, Traditions are made up of individuals instead of a hive mind. Being part of a Tradition doesn't mean that the group dictates who you are and what you do. I've met plenty of Euthanatoi and Akashics over the years who were friends, blood brothers and even lovers. Just because someone did something dumb in the past doesn't mean you have to keep doing it.

The Ahl-i-Batin

About the only good thing to come out of the Himalayan Wars were the Ahl-i-Batin. Before the War ended, a group of Akashics had had more than enough of that foolishness and so set off across Central Asia, going down into Afghanistan and Persia. There, in the desert, they came upon a sect of Dervish mystics — an early Ecstatic group — and after breaking bread together, the two leaders of each faction supposedly fused into one being. I don't know if that's just a metaphor for sex or some sort of heavy duty ritual — maybe both; sex is a powerful, magical focus, after all — but this supposed entity, which called itself Khwaja al-Akbar, started spouting some heavy duty prophecy and laid out the Doctrine of Unity. This Doctrine called for "all parts of the Divine to again become One." Exactly what that means is open to interpretations, and even the Batini were pretty close-mouthed when it came to discussing the Doctrine. Some people think that the "Divine" refers to the various mages, which would explain why the Batini were such strong supporters of the Council. Others see a strong similarity to Celestial Chorus beliefs, which may explain why the two factions enjoyed close, if not always friendly, relations. At any rate, the Ahl-i-Batin were always about the best role model one could have when it comes to intra-Tradition relations. Despite their differences with European mages — the Euthanatoi and others — the Batini kept the channels of communication open and persevered through endless hardships with the patience of Job. Unfortunately, even their legendary patience reached a breaking point. But that's a story for a little later.

Behind Enemy Lines

With the end of the Himalayan Wars, the Akashic Brotherhood and the Chakravanti begin making it a point to ignore each other as much as possible. In spite of the antipathy between the two groups, members of each group keep popping up in the other's backyard. Over the centuries, a number of Indian Buddhists and Jains have found the Brotherhood, usually as members of the *Kannagara* (the monastic ascetics who have traditionally served as the Brotherhood's leadership). The *Vajrapani* (the Brotherhood's martial arm) also count a small collection of Kalaripayit gurus among their numbers. The Akashics have traditionally kept a low profile and the Chakravanti leave them to their own business. On the other side of the fence, numerous Euthanatoi have worked their way into East Asia's ever-present gambling subculture over the centuries. These lucky mages rarely find themselves in the same circles as Akashics, cutting down on the chances of conflict.

A Golden Age

The Sixth century BC was a turning point for most of the world. It saw the start of Greece and China's "golden ages of science," as well as the creation of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism. The Phoenicians advanced the art of sailing to the point where they could circumnavigate Africa. The Hebrews codified their beliefs into a doctrine durable enough to survive over two millennia of Diaspora and oppression and the Japanese islands were unified under their first emperor. In fact, I've even met a few nut cases who think the sheer number of events during that period are too much of a coincidence to be anything but the work of some vast conspiracy, usually involving aliens, ancient Atlanteans or some similar nonsense. But I digress.

As I said, the Sixth century saw the start of Greece's "golden age of science." Over the next few hundred years, men like Thales, Hippocrates and Archimedes laid the groundwork for western scientific thought. But one of the first and most important — to us magician types anyway — was Pythagoras. Pythagoras was a genius mathematician as well as a magician schooled in the various arts and sciences of Egyptian cults devoted to Tehuti (or Thoth, as the Greeks called him). He managed to blend Egyptian and Greek mysticism with his theories of mathematics and acoustics and created his own mystery cult. By the time he died, his students were pretty much worshipping him as a god. Pythagoras is important to us for two reasons. First off, he had a lot of influence over most of the Traditions. His mathematical theories influenced both the Hermetics and the Batini, and the Hermetics still incorporate these formulae into a lot of their rituals. His acoustical-based mysticism gave birth to numerous sects and cults that found their way into the Celestial Chorus and Cult of Ecstasy. You even find his handprints on modern groups. I once met a member of the Sons of Ether who would take complex mathematical formulae, convert them to music using Pythagorean acoustical theory and then

use synthesizers to play the music through specially grown "Ether-sensitive" crystals. Don't laugh, I saw her do everything from communicate with the dead and heal broken bones to control the weather and vaporize a Buick with that rig. The second reason Pythagoras is important is that he's proof that science and magic are not diametrically opposed to each other. They can exist side by side and they can be blended together to create something greater than the sum of their parts. Now you know why every Tradition has its share of technomancers, mixing ancient magic with modern technology. They've had an easier time adapting to the ever-changing world, and sometimes I think they're our best hope for the future.

Ancient Legacies

While much of the mystical heritage of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome has been long plowed under and picked over through the centuries, its influence is still felt among the Traditions.

• **Celestial Chorus:** Egypt is home to one of the Chorus's oldest sects, the *Sacred Congregation*. Beginning as a cult devoted to Pharaoh Amenhotep IV's sun god, Aton, the group undergoes a rapid conversion to Christianity during the First century AD. By the time of the Grand Convocation, the Coptic sect merges with the Messianic Voices, but when the Reformation causes the European Chorus to fragment, members of the Sacred Congregation reassert their distinct cultural identity. The majority of the Congregation call Egypt their home, but poverty and an increase in Islamic fundamentalism in their native land has lead many to seek their fortunes in Europe or North America. Members frequently join either the *Alexandrian Society* (the scientific sect founded by members of the Congregation) or the monastic *Anchorites*.

In addition to the Pythagorean cults, which influenced the early Messianic Voices, ancient Greece also gave rise to a small sect known as the *Sisters of Gabrielle*. According to legend, their founder and namesake was a worshiper of Apollo who was inspired by the god's reputation as a slayer of monsters to become a monster hunter herself. For practical reasons, this all-female sect has long opened its membership to any faith, but their magic retains its distinctive Classical style. Primarily slayers of demons, monsters and Nephandi, the Sisters are also skilled in the healing and prophetic arts. Traditionally, bows and spears served as their focus weapons, but modern Sisters favor everything from knives and swords to brass knuckles and handguns. While the Avatar Storm traps many of the group's Masters in their Umbral realm of New Delios, the majority of the Sisters remain on Earth. Many ally with the Order of Hermes during the Second *Massasa* War, and several continue to battle the undead even after the war has ended.

Once the bitter rivals of the Messianic Voices, the Roman *Mithraic Singers* were forced underground when Emperor Theodisius the Great closed all Pagan temples in the Roman Empire. By the 12th century, the Singers have transformed themselves into a secret and heretical knightly order, no longer worshiping the legendary Mithras as a god but instead honoring him as an early prophet and miracle worker (and some say as a manifestation of the Archangel Michael). Today, the *Sons of Mithras* are an elite martial fraternity, recruiting their membership from colleges and military officer's schools. The order uses the Roman gladius as their symbol, which members learn to wield as both an effectively lethal melee weapon and as a magical focus for divine wrath (Prime 2 is the most basic, but this can also be used for a wide variety of destructive Entropy, Forces, Life or Matter effects). Furthermore, they are instructed in a number of martial training exercises handed down from antiquity, which serve as additional channels for mystical power (Correspondence 1, Life 3, Mind 1 and Time 3 effects being some of the most common). The all-male fraternity maintains an excellent working relationship with the Sisters of Gabrielle (the two sects share information and even training techniques), often joining them in battles against demons and the undead.

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** During Greece's classical age, the worship of Dionysus attracted numerous followers, from skilled playwrights to murderous lunatics. Several Ecstatic sects also formed under the god of wine's aegis. The most infamous of these is the small all-female cult known as the *Maenads*, whose drunken revelries always end in the bloody murder of one or more human victims. While some of the Mad Women have made the occasional effort to direct their killing rage toward "deserving" targets, the standards by which they decide which male deserves to be ripped limb from limb are so subjective as to be all but meaningless. The cult's murderous rites frequently leave members subject to both Jhor and Madness, making them even more dangerous. Some Maenad cults have fallen so far that they've taken to home invasion, leaving entire families of innocents dead.

There is a growing movement within the Cult of Ecstasy to have the entire sect declared *barabbi*.

Less extreme are the Roman *Bacchantes*, also known (since the 15th century) as the *Fellowship of Pan*. Sometimes dismissed as drunken sybarites (younger members occasionally earn the derisive nickname "frat boys"), the group plays home to a diverse number of philosophers, writers and scholars. While Bacchantes are famous for having an inhuman tolerance for alcohol (one of the benefits of Life magic), members are also expected to be witty and intelligent conversationalists — even when drunk — as well as possess some level of artistic and athletic ability. Excellent style and fashion sense are also a must. In spite of their somewhat flamboyant personalities, the Fellowship favors subtle magics, typically focused through athletic exercises and the spoken word (debate, satire and biting sarcasm are the sect's trademark vehicles for Mind effects) as well as a wide range of musical, literary and artistic styles. While some might mistake the Bacchantes for intellectual party boys (and girls), their athletic interests frequently include boxing, Savate and other martial arts. A few even practice the ancient art of pancratium, making them brutally effective hand-to-hand combatants.

• **Euthanatoi:** One of the founding factions of the Tradition, the *Pomegranate Deme* trace their origins back to the Eleusian Mysteries, a cult devoted to the worship of Kore, or Persephone, who symbolizes the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth through her representation of the planting and harvesting of grain. The Deme deal heavily with the chthonic spirits of death and decay, as well as with the Restless Dead (in the past, they would help shades pay their way across the River Styx or bring retribution to kinslayers; today these relationships are more like business contracts, resulting in the trade of information, favors and the grave goods ghosts use as currency). The sect only recruits those who follow the ancient mysteries, and their numbers continue to dwindle despite the use of resurrection arts to allow dying members to be reborn as new initiates.

Though not a sect, the *Pallottino* family is descended from the ancient Etruscans of northern Italy and has survived through the Roman Empire and the Renaissance as a powerful merchant house. Today, they stand as one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Europe and have their fingers in pies both financial and political all over the globe. Thanks to careful breeding and arranged marriages, a strong magical talent runs through the bloodline. While only a handful of each generation Awakens, the majority of the clan possesses no small amount of skill as Sorcerers and Mediums. The Pallottinos place a great emphasis on respect and reverence for their dead relatives and ancestors. Family burial crypts are immensely sacrosanct; so much so that the Pallittinos still carry out a centuries-old vendetta against a family of Venetian grave robbers who attempted to plunder one of their crypts during the Middle Ages. Every member of the family keeps one or more relics — a finger bone or skulls are the most common — taken from the body of an ancestor who serves as her guardian spirit and advisor (and for Awakened members as the Avatar). These relics also serve as foci for necromantic rituals, soothsaying and other magics. The Pallottinos have the unique distinction of being the only living people who can speak, read and write Etruscan, and the family uses the long dead tongue as a secret code language. Family members are most frequently found using their skills as conspirators, arcane scholars and diplomats among the Golden Chalice, Scholars of the Wheel and Albireo. A few have even insinuated themselves into the Syndicate as highly effective double agents.

• **Order of Hermes:** Although the Houses of Hermes do not official form until the Eighth century, the entire Tradition traces its roots back to the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman cults devoted to Thoth, Hermes and Mercury. Ironically, one of the Order's youngest Houses — *House Shaea* — is also one of the oldest occult sects in the world. Founded during Egypt's quasi-mythical Dynasty 0, the members of *House of Seshat* have spent five millennia serving as mystical scholars, scribes and teachers. Their reputation as binders of evil spirits and demons is well known, going back to the 10,000 Djinni Plague and beyond. It's even rumored that the House has a race of cat demons captured and bound to their service, but no proof of such a thing has ever been found. With the coming of Islam, the Seshati renamed themselves the *House of the Crescent Moon* and joined the alliance known as the *Web of Faith* (see page 99).

Pythagorean mathematics is another ancient legacy the Order draws upon, and it is *House Fortunae* which displays the Tradition's Greek roots the most. Although the House of Luck does not come into existence until the 20th century, Neo-Pythagorean mathematics is the foundation on which the sect is built, and many members study it alongside Hebrew Qabbala, calculus and modern Chaos Theory. Most recently, the archaeological work of Dr. Winston

Brown has inspired a growing Babylonian revival among the Order. Members of this movement seek to refine and purify their Art into its most pristine and unaltered form, intently studying ancient Mesopotamian history and anthropology, long dead languages and obscure works on astrology and demonology. Some revivalists have voiced the idea of forming a new House devoted to Babylonian magic, but so far it remains only talk.

• **Verbena:** Among the European core of the original Verbena were Greek devotees to the ancient spirits and gods of fertility, agriculture and death that predate the worship of the Olympians. Known as the *chthonioi* ("earth gods"), a name that also refers to the spirits they revere, they have existed for millennia throughout Greece's rural communities, conducting their rituals in caves or hidden groves. Over the past few centuries, they have spread slowly to the New World, and some have even adapted their rites to the urban landscape, substituting city parks for groves and basements or tunnels for caves.

As a group, the chthonioi shun any sort of organization above the local level. The exception to this is the *Circle of Hecate*. This all-female sect is devoted to obtaining wealth and influence within the mortal world. They reputedly trace their origins back to ancient Sparta, where they wielded great influence over the city-state while the male populous was off fighting wars. During the time of the Roman Empire, they spread throughout Europe, and for centuries the Circle was content to play to the power behind the throne, influencing the wealthy and the powerful. Over the past few decades, they have stepped into a much more public role and taken the reins of power themselves. Members include politicians, advisors and wealthy businesswomen. Ancient chthonic rites, augmented with tricks learned from Italian strega and Voudoun mambos, give them a powerful edge in their climb to the top.

For more on the magic of ancient Greece, see **Dead Magic**.

• **Order of Hermes:** It is said that druids are marked by destiny to meet an often dark fate. If this is true, then *House Diedne* stands as a shining example of cruel fortune. Born from the culture of the Romanized Britons of England, House Diedne blended druidic lore and mysticism with the ritualized high magic of the Roman Mercury cults. The other Houses saw the Diedne as strange and even backwards (for daring to pollute the pure Hermetic arts with savage superstition), and because of this the House is the perfect pawn in House Tremere's schemes to distract the rest of the Order from its dark experiments. Only House Merinita stands in House Diedne's defense when they are accused of Infernalism, but Merinita's power has been in decline and they can do little to protect their allies from the purges. The last known member of House Diedne is Giguled and put to death in the winter of AD 1012. And so the Diedne pass into the mists of history.

Or so everyone believed. Over the centuries, rumors persist that some members of House Diedne escaped into the Otherworld where they sought refuge with the Fair Folk. Every so often, one Hermetic or another reports sightings of someone (or something) that might be a member of the lost House. These sightings begin to take on the same air as those of Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster, and some Hermetics devote their lives to investigating the Diedne's fate. Many of those who did now wish they had been wasting their lives in pursuit of a myth. In the wake of the Reckoning, House Diedne has returned to take its revenge upon the Order that betrayed them. These modern Diedne are strange, alien creatures descended from unions between surviving mages and the Fair Folk. Some are more spirit than flesh and most lack experience at being human or humane, making them capable of extreme and callous cruelty. For now, the Diedne have only been seen in the British Isles, and only those Houses who were members of the Order at the time of the purge (with the exception of Merinita) are targets of their wrath. Houses Solificati, Shaea, Fortunae, Janissary, Thig, Hong Lei and others are safe, at least for now.

• **Verbena:** While one might expect the druids to make up the majority of British and Irish Verbena, they are and always have been a minority when compared to the herbalists, folk wizards, farmers and craftsmen who are the Tradition's backbone. The druidic sects have traditionally been rather insular, and the fate of House Diedne only served to reinforce a mistrust of outsiders. When Nightshade forms her alliance of British willworkers, the druids only agree to join the coalition out of a desire for revenge against the Cabal of Pure Thought and because numerous acts of divining indicate that the druid ways will die out if they do not. Modern druids continue to fulfill their ancient duties, usually applying their skills to become historians, teachers, solicitors, doctors and community leaders. Others strive to become modern-day bards, using poetry, music or even journalism to rally support for their causes and to lampoon the targets of their wrath in the classic Celtic tradition of satire.

Blood of the Fair Folk

The blood of the Fair Folk is a powerful thing, and those people who carry it in their veins are often capable of feats beyond those of ordinary men. Characters with the Fae Blood merit (**Mage: the Ascension**, page 295) often have some strange and supernatural ability — the power to see and speak with the spirits of the dead; to breathe underwater; incredible strength or beauty; to affect people's emotions with one's voice — as their birthright. While these powers do not risk Paradox, they do not come without a price. Characters with Fae Blood often have a weakness to cold iron. The level of this sensitivity varies from person to person, ranging from a simple +1 difficulty to all rolls while holding or touching anything made of iron to suffering second-degree burns at the metal's very touch (Storyteller's discretion). Fae-blooded mages bound with iron find themselves unable to use magic or their fae gifts and also take aggravated damage from weapons made of cold iron. In addition, characters with Fae Blood usually have Dynamic Resonance and gain it much more quickly than more "normal" mages.

Players familiar with **Changeling: the Dreaming** and its rules for Kinain (humans who are blood relations to Changelings) should note that while Awakened mages can possess Fae Gifts, they are unable to learn Changeling Cantrips. Any attempt to learn them simply results in the character mimicking the Art's effect with the appropriate Spheres (assuming she has them). Sorcerers and Psychics, as well as those Kinain who don't bother to learn human magic, can learn the Arts and Realms necessary to cast Cantrips but some find the act of seeking out a Changeling mentor willing to teach them more trouble than it's worth. These rules also apply to characters that have blood-ties to the spirit folk of other lands, although such characters may have allergies to substances other than cold iron (Jade for those related to the spirit folk of East Asia, for example).

The Mystic Age

As the old Chinese curse goes, "may you live in interesting times." Well, the period before the Ascension War began certainly was a very interesting time. This was an age of mysticism, faith and war. Empires were carved out. Religions were born. And mages, one way or another, were right in the middle of it.

Most Traditionalists call this period the Mystic Age. Pagan magic and Christian miracles thrived in Europe. The Ahl-i-Batin reached their greatest heights in the Middle East. The Akashics helped build the Shaolin Monastery in China. And the Order of Hermes was born. A lot of the old Masters are really nostalgic for this period. It was the last time they could do as they pleased without having to worry about the Order of Reason shooting cannonballs at them. Of course, the problem with nostalgia is that it focuses on the good and ignores anything that might threaten the carefully crafted illusion. Even without the Order of Reason to cause trouble, mystic willworkers were more than able to make their own mischief.

The Web of Faith

Never underestimate the power of faith. Faith can move mountains — literally, where we're concerned. Faith is what caused an Arab merchant to come down from a mountain and found an empire that spread from Spain and North Africa to India.

Mohammed's new faith swept through the Middle East's mage community like a thunderbolt. A lot of the old Thothian cults and Dervish sects found themselves swept up in the changes and some even managed to thrive during Islam's golden age. But it was the Ahl-i-Batin who latched on to the new religion the hardest. A lot of the Batini saw Islam as being highly compatible with their Doctrine of Unity, and the idea of one religion replacing the countless competing faiths across the region was equally appealing to the sect's goals. (Some people say that the Batini *invented* Islam, but I personally think that's hogwash.) An outgrowth of this was that Islam now provided common ground for several of these formerly rival factions. And, at the time, that was something they really needed.

Over the centuries, the Middle East had been plagued by a series of Infernalist wizards who fancied themselves as world conquerors. The last, and by most accounts the nastiest, was Al-Malek Al-Majun Ibn Iblis. From his brass fortress, Irem, in the deserts of Arabia, he began a reign of terror across the region as his demonic soldiers slaughtered — and in some cases devoured — entire towns and nomadic tribes. Luckily, there are people who just won't stand for that sort of thing. Led by El-Assad-Al-Gabaar — the Splendid Lion, the first Batini archmage to convert to Islam — an army of mages from almost a dozen sects converged on Irem and laid siege to Al-Malek and his demon army. It was an epic battle that reportedly lasted for seven days and nights, during which the moon turned red as blood and the sky was lit with fire. The number of holy warriors slain at Irem was said to have been so great their blood formed a small lake. According to the stories, this lake of blood miraculously transformed into an oasis that became known as the Oasis of Eternal Bliss. In the end, Al-Malek was slain. His corpse was beheaded, and then burned, the ashes placed in a bronze urn and magically sealed "until the day when the seas are boiled to dust." The fortress of Irem was said to be such a temple of blasphemy that angels wiped its ruins from the very face of the earth. A Batini poet, Kurrat al-Ayn bint-Shadar, wrote a nine-hundred-page account of the battle, called *The Lion of the Oasis*. A lot of mage communities in the Middle East hold annual celebrations to commemorate the battle of Irem. Part of it includes a recital of Kurrat al-Ayn's masterpiece over a period of seven days and nights. If you ever get a chance, you should see it. It's a real treat.

The result of this alliance against Al-Malek was extremely strong ties between the various Islamic sects. Like the alliance against the Djinn centuries ago, these mages had shed blood together but, unlike the last alliance, they had more than a common enemy binding them. Most of them shared Mohammed's new faith, and the Ahl-i-Batin were on hand to work with that. They convinced the leaders of the Righteous Ghazi, the House of the Crescent Moon, the Dervish sects and others to pool their resources and bind their nodes and chantries together into a network that would allow them to strengthen each other and become greater than the sum of their parts. This network became known as the Web of Faith, and it was the pillar of the Islamic mage community for over four hundred years. Wherever Islam extended its influence, the Ahl-i-Batin worked to spread the Web right along side it. At its zenith, the Web of Faith stretched from Iberia and Nigeria to western China and Indonesia. Even after the Mongol hordes managed to destroy countless chantries and nodes during their rampage through Persia and the Middle East, the relationships forged during this time helped pave the way for the Council of Nine.

Legacy of Faith

The Web of Faith truly is the direct forebear of the Council of Nine, and many Tradition mages in the

Muslim world view the Council simply as an extension of their organization. The Web of Faith still exists and members frequently place their allegiance to the Web before that of Tradition. It is believed that the Web of Faith has remained in contact with the Ahl-i-Batin but, if that is true, members do not speak of such things with outsiders.

Strands of the Web can be found among four of the modern Traditions, as well as other factions:

• **Celestial Chorus:** From its very beginnings, Islam is a militant religion and the *Righteous Ghazi* reflects this. The sect draws its earliest members from those recent converts who volunteer to join the Prophet Mohammed's armies, and it is from these *ghazi* ("fighters") that the group eventually takes its name. The Righteous Ghazi are devout holy warriors who struggle against the forces of darkness while also working to purify their own souls by upholding the ethics, morals and virtues of Islam. A Ghazi's Avatar frequently takes the form of an angel or of a djinn who has chosen to serve Allah, often speaking to the mage in his dreams (this can be represented by the Dream background, as well as serve as a focus for certain Correspondence, Mind and Time effects; these prophetic dreams are common among all of the Web's factions). In spite of their militant name, many of the modern Ghazi choose other battlefields upon which to fight. They work as teachers, doctors and judges, working to uphold the Muslim virtues of justice, honor and charity. While the sect has always been male dominated, women form a significant minority.

Though not members of the Web of Faith, other sects exist on the alliance's fringe. The Coptic Christian Sacred Congregation (see Ancient Legacies sidebar on page 93) are never actively hostile to the Web but choose to keep the group at arm's length, even at times when their interests intersect. *The Majestic Kings of Light and Truth* is a sect of Zoroastrian magi devoted to the service and worship of Ormazd (also known as Ahura Mazda). The Majestic Kings originally serve Persia's King of Kings as advisors, priests and bodyguards. With the Muslim conquest of Persia, the Zoroastrians become a religious minority and are gradually pushed out of the region. Today, the Majestic Kings are found primarily among the Parsi population of Bombay. To the Majestic Kings, fire is a symbol of the divine light that burns within every person's soul and it serves as a focus for many of the sect's magical effects (especially Mind, Prime and Spirit). The Kings also believe that learning and intellectual contemplation are acts of devotion, and that to be a servant of Ormazd, one must have a love of knowledge and academics. Because of this, they are some of the most well educated and scholarly members of the Chorus and several serve as members of the Alexandrian Society.

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** The *Dervish* is a loose collection of Sufi mystics who seek spiritual enlightenment through poverty and religious study under respected Masters. They shun any sort of organization beyond that of teacher and students and in the past would frequently defer to the Batini in all matters of politics. Their magic is very subtle, with music, dance and poetry as the most common foci. This practice is sometimes augmented by using hashish or even opium to produce prophetic visions.

• **Dreamspeakers:** The *Sheikha* is a mostly female sect found among the nomadic Bedouin tribes. They serve as healers, soothsayers and exorcists, using their magic to help their tribes survive the harsh environments of the Saudi Desert. Over the past century, the Sheikha have grown more and more concerned by what they see as the Saudi government's attempts to "civilize" the Bedouin, forcing them to abandon their traditional nomadic existence.

• **Order of Hermes:** With the coming of Islam, the House of Seshat becomes known as the *House of the Crescent Moon* and contributes their collection of ancient knowledge to the Web of Faith. During the Grand Convocation, they lobby to be admitted to the Order of Hermes and are accepted under the aegis of House ex Miscellanea as *House Shaea.* By the 1980s, the Seshati have grown large enough, and hold enough influence, to force the Order to recognize them as one of the major Houses, and their influence within the Tradition only continues to grow. Although the Reckoning and its aftermath have the House busy scouring their libraries and archives — searching for any sort of prophecy or historical precedent that might apply to the Avatar Storm — the plagues of walking dead and the Red Star have not kept members too busy to keep from flexing their political muscle. The House of Seshat has always been very good at collecting countless small and trivial scraps of information, sorting and cataloging each piece until gradually the larger picture begins to emerge. The other Houses would be shocked if they were ever to uncover just how many of the Order's dirty secrets House Shaea knows, and in the wake of the Second *Massasa* War, House Shaea is positioning itself to become the chief powerbroker within the Order of Hermes.

• **Ahl-i-Batin:** The undisputed leaders of the Web of Faith, the Batini become one of the Council of Nine's strongest pillars. For over four centuries, they labor to keep the Traditions together through countless tribulations and crises. But even the stron-

gest pillar is worn down over time, and after the Great War, the Batini reach their breaking point. When the European powers carve up the corpse of the Ottoman Empire, the Technocratic Union moves into the Middle East. History teaches the Batini that they can expect no help from the Western Traditions. The Order of Hermes would not help them when the Mongols came, and the other Traditions have done little to aid each other in the Americas, India, Australia and Asia. The Ahl-i-Batin renounce their membership with the Council of Nine and sever all contact with mages outside the Muslim world.

After the chaos of the Second World War, the Subtle Ones are nowhere to be found. Rumors persist of their destruction, or of their leaving Earth altogether. Before the war, a handful of disciples and students joined the Order of Hermes's House ex Miscellanea as "House Batini," and many mages wonder if these few wizards are all that remain of the once proud Tradition. But some suspect that those in the Order are simply lying low and keeping an eye on their former allies....

• **Taftâni:** Persian magi and sorcerers, the *Taftâni* are more a disorganized mob with similar beliefs than an actual sect. The self-styled Masters of the Djinn occasionally ally with the Web of Faith but refuse to join. Clinging fanatically to their Pagan and Zoroastrian faiths, the sect gradually withers away to almost nothing as Islam leaves them with fewer and fewer potential apprentices. Many believe that the group completely died out during the 17th century, but the Weavers still exist in tiny groups in India, Iran and the Middle East. In addition to their skill at controlling the Djinn, the Taftâni are also famous for their Wonders and Talismans, many of which are extremely vulgar.

• **Mokteshaf Al Nour:** Islam's golden age sees great advances in the sciences as ancient Greek and Egyptian knowledge mix with lore from India and China. Riding this wave of scholarship are the *Mokteshaf Al Nour* ("Collectors of Light"), a collection of guilds and hakims (scholars versed in science, philosophy and theology). The Collectors divide themselves into five sects, each specializing in a different area: *Hands of Mercy* (medicine), *Observers of Fate* (astronomy and astrology), *Seekers of Truth* (mathematics, alchemy and engineering), *Riders of the Wind* (trade, travel and navigation) and *Keepers of Law* (politics, law and philosophy). The Collectors believe that a greater understanding of the world Allah has created will lead to a much deeper spiritual understanding. They also believe it is their duty to help bring peace and order to the world under the banner of Islam, and because of this, they are one of the founding members of the Web of Faith.

The Oasis of Eternal Bliss

Despite — or perhaps because of — its bloody origins, the Oasis of Eternal Bliss served as one of the Ahl-i-Batin's most important chantries. For centuries, the powerful node within the Oasis was one of the cornerstones of the Web of Faith and the location served as a meeting place for mages throughout North Africa and Southwest Asia. Even after the Web's collapse, the Oasis survived and became one of the Council of Nine's strongholds during the early days of the Ascension War. However, as relations between Middle Eastern and European mages soured, the Oasis became less and less important to the Council leadership. By the beginning of the 20th century, most mages outside of the Middle East had forgotten about this powerful resource and with the Batini's departure, all records of how to find the Oasis were gone. Outside of the Ahl-i-Batin, its location is known only to the handful within the modern Web of Faith who still attempt to keep contact with the Subtle Ones.

Strangely enough, the Oasis has undergone a renewal of popularity over the past decade, even to the point that several cabals have gone off into the deserts looking for it. Most have returned empty-handed. Others haven't returned at all. Exactly how this revival began is a mystery. Some point to the surprising rediscovery of several books on the battle of Irem in Horizon's library. Others believe it began with an article on the annual recital of *The Lion at the Oasis* in *Paradigm Magazine*, or through an eerily similar collection of vision quests undertaken by several Ecstatic shamans in the New Mexican desert. Regardless of the interest's origins, rumors about the Oasis of Eternal Bliss have only grown more and more elaborate. If legends are to be believed, the Oasis is hidden by a great mirage, only visible at sunrise; The lake's waters are pure Tass: healing all wounds and giving eternal life to those who drink of it, burning the unfaithful, and granting powerful visions to any who gaze upon the moon's reflection in the lake; An entire city lies hidden beneath the Oasis, populated by thousands of Batini, ready to ride forth as a thundering army and smite the Technocracy, restoring peace to the land, and so on. Some stories already claim that the Oasis is the true resting place of the Holy Grail, and some Tradition scholars believe it's only a matter of time before Roswell aliens and Elvis work their way into the ever-growing legend. Which — if any — of these tales are true is entirely up to the Storyteller.

Muslim world view the Council simply as an extension of their organization. The Web of Faith still exists and members frequently place their allegiance to the Web before that of Tradition. It is believed that the Web of Faith has remained in contact with the Ahl-i-Batin but, if that is true, members do not speak of such things with outsiders.

Strands of the Web can be found among four of the modern Traditions, as well as other factions:

• **Celestial Chorus:** From its very beginnings, Islam is a militant religion and the *Righteous Ghazi* reflects this. The sect draws its earliest members from those recent converts who volunteer to join the Prophet Mohammed's armies, and it is from these *ghazi* ("fighters") that the group eventually takes its name. The Righteous Ghazi are devout holy warriors who struggle against the forces of darkness while also working to purify their own souls by upholding the ethics, morals and virtues of Islam. A Ghazi's Avatar frequently takes the form of an angel or of a djinn who has chosen to serve Allah, often speaking to the mage in his dreams (this can be represented by the Dream background, as well as serve as a focus for certain Correspondence, Mind and Time effects; these prophetic dreams are common among all of the Web's factions). In spite of their militant name, many of the modern Ghazi choose other battlefields upon which to fight. They work as teachers, doctors and judges, working to uphold the Muslim virtues of justice, honor and charity. While the sect has always been male dominated, women form a significant minority.

Though not members of the Web of Faith, other sects exist on the alliance's fringe. The Coptic Christian Sacred Congregation (see Ancient Legacies sidebar on page 93) are never actively hostile to the Web but choose to keep the group at arm's length, even at times when their interests intersect. *The Majestic Kings of Light and Truth* is a sect of Zoroastrian magi devoted to the service and worship of Ormazd (also known as Ahura Mazda). The Majestic Kings originally serve Persia's King of Kings as advisors, priests and bodyguards. With the Muslim conquest of Persia, the Zoroastrians become a religious minority and are gradually pushed out of the region. Today, the Majestic Kings are found primarily among the Parsi population of Bombay. To the Majestic Kings, fire is a symbol of the divine light that burns within every person's soul and it serves as a focus for many of the sect's magical effects (especially Mind, Prime and Spirit). The Kings also believe that learning and intellectual contemplation are acts of devotion, and that to be a servant of Ormazd, one must have a love of knowledge and academics. Because of this, they are some of the most well educated and scholarly members of the Chorus and several serve as members of the Alexandrian Society.

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** The *Dervish* is a loose collection of Sufi mystics who seek spiritual enlightenment through poverty and religious study under respected Masters. They shun any sort of organization beyond that of teacher and students and in the past would frequently defer to the Batini in all matters of politics. Their magic is very subtle, with music, dance and poetry as the most common foci. This practice is sometimes augmented by using hashish or even opium to produce prophetic visions.

• **Dreamspeakers:** The *Sheikha* is a mostly female sect found among the nomadic Bedouin tribes. They serve as healers, soothsayers and exorcists, using their magic to help their tribes survive the harsh environments of the Saudi Desert. Over the past century, the Sheikha have grown more and more concerned by what they see as the Saudi government's attempts to "civilize" the Bedouin, forcing them to abandon their traditional nomadic existence.

• **Order of Hermes:** With the coming of Islam, the House of Seshat becomes known as the *House of the Crescent Moon* and contributes their collection of ancient knowledge to the Web of Faith. During the Grand Convocation, they lobby to be admitted to the Order of Hermes and are accepted under the aegis of House ex Miscellanea as *House Shaea.* By the 1980s, the Seshati have grown large enough, and hold enough influence, to force the Order to recognize them as one of the major Houses, and their influence within the Tradition only continues to grow. Although the Reckoning and its aftermath have the House busy scouring their libraries and archives — searching for any sort of prophecy or historical precedent that might apply to the Avatar Storm — the plagues of walking dead and the Red Star have not kept members too busy to keep from flexing their political muscle. The House of Seshat has always been very good at collecting countless small and trivial scraps of information, sorting and cataloging each piece until gradually the larger picture begins to emerge. The other Houses would be shocked if they were ever to uncover just how many of the Order's dirty secrets House Shaea knows, and in the wake of the Second *Massasa* War, House Shaea is positioning itself to become the chief powerbroker within the Order of Hermes.

• **Ahl-i-Batin:** The undisputed leaders of the Web of Faith, the Batini become one of the Council of Nine's strongest pillars. For over four centuries, they labor to keep the Traditions together through countless tribulations and crises. But even the stron-

gest pillar is worn down over time, and after the Great War, the Batini reach their breaking point. When the European powers carve up the corpse of the Ottoman Empire, the Technocratic Union moves into the Middle East. History teaches the Batini that they can expect no help from the Western Traditions. The Order of Hermes would not help them when the Mongols came, and the other Traditions have done little to aid each other in the Americas, India, Australia and Asia. The Ahl-i-Batin renounce their membership with the Council of Nine and sever all contact with mages outside the Muslim world.

After the chaos of the Second World War, the Subtle Ones are nowhere to be found. Rumors persist of their destruction, or of their leaving Earth altogether. Before the war, a handful of disciples and students joined the Order of Hermes's House ex Miscellanea as "House Batini," and many mages wonder if these few wizards are all that remain of the once proud Tradition. But some suspect that those in the Order are simply lying low and keeping an eye on their former allies....

• **Taftâni:** Persian magi and sorcerers, the *Taftâni* are more a disorganized mob with similar beliefs than an actual sect. The self-styled Masters of the Djinn occasionally ally with the Web of Faith but refuse to join. Clinging fanatically to their Pagan and Zoroastrian faiths, the sect gradually withers away to almost nothing as Islam leaves them with fewer and fewer potential apprentices. Many believe that the group completely died out during the 17th century, but the Weavers still exist in tiny groups in India, Iran and the Middle East. In addition to their skill at controlling the Djinn, the Taftâni are also famous for their Wonders and Talismans, many of which are extremely vulgar.

• **Mokteshaf Al Nour:** Islam's golden age sees great advances in the sciences as ancient Greek and Egyptian knowledge mix with lore from India and China. Riding this wave of scholarship are the *Mokteshaf Al Nour* ("Collectors of Light"), a collection of guilds and hakims (scholars versed in science, philosophy and theology). The Collectors divide themselves into five sects, each specializing in a different area: *Hands of Mercy* (medicine), *Observers of Fate* (astronomy and astrology), *Seekers of Truth* (mathematics, alchemy and engineering), *Riders of the Wind* (trade, travel and navigation) and *Keepers of Law* (politics, law and philosophy). The Collectors believe that a greater understanding of the world Allah has created will lead to a much deeper spiritual understanding. They also believe it is their duty to help bring peace and order to the world under the banner of Islam, and because of this, they are one of the founding members of the Web of Faith.

The Oasis of Eternal Bliss

Despite — or perhaps because of — its bloody origins, the Oasis of Eternal Bliss served as one of the Ahl-i-Batin's most important chantries. For centuries, the powerful node within the Oasis was one of the cornerstones of the Web of Faith and the location served as a meeting place for mages throughout North Africa and Southwest Asia. Even after the Web's collapse, the Oasis survived and became one of the Council of Nine's strongholds during the early days of the Ascension War. However, as relations between Middle Eastern and European mages soured, the Oasis became less and less important to the Council leadership. By the beginning of the 20th century, most mages outside of the Middle East had forgotten about this powerful resource and with the Batini's departure, all records of how to find the Oasis were gone. Outside of the Ahl-i-Batin, its location is known only to the handful within the modern Web of Faith who still attempt to keep contact with the Subtle Ones.

Strangely enough, the Oasis has undergone a renewal of popularity over the past decade, even to the point that several cabals have gone off into the deserts looking for it. Most have returned empty-handed. Others haven't returned at all. Exactly how this revival began is a mystery. Some point to the surprising rediscovery of several books on the battle of Irem in Horizon's library. Others believe it began with an article on the annual recital of *The Lion at the Oasis* in *Paradigm Magazine*, or through an eerily similar collection of vision quests undertaken by several Ecstatic shamans in the New Mexican desert. Regardless of the interest's origins, rumors about the Oasis of Eternal Bliss have only grown more and more elaborate. If legends are to be believed, the Oasis is hidden by a great mirage, only visible at sunrise; The lake's waters are pure Tass: healing all wounds and giving eternal life to those who drink of it, burning the unfaithful, and granting powerful visions to any who gaze upon the moon's reflection in the lake; An entire city lies hidden beneath the Oasis, populated by thousands of Batini, ready to ride forth as a thundering army and smite the Technocracy, restoring peace to the land, and so on. Some stories already claim that the Oasis is the true resting place of the Holy Grail, and some Tradition scholars believe it's only a matter of time before Roswell aliens and Elvis work their way into the ever-growing legend. Which — if any — of these tales are true is entirely up to the Storyteller.

After the Mongol hordes sack Baghdad, the Mokteshaf Al Nour believe the Ahl-i-Batin's organization is a failure and sever all ties to the Web. The group relocates to Turkey, attaching themselves to the Ottoman Empire, and when the Order of Reason forms, the Collectors are snubbed by the Christian-dominated Conventions. The exceptions are the High Artisans, who gladly count the Seekers of Truth among their number. When the Technocratic Union is founded, the Collectors are not invited to join, but by the time of the Great War, the increasingly secular Collectors enjoy friendly relations with the German Technocracy. As the Ottoman Empire collapses, the majority of the sect throws their support behind Kemal Attaturk's plans for the modern Republic of Turkey and formally joins the Technocratic Union. A small faction refuses to join the Union and retreat into the shadows, seeking to combine modern science with their classical beliefs. The fate of this small group is unknown, but is the subject of persistent rumors among the modern Web of Faith. Some say they have joined the long lost Ahl-i-Batin. Others that House Shaea is attempting to recruit them into House ex Miscellanea. Less common stories claim the sect is being courted for membership by the Celestial Chorus's Alexandrian Society or even by the Sons of Ether.

For more information on the Ahl-i-Batin and the Taftâni, see **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin and Taftâni.**

Mystic Europe

While the Middle East was undergoing a cultural revolution, two events in Europe had an impact on mage society. The first was the creation of the Order of Hermes. Love them or hate them, the Hermetics have been the cornerstone of the Council of Nine and the Traditions since the beginning, and whether out of a sense of *noblesse oblige* or just sheer arrogance, they've typically been our leaders for most of the Ascension War. All at once, they manage to exemplify the best and worst of the Tradition ideal — a total dedication to their art, matched only by their incredible hubris.

After Rome fell, the former members of the old cults devoted to Hermes and Mercury were drifting around without much direction. Some ended up in the Byzantine Empire trying to rebuild their former glory. Others tried to find their place among the new barbarian kingdoms, either as powers behind the throne or as eccentric recluses. All of that changed around the end of the Eighth century. Trianoma — one of the old Roman Mercury cultists who'd been wandering Europe for the past three hundred years or so — apparently realized that with the way things were going, the Hermetic ways would be dead and buried in a few centuries. Not from any outside threat, mind you. Just that there was no organization and almost no new initiates. No new blood means no group after a while. So Trianoma set off to try and round up as many old Mercurians, Thothians and Hermetics as she could.

She found twelve Hermetic masters, each of whom had started to build a cult of personality around himself. This was a pretty colorful bunch: A reclusive German bookworm. An Iberian nobleman with an obsessive vendetta against the Muslims. A Romanized Briton who claimed to be half-faerie. Some Italian midget with a habit of challenging everyone to magic duels. And a Byzantine prophet who was, from all accounts, a lunatic. That Trianoma got this band of weirdoes to actually meet was a big enough feat, but getting them to agree to form an alliance was nothing short of a miracle.

But ally they did, and so the Order of Hermes was born. For their first century, the Order spent most of its time trying to codify their theories and magical styles into a single, cohesive system. At least that's what they were doing when they weren't trying to come up with a way to keep from killing each other over every petty argument or watching one of the House founders incinerate himself. After a while, they decided they needed a headquarters, but no House would agree to let one of the other House's holdings be the Order's main base. So, they went out and stole a building from someone else. They found a necromancer's stone keep in Turkey and raided it. They killed the guy living there — they say he was an Infernalist, but I sometimes think that was just an excuse made after the fact — and then literally made off with the building. They moved the whole thing to the Pyrenees Mountains between Spain and France and re-christened it Doissetep. That little castle rapidly became the Order's pride and joy. A pity they ended up blowing it to smithereens over a petty squabble. But that's a story for later.

While the Hermetics were getting their act together, the Franks were busy putting together a kingdom in Western Europe. They reached their height under Charlemagne, who managed to conquer or annex the Saxons and the Lombards, eventually getting himself crowned Holy Roman Emperor. Despite all of his good press, Charlemagne was really just a very successful German tribal king, and his Paladins weren't exactly poster boys for the chivalric ideal. Royal enforcers might be a more apt description.

Most of the paladins' reputation probably comes from a secret society of mages formed during the Dark Ages. Called the Palatines, they were a diverse bunch of warriors, priests and mystics who wandered Western

A-Viking We Will Go

For nearly two hundred years, the Norsemen dominated Europe. Hailing from the frozen lands of Scandinavia, the Vikings raided cities and towns throughout Europe and North Africa, extorting tribute everywhere they sailed. However, the wild berserker pirate stereotype barely scratches the surface of Norse culture. The Norse were skilled craftsmen and shipwrights, building colonies in Ireland, Russia, Iceland and North America. The Vikings were also traders, selling their goods throughout Europe and the Middle East.

The Norse viewed magic as an unwholesome (but not evil) practice, and it comes as no surprise that Odin, the god of magic, was also the god of death. The Lord of the Gallows continues to exert a strong influence over Norse mages — known as *Spae-crafters* — and many of their magics and rituals are derived from the worship of Odin, as well as from the myths told about him. Shapeshifting (Life), weathercraft (Forces), divination (Time), scrying (Correspondence) and curses (Entropy) are all common, and Runes are frequently used as a focus. All Spae-crafters, regardless of sect, use the same ritual when undergoing a seeking: the mage will hang herself from an ash tree for nine days, suspended between life and death while she seeks mystic knowledge. Adepts sometimes take this further, piercing themselves with a spear beforehand, and it is extremely common for a Spae-crafter to sacrifice an eye upon reaching the rank of Master.

The modern Spae-crafters are primarily found among three Traditions:

• **Verbena:** The largest number of *Spae-crafters* (which is also the name the sect uses for itself) is found among the Verbena. They lean heavily toward the shapeshifting arts, with the bear, wolf and raven being favored forms. Others are skilled healers and herbalists. The Verbena are typically the leaders of Spae-crafter society, and while most prefer rural life in small towns and farms, some younger Spae-crafters have taken their arts into the cities.

• **Euthanatoi:** *Yggdrasil's Keepers* are the spiritual heirs to the Norns, the three sisters who knew the Wyrd (destiny) of every man and god. As agents of

Wyrd, the Keepers help others reach their destiny, whether good or ill. Traditionally, the sect wanders Scandinavian battlefields, reading the Wyrd of the mortally wounded to divine who is destined to die and who is destined to live on as a member of the sect. The lack of a war in Scandinavia over the past fifty years has forced the sect to modify their recruitment style somewhat. Many work as doctors and paramedics, continuing to live up to their sobriquet, "choosers of the slain." The Keepers are also known as the Gallowsmen, named for Odin's vigil when he hung himself from one of Yggdrasil's branches (which Spae-crafters replicate during their seekings).

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** The *Hagalaz* ("hailstone") sect has long been a group surrounded by controversy. Named after the Rune symbol of change, theirs is a lifestyle of perpetual action and chaos. As tricksters, the Hagalaz work to shock people out of complacency, forcing them to look at the world from a new perspective. However, this sect also has a darker side, with members bringing about change through violence and destruction. When the Nazis invaded Norway, the Hagalaz became partisans and by the war's end the Scandinavian sect was almost exterminated. During the 1970s, the group began to make a comeback, but in their desperate desire for new blood, the sect opened its doors to all manner of misanthropes, thugs and neo-Nazi scum.

The Norwegian Hagalaz are now bitterly divided, with the traditional Spae-crafter tricksters on one side and a nightmarish collection of Viking wannabes, metal-head goons and anti-Christian fanatics on the other. The rest of the Cult of Ecstasy considers the new Hagalaz to be little better than barabbi, and the other Spae-crafter sects have declared them outlaws — literally beyond the protection of Spae-crafter or Tradition law. The Hagalaz are rapidly heading towards a civil war — one that is likely to suck in other Scandinavian mages as well.

For more on Norse history and culture, as well as Spae-crafter beliefs, see **Wolves of the Sea** for **Vampire: The Dark Ages.**

Europe, battling demons, Infernalists, vampires and other monsters with sword and fire, magic and faith. They drew members from numerous other mage sects, including the Messianic Voices and the Order of Hermes. There were even members who would have been considered Verbena or Euthanatoi if those Traditions had existed back then. The Palatines existed in total secrecy, believing that their work was its own reward, and that public acclaim would only lead to the sin of hubris. By the 12th century, the Palatines had reorganized themselves as a secret order of knights and priests called the Palatine Knights. When the Ascension War began, the sect was torn in half as members divided between the Order of Reason's fanatical Cabal of Pure Thought and the Council of Nine. It's rumored that the Palatines still exist today. Supposedly they find mages who've already taken up the task of demon and monster hunting on their own. I've never met anyone who claimed to be a member though. I guess if they still exist, their old rules about not advertising their presence and not accepting praise for their work still hold.

The Bloody Sands of Time

Unfortunately, not everything during the Mythic Age was friendship and cooperation. A seemingly inevitable source of conflict in mage society is politics. Not just our own jockeying for power in the shadows, but the fallout from mundane politics coloring our own relations. A series of bloody conflicts left most mystic societies completely unprepared for the coming of the Order of Reason.

While the spread of Islam helped the Ahl-i-Batin to spread their Web of Faith across Africa and Asia, it also helped piss off countless European and Hindu mages. The Order of Hermes — especially House Flambeau — had been involved in the Spanish Reconquesta since the beginning, but after Pope Urban II called the first Crusade to take the Holy Land, numerous European mages went to the Middle East, clashing violently with the Ahl-i-Batin and other members of the Web of Faith. A lot of the Crusader mages were there out of faith and piety. Others just wanted to take the opportunity to carve out their own power bases or simply loot the Holy Land of mystic relics and wonders. The worst of it came when the Crusaders finally took Jerusalem and massacred everyone they found in the city, not caring if they were Muslim, Jew or Christian. The Crusades drove a wedge between European and Islamic mages, and despite the best efforts of Batini, Ecstatics and Chorusers over the centuries, that rift has never truly healed.

On the other side of the Islamic world, the Muslims gradually managed to conquer most of Northern India, establishing the Delhi Sultanate. Of course, Islam and Hinduism have a hard time coexisting and the leaders of the Sultanate were pretty ruthless when it came to holding on to their power and influence. As a result of this, several of the traditional Hindu sects joined together in a loose alliance called the *Asthika*. This alliance

The Palatines Today

The Palatines still exist in the modern World of Darkness. Despite the secret knightly order's break up when just over half their number left to join the Cabal of Pure Thought in the 14th century, the sect has managed to survive and adapt over the passing centuries. Known over the years as the Palatine Brotherhood (from the 15th to 17th century), the Fellowship of the Hammer (18th), and the Palatine Society of Gentlemen (until the Second World War), the group has remained cloaked in secrecy, revealing their existence to no one. They have no central organization and no official leadership — two factors that have allowed them to continue running smoothly even in the wake of the Avatar Storm — and members frequently only know the person who inducted them into the group and a handful of others. Although the Celestial Chorus continues to provide the bulk of the order's ranks, the modern Palatines include at least some members from every Tradition and every continent. Notably, a sizable number of Etherite Adventurers and Utopists have found their way into the sect over the past century. After the formation of the Council of Nine, creed became less and less important as a membership requirement. Now, all that is needed is a willingness to risk life and limb in the battle against the forces of darkness, with no regard for fame or reward. The sect's only symbol is that of a war hammer, used by the original order as a symbol of Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles the Hammer. Modern members recognize each other by a hammer symbol worn somewhere upon the body, either as jewelry (lapel pins, rings, pendants) or tattoos.

was led by the Chakravanti cults, the old veterans of the Himalayan Wars, and the Vishnudharadhara, an order of Hindu priests and holy warriors formed during the Gupta Empire back in the Fourth century or so. Of course, those two groups never really got along. Luckily, the Indian Ecstatic sects were there to play peacemaker between the two, otherwise the alliance would have just fallen apart. As for the Asthika, it served two purposes. First off, it helped to preserve a lot of classical Hindu culture, art and literature from the Muslims. Second, it coordinated Vishnudharadhara, Chakravanti and Ecstatic retaliation against the Sultanate and the Web of Faith. The conflicts in India rivaled those of the Crusades for their ferocity and bloodshed and, like the Crusades, a lot of the bad blood is still there.

The Asthika

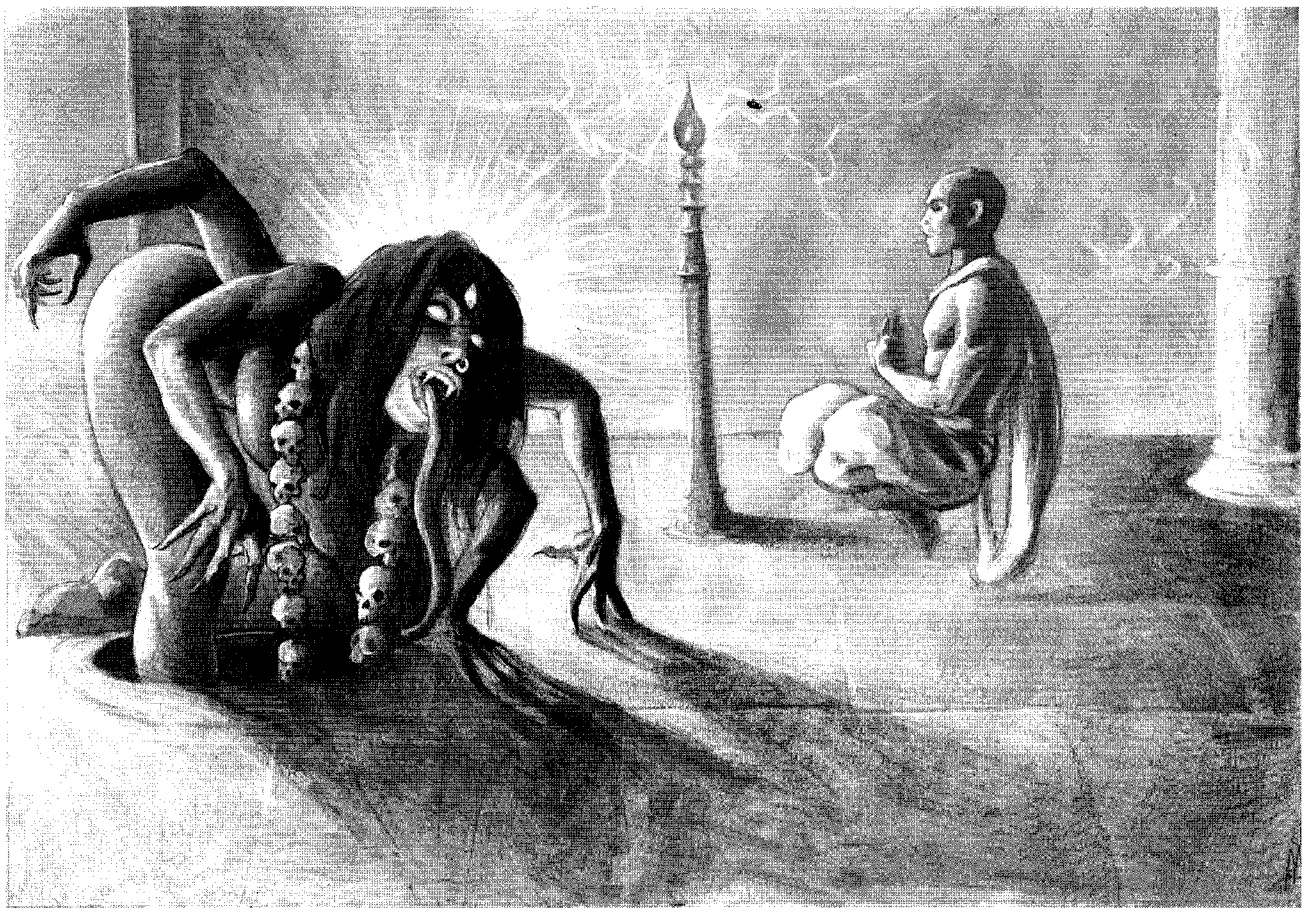
Founded during the early days of the Delhi Caliphate, the *Asthika* ("believers") are an alliance of Hindu mages devoted to preserving India's traditional culture in the wake of outside conquest. Originally created to stand against the Web of Faith (with whom the Asthika have had fluctuating relations (they are currently at a very low point), the group has waged bloody battles against the Portuguese and British as well. Zealous supporters of Mahandas Ghandi's drive for Indian self-rule, the modern Asthika are extremely nationalistic. Recent events in South Asia — both mystical and mundane — have left the group incredibly tense, if not paranoid. Continuing conflicts with the Technocracy, the Web of Faith and an influx of foreign demons have only aggravated an already volatile situation.

The majority of the Asthika are found within three Traditions, with a rapidly growing fourth faction:

• **Celestial Chorus:** Formed during the Gupta Empire, the *Vishnudharadhara* ("Vishnu's Sword") strive to embody the highest ideals of Hinduism, using their role as scholar-warriors to inspire others. Drawn primarily from the Brahmin and Kshatriya castes, the sect is one of the founding pillars of the Celestial Chorus (along with the Righteous Ghazi and the Messianic Voices). The Vishnudharadhara involve themselves heavily in Indian politics and are relentless in their battles against both the Infernal and the undead.

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** India is considered the spiritual home of the Ecstatics, and over a dozen sects of varying size call the land their home. Indian Ecstatics draw upon a wide range of influences, including Tantrik ritualism, Jain asceticism and Buddhist mysticism. Lacking any sort of unity outside of their Tradition and the Asthika, these diverse collections of Siddhu and Dakini frequently play peacemaker between the Vishnudharadhara and the Chakravanti.

• **Euthanatoi:** Like the Cult of Ecstasy, the Euthanatoi also consider India their spiritual homeland and the *Chakravanti* are the core the Tradition was built upon. Tracing their roots back to the Himalayan Wars, the Chakravanti are an alliance of warriors, healers, gamblers and technomancers. Once, the group counted small necromancer cults among their number, but no longer. Legend holds that one sect, whose name is no longer spoken,



transformed themselves into flesh eating demons and have since been hunted to extinction. More recently, the Consanguinity of Eternal Joy, an assassin cult, has fallen into Jhor-tainted insanity and been declared *barabbi*. The Consanguinity's actions have brought shame to the Chakravanti, and they now seek nothing less than the total annihilation of this twisted mockery of everything they hold sacred.

• **Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether:** Together, these two Traditions form the smallest but fastest growing block within the Asthika. Enlightened mathematicians have long been a part of India, going back as far as the Third century BC, and several even join the Order of Reason during the 15th century. After the British conquest of India, the system of using Western-educated elite to help govern the region creates a contingent of native Technocrats, including members of the Electrodyne Engineers and the Analytical Reckoners. As both Conventions defect from the Union, their Indian members leave with them, and the Asthika grudgingly grant the technomancers membership. The two Traditions try to work very closely, pooling their resources to make up for their lack of numbers when compared to the other Traditions. The growing importance of computers in India's cities has allowed the Virtual Adepts to rapidly become the senior partner in this relationship, and they compete heavily with Iteration X over potential recruits.

While the Web of Faith was fighting a two-front war, events in Europe nearly tore the Order of Hermes to pieces. It's almost impossible to get the Order to talk about this time period, but recent events forced a lot of Hermetics to come clean with their fellow cabal members and chantrymates. Around 1200 or so, the Order of Hermes discovered that the leaders of one of their Houses had transformed themselves into vampires. On top of this, they'd been going around turning the rest of their House and any other Hermetic they could get their hands on into one of the undead. If you've never met a mage turned vampire, consider yourself lucky. The Hermetics believe that getting turned into a vampire destroys

your Avatar, and I've never seen anything to prove otherwise. By their codes and laws, that's about as bad a sin as you can commit. The Hermetics expelled this renegade House from the Order, even going so far as to strike its name from most of their histories and records, referring to them only as the *Massasa* — the undead. Then the Order called a Wizard's March — a formal Hermetic declaration of war — against this House *Massasa.*

With that, a covert war broke out all over Europe. House Flambeau, always eager for a fight, prosecuted the war with a vengeance. They were especially bloodthirsty because, a few years earlier, House *Massasa* had convinced them that one of the other Hermetic Houses — Diedne, if I remember correctly — were guilty of trafficking with demons. House Flambeau had gleefully exterminated the Diedne, and now believed that the *Massasa* had tricked them into destroying an innocent House just to distract the rest of the Order from their own unholy plots. In their quest for vengeance, the Flambeau were willing to cut deals with all manner of monsters, including other vampires that the *Massasa* had managed to offend. House Bonsagus balked at working with such fiends, and House Quaesitor, shocked not only by the idea that they had been tricked into condemning the Diedne but also by the fact that the vampire infestation had happened right under their noses, spent the beginning of the war stumbling around like a duck that had been hit on the head. The seers of House Criamon rapidly fell under suspicion for not having foreseen House *Massasa*'s treachery, and more than a few of their numbers died at the hands of enraged Flambeau. Mages of other sects got dragged into the war also, especially members of the Palatine Knights. The war lasted over a century, and by the time it was over, the Order was battered and bloody. Countless magi and apprentices were dead, chantries were destroyed and none of the Houses trusted each other anymore. Some Hermetics even left the Order altogether, becoming Orphans or trying to restart the old Cult of Mercury. On top of this, several Palatines, already disturbed by House Flambeau's vampire allies, had uncovered the true cause of the war. After that, a lot of Palatines, including members of the Messianic Voices, considered the Hermetics little better than the monsters the Knights were dedicated to destroying.

While the Hermetics were busy tearing themselves apart, mundane politics were spinning out of control in southern France. Around the turn of the millennium, a group of Cathar missionaries arrived in Albi, France and started preaching their flavor of Gnosticism to the local peasants and nobles. If you've never heard of Catharism, it's a heretical movement teaching that the material world is inherently evil, having been created by the devil to damn us all to a sinful existence trapped in a prison of flesh. The only hope of eternal salvation is to be blessed by one of the Cathar leaders and then live out the rest of your life in total poverty, celibacy and fasting. Of course, this means you either starve to death or commit suicide before the desire to eat forces you to fall from grace. Now, if you follow the Cathar logic, because the devil is the one who created the world, it's really the devil masquerading as God throughout the Old Testament, which means that the Catholic Church is really the church of Satan. Needless to say, the Church wasn't very amused with this.

Gradually, Catharism caught on with the nobles in southern France, and even managed to pop up in places throughout Europe. By the end of the 12th century, the Cathars had formed their own parallel church and Rome was fed up. When a Cathar nobleman had a papal legate murdered after being excommunicated for heresy, Pope Innocent III called for a Crusade against the Cathars. King Philip II of France, eager to bring the nobles of southern France under his thumb, gladly raised an army for the Pope. With the motto of "kill them all; The Lord will know well who are His," the Crusaders rampaged through southern France, leveling cities, slaughtering entire villages and murdering hundreds of thousands of people, Catholic and Cathar alike, over the next twenty years.

By the time the Albigensian Crusade ran out of people to kill, Pope Gregory IX — Innocent III had dropped dead a few years earlier — wanted to make sure that the Cathars didn't come back to bother the church anymore, so he created the Papal Inquisition to go out and look for heretics. I can tell by that look on your face that you're expecting me to talk about witch hunts and the Celestial Chorus going around burning Verbena at the stake or something, aren't you? Well, too bad. That didn't happen. All the Inquisition cared about then was heretics. That mainly meant any surviving Cathars but also the Waldeneses, a group that more or less laid the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation. The In-

The Surviving Cathars

In the real world, the Albigensian Crusade and the subsequent Inquisition destroyed the Cathar heresy. In the World of Darkness, the presence of an organized conspiracy (the Messianic Voices) within the Catholic Church that is willing to smuggled heretics away from the Inquisition's torture chambers allow enough Cathars to survive so that they have the opportunity to rebuild. During the Grand Convocation, several of these sects chose to join one Tradition or another, seeking the strength and safety that comes in greater numbers. Fearing a repeat of events in the 13th century, these small sects work to keep as low a profile as possible. While this has resulted in the groups remaining very small over the years, it has also helped them to avoid detection by the Technocracy.

Among the Traditions, the Cathars are primarily found among three factions:

• **Celestial Chorus:** Known as the *Children of Albi*, this sect believes that the needs and desires of the human body and the material world hinder them in their search for union with the divine. Members reject material wealth and luxury, typically living in small communes where they raise only enough food and money to survive. Initiates eat only vegetables and fish — some choose to be strict vegetarians or even vegans — until they reach the stage of mystical enlightenment where they can subsist on spiritual energy untainted by the material world (using Prime and Life magic to live off of Quintessence).

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** One of the more extreme Cathar sects is the *Studiosi* — the Zealous Ones. Influenced by the flagellant movements that sprang up in Italy and Germany shortly after the Albigensian Crusade, the Studiosi not only reject the illusion of the material, but actively seek to destroy their prisons of flesh, believing that physical desires are simply a distraction from finding Gnosis (what other Ecstatics might call "hearing the world pulse"). Members routinely wear hair shirts, whip themselves bloody, and burn, brand and mutilate their own bodies. Castration and female circumcision is also fairly common among the sect. The Studiosi believe that the Technocratic Union has replaced the Catholic Church as the chief earthly servants of Rex Mundi, the demonic king of the material world. Because of this, they are some of the most fanatical and militant supporters of the Ascension War, and their heavy number of casualties has ensured that the sect remains small.

• **Akashic Brotherhood:** One of the more curious groups to emerge from the Grand Convocation is the *Route de la Vérité* ("Road of Truth"). After a series of philosophical and metaphysical discussions with representatives of the Akashic delegation, a small circle of Cathar ascetics feel that their place is with the Brotherhood. The *Marcheurs* ("Walkers"), as members call themselves, are part of the eclectic Li-Hai sect and teach their members to see past the illusion of the base material world and achieve enlightenment through Gnosis. Hiding in the Pyrenees Mountains for several centuries, the sect gradually spreads back into southern France. For the past few centuries, the Marcheurs have used Savate and, to a lesser degree, fencing as gateway arts to Do and several of their chantries also double as salles (Savate schools).

For a more in-depth look at the beliefs and history of the Cathars and other Gnostic groups see **Cainite Heresy** for **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.

quisition mostly stuck to France and Italy, since that's where most of the Cathars were.

As for what we were doing during all this, the Hermetics barely even noticed. They were completely absorbed in the *Massasa* War and thought everything that was going on was just one more plot against them by the vampires. Chantry attacked by a peasant mob? Vampires did it. Your apprentice broke his leg? Must be a vampire curse. The King of France sends an army to slaughter tens of thousands of his own subjects (obviously just so they can attack your chantry in the process)? Well, it's those damn vampires again.

The Messianic Voices, on the other hand, were stuck right in the middle of it. A few supported the crusade. Most had misgivings as soon as the butchery started, and a lot of them just tried to avoid the region all together. A handful of them were sympathetic, being old enough to remember how they were persecuted during the Roman Empire, or at least having had mentors who drilled it into their heads, and tried to shelter what refugees they could. When the Inquisition started, they were just as divided. Most didn't see that much wrong with it, but a sizable number realized that the Messianic Voices themselves qualified as a heretical sect and were very likely to end up on the Inquisition's

hit list right alongside the Cathars. When Pope Innocent IV — Popes tended to have pretty short careers back then — authorized the Inquisition to start using torture to get confessions, the Messianic Voices balked. Most went as deeply underground as they could, even hiding in the Umbra. Others started smuggling heretics out of the Inquisition's torture chambers. A lot of them got caught and ended up being tortured to death for their beliefs.

Over the past few years, it seems like it's become trendy for certain circles to blame the Chorus for any and every slight ever committed by Christianity, real or imagined. A couple of cliques in the Verbena are the worst about this, but you also see it in the Order of Hermes — some of them can't seem to grasp the idea that mages don't control the world like pawns on a chessboard and assume that anything Western religion has ever done is some sort of Chorus plot. Even worse is when the rumor mill gets started and people start repeating whatever wild "look at what the evil Christians are doing now" story is making the rounds. I think the latest crack-induced delirium involves the South American members of the Chorus allying with the Technocracy so they can wipe out the Dreamspeakers in the Amazon. All of this is, of course, pure crap. The Chorus has always been heretics, and from the early days of Christianity to the Thirty Years War, one party or another has persecuted them for their beliefs. They've known the Inquisition's flame as well as the rest of us, and they've stood by the Council of Nine through thick and thin. They aren't saints — none of us are — but they deserve better than lies and slander born out of ignorance and bigotry.

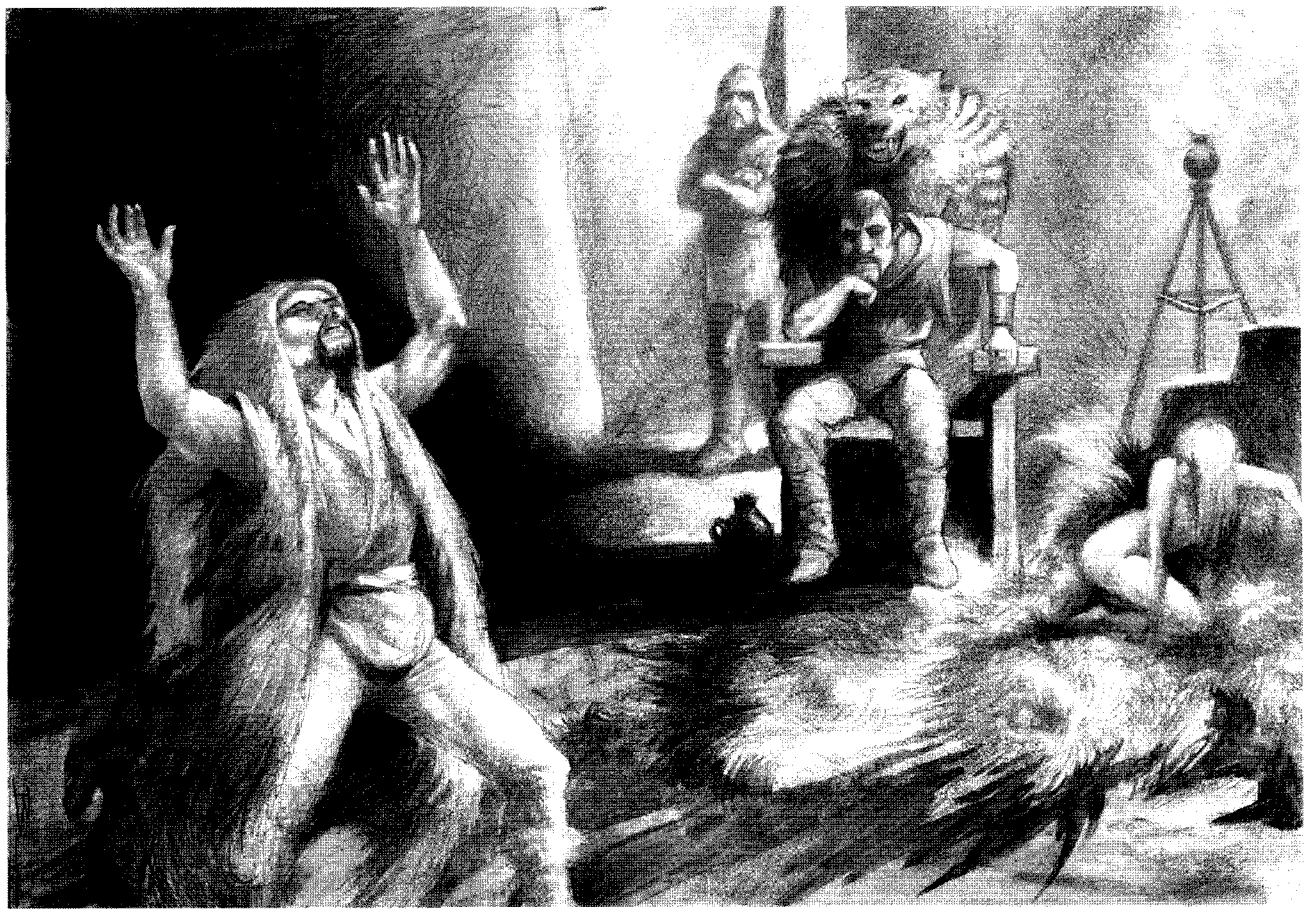
The Golden Horde

While this was going on, Asia had its own problems. Out in the steppes, a man by the name of Temujin had managed to get himself named Genghis Khan — "Lord of the Nation" — of the Mongols. Under his leadership, the Mongol horsemen destroyed their more powerful rivals, the Tatars, almost to a man. Then he turned his attention to China. At the time, China-proper was the little Song Empire down in the south. Northern and western China were in the hands of the Jin Empire, another group of horse warriors who'd gotten tired of just extorting money and tribute from the Song and had just conquered most of the kingdom. The Song decided to ally with the Mongols, but ended up not doing much more than watching the Great Khan take all of the Jin territory as his own. The Wu Lung took advantage of this alliance and tried to use the Mongols to destroy Akashic strongholds in the Jin Empire. Unfortunately, the Mongols also hit the Wu Lung's Jin strongholds as well.

When Genghis had reached the Pacific Ocean, he turned around and started going west. He conquered a huge chunk of Central Asia, and his lieutenants even led raiding parties as far as the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus in southern Russia. The Mongols were ruthless in their conquest, massacring armies, slaughtering peasants and destroying cities. The shamans who rode with them were just as vicious in their battles with Russian, Muslim and Chinese wizards. After Genghis died, his son, Ogadei, carried on in his father's footsteps. The first thing he did was send his brother, Batu, west to conquer the Russian lands Mongol hordes had rampaged through ten years earlier. By the time Batu was done, he'd conquered everything as far as Poland and Hungary. The only thing that stopped him from taking Vienna and the rest of Europe was Ogadei dropping dead. Batu took his armies back into Russia and made his play to become the next Great Khan.

Batu never managed to take the throne, but the Mongol Empire kept right on rolling. Their next big push was into Persia and the Middle East. Under Hulegu Khan, they completely crushed the legendary Assassin cult and then conquered Baghdad, taking the Caliph and sticking him in a sack to be trampled into paste by horses. In their rampage, the Mongols burned and destroyed hundreds of chantries and nodes belonging to the Web of Faith. The Web never really recovered from that invasion. They were still rebuilding when the Grand Convocation was called, and some say the Ahl-i-Batin were still trying to recover lost nodes when they left the Council of Nine.

Eventually, Kublai Khan managed to become the Great Khan, but in the process, the Golden Horde of Russia and the Ilkhanate of Persia broke away from the Empire and became their own independent states. Kublai, already a confirmed Sinophile, decided to make up for it by finally conquering the rest of China. After the Song was defeated, it was obvious that the new barbarian king held the mandate of heaven, and Kublai became the first emperor of the new Yuan Dynasty. Over the years, the Akashics had managed to work their way into the Khanate's power structure, and now the Wu Lung struggled with the Brotherhood over who got to influence the now reunified Chinese Empire.



For Want of a Nail...

In December of 1241, the Golden Horde, having already conquered Poland and Hungary, is closing on Vienna, Austria when they receive word that Ogadei Khan — leader of the Mongol Empire stretching from China and Korea to Turkey and Eastern Europe — has died. The Horde is forced to turn back so that their leader, Batu, may lay his claim to become the next Great Khan. This twist of fate is literally the only thing that saves Europe from Mongol domination; there is no military force on the continent capable of stopping the Golden Horde. The Battle (massacre is more fitting) of Wahlstadt in Poland has already proven how ineffective European knights, fighting with lance and sword, are against Mongol bowmen.

Over the centuries, one mage sect or another has attempted to take credit for Ogadei's well-timed death. In the real world, Ogadei's death is due to diet rather than any sort of foul play. In the World of Darkness, the truth (if any) behind claims of magical influence over the Great Khan's death is left to individual Storytellers to answer.

...the Kingdom was Lost

On the other side of the coin, magic (as well as countless other *deus ex machina* available in the World of Darkness (from vampire blood to Infernal intervention) makes it feasible for Ogadei to live past 1241. Even extending the Great Khan's life by a year or two leads to enormous alterations in world history. After sacking Vienna, the Golden Horde can easily attack Paris and Antwerp, or even force their way through the Alps to reach Rome. In such a scenario, the Renaissance — and the rise of the Order of Reason with it — becomes all but impossible.

The modern heirs to the Great Khan's legacy can be found among the Dreamspeakers and the Akashic *Jnani*, as well as the independent *Sons of Tengri* (see **Dragons of the East**). For more information on the Mongols, see **Wind From the East** for **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.

Cry Havoc

By the 14th century, mage affairs throughout Europe and Asia were a shambles. Mages everywhere were at each other's throats or dealing with the fallout of the past two centuries of chaos. It was in this sea of confusion that the idea of the Council of Nine was born. But it would take a series of visionaries, each building on the work of their predecessors, to bring it about. That, and a threat bigger than any of us.

The Order of Reason

I don't know if you've ever heard of the Order of Reason or not. They aren't the same thing as the modern Technocratic Union; the Sons of Ether told us that much when they left the Union to join us. More like the Order is what laid the foundation for the Technocracy. The core of the Order of Reason was a group known as the Craftmasons. They were a band of engineers, social reformers and artificers who wanted to build a better world by bringing order and stability to Europe. Part of that stability meant getting rid of the vampires, goblins and other monsters that terrorized mankind. All fine and good. Unfortunately, they also had a bit of a mad on for the Order of Hermes, which isn't surprising given that the elitist, self-absorbed Hermetics were pretty much the antithesis of the egalitarian and socially-minded Craftmasons. Gradually, the Craftmasons managed to find allies through out Europe and parts of the Middle East and Asia to help advance their great work. A lot of the old Greco-Roman philosopher guilds joined them, along with Italian merchant houses, the Knights Templar and others. Calling themselves the Order of Reason, this group set out to remake Europe in their own image. And since this image didn't include magic, they declared war on every mystical sect they saw.

The Drawing of the Three

It has been said that the Council of Nine owes its existence to one man and, in a way, that's very true. No one knows where Sh'zar the Seer came from. Some say India or Persia. Others Africa. I've even heard stories that he was some sort of seraphim or dragon who'd taken human form. In the end, it doesn't really matter. Skilled in a variety of Ecstatic arts from all over Asia, he was a powerful magician and prophet. Haunted by drug-induced visions of doom and destruction, Sh'zar attended a gathering of magi in Persia hoping to share details of his vision with others and gain new insights on his dilemma. This gathering, now known as the First Samashti, included mages from all over India and the Middle East, as well as smaller contingents from Africa, Europe and China. The host was a Persian merchant, mystic and healer by the name of Sirdar Rustam. He was a member of one of the Indian Chakravanti sects, and the Euthanatoi consider this gathering the formal foundation of their Tradition.

Anyway, Sh'zar shared his vision with other soothsayers and seers and while all agreed that it was an omen of something bad on the horizon, no one could quite agree on the interpretation or suggest what to do about it. What really happened next is lost to the sands of time, but the legend goes something like this. After leaving the Samashti, Sh'zar traveled across the deserts of Persia until one night, while sleeping, a new vision came to him in a dream. The ground Sh'zar slept upon was the very spot, over a millennium ago, where Khwaja al-Akbar handed down the Doctrine of Unity to the Ahl-i-Batin, and now Khwaja al-Akbar came to the Seer and gave him the answer he sought. Sh'zar was to go forth and gather every mage on Earth, binding them into a single unified brotherhood. I have no idea if that legend is true or not. Sh'zar could have come up with the answer on his own. He'd seen sects from three

A Date That Will Live In Infamy?

In the winter of 1210, the Craftmasons laid siege to the Hermetic chantry of Mistridge, throwing down the gauntlet and officially beginning the Ascension War. At least, that's the line self-styled Ascension Warriors have drilled into the heads of countless Initiates over the past few centuries. The truth is somewhat less dramatic. Mistridge is located in the Languedoc region of southern France, and in 1210, the area is caught up in the Albigensian Crusade. At the same time, the Order of Hermes is in the middle of a bloody and violent war with the rogue House of Tremere. Save for House Verditius, who draw portions of their membership from the same sources as the various European Artisan sects, the Hermetics have never heard of the Craftmasons. When Mistridge's destruction is uncovered, Hermetics assume it to be just one more casualty of the *Massasa* War. It is not until the Order of Reason lays siege to Doissetep itself in 1448 that the Houses of Hermes realizes they are facing a new threat. The Hermetics might never have discovered the truth behind the fall of Mistridge had it not been for the Solificati. One of the founding Conventions of the Order of Reason, the breakaway alchemists' guild is aware of the Craftmasons' history, and shares this knowledge with the Order of Hermes at the Grand Convocation.

continents band together into the Euthanatoi, and he could have easily spoken to members of the Ahl-i-Batin at the Samashti. Still, it's a nice story.

Sh'zar traveled throughout the Middle East seeking others to believe in his new vision. Still recovering from the Mongol attacks a century before, the Ahl-i-Batin showed interest in the Seer's idea — it was an extension of their own goals, after all — as did the newly formed Euthanatoi. Now Sh'zar had a bigger task ahead — getting the scattered, hostile and self-centered mage sects of Europe to listen to him. He traveled all over Europe, speaking to dozens if not hundreds of willworkers. Some listened; most dismissed his visions as the rantings of a madman. Luckily, he found three influential Masters who listened and believed.

The Witch

The Catholic Church didn't care that much about witchcraft in the early 15th century, but the Order of Reason did. One of the Order's factions, the Cabal of Pure Thought, had a vision of "One World, One God," and there wasn't any room for witches or Pagans — or really anyone who wasn't a strict Catholic — in their perfect universe. The knights of the Cabal attacked folk mages throughout Europe, hitting communities in England and Germany the hardest. Obviously, these people wanted revenge. A shadow war raged across the British Isles as an alliance of peasant sorcerers, druids and mystics hunted down their attackers.

Leading this alliance was a young woman known only as Nightshade. No one knows what her real name was. She was the sole survivor of a Cabal attack that left her friends and family — everyone she cared about — dead. All she had left was revenge. She named herself after that most poisonous of plants and brought death to those who had destroyed her life. In the process, she found a new family to care about, made up of fellow survivors. Revenge was replaced with a desire to protect her new family. And in that spirit, she listened to Sh'zar's vision.

The Wizard

By the 15th century, the Order of Hermes was falling apart. The *Massasa* War had torn them asunder and the Houses were at each other's throats. No House trusted the others, and many believed the Order's days were numbered. This was the situation in which Sh'zar found Master Baldric LaSalle bani Tytalus. If you're unfamiliar with House Tytalus, their core belief is growth through conflict. Most took this to mean challenging other Hermetics to duels every chance they could. LaSalle was different. He sought out challenges that went beyond mere magical dueling. LaSalle spent decades attempting to hone himself into the perfect magus, perfecting mind, body and soul alongside mystical skill. He was an accomplished diplomat and politician, as well as athlete, scholar and warrior. Stories have him besting Sphinxes in riddle contests, outfighting some of Europe's greatest swordsmen, and stealing the hearts of queens both mortal and faerie. God knows how many of those are true, but by all accounts, he was one of the most impressive figures of his era. Now, Sh'zar presented Master LaSalle with the greatest challenge of his life — reunify the shattered Order of Hermes and get them to ally with "lesser" magicians throughout the world.

The Hierophant

After the break with the Church, the Messianic Voices had gone underground. The Cabal of Pure Thought eagerly hunted down the heretics, turning them over to the Inquisition or just killing the rogues themselves. Monasteries became favored hiding places for the Voices, and it was in such a place that Sh'zar found the man who would found the Celestial Chorus. Valoran was a French bishop who had been forced to disguise himself as a simple monk after being denounced by the Inquisition. A powerful miracle worker, he was renowned not only for his abilities as a healer and exorcist, but for his skills as a theologian and scholar as well. Valoran was unique among those Sh'zar met because he knew the Seer was coming before he even got there. The Archangel Gabriel had come to him in a dream, showing him a vision of a choir of thousands, each singing with their own voice but united in one song. Valoran believed that God wanted him to join Sh'zar's crusade, and the monk took to it with a fervor that matched — if not surpassed — the Seer's own. To Valoran, the Council of Nine was the destiny God had set forth for him, and for the rest of his life, he believed that the unity of the Nine Traditions was nothing less than God's will.

The Meeting at Mistridge

Sh'zar instructed the three masters to gather at the ruins of Mistridge, a Hermetic chantry in southern France that had been destroyed by the Craftmasons under cover of the Albigensian Crusade. The Seer had never been to Mistridge before, nor had he even heard of the place; it had been revealed to him in one of his hashish-inspired visions. These abandoned, burnt out ruins, he told them, were all that would remain of their respective mystical traditions unless they joined together and helped each other. This gathering lasted for

a few months, and the four masters and their respective entourages spent most of it arguing and debating until they finally agreed on the idea of a council of mages to help bring some sort of order to the diverse groups, and to help formulate some sort of defense against this new Order of Reason. These debates helped bring the three rival European willworkers closer together; they didn't quite become friends, but they at least developed a mutual respect for the others' passion and intelligence. With the gathering's end, the four groups, led by LaSalle, Valoran, Nightshade and Sh'zar scattered to the four winds, planning to gather more converts to their cause and meet again in nine years.

Those next few decades are when the Council of Nine first starts to come together. It's also the period three Traditions trace their formal foundation to. The first is born during the gathering itself. Sh'zar, in his quest to find mages who would listen to his vision, had been all over Europe and while Nightshade, LaSalle and Valoran were the three most influential who attended the first gathering, they weren't the only ones. One of these was William Groth, the leader of a band of German folk mages who, like Nightshade's group, were survivors of Cabal assaults. United by shared pain, loss and a desire to protect those who looked to them for leadership, Nightshade and Groth rapidly overcame their language barrier and over the next few months became friends and then lovers. The two were wed in a mystic ceremony that bound them together, heart and soul. This ceremony also symbolized the union between the two factions, whom Nightshade and Groth envisioned as being just the first two branches of a mighty tree that would spread over all creation. They named this new group the *Verbenae* —Latin for "sacred branches." This British and German core would soon be joined by Italian, Slavic, Greek and other sects.

Verbenae?

The word verbena — "sacred branch" — is the singular form of verbenae. Each of the Tradition's individual factions — the druids, the chthonioi, the vedun, and others — are a branch spreading out from the sacred tree, just as each individual Verbena is a smaller branch spreading forth from one of these larger branches. However, just as Euthanatoi — the proper plural form of Euthanatos — has fallen out of general use, so has Verbenae. Ironically, both terms see more use among the Order of Hermes (whose members tend to be more familiar with the Ancient Greek and Roman languages) than they do among their own Traditions.

When the Mistridge gathering ended, the two newlyweds each set off in an opposite direction, each seeking more mages to join both their new Tradition and the second gathering. Nightshade went west, first to Iceland and then further, following the old routes the Vikings — or if you believe the legends, the Welsh Prince Madoc — used to reach North America. She traveled throughout the Americas, speaking to medicine workers and priests all over the two continents. From there, she managed to find her way to Africa where she persuaded even more groups to attend the second gathering. Groth went east, first into the Balkans, and then into Russia. Groth died out there in Asia. To this day, no one knows what happened to him. Supposedly Nightshade was wandering the African Savannah when she felt his death. We know Groth made it as far as China, because the Akashics who traveled to the second gathering said he was the man who told them of it. There were even shamans from Siberia who spoke of a giant with hair of fire and a voice that spoke with thunder. William Groth became the first martyr for the Council of Nine, and the Verbena still honor his memory.

As Nightshade and Groth traveled the globe, Valoran set to work trying to reunify the Messianic Voices. He had his work cut out for him. The Voices had been split along Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox lines for centuries, and a collection of offshoots — Cathars, Armenians, even a few die-hard Celtic Christian hold outs — made things even more complicated. Luckily, Valoran had a gift for public speaking and was no slouch as a diplomat either. He shared with the others his vision from the Archangel, and worked hard to smooth over what differences he could. His faith and passion for his goal of unity proved contagious. Gradually more and more began to share his dream, and by the time of the second gathering, Valoran was able to present a unified faction of Christian magi from across Europe. Over the next two decades, Valoran would be the driving force that transformed the Messianic Voices, Righteous Ghazi and Vishnudharadhara into the Celestial Chorus.

Sh'zar, meanwhile, returned to Persia. While he'd been in Europe, three of his followers had been busy organizing a gathering of Ecstatics from all over Asia and Africa. The Seer returned, bringing with him representatives from surviving Greek and Roman cults. This collection of mystics, visionaries and seers became the Sahajiya — what you know as the Cult of Ecstasy. It was here that Sh'zar laid down the Code of Ananda, a set of laws and codes of behavior that the Ecstatics live by. The Cult has developed a reputation — here in the West, at least — of being nothing more than drug-

crazed sybarites. Of course, if you believe that, you probably also believe the stories making the Verbena out as nothing more than New Age crystal gazers and the Euthanatoi as death-worshiping sociopaths. The Code emphasizes personal responsibilities for one's actions and respect for others, and these were the cornerstones Sh'zar used for his new Tradition.

Master LaSalle, unfortunately, had run into a brick wall trying to persuade his fellow Hermetics to attend the second gathering. He spent eight years in endless debates, secret meetings and duels working to make his voice heard and to convince others of the Seer's vision. LaSalle burned up every favor and boon owed to him and was forced to kill at least a dozen of his fellow Hermetics in personal combat. The seers of House Criamon supported him, and so did the artificers of House Verditius. Those two had some inkling of what was on the horizon, either through mystical prophecy or simply from moving in some of the same social circles as the Order of Reason. The other Houses either buried their heads in the sand, thinking that nothing could threaten the great and powerful Houses of Hermes or did nothing, paralyzed by the fear that taking any action at all might lead to a repeat of the destruction caused by the *Massasa* War.

Finally, the choice was taken out of their hands. A year before the second gathering at Mistridge, the Order of Reason attacked Doissetep. The Hermetics were caught off guard and found themselves unprepared for the mix of clockwork war machines and faith-welding knights the Order threw at them. The siege lasted for five months and only ended when the Hermetics were finally able to reactivate the wards and inscriptions they'd originally used to move the fortress from Turkey. Unfortunately, the Hermetics had added on to their little clubhouse over the centuries, and no one had bothered to rig the new buildings for transport. Almost half of the fortress was left behind when the leadership bolted. The Hermetics left nothing but servants and apprentices to defend what was left. They were quickly overrun and massacred by the Order of Reason's soldiers. The Craftmasons had attacked Hermetic chantries before, but always under the cover of other conflicts. Now they'd openly attacked the Hermetics' pride and joy, their most important and most prestigious chantry. The Order of Hermes was now at war.

The Traditions Gather

The first Mistridge gathering had been a small affair — less than two dozen mages basically having a camp out. The second gathering had over a hundred people there, from all over Europe, Asia and Africa. There were even a few from the Americas, so the stories go. Unfortunately, a gathering of that sized attracted the notice of the Order of Reason. They attacked the Mistridge gathering with every tool in their arsenal — hand cannons, Greek fire, clockwork tanks, armored knights and airships. The gathered mystics fought back, but they were badly outnumbered and might have been wiped out if not for one thing. The Order of Hermes had been caught flatfooted once before, and vowed to never let that happen again. Their representatives at Mistridge had come prepared for

Spreading the Word

Pre-industrial civilizations do not exist in isolated pockets. The Silk Road carries trade between Rome and China, and the Muslims travel from Mali and Kenya to Central Asia and Indonesia. Sh'zar first enters Europe through Venice, and the Ahl-i-Batin are easily able to spread word of the second Mistridge gathering into Africa, China and Southeast Asia. While the voyages of Nightshade and Groth are traditionally attributed to the "Paths of the Wyck" (pathways through the Umbra), such fantastic methods prove largely unnecessary. Groth simply travels the Danube River through the Balkans to the Black Sea and from there travels the Steppes on horseback until he encounters the Akashic Brotherhood in Mongolia and meets his final fate within the Middle Kingdom. Nightshade sails to Iceland and there finds Spae-crafters old enough to remember how to reach Vinland. Once in North America, she simply walks from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and then down into South America. From there, she uses the Paths of the Wyck to journey to Africa and follows Muslim trade routes back to Europe.

Or... perhaps, in hopes of expediting matters, Groth and Nightshade *do* journey the Paths of the Wyck. The magical travel insures that they arrive exactly where they need to be — especially important since, while modern anthropologists might know enough to trace civilization routes, explorers of the 15th century might not understand the flow of migration and citifying patterns. Certainly this could explain how Nightshade manages to cross the entirety of North America (three thousand miles!) in such a short time while still contacting many different magicians, and how Groth arrives *exactly* at the Shaolin temple and the Tibetan monastery that both serve as center points for the Akashic Brotherhood.

such an event and so summoned forth over a dozen dragons that the Order had made pacts with. You're probably too young to have ever seen a dragon, and their place in this world is long over. They are, as one Hermetic poet once said, "The power of the universe given form of flesh." The Hermetics and their dragon allies tore into the Order of Reason, hurting their army badly. Before the artificers could recover, the other mystics had rallied and managed to drive the Order of Reason from the battlefield. If you've ever wondered why the Order of Hermes ended up having so much influence over the formation of the Council of Nine, why they have so much say in setting Council policy, or even why the other Traditions have ever put up with such a collection of swelled-headed bastards, this is why. Not only did their actions save the lives of countless representatives, but also the Order of Hermes showed just how much power they were bringing to the table.

After that, it was decided that the mystics needed a safer place to meet. So they built one. A realm was constructed in the spirit world, drawing power from nodes all across the world. The place was named Horizon, and it was here that the Council of Nine was created and the Nine Traditions formalized. If there were a hundred mages at Mistridge, there were five to ten times that number at the Grand Convocation. Groups were crawling out of the woodwork, including dozens that no one had ever seen before and a few, like the Mithraic Singers, that most mages believed were long dead. Groups from Polynesia and Australia showed up without even being invited; they said they'd learned of the Convocation from dreamquests or from spirit messengers.

It took another nine years for the Traditions to be formalized, and very rarely did things work out smoothly. Arguments were common, as were formal duels and even fistfights. Try to imagine one of those bad political discussion shows with the obnoxious pundits shouting at each other crossed with Extreme Wrestling Warfare, and you might get an idea what the Convocation was like. Just deciding on a number of Traditions was a problem. Some wanted every group to have an equal voice, but that got shouted down by almost all of the larger groups. Someone in the Order of Hermes suggested making them all Hermetic Houses, with the smaller ones going in House Ex Miscellanea. Not even the Hermetics would go for that. Some in the Verbena and the Chorus suggested three groups, but that didn't fly either. Thirty-three was proposed. The Akashics suggested five, then eight. Finally, everyone settled on nine — one for each of the Spheres that they'd decided upon. (The whole debate over the unified magic of Spheres was another one of those long, drawn-out fights, too.)

Then came the next big hurdle of whom those nine Traditions would be. Someone — one of the Ahl-i-Batin, I think — suggested groupings based on region. In theory, that sounded good, but no one would go for it. The Hermetics demanded their own group, and the Verbena and Chorus weren't thrilled with the idea of merging. On top of that, the Sahajiya, having just formed, weren't in the mood to be broken apart again. Through all of this bickering, the power players gradually emerged.

The Order of Hermes was not going to budge on keeping their own identity, and after Mistridge, no one was very willing to argue with them over it. Nightshade and Valoran provided the next two power blocks. Nightshade managed to gather folk mages from all over Europe under her banner, and started making alliances with groups from Africa and the Americas as well. Meanwhile, Valoran, after years of theological debate and discussion with Muslim and Hindu leaders, had managed to turn the Messianic Voices, Righteous Ghazi and Vishnudharadhara into something that could qualify as a confederacy. Sh'zar commanded enough respect that the others listened to him, and under his leadership, the Sahajiya continued to grow as they attracted more factions from Europe and the Americas under their umbrella. Chalech was the leader of the Chakravanti, and because of their alliance with the African Madzimbabwe and with European sects, he became the spokesman for mages across three continents. Likewise, the Ahl-i-Batin spanned most of the known world, and may very well have been the largest faction at the Convocation. After the Mongol conquest of China, the Akashic Brotherhood had managed to gain a fair amount of influence within the empire, and combined with their mystical and martial skill, they were the largest and most powerful mage sect in East Asia.

It soon became clear that these groups would claim seven of the nine seats. The next seat was auctioned off in a back room deal. The Solificati were a small guild of European alchemists, who'd been founding members of the Order of Reason. They left — or were kicked out, depending on whom you ask — and decided to throw in with the Council of Nine. The "Crowned Ones," as they so humbly called themselves, used what they knew about the Craftmasons' strengths and organization to literally buy themselves a seat on the Council. The Solificati barely outnumbered the average Hermetic House, and this left a lot of other mid-sized factions pissed off. To them, it looked like the Europeans were playing favorites with one of their own.

Strange Bedfellows

When the Nine Traditions are formalized, the Council clumsily attempts to shoehorn the Aboriginal willworkers of Australia into the Dreamspeakers. This action almost causes the entire Australian delegation to walk out on the Grand Convocation. Aboriginal societies are extremely diverse, showing variations from one language group to another, and even from family group to family group. It is impossible to make blanket statements about the people as a whole, but there is one near constant: an incredibly strong and sacrosanct gender division in matters of religion and magic. Men are never allowed to learn women's magic, and vice versa. Each gender forms its own separate mystical societies, and these divisions are so important to the Aboriginal willworkers that they refuse to be lumped together into a single Tradition, believing that such an arrangement will inevitably result in violations of the taboo against men and women sharing each other's mystical knowledge.

Near the end of the Grand Convocation, a compromise is reached. Again, one cannot make blanket statements about Aboriginal culture, but frequently, male magic leans toward matters of the spirit and the ephemeral while female magic is more oriented towards life and the physical. Because of this, many female societies join with the Verbena while their male counterparts become part of the Dreamspeakers. Other societies refuse to join either faction, finding the compromise unsatisfactory because each Tradition includes members of both genders. These Disparate willworkers return to Australia where they remain undisturbed until the arrival of Europeans. Badly mauled by disease and conquest, some relent and seek sanctuary with the Dreamspeakers. Others choose to remain independent; some even manage to survive into the modern day. Presently, the majority of traditional Aboriginal willworkers are Dreamspeakers, Verbena or Disparates/ Orphans, but occasionally one finds her way into the Cult of Ecstasy or the Celestial Chorus.

Please note that this is an extremely abbreviated and simplified look at Aboriginal religion and magic. The above generalizations are riddled with exceptions (numerous groups include male rites with a strong bodily focus or female spiritual rites) and the Dreamspeaker/ Verbena division is a compromise that even modern members of those Traditions are not completely happy with.

That left one seat. Star-of-Eagles was a powerful medicine-worker from the Powhatan nation — part of what's called North Carolina these days. He'd been invited to the Convocation by Nightshade, and there he met Naioba, a priestess from the Yoruba of West Africa. Together, they decided to form a Tradition for followers of the spirit path: a union of shamans and medicine workers from both of their lands — the Dreamspeakers. The other Traditions agreed to this, but where Star-of-Eagles and Naioba saw a brotherhood of those who spoke with the spirits, the others saw a dumping ground for their little brown brothers, as well as any other primitive witch doctor who didn't meet their standards of a "real magician." Obviously, this left a lot of bitterness among the willworkers of Africa and the Americas, especially among those groups who were no more shamans than the Order of Hermes were. A lot of these groups fought to retain their cultural identity, and several of them found their way into other Traditions. A lot more of them just left in disgust.

Once the Nine Mystical Traditions were formalized, and their representatives chosen, the Council decided to create a symbol of this great unity. They called it the First Cabal, and each Tradition appointed someone they thought best represented their ideals. The road to hell, as they say, is paved with good intentions and the Cabal was the Council's biggest success and its greatest failure. Like I said, each Tradition picked someone they felt best represented their group. Unfortunately, no one stopped to consider how these people would work as a group. The Chorus's choice was a sheltered nun who'd never been outside of her little corner of France, and here she was the only Christian in the group. The Euthanatoi at least had the common sense to not send someone who'd fought in the Himalayan War during a past life, but that representative and the Akashic one still went to bed every night wondering if the other was going to stick a knife in his back. The Dreamspeakers sent a Seneca warrior and I'm still surprised that he didn't drop dead from smallpox or any of a hundred other diseases. Still, in spite of their differences, the First Cabal was able to make a name for themselves, serving the Council as ambassadors, explorers and leg breakers. And then everything fell apart.

Rroitia

The Rroma (often referred to as Gypsies, a term which many find disparaging) are an ethnic group which migrate out of northwestern India sometime during the first millennium AD and begin entering Europe in large numbers during the 14th century. Many of the Rroma are forced into slavery in Bulgaria, Transylvania and other Eastern European kingdoms. The 19th century sees the end of slavery and serfdom in Eastern Europe, which leads to an exodus of Rroma to North America. This same century also sees the birth of many of the modern-day "gypsy" stereotypes as the same skewed ideas and theories, which portray Native Americans as "noble savages," lead to the fanciful romantification of "True Romany" as singing, dancing, scarf-wearing vagabonds. This stereotyping is perpetuated throughout the 20th century through works of popular fiction, cheap horror movies, "medieval" or "Renaissance" reenactment societies, and badly researched role-playing game supplements.

At the Grand Convocation, those Rroma mages who attend frequently find themselves treated with disdain by other European willworkers. Although Nightshade and Chalech offer them places within the Verbena and Euthanatoi, the Rroma refuse, believing that these Traditions' use of blood magic and dealings with the spirits of the dead make them *marimé*, or unclean. In the end, the majority of Rroma willworkers find their way into the Dreamspeakers or remain independent. Traditionally, their magic revolves around healing, protection from hostile spirits and cursing (Life, Spirit, Correspondence, Entropy). Some Rroma women act as fortunetellers, but this is always done for the benefit of *Gadje* (non-Rroma) and never among themselves. Metalworking has always been a common occupation (even today with Rroma welders and auto mechanics) and some mages augment their skills with technomagic. Some Rroma have blood ties to the assorted spirit folk of India, Persia, the Middle East and the Balkans (represented by the Fae Blood merit) and their unique gifts sometimes leave outsiders with the mistaken impression of some form of racial "Gypsy blood affinity" for mystical powers.

Today, Rroma Dreamspeakers are found in all strata of the Tradition. Anthropologists, linguists and historians who seek to raise awareness of the real history, culture and current struggles of the Rroma are found among the *Baruti* (a faction of teachers and storytellers who took their African name in honor of the Tradition's martyred cofounder, Naioba). Technomancers who blend older arts with blacksmithing, automotive repair and even computer science join the *Ghost Wheel Society* (techno-shamans who first appeared in the 19th century American West). Those who wish to preserve traditional Rroma culture from assimilation — often those from larger Eastern European communities; only about 5% of which are nomadic or migratory — find their way into the *Keepers of the Sacred Flame* (conservatives who work to keep dying and endangered cultures alive). Some members, alarmed at the growing racial hatred and violence aimed at Rroma in the wake of Communism's collapse, have chosen to become members of the *Red Spears* (militants, whose name was inspired by the Creek Wars, dedicated to protecting their families and nations from outside aggression).

Even though the Dreamspeakers are the traditional home to Rroma mages, they are found throughout all of the Traditions (although Verbena and Euthanatos are still extreme minorities), as well as the Technocratic Union. The Rroma are something of an invisible minority in the modern world. Some nations refuse to recognize the Rroma as a legitimate ethnic group, and many prefer to keep their ethnicity a secret rather than deal with the prejudice and stereotypes of Gadje. Others have become increasingly vocal about their heritage as they work to raise awareness of the problems facing their people at the dawn of the 21st century, including the rising tide of racist violence in Eastern Europe and the reclamation of family assets lost during the Holocaust.

Those interested in more information on the Rroma are urged to check out the Patrin Web Journal (http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/patrin.htm).

The Center Does Not Hold

To represent them in the First Cabal, the Solificati chose Heylel Teomim, an up-and-coming young alchemist who was the Tradition's golden boy/ girl. A few years before, he'd discovered a way to fuse himself with one of his female coeds, turning himself into a hermaphrodite. Since this sort of thing has a lot of mystical significance and symbolism, the Solificati fell all over themselves lavishing praise on their young prodigy. Funny how no one else mentions whether or not his

female half wanted to end up sharing bodies with him. Heylel betrayed the Cabal to the Order of Reason, and half of them died before one was able to escape and bring help. The renegade alchemist was captured and placed on trial, and in his defense, he claimed he'd betrayed the group to prove how the Council's great show of unity was a sham. Heylel was put to death and his Avatar was destroyed. After that, the Solificati were disgraced. Their leader was assassinated by one of his rivals, and the group disintegrated. Some managed to join the Hermetics as part of House Ex Miscellanea. Others showed their true colors and rejoined the Order of Reason. A few tried to go it alone and vanished into the mists of history.

After that, things went all to hell, riding a bullet train all the way. Star-of-Eagles and Naioba had married but she was murdered by one of her rivals. Star-of-Eagles sunk into a deep depression and all but abandoned his place on the Council. Upset with his inability to foresee Heylel's treachery, and under suspicion from the other Council members because of it, Sh'zar retreated into a drug-induced fog and eventually vanished altogether. An ultraconservative faction tried to seize control of the Order of Hermes and withdraw the Tradition from the Council. Master LaSalle defeated their entire leadership in a series of duels before dying of the wounds he received. The Cabal of Pure Thought continued to hammer away at the Verbena, and a growing number of them wanted to declare all-out war on anything that smacked of Christianity. Some even tried to purge their Tradition of anyone who didn't meet their standards of "real Paganism." Nightshade would have none of it. She'd worked too hard for the dream she and Groth had shared, and wasn't about to let it fall apart in a fit of fanatical orthodoxy or in some suicidal holy war.

Then real world politics stuck its nose in things. The Turks had finally managed to conquer Constantinople, bringing an end to the once great Byzantine Empire. After that, they kept right on rolling through the Balkans until they were parked outside of Vienna. The Order of Hermes, unable to grasp the idea that governments aren't pawns that mages move around on chessboards, blamed the Batini for it and the whole episode drove a wedge between Muslim mystics and their European counterparts. Meanwhile, the Reformation had begun and as Catholics and Protestants across Europe started killing each other, the Celestial Chorus was tearing itself apart. Valoran exhausted himself through decades of peacekeeping and, though he was able to keep the Chorus together, the Messianic Voices fragmented into dozens of rival sects.

The Burning Times Myth

Any discussion of the history of magic inevitably leads to the period often referred to as "The Burning Times." Unfortunately, much of what is considered common knowledge about this period is erroneous. Many of the popular misconceptions about European witch trials are the result of outdated or incomplete information, the deliberate misinterpretation of evidence and, in some cases, outright forgery. Over the past two decades, research on the witch hunts has advanced by leaps and bounds as historians, anthropologists and sociologists continue to uncover more and more records kept during the trials. However, the New Age and Pagan movements have largely failed to keep up. Sensationalist authors, concerned more with book sales than scholarship, have played to readers' emotions while ignoring evidence that clashes with their personal theories (Anne Llewellyn Barstow's *Witchcraze* being one of the worst offenders).

Before the 15th century witch trials are rare, and outbreaks of witch hysteria do not start until the mid-16th century, rapidly fading away a century later. In all of Europe, there are less than one thousand executions on charges of witchcraft between 1300 and 1500, and less than 200 are the result of the Inquisition. Pope Gregory IX founds the Roman (or Papal) Inquisition to find Cathars and other heretics in the wake of the Albigensian Crusade, not to hunt witches. In 1258, Pope Alexander IV explicitly forbids the Papal Inquisition from investigating charges of witchcraft and this is not overturned until 1326. The 1484 Bull *Summis desiderantes* condemns witchcraft as a practice but does not classify it as a heresy. The Spanish Inquisition's primary concern is with *Marranos* ("secret Jews") and *Moriscoes* ("secret Muslims") among the *Conversos* — those who chose to convert rather than face death or exile after the Reconquesta. When witch hysteria starts to appear in northern Spain in 1609, the Spanish Inquisition goes out of its way to quash the panic.

The Catholic Church rejects Kramer and Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of Witches") almost immediately, even going so far as to censure Kramer. Instead, the Malleus becomes the guidebook for secular courts, which conduct the vast

majority of witch trials. It is in these local secular courts that the witch hunts rapidly become mired in corruption, as professional witch finders are paid bounties for every witch they accuse, and magistrates are paid for every one they find guilty. The worst hunts take place in Germany and Switzerland, where the chaos of the Reformation and the Thirty Years War leaves the region in anarchy and local courts operate with little or no oversight. Ironically, it's the unregulated local court system, then, that leads to the accusation and trial of so many "witches," less so than the Church itself.

For years, people simply guessed at the number of people killed during the witch hunts, often pulling numbers out of thin air or basing them on extremely skewed propaganda written by witch finders themselves (which were calculated to create panics and ensure more work). Careful analysis of the trial records conducted in the last two decades continues to reduce the number of confirmable executions and most scholars now consider estimated death tolls over 100,000 to be extremely suspect. While it is possible that in the World of Darkness, these death tolls may be doubled or perhaps even tripled, figures like nine million deaths cannot be feasible at all unless one attempts to count victims of the Albigensian Crusade, the Spanish Inquisition and the Reformation as "witches" — an act which does a grave disservice to those people, many of whom died as martyrs to their faith. The distortion of evidence to generate emotional appeal does an equal disservice to the real victims from this time of public hysteria and judicial corruption.

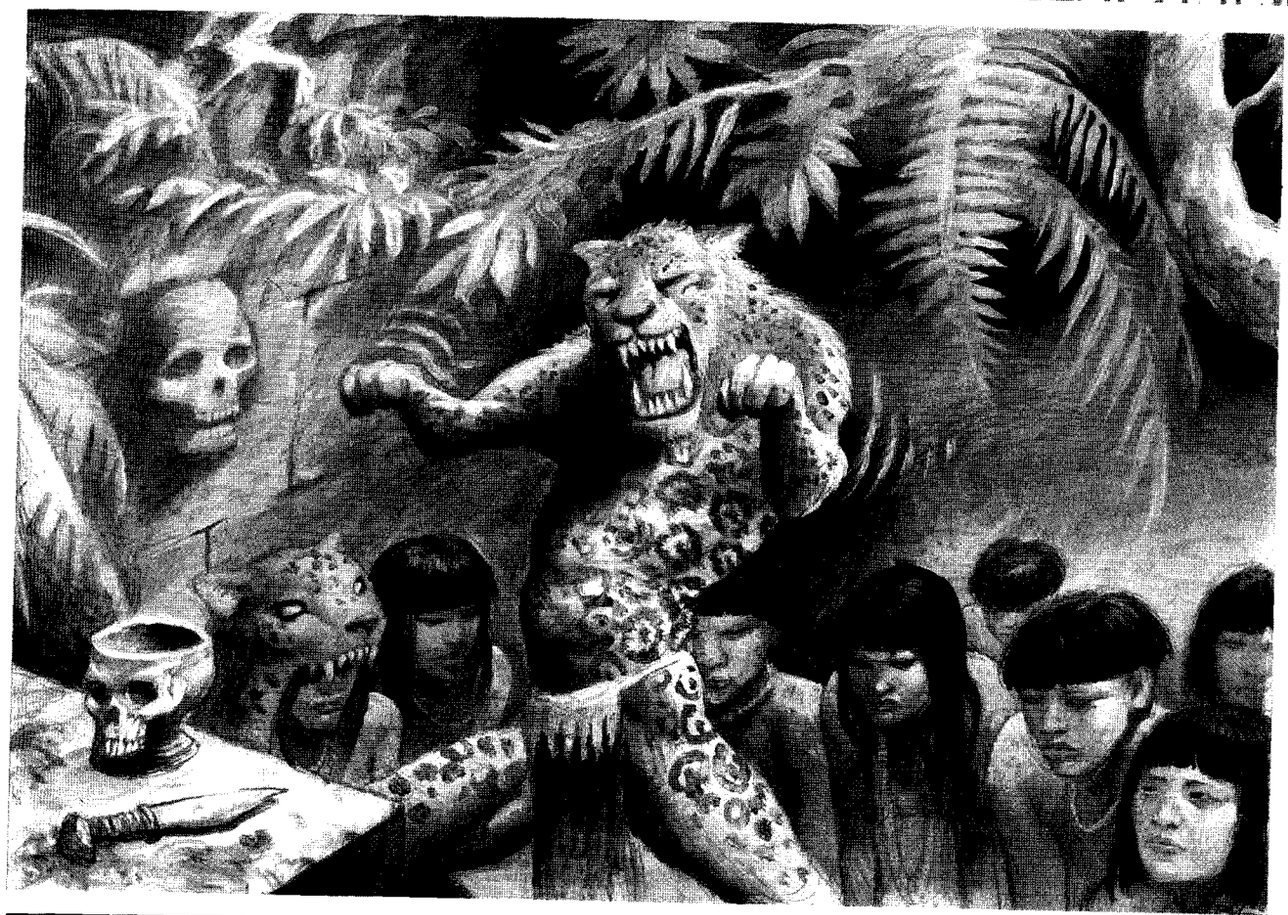
This is not to say that the Burning Times didn't happen — but they were most probably not as widespread as some believe, and the motives behind the persecution of "witches" were probably not as simplistic as some people claim. Like any period of human turmoil and persecution, the facts can be difficult to find or swallow, but the tragedy was real, regardless.

Outside of Europe, things were just as bad. The Akashics had gradually lost what influence they had over the Ming Dynasty. Their ancient rivals, the imperial wizards of the Wu Lung, were a lot better at the political game and ruthlessly attacked the Brotherhood wherever they could. Meanwhile, the Spanish and Portuguese had decided to divide the Americas among themselves, and Conquistadors went trampling all over the place with swords and cannons. Even worse, they brought disease with them. Smallpox, measles and worse spread across both continents like wild fire, killing millions. In a just over a century, Mexico went from a population of twenty million to barely two million. Europeans didn't even have to visit an area for plague to hit. One nation would spread it to another, and they'd spread it even further. The Moundbuilder culture of North America was annihilated by disease years before any white man ever set foot in the region. The Dreamspeakers were horrified. They'd never expected anything like this. Some blamed the other Traditions. Others blamed each other for not doing enough to help stop the plagues. By the 18th century, almost half of the Dreamspeakers in North America had left the Council and their Tradition out of bitterness or anger.

Lost Empires

While it's easy to lump all of the Americas' native willworkers into one simple package (it's what the Council tried to do, after all), the truth is slightly more complicated. Not every Native American mage is a shaman or medicine man, and many sects don't find the Dreamspeakers to their tastes. South America in particular is different from what many people think of when they hear the term "Native American." While the Conquistadors managed to carve a bloody swath through the continent, ultimately the Spanish never made an effort to seriously colonize much of the territory. In nations like Peru and Bolivia, the majority of the populations are still full-blooded natives, many of whom continue to speak their own languages and practice their own customs. While many of the Americas' mages call the Dreamspeakers home, other Traditions play host to their own factions.

• **Celestial Chorus:** Inheritors of the Incan priesthood, the *Sons of Inta* are divided over their role in the modern world. Traditionalists struggle to keep the ancient religion and culture of their ancestors alive among isolated Andean villages, while reformers believe their duty is to help guide the modern nation of Peru into the 21st century without forgetting its cultural heritage. Both camps pay homage to the spirits of their ancestors, consulting them frequently for guidance in critical matters. Likewise, both maintain their devotion to Inta, the sun god from whom the Incan royal dynasty descended, although the modernists sometimes blend traditional beliefs with Roman Catholicism.



Traditional Sons are living history books, perfectly versed in the ancient rituals and customs of the Empire. Modernist Sons span the entire width of modern Peruvian culture, from folk musicians and historians to businessmen and politicians.

• **Cult of Ecstasy**: Among the earliest masters of the Sahajiya was Xiootan Iox, a Mayan priest and mystic whose followers used the sacred arts of bloodletting to work their divine magic. Today, their descendants survive as *los sangradores*, a secret cult in Mexico and Central America. Members pierce their bodies, frequently through the tongue or genitals, to achieve mystical ecstasy through blood loss. The blood serves as a sacrifice to the gods and spirits, allowing los sangradores to touch the spirit world. More potent magics involve piercing body parts with thick coils of rope followed by frenzied dancing which causes the long blood soaked ropes to scatter their sanguine offerings to the four winds.

Somewhat less bloody is the loose fellowship known as the *Fifth World Tribe*. Tracing their roots to the peyote ritualists of the American Southwest, the Tribe came into its own with the Beat culture of the 1950s. Today, the sect combines several forms of Native American shamanism with rebellious, socially driven music and an anarchistic, often nomadic lifestyle. The Tribe has incorporated countless forms of musical expression over the decades, including spoken word, traditional drumming, blues, heavy metal and rap. Members frequently undergo vision quests using peyote, sweat lodges, the sun dance and even the legendary Quetzlzacatenango peppers. Several adepts practice the art of shapeshifting so they may take the form of their totem spirits (coyotes, ravens, snakes, rabbits and bears are the most common), sometimes leaving outsiders with the mistaken impression that the Tribe includes werebeasts among its numbers.

• **Order of Hermes**: While most Hermetics would scoff at the idea of the Americas holding anything worth incorporating into their Art, others are less shortsighted. House Fortunae has proven the most willing to incorporate outside ideas into their magical style. Some members study Cherokee, Navajo and other languages for use as the basis of mystically enhanced encryption codes. Hermetic chantries in Mexico are the center for projects to

study Mayan and Aztec mathematics, astronomy and astrology in the search for both mystic insight and for clues to the cause of the recent Reckoning.

• **Verbena**: As Nightshade makes her journey across the Americas, she encounters the Mayan jaguar priests known as the *Balamob*. To the Balamob, human blood and other bodily fluids are inherently sacred. They are the mystical sap of the world tree given physical form and their sacrifice to the gods lies at the core of the sect's rituals. Bloodletting and bodily mutilation are acts of piety, allowing the priest to touch *Xibalba* (the spirit world) and work his magic. Upon his initiation, every Balamob makes contact with his *wayob*, the companion spirit that serves as both advisor and guardian (and for Awakened mages, the Avatar). Shapeshifting, especially into the form of the jaguar, is the sect's trademark, but they also show great skill as shamans and diviners through the use of hallucinogens and astrology. Although a few members have ventured into the urban jungles of the United States, the majority of the sect makes their home among the native Mayans of southern Mexico and Guatemala. Here they work to champion the rights of their people and often find themselves in conflict with the local militaries.

The Balamob attend the Grand Convocation at Nightshade's invitation. Because of their skill as shapeshifters, their reverence for blood magic and their respect for Nightshade, the jaguar priests choose to join the Verbena. With the Convocation's end, their representatives return to Central America, and in the course of the Spanish conquests and the chaos of the early Ascension War, they lose contact with the rest of their Tradition. The mainstream Verbena once again become aware of their Mayan cousins when a group of Balamob arrive in Horizon to attend Nightshade's funeral in 1988, but even then contact remains rare. Now, in the wake of the Reckoning, the Balamob seek to strengthen ties with the Tradition they have been apart from for so long.

• **Euthanatoi**: At the Grand Convocation, a small group of Mayans requests to join the Euthanatoi. As servants of Ah Puch, the Mayan god of death, they prowl the houses of the sick, healing those destined to live and killing those fated to die. They give voice to the spirits of the dead, and their cries of morning pierce the darkness of night, striking terror into all who hear them. When the Convocation ends, they return to their homeland and are never seen again. Today, many assume that the sect was wiped out during the Spanish conquests and only a handful of Euthanatoi historians even remember them. But in the jungles of Guatemala and the Yucatan, natives still whisper the name of the *Yum Cimil* — the Lords of Death.

For more on the magic of the Aztecs, Mayans and Incas, see **Dead Magic**.

Common Ground

Things were falling apart, and many of the old guard believed that the Traditions wouldn't last another century. But thanks to a younger generation of mages, we managed to hold together. The Traditions are always evolving and adapting to the endless stream of changes in human culture. Our biggest strengths have always been our flexibility and diversity, and most of the Traditions include cultures and influences from around the globe. When something new comes along, more than one Tradition will draw on it, adopting the culture's practices as their own. These mutual interests helped hold the Traditions together, even while the Council was splintering. Some of those cultural alliances, like the Web of Faith or the Asthika, were already well established. Others were brand new.

Slavery left an extremely brutal legacy on the Americas and its shadow continues to haunt race relations across both continents. The Spanish started buying African slaves from the Portuguese after all of their native slaves kept dying of disease, and the French and English followed their lead. Gradually, the West African faiths of the slaves started to mix with those of the remaining natives and later the Catholic or Anglican faiths of their overlords. A whole new religion sprang out of this mix. The Voudoun of French Haiti is the most famous, but there are variations all over the region, from as far south as Brazil to as far north as Missouri and the Carolinas. This eclectic mix of cultures created its own unique mystical sects as well as attracting the attention of at least half of the Traditions. Mages born into the culture became supporters of resistance movements, often taking part in slave uprisings. Others, called Maroons, escaped into the jungles or mountains, forming their own communities, usually led by priest-kings. Several of the sects — Dreamspeakers, Verbena and others — that were born in this period still exist to this day and maintain strong ties with each other.

VOUDOUNISTAS

"Voodoo" is an American corruption of the French Haitian word Voudoun, and has come to be a catchall term referring to a half-dozen different faiths throughout Latin America and the American Southeast. Voudoun combines the beliefs of the West African Kingdom of Dahomey with French Catholicism and is found primarily in Haiti and other French Caribbean colonies as well as in parts of Louisiana. Santería and Candomblé are mixtures of Iberian Catholicism and the religions of the Yoruba nations of West Africa. Santería is most common in Cuba and other Spanish Caribbean counties, while Candomblé is found in Brazil. Obeah draws on Anglican rather than Catholic influences, and originates in British controlled areas. Hoodoo is a slang term referring to a mixture of African folklore, Christian evangelicalism and Southern superstition found throughout America's Deep South. Immigration has brought practitioners of these faiths to major American cities and Awakened members with them.

Male priests/magicians are called houngans, santeros or conjure men; women are mambos or santera. Music, prayers, dance, candles, herbs and offerings of animals, salt, rum or even gunpowder are common foci, used to invoke the powers of the loa or orishas. Others include weapons (especially machete) or clothing (the Ta Kiti are infamous for wearing the black garb of Baron Samedi as a means of intimidation; a Mind 2 effect).

The majority of modern Voudounistas are found within the Dreamspeakers and the Verbena, but other Traditions have their own ties to the loa.

• **Euthanatoi:** The *Ta Kiti* began as an offshoot of the African Madzimbabwe, but today form their own unique sect. They consider themselves the favored of Ghede, the Voudoun Loa of death and fertility, and like their patron they glean wisdom from the spirits of those who have died. The Ta Kiti frequently watch over graveyards to protect the bodies of the dead from defilement by body snatchers and necromancers. Many within the sect are concerned by the recent flood of zombi, both in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Ghede, who holds the power to resurrect the dead, will sometimes share the secret of making zombi —

after extensive bribes of rum and other offerings, of course — but such plagues are unprecedented. Many Ta Kiki wonder if some *bokkor* (corrupt sorcerer) has tried to steal Ghede's power for himself, with disastrous results.

• **Cult of Ecstasy**: The Voudounistas have spawned several small Ecstatic sects, as well as numerous independent houngans and mambo, all of whom use dance, drink and sex to touch the divine. The *Erzuli Jingo* are an all-female sect who honor Erzulie Ge-Rouge in her role as Loa of love and beauty, as well as her darker aspects of envy, discord and vengeance. They are famous for their skills of seduction, deception and social manipulation, and members frequently work to cultivate influence among the rich and powerful within their communities. Other sects include the *Confrérie de Chango*, a militant brotherhood known for their powerful fire and lightning magic, and the *roda do jogo*, Brazilian martial artists whose fighting abilities are said to rival that of the Akashic Brotherhood.

• **Celestial Chorus**: *The Society of St. Anthony* believes that the orishas are servants and messengers of God. Found primarily among Cuban, Puerto Rican and other Spanish Caribbean communities, they work to protect their neighborhoods from threats both mystical and mundane. Members of the Society are recognized among the Chorus for their skills as diviners, exorcists and curse breakers.

• **Akashic Brotherhood:** Although not normally associated with the Caribbean arts, the Akashics count a growing number of Voudounistas among their Tradition. The *Roda d'Oro* ("Circle of Gold") are a branch of the *Li-Hai*, the Brotherhood's eclectic gathering of iconoclasts and rebels. The Roda work to blend Western martial arts and belief systems with traditional Akashic methods. The sect draws members from across the globe — the Philippines, Europe, Africa — but its largest concentration is in South America. Here, Akashic Capoeristas apply Do to the capoeria fighting style, the Candomblé religion and other aspects of Brazilian culture.

• **Virtual Adepts:** Perhaps one of the more usual groups found among the Traditions, the *Cyber-Houngans* first appeared shortly after the tragedy of the White Out. This small group of Adept *Nexplorers* claim to serve enigmatic denizens of the Digital Web known as the Electric Loas. The origin of these strange beings are unknown — theories include everything from renegade Iteration X artificial intelligences, the ghosts of those who died in the White Out and demons to the native inhabitants of the Web, alien computer hackers or even the remains of Alan Turing's mind. Fellow hackers consider the Cyber-Houngans slightly disturbing, not only because of their potentially questionable loyalties, but also because some have begun to display skill with traditional Voudoun magic in addition to the Enlightened Science the Adepts favor.

• **Bata'a**: Not all Voudounistas are interested in pursuing the Ascension War. Those sects who chose to shun the Traditions eventually form an alliance known as the *Bata'a*. The Bata'a make no distinction between mages, sorcerers and other practitioners of the Voudoun arts (Mediums, welders of True Faith, those with blood ties to the African or American spirit folk), and many do not bother to differentiate between themselves and those sects who chose to side with the Council of Nine (often claiming, erroneously, that their numbers surpass those of several Traditions). Because of this, many Bata'a leaders overestimate the strength of their Craft and ignore the amount of damage the Technocracy and other enemies have managed to inflict over the decades. In the wake of the Reckoning, a younger generation of leaders realizes that their Craft is in danger of dying and decides to ally with the Traditions. Most Bata'a join with the Dreamspeakers or Verbena, but former Craftmembers find their way into all of the above Traditions. This dispersal has served to bind these sects closer together.

Another boost to our little social club came from the Romantic subculture in Europe. I can see by the blank look on your face that you've never heard of the Romantics, have you. Romanticism was a philosophical movement from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that emphasized emotion and intuition over logic and reason. Music, literature and art were where the philosophy found its greatest outlet. Lord Byron epitomized the Romantic ideal. He lived his short life to the fullest, making a name for himself as a writer, athlete and party animal. Several of the European Traditions had a swell in membership as magically-talented Romantics found themselves part of one faction or another. It wasn't uncommon to find gangs of Ecstatics, Euthanatoi and Hermetics traveling Europe and getting drunk on absinth together.

Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know

The Romantic movement has faded into history, but its legacy continues to echo down through the ages. From Oscar Wilde and Gertrude Stein to Jack Kerouac and Jim Morrison, writers, artists and musicians continue to deal with themes of emotion, passion, spiritual alienation and social criticism. Among the Awakened, the Romantic legacy is strongest in three Traditions and one Craft.

• **Cult of Ecstasy:** The passion of the Romantics attracts European and American Ecstatics in droves, spawning several sects within the Tradition. *The Kiss of Astarte* is an all-female sect that draws inspiration from the idea of the "noble savage" and blends classical Greek and Celtic rites with African and Native American rituals. Other groups, such as the *Fellowship of Pan* and the anarchist *Dissonance Society* also draw upon Romantic influences.

One sect traces its roots to England's 18th century Hellfire Club. Meeting in the ruins of Medmenham Abbey in Buckinghamshire, Club members engage in countless acts of debauchery, including taking part in satirical "black masses" simply for the thrill of being blasphemous. The group breaks apart after only two decades, but the handful of Ecstatic members decide to keep the Club alive as the *Acharne*. Modern members are frequently active in the Goth-Industrial scene as well as the S&M community. In addition to the standard Ecstatic foci, they recognize the enlightenment that can come from submission, domination and pain (contrary to stereotype, the sect shares the S&M community's fanaticism concerning mutual consent by all involved parties). Unfortunately, for some members, the black masses are not so satirical, and several have willingly sold their souls to demons and other dark entities. These fallen Ecstatics pervert the sect's beliefs, engaging in sickening orgies of rape, torture, human sacrifice, cannibalism and more.

• **Euthanatoi:** After the fall of Constantinople, the *Golden Chalice* is forced to scatter throughout Italy and the Ottoman Empire, eventually spreading across Western Europe and the Mediterranean. The spirit of opposition to political tyranny that infused many Romantic works provides fertile recruiting ground for the Chalice. Even today, many within the

sect lead double lives, living and working as writers, artists and socialites until they are called upon to exercise their talents as assassins. The Celtic *Aided* also draw members from the Romantics, and several break away to form their own faction. Known as the *Order of the Black Willow,* these Romantics delve heavily into spiritualism and Gothic horror until Infernal corruption eats them from within. The Order is declared *barrabi* and the rest of the Tradition hunts them to destruction. Rumors persist of the cult's survival, and some suspect that they have found their way into the Acharne.

• **Order of Hermes:** One of the founding Houses of the Order of Hermes, *House Merinita* quickly suffers a turn of ill fortune after their founder disappears (many Hermetic historians believe interaction with the Fair Folk drove her mad and theorize that she still survives as one of the Marauders). Forced into House Ex Miscellanea, the House withers on the vine and by the eighteenth century, many believe Merinita will soon fade into oblivion. Romanticism and the Gaelic revival that follows breathe new life into the House, and the group continues to attract new members even after the Reckoning. Several of the new House leaders feel the time has come to reclaim what they see as their rightful place as a full House.

• **Hollow Ones:** Given the stereotypes about baby witches, psychotic death-worshipers and "Technocrats with magic wands," it's ironic that some Traditionalists dismiss the Hollowers as nothing more than mopey vampire wannabes who can't be bothered to get out of bed in the morning (as if such a person could actually have the willpower needed to work magic). Like the gothic writers of old, the Hollow Ones are drawn to the grotesque, the mysterious and the desolate, and they find such things in abundance in the World of Darkness. More a collection of cliques than an actual group, the Hollowers are first recognized as a Craft (by outsiders, at least) during the 1920s. At the time, they are considered a part of the Lost Generation of expatriate artists, poets and intellectuals living in postwar Paris. Over the decades, the Hollowers attach themselves to zoot-suiters, swing kids, beatniks, punks, headbangers and ravers; the Goth subculture is only the latest and most visible to serve as a home to this versatile Craft. Outsiders claim that there are no old Hollow Ones, but this is shortsighted stereotyping. Older members simply become better at passing for mundane, while never losing their fascination with the dark and morbid corners of the world.

The Voudounistas and the Romantics, along with others like them, helped keep the idea of intra-Tradition cabals alive at a time when the whole house of cards could have collapsed. Others have followed their example over the centuries, from Wild West gunfighter gangs and pulp adventurers to modern business lodges and rock bands. Today, single Tradition cabals and even chantries are the exception rather than the rule. It was that sort of unity that helped us survive what was next.

Empire of Reason

Given how close the Traditions came to total collapse back then, you're probably wondering why the Order of Reason didn't just wipe us all out. Well, for the simple reason that they were falling apart too. When the Sons of Ether joined the Council of Nine, they gladly shared what they knew of the history and organization of the Technocracy. The Reformation had shattered the Cabal of Pure Thought into a dozen or more rival sects, each claiming their take on Christianity was the One True Way. They became more concerned with fighting each other than fighting us. The other members of the Order didn't fare much better. The chaos of the Thirty Years War, the English Civil War and other conflicts proved too much for the Order and by the middle of the 17th century, they'd fallen into their own civil war. After the dust settled, what was left of the Order continued with their plans for a safe and stable world, but they no longer had anything that could seriously be called a central leadership. It didn't take long for things to get out of control.

Gods and Monsters

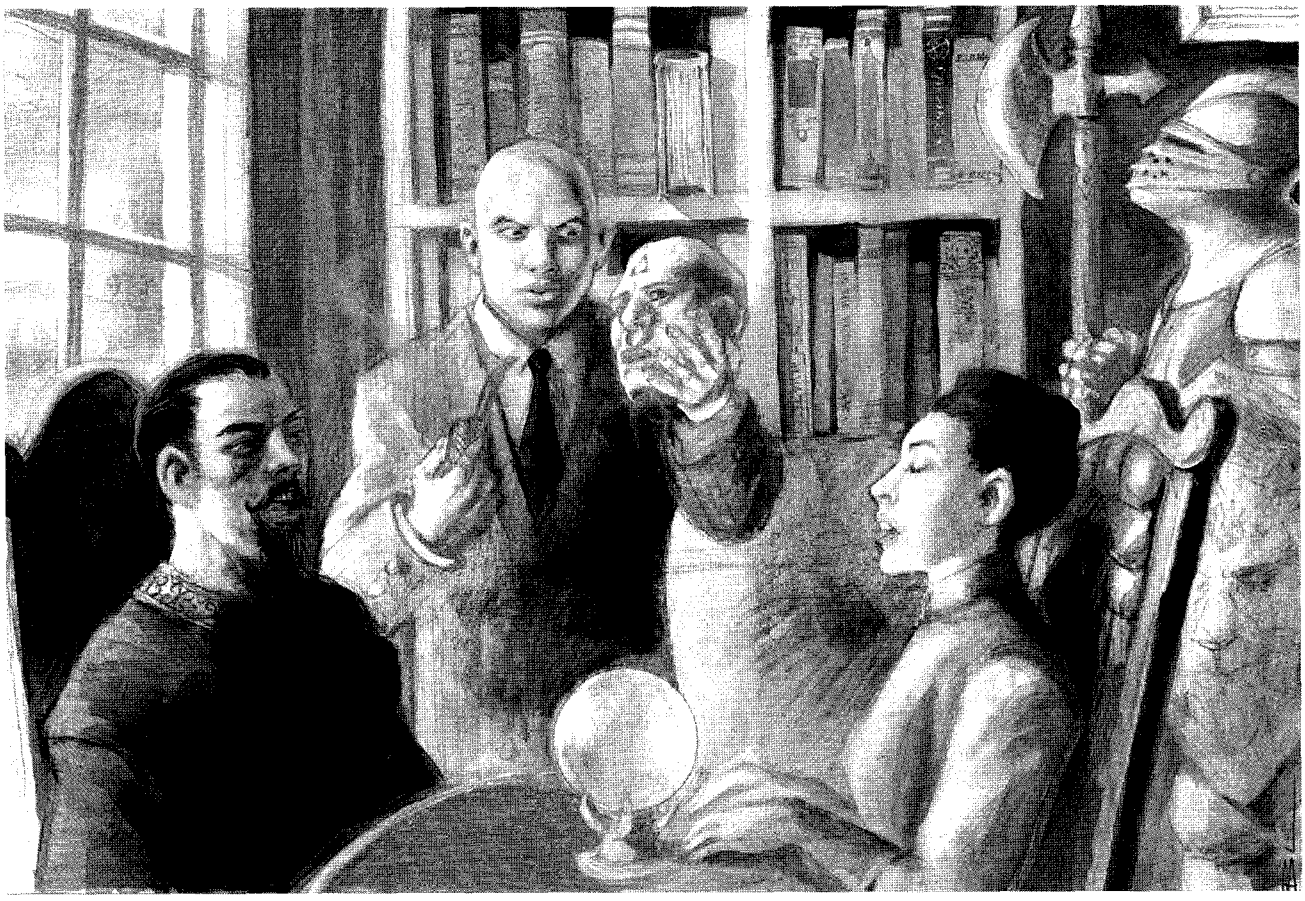
I don't know which came first, the book or one of the actual creatures, but after Mary Shelley's story came out, it seemed like half the technomancers in Europe were trying to create their own Modern Prometheus. It's not like creating artificial life was anything new. The legend of Pygmalion aside, the Hermetics had been creating homunculi for centuries and some Verbena where even rumored to transform plants into humanoid servants. But now supposedly rational scientists were tripping all over themselves to develop their own version of élan vital — stitching together parts of corpses, synthesizing bodies out of chemicals or even trying to turn animals into humanoids. Some of these things were too freakish to survive, but others proved disturbingly durable. More than a few are still out there, still

alive after all these years. The Sons of Ether claim that some are members of their Tradition, and a few Etherites go so far as to claim that the original creature is one of theirs. Of course, they've never been able to produce this mythical member. Supposedly he lives in seclusion in the center of the Earth while battling agents of the Fourth Reich, ruling the mole people or whatever the legend of the week happens to be.

Of course, the Promethean Plague, as some wiseass named it — I think "Frankenstein Fiasco" is more fitting — was nothing compared to Le Terreur. The French had grown tired of their decadent monarchy and increasingly antiquated law codes. A failed harvest led to starvation, and food riots turned into revolution. A republic was formed but the new government, finding itself at war with Austria and on the verge of a civil war, became more and more radical until the fanatical Committee of Public Safety took over. The Committee abolished the Church in France and even outlawed Christianity, replacing it with a state religion devoted to the Goddess of Reason. Death squads roamed the countryside, guillotining anyone they thought disloyal — or who just looked at them funny. The slaughter became so bad that another rebellion overthrew the Committee. Finally Napoleon managed to seize control and declare himself Emperor, dragging Europe into another fifteen years of war.

Many within the Order of Reason were horrified. Reason had raged out of control, leading to a Corsican midget conquering Europe and monsters born from blasphemous experiments. They wanted stability and control, not mass executions and war, so they set about overhauling their entire organization. The fractured Cabal of Pure Thought was seen as a hindrance, and they were transformed from holy crusaders into soldiers of order. The other factions also reorganized, updating and standardizing their methods until they became the predecessors of the Conventions we know and love today. By the middle of the 19th century, they'd gotten their act together and re-christened themselves the Technocratic Union. One world order, ruled by the technological elite.

The new Technocratic Union was leaner and meaner than the older model. We were caught completely off guard as Manifest Destiny and Victorian Imperialism steamrolled their way across the globe. Western Europe — especially Britain — and the United States became vehicles for Union progress, and the sun never set on the mighty Anglo dominion. Filibusters traipsed all over Latin America hoping to carve out an



American empire from the Great Lakes to the Amazon, while the European powers carved up Africa like a Christmas turkey. In their quest for ivory and wealth, the Belgians brutalized the Congo so badly that even the other empires considered them butchers.

A Matter of Faith

Like the Messianic Voices, the Order of Reason's Cabal of Pure Thought also shatters during the Reformation. As more and more Protestant faiths break away from the Catholic Church, members of the Cabal go with them. Each faction believes it follows the One True Faith, and clashes between the former comrades in arms often turn violent. When the Technocratic Union reorganizes the Cabal into the Lightkeepers (what is today known as the New World Order), the rival religious factions are ordered to place their devotion to Order before their devotion to God (despite claims by some Traditionalists to the contrary, the Union has never been fanatically atheist, just extremely secular). While many agree to take up the crusade for peace and prosperity, a sizable number of die-hard believers do not. The most famous of these are the *Knights Templar*. In an eerie repeat of events in France centuries before, the Knights fool the Technocratic Union into believing they have been destroyed. The surviving members of the order go into hiding and continue their secret crusade against the monsters that prey on the innocent. In the wake of the Reckoning, many of the Knights Templar have chosen to ally themselves with the Celestial Chorus. While this alliance does not always operate smoothly, it represents the mending of a rift that dates back to the breaking of the Palatine Knights during the 13th century.

The Knights Templar are not alone. When the Anglican Church breaks with Rome in the 1530s, members of the Cabal of Pure Thought break away and form the *Knights of St. George*. The Knights remain independent over the next few centuries, clashing with both the Cabal and with the Traditions. As with the Templars, members of the sect refuse to place their faith second to anything. However, the Knights of St. George exist within the very heart of Union power and influence. Remaining independent is not a viable option if they wish to survive. Grudgingly, the Knights strike a deal with the Celestial Chorus, trading their service and warriors and demon hunters in exchange for sanctuary.

The Dreamspeakers were hit the hardest. One by one, their home nations were subjugated at gunpoint, and missionaries came to help teach the poor savages how to act like civilized men. With Indian Schools and the Stolen Generation, Americans and Australians did everything possible to try and obliterate their lands' native cultures and languages. A lot of Dreamspeakers wanted to leave the Council altogether. They weren't alone. After the Sepoy Rebellion, half of the Euthanatoi and nearly a fourth of the Chorus wanted to join them. Imperialism brought China the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion; by the time of the Boxer Uprising, most of the Akashic Brotherhood didn't want anything to do with the gwellio, be they Technocrat or Traditionalist. It was the Ahl-i-Batin who helped hold things together. Diplomacy was always an area they excelled at, and they pushed themselves to the limit, emphasizing the ties American, African and Indian mages had with each other and with the other cultures within their Traditions. But even their best efforts amounted to trying to hold together an airplane with bailing wire and chewing gum. Things were ready to fall apart at the drop of a hat.

Bright Continent

Outsiders have the bad habit of lumping all of Sub-Saharan Africa into a single homogeneous group. Even members of the Traditions are known to foolishly assume that every African willworker is a Dreamspeaker. Africa is home to hundreds of nations, tribes and ethnic groups, as different from each other as Scots are from Greeks, or New Yorkers are from Texans. This diversity has given birth to countless mystical sects, many of whom have chosen at one time or another to join the Traditions. Over half of the Traditions have roots and branches in Africa, and several cultures play home to more than one sect.

• **Celestial Chorus**: The number and diversity of Choristers in Africa stuns many mages, even among their own Tradition. The Ethiopian Orthodox *Sons of Menelik* trace their lineage back to Biblical times and are rumored to possess the legendary Arc of the Covenant. Islamic conversion brings the Righteous Ghazi — as well as other members of the Web of Faith — to West Africa and to the Swahili city-states. The Kirdi Choristers of Cameroon and Nigeria work magic by asking their ancestors (in the form of their Avatars) to intercede with the divine on their behalf. *The Golden Shield* is a militant Zulu sect famous for their martial

magics and skill at forging the traditional *iKlwa* spears (often enhanced with Matter, Prime and other magics). They honor *Unkulunkulu*, also called "he who roars so that all nations are struck with terror," and remain active within South Africa's Inkatha Freedom Party.

• **Dreamspeakers**: The African Dreamspeakers include dozens of sects and societies gathered from nations and cultures across the continent. One of the more famous cultures is the bushmen people of southern Africa, such as the !Kung and the San. Among the bushmen legends is Guana, the lord of the dead who endlessly seeks to conquer and destroy the world of the living. Dreamspeakers among the bushmen fear the recent plagues of walking dead are part of Guana's dark schemes and consider it their sacred duty to destroy these creatures.

The *Uzoma* make up one of the largest factions of African Dreamspeakers. Found among the Yoruban of West Africa and immigrant communities in America and Europe, they are priests who follow a holy calling to serve as intermediaries between their people and the spirits. Acting as advisors, soothsayers and healers, they summon the orisha spirits to aid them in their magic. The Uzoma attend the Great Convocation and join the Dreamspeakers, but after the murder of Naioba most of the group return to their homeland and shun contact with non-African mages. By the 20th century, many have forgotten that the sect was ever a part of the Traditions. In the aftermath of the Reckoning, the Uzoma have decided the time has come to play a more visible role in the world.

• **Euthanatoi**: Ancestor veneration plays a part in cultures throughout Africa. This is not a form of worship as much as it is the belief that the spirits of the dead continue to watch over their descendants and must therefore be honored and respected. The members of the *Madzimbabwe* sect believe themselves to be agents of the ancestor spirits (traditionally, a grandparent or other respected ancestor serves as the mage's Avatar), and each member of the sect works to oversee the well being of her family and community. The modern Madzimbabwe live throughout Africa and North America, as well as parts of Western Europe, where they carry out their role of stewards by working as doctors, teachers, priests, police officers and community activists.

• **Verbena**: Like the Dreamspeakers, the Verbena also play host to several mystical traditions

from across the continent. A large percentage of African Verbena are herbalists, such as the Zulu *izinyanga*, who use traditional animal- and plant-based medicines to heal physical and mental ailments as well as to create more fantastic effects (such as the use of powdered rhinoceros horn to become an unstoppable fighting machine during combat; a Life 3 effect). Others are game wardens, veterinarians and ecologists working to preserve Africa's natural ecosystems in the wake of growing industrialization and climate changes. Some focus on the arts of shapeshifting, helping to perpetuate the stories of witches and sorcerers who stalk their enemies in the form of hyenas and leopards.

• **Ngoma**: Born in the city of Great Zimbabwe, the Ngoma followed Africa's trade routs into the Swahili city-states and the Mali Empire. A few even traveled as far as Baghdad, India and China where they served as ambassadors among the Web of Faith, the Asthika and the Wu Lung. Today the Ngoma draw their members from the educated elite of Africa's cities, as well as among upper class immigrants in New York, London and other cities. In days past, they served as wizard-priests, royal advisors and scholars. Now they work as politicians, business leaders and college professors. Initiates must undergo years of study before joining the sect and members are expected to be versed in a wide range of subjects, from astrology, Umbral lore and high ritual magic to economics, modern science and politics.

The Ngoma attend the Grand Convocation at the invitation of Nightshade, Naioba and the Ahl-i-Batin. Once the number of Traditions are settled upon, they present a plan for themselves, the Order of Hermes and the Wu Lung to form a single Tradition devoted to high ritual magic which would assume leadership over the other eight Traditions. The Wu Lung, believing that nothing outside of China is worth their concern, make no comment, but the Hermetics refuse to "delude their Art with savage superstition" and attempt to force the Ngoma into the Dreamspeakers. The Ngoma refuse and leave the Convocation. When European conquest of Africa begins in earnest, the Ngoma are decimated and find shelter among the African Traditions. African nationalism during the second half of the 20th century brings about a revival for the sect, and they begin working to take a greater role in the leadership of regional mage society.

Now, at the dawn of the 21st century, the Ngoma have begun a most ambitious undertaking. Sponsored by House Shaea, they have currently joined the Order of Hermes under the aegis of House ex Miscellanea. *House Ngoma* is one of the largest factions in the "House of Salad" (only House Merinita, which has been slowly but steadily growing for almost two centuries, and House Verditius, which is growing and modernizing at a breakneck pace, can match their numbers), but this is only the first step. Within the next several years, the Ngoma plan to make a bid for full House status. Eventually they will take their rightful place as a full Tradition.

For more on the magic of Sub-Saharan Africa, see **Dead Magic**.

European mages had a slightly easier time of it. The Supernatural was just one more thing that science hadn't gotten around to explaining yet, and spiritualism and mystery cults like the Golden Dawn thrived. Still, the Union was perfectly willing to respond to a perceived threat with deadly force. I remember the first time I ran up against one of their so-called "black coats" — what you call the Men in Black these days. It kind of takes the fun out of a gunfight when you pull a Colt Peacemaker and the other guy pulls a clockwork-powered Gatling pistol. I've still got the scars from having a half-dozen .22 caliber rounds embedded in my thigh.

Utopia Lost

When the Technocratic Union was born under the lights of the Crystal Palace, they had two main goals. One was to bring order and stability to Europe and America after over half a century of war and revolution. The second was to use science and technology to create a utopia for humanity: an end to war, disease, crime, fear and ignorance. Of course, for some, the idea of social order was more important than building a perfect society. For others, the utopian dream was at the heart of every thing they did. Those twin ideals of total order and progressive utopia could never quite get in synch with each other, and the two camps became rivals for control over the Union's soul. Near the end of the Victorian Era, the Order camp had become the dominant force in the Technocracy, and the high ideals of the Utopians were being set aside in favor of social conformity and global hegemony. The dream was souring and the Utopians became increasingly discontent. Some even wondered — quietly and in private, of course — if the Union had become a threat to their vision of a perfect world.

The Utopian ideal was strongest among a Convention — that's the name the Union uses for its various cliques — called the Electrodyne Engineers. The Engineers started as an eclectic fraternity of natural philosophers and tinkerers known as the Voltarian Order. Inspired by Count Volta and his experiments with batteries, they focused their skills of advanced science and technomancy toward the fields of electromagnetism, conductivity and electrical power. As the Order of Reason reorganized itself, the Voltarians became the Electrodyne Engineers and their work with electricity made them the sister Convention to the machine-oriented Mechanicians — what we know today as Iteration X and whom older mages still derisively refer to as the "Clockwork Convention."

No one knows who took the first step, but by the turn of the century, several leaders within the Electrodyne Engineers had been in close contact with members of the Order of Hermes. Shortly after that the Engineers, joined by Utopians from other Conventions, formally broke away from the Union and joined the Council of Nine. Around the same time, Albert Einstein got around to publishing his theory of special relativity, which was the precursor of his theory of general relativity that is so famous. This theory pretty much disproved the idea of luminiferous ether — the mysterious, invisible, undetectable and immeasurable substance that filled all space and served as a medium for light waves to travel through. Some wag among the Engineers' leadership seized on this and dubbed the new Tradition "Sons of Ether," memorializing the year of their defection with the name of a scientific theory that was disproved in the same year. The tongue-in-cheek name became a symbol of rebellion against those who had hijacked their vehicle for bringing about a scientific utopia, and it stuck.

Reaction within the Traditions was mixed, to say the least. The Hermetics, obviously, were thrilled with their little coup. Others saw the Etherites as little better than the enemy, and some viewed them as further proof of European plans to dominate the Council. I think a lot of the Etherites felt the need to prove themselves to the other Traditions. Maybe that's why that lunatic Vargo did what he did.

Master of the Future

Whatever Czar Vargo's real name was, it's lost to the mists of time. Supposedly he was the son of a

Ukrainian fisherman who stowed away on a cargo ship and ended up in Marseille. He became the servant and apprentice of a local Electrodyne Engineer as well as a stanch member of the Utopian camp. He'd also developed an obsession with the work of Jules Verne, especially with the character of Robur the Conqueror. Vargo was a prodigy in the field of airship design, building bigger, faster and more powerful models. His biggest success though was his experimental "conversion engine" which was said to transform air into energy — what would today be called cold fusion. Vargo was an outspoken pacifist, and as Europe stood on the brink of war in 1914, he decided to act.

Vargo wasn't alone, of course. He had help from other Etherites and even some Technocrats, but because he was their leader and spokesman, he's the only one anyone remembers. Huge airships — a mix of powerful armored zeppelins, flying wings and hoverships, all designed and built by Vargo over the years — appeared over the capitals of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Austria demanding that each government disarm its military and surrender to the almighty Czar Vargo.

I once had a young mage ask me why we didn't just try to prove to the masses that magic is real by pulling some huge — and brainless — magical stunt, like throwing fireballs on TV or summoning angels in Times Square. Aside from the fact that skeptics would come crawling out of the woodwork to explain what kind of trickery and sleight-of-hand we'd used to pull it off — look at what happened when that Orphan tried to work magic on TV a couple of years ago — there's also the little matter of reality reaching up to smack you back into your place. And that's what happened to Vargo. He claimed he had a device that would render all modern weapons useless. I'm guessing a chemical converter beam designed to make gunpowder inert; those are easy enough to make, and with his converter engine to power it, he could affect a continent. When the device was activated, Paradox hit. But it didn't just knock Vargo down. No, it body slammed him into the concrete and then let a rhino tap dance on his face while wearing golf shoes.

Time warped in on itself, doing everything possible to keep Vargo's act from ever taking place. It's like a wave rolling through time. As we get further and further from the event, the shockwave rolls further and further back through time. During the Great War, it was like he had just disappeared off the face of the earth and had never tried to stop the war. But after the war, I found that people who had attended to ceremony officially welcoming the Etherites into the Council could no longer agree on whether or not Vargo had been there. During the Great Depression, I met an Etherite who swore he'd attended Vargo's funeral after he'd died in a lab accident before the turn of the century. After World War II, I found an article in *Paradigma* — the Etherite science journal — written by the man reputed to be Vargo's mentor, claiming that he'd had no such student. I was in Odessa once during the Cold War. I met an old fisherman who was trying to

Another Fine Myth

Because so much of their work revolves around conductivity and ways to transmit energy waves through materials, it is understandable that more than a few Electrodyne Engineers delve extensively into ether research, often looking for ways to store or transmit light waves. Many of these Victorian Era ether-oriented devices are prized possessions of the modern Etherites who own them, with luminiferous transduction cables (basically ether-tech fiber optic cables) being only the most common collectibles.

Sadly, some of these ether specialists cannot cope with the idea of their life's work being stuck on a museum shelf alongside medical leeches and spontaneous generation. They fall into subtle Quiet as their minds develop wild conspiracy theories to account for their loss of fortune. These paranoid madmen pass their stories of persecution on to students, painting themselves as grand geniuses whose envious rivals conspire to destroy them. Throughout the 20th century these stories grow more outlandish as they pass on from generation to generation. Unlucky Etherite recruits are subjected to rants about secret Technocracy cabals who are responsible for all of humanity's scientific advances (save those the Etherites wish to take credit for) and who dole out their preordained wisdom to the unwashed masses (who are incapable of deciding what to eat for breakfast in the morning unless their Secret Masters leave them instructions) through untalented puppets like Einstein, and how the Etherites bravely rebelled when the Union tried to destroy their precious ether. In addition to the obvious anti-Semitic nature of these stories ("That little Jew couldn't possibly have thought up such a theory without help!"), skeptical Etherites are quick to deride the idea that their entire Tradition revolves around nothing more than perpetuating a long dead scientific theory ("Perhaps we should change our name to 'Sons of the Flat Earth' then?").

drink himself to death because he'd come back from fishing one evening to find that his village was gone, and everyone he'd asked had told him that the only village there had been destroyed back in the time of the Tzars. I still have vivid memories of sitting in a Paris cafe, seeing Vargo's ship appear in the sky. Others have similar memories. But as the years pass, more and more of them seem to forget, and those that remember can't agree on the details. That is the power of Paradox.

Rewriting History

It is ironic, and perhaps a little sad, that when confronted with what happened to Czar Vargo, many mages don't want to believe it. Some try to claim that the Technocracy defeated him and then erased all traces of the event, even erasing it from the minds of the entire population of Europe. Others point out the foolishness of this idea. If the Technocracy can destroy all trace of such an event, why stop with Vargo? Why not wipe out all trace of Woodstock? Why not rewrite the 1960s altogether? The Technocracy just isn't that powerful. Extremely well-connected and influential, yes. Able to rewrite history so that events that affect the course of nations and continents never happened, no — at least, not on events so fresh in the minds of recent generations. Perhaps many mages just find the idea of a nearly omnipotent antagonist more comforting than thinking about what the Consensus might do when a mage pushes too hard.

An Age of Twilight

Vargo's attempts to stop the Great War failed and Europe turned into a slaughterhouse. An Etherite once told me that the entire system of treaties and alliances which bound Europe together were part of a carefully engineered system of Technocracy political engineering designed to bring an end to war: two huge super-armies, each acting as the other's deterrent. If that's true, I guess Paradox slapped that ambitious plan down too. Or maybe, as Rowan Atkinson said, the whole plan was just bullocks.

The Four Horsemen laid siege to the world. An entire generation of young men was eaten alive by machine guns and poison gas as Europe's monarchies lay in ruin. Russia fell into a civil war that left millions dead and starving. The Turks massacred their Armenian subjects and no one cared, setting a precedent that would come back to haunt everyone. War was followed by plague as influenza swept the globe, killing millions more. By decade's end, people were forced to confront the horrors technology could unleash, as well as science's limitations in the face of God and Nature. Everyone had her {or "his"} own way of dealing with it. Some turned to political movements like communism and fascism; others tried to lose themselves in bathtub gin and jazz music.

It was during this time that the Council of Nine suffered one of its worst blows. The British and Russians had been meddling in Persia for years, but after the Ottoman Empire finally fell apart, the British and French carved up the corpse for themselves. With the new wave of Imperialism came the Union, eager to get their hands on the recently discovered oil. For centuries, the Batini had been lucky. The Order of Reason had considered the Middle East a low priority, and the

An Age of Adventure

With the end of the War to End All Wars, many see the 1920s as a time of unbounded opportunity for anyone with the will to seize it. Mages are will incarnate, so it comes as no surprise that mystical adventurers thrive during this eerie period. With square jaws and two-fisted derring-do (augmented by a little magic, of course), countless Cabals set out to travel the four corners of the world and battle dastardly villains, be they mundane or magical. Many of these adventurers are still the stuff of legend within their respective Traditions and continue to serve as inspiration for those who wish to take a more proactive role in the struggle for humanity's future. The Etherite Doc Eon, the Man of Tomorrow, is only the most famous. Every Tradition can point to someone: Lady Rebecca Bolingbrook, Jaguar Queen of the Amazon (Verbena); Richard O'Dare, soldier of fortune and the luckiest man alive (Euthanatoi); Dr. Geoffrey Bleys, Investigator of the Uncanny (Order of Hermes); Black Lotus, scourge of San Francisco's underworld (Akashic Brotherhood); The Unkillable Erica Riley, escape artist and daredevil extraordinaire (Cult of Ecstasy); Prof. John Anselm, intrepid archaeologist (Celestial Chorus); The Crimson Ghost, the African manhunter who is said to be immortal (Dreamspeakers); Sir David Tinners, Phantom of the Arabian Desert (Ahl-i-Batin). Even the Virtual Adepts have Jimmy Kelly, the investigative reporter and social crusader.

Players and Storytellers with an interest in this time period are advised to check out **Adventure!**. While not part of the World of Darkness, it covers the entire pulp genre and is easily compatible with **Mage**.

Union had never made a major effort to bring the region under its thumb, the way it had with Africa, Australia and the American West. Now they were hit with the full force of Technocratic Imperialism. History had shown them all too clearly that they could expect no help from the other Traditions. The Ahl-i-Batin formally withdrew from the Council of Nine, and severed all ties with those mages who weren't native to the Middle East. The Batini, who had for centuries been the Council's strongest pillar, helping to hold the Traditions together through countless obstacles, had finally declared the undertaking a failure. At the time they left, the Second World War was looming on the horizon, and by the time that was over, the Batini had disappeared into the deserts, almost like they'd never existed. Maybe they're dead now, or maybe they're out there, waiting to see if the rest of us can finally get our act together.

Blood and Iron

The Second World War is the darkest period in our history, bar none. There had been war and devastation before — those seem like a historic constant sometimes. Mages squabble and fight over mundane politics all the time, from the Roman Empire and the American Civil War to Vietnam and the Cold War. Neither of these things was new, but never before and never since have they happened on such a scale. The world stood at the edge of the precipice and was only a small step away from tumbling into the abyss. During the Twenties, it was like a twilight had settled across the world. Now we were in the darkest of night.

Germany was humiliated after the Great War. Adolph Hitler gladly stepped on the scene and gave the Fatherland exactly what it wanted: a scapegoat to pin all of its troubles on. It's always easier to blame someone else than to face up to your own mistakes and shortcomings. Germany rearmed and, after testing their forces in the Spanish Civil War, slowly gobbled up more and more of Europe while the other nations stood by and did nothing. Entire villages were massacred as the Nazi war machine rolled across the Soviet Union. The Nazis turned mass murder into a science, slaughtering Jews, Rroma and Russians by the millions.

The Japanese didn't need a demagogue to send them into war, though; the entire nation had been training for it for centuries. After the Meiji Restoration brought them the modern weapons of war, they took to imperialism like ducks to water and quickly carved out territories in Korea and the Pacific. Then they turned their attention to China, butchering the populace with gleeful brutality. Japanese newspapers eagerly reported on contests between officers over who could behead the most peasants in the shortest time, while scientists tested their latest germ warfare experiments on human guinea pigs.

At Best Barbarism

A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic
- Joseph Stalin

It is beyond the ability of this section to convey the total extent of the carnage created by the Second World War. An entire volume twice the size of this book could not even begin to do justice to the endless list of atrocities committed by the various regimes — the Holocaust; the Rape of Nanking; the Katyn Forest Massacre; the Bataan Death March; the use of biological weapons in China; POW slave laborers worked to death; Japanese rape camps; the forced relocation and enslavement of numerous Soviet ethnic groups, simply because Stalin believed some of them had been disloyal during the war; grotesque experiments (which can only be described as "medical" if the word's definition is twisted beyond all recognition) on humans; and countless other acts of inhumane barbarism. The sheer number of victims can be mind numbing, and it is sometimes more comforting to look at them as simple numbers on a page rather than deal with the idea that so many individual people — people just like us — were brutalized and murdered.

The events of this period show all too graphically the depths of depravity to which the human race can sink. These events are not the work of Nephandi, of Technocrats, of vampires, or of any other supernatural menace. To even suggest such a thing removes the blame from the shoulders it so squarely belongs upon. We do not need blood-drinking corpses and demon-worshiping fiends to inspire us to atrocity. The human race is able to produce its own monsters.

Over the past half a century, literally hundreds of books and documentaries have been written or produced on these tragedies. White Wolf's **Charnel Houses of Europe: The Shoah** for **Wraith: the Oblivion** provides a look at the Holocaust and its repercussions in the World of Darkness. Those who wish for more information on these events are encouraged to visit their local library.

Guilt and Responsibility

Both the Traditions and the Technocracy are tainted by the stain of the Second World War. Members of every Tradition and Convention were found among the Nazi and Japanese war machines. Many within the Verbena and Akashics make a point to tell new members of their Traditions' sins in order to ensure such a thing does not happen again. The Virtual Adepts take a small amount of pride in the fact that the few Nazi supporters within the Analytical Reckoners were hunted down and eliminated prior to their breaking away from the Union. In stark contrast, the Asian Elemental Dragons attempt to place all blame for Japanese war crimes upon Western Technocrats (a laughable claim that is accepted by members so that their leaders will not lose face, as well as so that the fragile house of cards which is the Elemental Dragon alliance will not come crashing down).

Both empires contained elements devoted to the occult. Japan had its state religion of Shinto and pilots who believed they could be made invisible to American ships. The Nazi SS was practically a religious cult in itself, and their "Ancestral Research" agents scoured Europe looking for artifacts of the great Aryan mythical heritage. The German Thule Gesellschaft attracted hundreds of members. And we were right in the middle of it. Japanese Akashics and Dreamspeakers served as spies and assassins, killing any Chinese mage who opposed them. Verbena and Hermetics eagerly joined German occult groups. Etherites performed the most barbaric and inhumane experiments in the name of the Reich and the East Asian Coprosperity Sphere. The Technocratic Union split along national lines as well. Both of us quickly fell into a state of civil war, spreading across the globe and even beyond the Gauntlet.

Things went from bad to worse. The sheer level of hatred, fanaticism and murder within the German and Japanese empires attracted the Nephandi — the fallen sorcerers who seek nothing less than the annihilation of the universe. Many of the German and Japanese mages were corrupted into their ranks. By sheer numbers, they now had the mystical power to destroy the world. It was a desperate situation, and equally desperate measures were needed. The Sons of Ether engineered an alliance with the Technocratic Union, and we joined forces to wage relentless war against the Nephandi.

By the War's end, our shadow war reached its climax. The Nephandi archmages had gathered outside

Operation: Olympic

In the summer of 1945, Germany lies defeated, and the United States now turns its full attention to the Pacific and the planned 1946 invasion of the Japanese home islands. Throughout the war, as Allied forces draw closer, Japanese resistance becomes more and more fanatical. In the battle for Okinawa, 90 percent of the Japanese forces fight to the death; their military code does not allow surrender. Japanese civilians leap to their deaths from cliffs as a result of Imperial propaganda concerning their fate under American rule. Allied plans call for an amphibious attack on the island of Kyushu that will dwarf even the landings at Normandy. Japanese defense plans are extensive, including thousands of airplanes and submarines designed specifically for suicide attacks; hundreds of frogmen trained to swim up to Allied troop transports and landing craft with explosives; and the use of the same chemical and biological weapons that were field tested in China. Allied planners, fully aware of Japan's chemical stockpile, make preparations to use thousands of tons of poison gas against Japanese cities in retaliation. The number of estimated American casualties is over one million, and the US Army Chemical Corp expects five million Japanese casualties from the planned gas attacks. Millions more will die when the Imperial army carries out its orders to execute all prisoners of war, all interred enemy civilians and all enemy civilians in any territory under Japanese control as soon as the invasion begins.

The unfathomable entities the Nephandi call masters know of this invasion and the unprecedented death and ruin it will bring. They withdraw their support from the German Nephandi in order to conserve and focus their power for the coming slaughter. When the carnage begins, they will tear through the Gauntlet and visit oblivion upon the earth.

On July 16, 1945, the United States detonated the world's first atomic bomb outside of Alamogordo, New Mexico. On August 6, an atomic weapon was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, and on August 9, a second weapon was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. The combined death tolls, including those from radiation, have been estimated at approximately 300,000.

of Berlin for a ritual that would summon their dark lords and destroy the world. An assault team, made up of the best soldiers and martial mages the Traditions and the Technocrats could offer, attacked the site just as the ritual began. We might have been too late, but at the last moment, the Fallen Ones' powers failed them. The Hermetics try to claim credit for it. The Chorus believes it was an act of divine intervention. No one really knows how and why it happened — It just did. The strike force destroyed the Nephandi ritualists to the last man but lost a third of its number doing so. After that, the Nephandi were broken, and it was just a matter of hunting down those who were left. It took almost a decade, and there are still Cabals dedicated to searching for those unaccounted for.

Renegades of the Atomic Age

After the war, the two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, immediately saw each other as rivals. The world was divided between their two spheres of influence and a cold war began as both sides tried to out maneuver the other. The West entered an era of paranoia where "commies" were seen hiding under every bed and "National Security" was all-important. The Technocracy shared this new paranoia, looking to make sure what had happened to them with the Axis powers never happened again. As the control-freaks went to work, the Union drifted even further and further from its Utopian ideals until finally another Convention decided to jump ship.

The Virtual Adepts trace their origins back to England at the start of the 19th century. Charles Babbage, a genius mathematician and scientist, designed and invented a mechanical calculator he called a Difference Engine. His work inspired a number of British mathematicians and artificers to form a society called the Difference Engineers. A decade later, Babbage designed an even more advanced device he called an Analytical Engine. It was the first computer. The Difference Engineers were ecstatic, and they took to the thing like ducks to water. Babbage was also big on the idea of collecting social statistics and studying them in an effort to predict changes in society. The Engineers took advantage of the analytical engine to process and analyze information, and after Morse invented the telegraph, they set up networks of machines that shared data across cities and later across continents.

When the Union officially formed, the Engineers changed their name to the Analytical Reckoners and became some of the Technocracy's best theoretical thinkers. They latched onto every method of information collection, storage and exchange they could find: the telephone, the radio, television, the written word — some even did research into the areas of thought transference and telepathy. This interest in information meant that they gravitated to nations where they could more easily share information through open communication. That meant the lion's share ended up in the UK and the United States. When the Second World War broke out, the Reckoners lobbied for the Union to condemn the actions of the Axis, but too many Technocrats were enamored with the warmongers and their illusion of an orderly authoritarian society. A very vocal faction thought fascism was just what the Union needed and advocated it as a world government. The Reckoners were appalled. When the Nephandic threat became clear, they helped the Sons of Ether engineer the alliance. When the war was over, the Analytical Reckoners made plans to leave the Union but, before they did, something big happened.

If Babbage was one of the biggest mathematical and computer geniuses of the 19th century, Alan Turing was his 20th century counterpart. Famous as a code breaker and cryptographer during the war, Turing was also a skilled physicist and mathematician who pretty much invented modern computing. After the war, Turing was disgraced when he was outed as a homosexual, and so he turned his attention to quantum mechanics and wave function. To aid his work, he built a nonlinear mechanism — a computer that could think intuitively. With this computer, he tried to test the idea that the universe was formed entirely of numbers by recreating a portion of it in his computer. He succeeded beyond his wildest expectations. Turing created a subdimension made entirely of information and accessible through computers. Today, this realm is known as the Digital Web. Unfortunately, Turing's mind was lost inside the Web when he created it. He was found dead in his apartment, and a cover story — suicide by cyanide poisoning — was concocted. The Reckoners broke with the Union in 1956, and after five years in hiding, they formally joined the Council of Nine, renaming themselves the Virtual Adepts in honor of the virtual reality Turing had discovered.

Better to Burn Out...

Morale hit something of a high point after the Adepts joined. Our club finally had nine members again, and it didn't look like anyone was getting ready to jump ship. Unfortunately, the Technocrats were more than a little pissed that another of their number had defected. Like I said earlier, after World War Two, the Union leadership was pretty paranoid about how close the Nephandi had come to plunging the world

Into the Crossfire Where Camelot Fell

Do you believe in magic? Do you believe that two men could be wounded seven times by two bullets? Do you believe that eighteen witnesses could just magically up and die over the next three years?

— Steve Darnall, UNCLE SAM

People have been formulating conspiracy theories about the Kennedy Assassination since before the body was even cold, so it should come as no surprise that mages have developed their own. Theories involving the mob or that ill-defined entity known as "the military-industrial complex" inevitably lead to some combination of the Syndicate, the NWO and Iteration X. Others point to the Void Engineers, claiming they turned Kennedy into a martyr to motivate NASA in their quest to put a man on the moon. Of course, not all theories involve the Technocracy. A string of (supposedly coincidental) Masonic symbolism involved in the assassination casts suspicion on the Order of Hermes. One theory claims the Euthanatoi killed Kennedy out of concern that a repeat of the Cuban Missile Crisis would result in a nuclear war. Some even believe the Virtual Adepts engineered the assassination to prove their loyalty to the Council. The truth is, as always, up to the Storyteller to decide.

into eternal darkness, not to mention how many German and Japanese agents they'd lost to the Nephandi's ranks. During the Forties and Fifties, the Union had already started to tighten their grip. When the Virtual Adepts defected, it must have driven them over the edge. The Technocracy went into total war mode and came down on us like a ton of bricks. Their sudden assault caught everyone off guard. Everywhere you turned it seemed like MiBs, cybernetic war machines and chemically augmented supersoldiers were crawling out of the woodwork. Once, you may have disagreed with or disliked the Technocrats, but as long as you didn't do anything stupid, you didn't have a whole lot to worry about. Now, you felt hunted. Cornered. Paranoid.

After recovering from the initial shock, we started to react. That seems to be the defining characteristic of the Traditions, doesn't it: The Technocrats act; we react. One very noisy faction decided to meet force with force and retaliate with everything they had. These people were veterans of Sixties' radicalism and militant nationalism. They saw all-out armed revolution against the Technocrat Oppressors as the only way to go. A lot of ancient Archmages, still nursing their wounded pride from centuries old attacks by the Order of Reason, encouraged this view. Together they sold an entire generation on the idea of an "Ascension War." Initiates were convinced that this was the way things had always been and the way it would always be until the Traditions triumphed and the Evil Empire of the Technocracy lay in ruins.

Behind the Iron Curtain

Russia has never been described as a nice place. For centuries, the people of the *Rodina* ("Motherland") have labored under the harsh rule of the Mongols, the Tzars and the Soviets. Stalin's brutality leaves millions dead of war, famine and mass execution. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapses, ending seventy years of Communist oppression. For Russia's supernatural population, what arrives in the wake of Glasnost is far worse. A demonic beast claiming to be Baba Yaga, the monstrous hag of Russian folklore, awakens from her ancient slumber and begins a reign of terror. The creature gathers hundreds of monsters and demons under her leadership and leaves the mages of Russia and her neighboring nations badly mauled.

Among the Hag's so-called army are a dozen mages — primarily Verbena and Chorusers — bound to her will through lies and dark sorcery. Bolstered by the creature's infernal powers, this "army of the arcane" erects a mystical barrier that leaves the nations of the former Soviet Union cut off from the rest of the world. In the spirit world, demons and wraiths attack and kill any who dare cross the Gauntlet, while in the material world, a string of coincidental effects prevents any supernatural creature from leaving the country. Mages, Technocrat and Tradition alike, are detained by border guards or their planes and trains suffer mechanical failures. Even communication is cut as phone lines fail and letters are lost.

Once the shock of the Hag's assault wears off, the mages of Russia began to organize for retaliation. Calling themselves the *Bogatyri* (after the mystic heroes of Medieval Russian epics), the Tradition mages organize into secretive cells and wage a guerilla war against the armies of darkness. In 1999, the last of the Hag's enslaved mages are hunted down and killed. The mystical barrier collapses and the Hag disappears (her fate being a topic of much debate among Russia willworkers). However, her monstrous followers still haunt the Russian nights and the war continues. The cowards

have all fled. The foolish have all died. Those who are left are Bogatyri, and they will defend Mother Russia until their dying breath.

Several Traditions contribute the ranks of the Bogatyri:

• **Verbena**: The Russian *vedun* (women are called *vedomye zheny*) have lived among the Eastern Slavs for centuries. In the past, a vedun would typically live alone in the forest, where villagers would seek him out for his skills as a soothsayer, healer and maker of magic potions. Others would live as nomads, selling their services from town to town. This independence and isolation allow the Verbena to survive into the 19th century despite conflicts with the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, it cannot save them from Stalin. Collective farming all but obliterates the peasant culture of the Soviet Union, and it takes the vedun decades to recover. The vedun feel a sacred connection to the soil of the Rodina, and with the fall of Communism they now work to heal Mother Russia of the countless wounds she has suffered over the past century.

Separated from the vedun by nationality and culture are the Ukrainian *kozbar*. Inheritors of the famous 16th and 17th century traveling minstrels, they see themselves as the guardians of traditional Ukrainian culture, music and folklore. The kozbar are also nearly destroyed in the 1930s when Stalin tries to annihilate the Ukrainian national identity through purposely engineered famine, the theft and destruction of cultural relics, and mass execution. The modern kozbar keep busy trying to recover the culture and history that has been stolen from them and working to inflame the Ukrainian nationalist spirit.

• **Celestial Chorus**: Orthodox Christianity came to Russia in the 10th century, and the Messianic Voices came with it. The history of the Russian Orthodox Church is rife with conflicts over dogma and politics, so it is no surprise that the Russian Chorus is fractured into several (sometimes rival) sects. The largest and best organized of these factions is the *starovery* ("Old Believers"), who serve as the de facto leadership of the Tradition in Russia. Formed during the 17th century, the sect was persecuted as heretics until the Soviet era, forcing them to remain deep underground (and ironically giving them the skills to help survive Stalin's purges). Today, they are far more open and see the current state of Russian affairs as a great

opportunity for the Orthodox Church to reclaim its rightful political and social influence.

Two other sects round out the remaining majority of Russian Choristers. *The Order of the Firebird* is a martial brotherhood (the Soviet era saw the first female members of the Order) that traces their roots back to the druzhina knights of Kievian Rus. Since the time of the Tzars, they have existed as a secret society within Russia's military. Many are veterans of Spetsnaz (Russian special forces) and OMON (counter-terrorist units), making them some of the most deadly of the Bogatyri. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the *Kenotics*, who are more a collection of like-minded mystics than an organized sect. The Kenotics dedicate their lives to the Kenotic Ideal, the direct emulation of Christ as the means of salvation. Wrath and violence are the ways of the devil, and the Kenotics strive to remain meek and gentle. Practitioners routinely engage in fasting, and most are vegetarians. Those who remain true to the Kenotic Ideal find themselves protected from harm by their faith — weapons miss, wounds are healed instantly or attackers are overwhelmed with a sense of repentance and remorse; some are even said to be under the protection of angels (all of this can be done with second and third level Entropy, Forces, Life, Mind and Spirit effects or — at Storyteller discretion — with True Faith).

• **Cult of Ecstasy**: Russian Ecstatics are typically divided into two camps — the Western Ecstatics of medieval Russia and the Eastern Ecstatics of the Siberian regions conquered by Tzarist Imperialism. The Western Ecstatics are primarily Russian Orthodox monks. Many of these sects seek ecstatic visions through extensive fasting and flagellation. Some go as far as self-castration or even burying themselves alive to gain visions via asphyxiation and sensory depravation. Others seek visions through *umilyeniye*, a state of intense raw emotion and religious ecstasy brought on by viewing the incredible beauty of icons and other holy works of art (often using first level Sphere effects). During the times of the Tzars, a number of sects seek ecstasy through drink and other debauchery. Few of those practitioners survive the Soviet era. The Siberian Ecstatics are found among the region's Animist cultures. These societies are made up entirely of shamans, and they use psychotropic plants and fungi to help them touch the spirit world.

• **The Others**: Almost every Tradition has found its way into Russia at one time or another. The Dreamspeakers are still found among the cultures of Siberia, as well as the Tatars and the Sámi. The Euthanatoi of the Golden Chalice sect thrive in the time of the Tzars but are all but destroyed after the Communists come to power. Akashic Jnani still live along the borders with China and Mongolia. The Kalmyk Autonomous Province was once a stronghold for the Brotherhood, but when Stalin had the entire nation deported en masse to the gulags, it nearly destroyed the Kalmyks as a nation. Today, the Kalmyk Akashics struggle to help their people rebuild. The Web of Faith (see page 99) extends into Central Asia, and Turkmenistan appears to hold one of the largest concentrations of Taftáni in the world.

The Ascension War in the Middle Kingdom

Today, the struggle for the fate of reality is a global one. But the Ascension War began primarily as a conflict between Europeans. The Order of Reason and its successor, the Technocratic Union, were both founded in Europe and grew largely out of European belief systems and philosophies (with some input from Chinese Artificers and Legalists). The unique conditions — both mystical and mundane — of the Middle Kingdom (as many within Asia's supernatural community refer to the region) deserve notice.

China

When Qin Shihuangdi becomes the first emperor of a united China, he creates the Ministry of Works to regulate the activities and excesses of his nation's willworkers. All who register with the Ministry find their magic to be coincidental; all who refuse find their work to be vulgar. The Wu Lung, ardent supporters of Qin Shihuangdi, quickly gain control over the Ministry of Works, and through it dominate China's magical paradigm until the fall of the Ming Dynasty in the 17th century. Mystic and artisan-philosopher alike are forced to defer to the Dragon Wizards. Although numerous Chinese willworkers claim membership in the Order of Reason (especially the Artisans), or with local counterparts such as the *House of Hua T'o* (healers and physicians) or the *Zi Guang* (agriculturalists,

farmers and social scientists), they can do little to challenge the Ministry's stranglehold on the local paradigm. While this saves the Akashics and other mystics from much of the damage visited upon their European allies in the War's opening volleys, it also leaves them unprepared for the coming of the newly reorganized Technocratic Union in the 19th century. The Wu Lung, content in their power, are unable to view anything outside of China as a serious concern. Their representatives attend the formation of the Order of Reason and the Council of Nine, listen politely and then return home.

When the Technocratic Union comes to China, the native willworkers — Traditionalist, philosopher-scientist or Disparate alike — lack the strength or influence to oppose Western Imperialism. The Taiping Rebellion leaves Chinese sects exhausted and disorganized. Those former members of the Order of Reason who ally with the Union are forced to play a secondary role to their gweilo overlords. Meanwhile, the Akashics and the Wu Lung throw their support behind the Righteous Fists of Harmony (called the Boxers by Westerners), but the move backfires horribly. Once the Boxer Uprising is put down by Western armies, the Manchu Dynasty begins an attempt to modernize China with modern schools, a modern army and the promise of a constitution, furthering the goal of Chinese and foreign Technocrats to form a Chinese Republic. During the 1920s, China again falls into one of its warlord periods as Traditions, Crafts and the Union each back their own factions in the struggle for influence over the nation. Mao Zedong's rise to power proves as destructive to China's Awakened community as Stalin's regime does for the Soviet Union. The Cultural Revolution plunges the country into political and economic chaos, leaving the Traditions mauled and the Conventions in disarray. As moderates come to power after Mao's death, the Chinese Technocracy (firmly led by the NWO) reestablishes relations with their Western counterparts and the Traditions continue the struggle to keep their legacies alive in the midst of famine, poverty and government crackdowns. At the dawn of the 21st century, China is poised to either become the next global superpower or to collapse into chaos and civil war. Chinese

willworkers are divided over which fate would best serve their ends.

Japan

When Japan reestablishes full contact with the West in 1853 (the Japanese continue to allow the Dutch limited trading rights throughout the Tokugawa era), the country is forced to negotiate from a position of weakness. Japan's two alliances of artisan-philosophers (the *Court of Chrysanthemums* and the *Court of Plum Blossoms*) recognize the tremendous advantage of modern technology and throw their full support behind the Meiji Restoration. Allying with the Technocratic Union, Japanese philosopher-scientists join the Electrodyne Engineers, Mechanicians (Iteration X), Æsculapians (Progenitors), Invisible Exchequer (Syndicate) and Lightkeepers (NWO), all while maintaining their close ties under the Courts' overall umbrella. Japanese Akashics and Dreamspeakers are horrified as centuries-old traditions are thrown aside in favor of western fashions and rapid industrialization. This shock leaves the Japanese Traditions unable to offer effective resistance and much of the nation falls into the Technocracy's camp. A small faction of Enlightened samurai, who serve the Courts as warriors and bodyguards, refuse to abandon their traditions and join the Akashic Brotherhood. After the Second World War, Japan stands as an industrial and technological giant, wielding economic influence throughout the Pacific Rim. But today the nation is rocked by economic turmoil, and many people are looking for something to believe in. Perhaps the Traditions have something to offer them.

For more on the mages of the Middle Kingdom, see **Dragons of the East**, as well as **World of Darkness: Tokyo**, **World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X** and **Blood and Silk**.

Time to Pay the Piper

Nothing ever happens without consequences. Nothing. Never forget that. Some people are really lucky and can go their whole lives without having to pay their tab. Not us. Reality sees to it that we always settle our accounts sooner or later. And the longer we wait to pay, the more interest we owe.

The Archmages of Horizon used younger mages as cannon fodder until some of them finally rebelled. A group of Tradition mages, Orphans and others snuck into Horizon and attacked the Council members and their entourages. Subtlety did not carry the day. The battle was devastating. Horizon was left battered and broken. At least half the Council was dead, but I've yet to see any two casualty lists that match up so I don't know who, if anyone, is still alive.

Doissetep was the Order of Hermes's pride and joy, but it degenerated into a treacherous pit of vipers. The Order's leadership endlessly plotted and schemed against each other, each jockeying for supremacy for no other reason than to feed their already titanic egos. Finally, the pressure that had been building and building just exploded. Literally. No one is sure what happened. Apparently two ancient Archmages with a grudge got into a fight and ended up causing the entire realm to explode. The shockwave spread across the Otherworld, leaving chaos in its wake. A few smaller realms were completely destroyed. Even the Digital Web crashed. Hundreds of people died that day. All for the sake of someone's ego.

Then something even worse happened. In June of 1999, some fool — God only knows how — managed to wake up a monster. Maybe it was some sort of demonic summoning, or maybe someone just opened up the wrong Bronze Age tomb. Some people think it was an old and deeply deranged Marauder who'd managed to claw its way through the Gauntlet. Either way, what woke up was something more horrific than anything seen on Earth in several millennia. Whatever it was, this demon tore its way across part of eastern India and into Bangladesh. Its very presence created a massive typhoon over the Bay of Bengal and according to the few mages who survived their attempts to approach the thing, reality seemed to unravel as they came near it. Finally, the Technocracy nuked the damn thing. At least I hope it was them. I'd hate to think that some other conspiracy out there has that kind of firepower.

The metaphysical shockwave from the thing's death hit the universal fabric even harder than Doissetep did. This is what kicked off the Avatar Storm. By now, I'm sure you've noticed that crossing the Gauntlet is no picnic. Oh, you can still get across, but it's harder than it used to be — and for Masters and Archmages, it can be downright lethal. That whole demon incident was the straw that finally broke the camel's back. Reality had taken all of the crap from us uppity mages that it was going to stand. The cosmic forces in this universe have decided that they don't want the old Archmages having anything to do with this planet any more, and they've locked the old bastards out.

A Week of Nightmares

The first week of June 1999 hits the supernatural community hard. Supernaturally sensitive individuals are assaulted by intense and horrific nightmares and prophetic visions (as a general rule of thumb, those mages who practice Mind and Time magic are the most susceptible, but at the Storyteller's discretion, others may be affected as well, especially those who use "psychic" foci). Reports of phantasms and hallucinations, ranging from ghostly fires and ten-headed monsters to stories of entire cemeteries of corpses crawling out of the ground and running amuck, pour in from around the world. And then, just as the madness stops, the Avatar Storm begins to blow. Needless to say, it's a stressful week to be a mage.

Who's Covering It Up?

So how does one cover up the clandestine detonation of several nuclear weapons over a third world country, not to mention the rampage of a ten-thousand-year-old demon-god? Well, to start with, the Technocracy is very good at spin control. The NWO and the Syndicate each have their media branches, and these people do know what they're doing. (And no, the Technocracy does not control the media or any governments like puppets any more than the Celestial Chorus runs the Catholic Church or the Akashic Brotherhood controls all of the world's martial arts schools.) Adding to this, those members of the Traditions with influence among governments and the media also aid in the cover-up — as does every other supernatural creature with such connections. The truth getting out benefits no one. If the public ever found out that monsters and wizards walked among them, there would be widespread panic quickly turning into paranoia and violence. No one wants this.

Most militaries and intelligence agencies believe that India and Bangladesh almost went to war as the result of a previously unknown third party's terrorist attack using experimental chemical weapons (likely developed by former Soviet military scientists now selling their skills on the black market) and a tactical nuclear weapon (also purchased from one of the former Soviet republics). Many of the agencies also believe it is in the best interest of national security and the public that this incident remain highly classified. So, to the general public, a massive typhoon struck Bangladesh and northeastern India. Hundreds of thousands of people died from flooding and tidal waves. Thousands of relief workers went to the region. Some socially-conscious musicians put together a benefit album. And a lot of people never noticed amid all the hype about that big movie that came out.

Brave New World

And so here we are. You are a young mage, out to make your mark on the world. And you get a unique opportunity that no other generation of mages in history has ever had. You and your generation get the chance to try and change the world without having the last generation looking over your shoulder or getting in your way. You have a chance to be one of the architects of this new century. Every action you take helps craft the new world you're going to live in.

Over the years, I've heard a lot of mages compare what we do to a road. Roads to Ascension. Roads to damnation. Roads to power. Roads to victory over the Technocracy. The problem with roads is that they only take you where the people who build the roads think you ought to go. Your generation is different. You don't need roads. You have the freedom to go anywhere you want to go. Your generation has wings. And where you go with them is entirely up to you.

On the Edge of Infinity

There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That'll be the beginning.

— Louis L'Amour

The Ascension War is over, so you can't go around blowing up Technocrat bases. The Avatar Storm is keeping you from being able to go zooming around the Umbra on your cosmic jet ski. So there's nothing else to do in **Mage**.

If you believe that, I've got a bridge in New York to sell you.

In addition to the plot hooks liberally scattered throughout this chapter, other events are happening all over the world. Some of these are the direct result of the Reckoning or the events leading up to it. Others have been simmering for a long time and are now beginning to boil over. And mages are right in the middle of it.

In Darkest Night

As the Cult of Ecstasy's representative to the Council of Nine for over two decades, Marianna of Balador was known for many things. Her latest parties, newest lovers and most recent protégés never failed to become the topic of conversation within Horizon. But such notoriety is fleeting. Once the limelight shifts and the parties are distant memories, the crowd moves on to its new object of fascination, perhaps pausing later to ask, "Where is she now?" If history ever remembers the Queen of the Pleasure Dome, it will be for one thing.

In 1992, Marianna commissioned a cabal of Ecstatic mages to investigate rumors of an Infernalist cult — devoted to rape and child abuse — reported to be operating in New York, Los Angeles and other cities. The cabal delved unflinchingly into a dark and unpleasant corner of the world that many people try to keep out of sight, out of mind. Their search took them around the globe, from Manhattan high-rises to the back alleys of Bangkok, and although they found little evidence of the cult, they did find other mages — Traditionalists, Orphans and even Technocrats — each conducting their own private war against the ultimate evil. Over the past decade, what was once a loose network of acquaintances is now a steadily growing organization with agents scattered all over the world. They have no official name, but other mages call them the *Children's Crusade*. The Crusaders are a diverse group. They include teachers, police officers, doctors, lawyers, private detectives, journalists and even criminals and computer hackers. Although members of the Cult of Ecstasy still make up the majority of the Crusade, the number of non-Ecstatics continues to grow. Members of every Tradition can be found within the group, with the Celestial Chorus, the Euthanatoi and the Virtual Adepts each forming sizable minorities. Members of the Crusade have had few, if any, clashes with the Technocracy. The Union seems to turn a blind eye towards the activities of members and more than one Crusader has found himself the recipient of an anonymous tip in the form of a phone call, letter or e-mail. In the wake of the Reckoning, several Crusaders have made attempts to recruit new members, offering ex-Ascension Warriors a newer, darker enemy to fight.

Project Stormwarden

Without a doubt, the Avatar Storm does more to disrupt the status quo of mage society than almost any event in history. Only the formation of the Nine Traditions, tying mystics of countless lands and beliefs together in a lasting alliance, can even compare. The Avatar Storm disrupts communication through the Gauntlet and makes the journey to and from the Otherworld dangerous for Masters and potentially lethal for Archmages. While this state of affairs opens up a world of opportunity for younger mages still on Earth, it can also prove to be a little bothersome when one needs something — a person, a Wonder, information — that is stuck on the other side.

Luckily, mages have never been ones to just sit around and whine (well, most of them, anyway). Mages are doers. Once the initial shock of the Reckoning wears off, mages from around the world begin work on a solution to the Avatar Storm. Gradually word of the larger and more famous undertakings spread through the grapevine, and researchers begin sharing data, notes and ideas. By the beginning of the year 2001, this great undertaking is named Project Stormwarden, and it is divided into three parts.

The first part of the project is geared toward reestablishing communication with those outposts on the other side of the Gauntlet. Not only will this enable mages on Earth to learn who out there is still alive, it will also enable Stormwarden to exchange information with those on the other side who are (hopefully) doing the same work. Every possible means of communication is being attempted. Etherite scientists attempt to force messages through with increasingly larger and more powerful antenna arrays, while Choristers and Hermetics attempt to contact the other side with spiritual "carrier

pigeons." For now, the most promising avenue of communication appears to be the Digital Web. Virtual Adepts and other technomancers have left numerous messages at the Spy's Demise and other famous hangouts; a few appear to have even gotten responses. Members of the Akashic Brotherhood are experimenting with using the Akashakarma (what Westerners call the Akashic Record) as a means of cross-Gauntlet communication, but it's still too soon to tell if this actually works.

The second section of Stormwarden is devoted to research. These scholars, scientists and philosophers study the Storm and its effects, hoping to understand how and why it works, as well as why the Storm is happening and how to put an end to it. Members of the Hermetic House Bonisagus lead this effort, with the assistance of numerous Etherites, Virtual Adept Chaoticians and members of the Celestial Chorus's Alexandrian Society.

The third and, perhaps, largest part of Project Stormwarden is devoted to dealing with the Storm's effects. Those who brave the Storm risk injury, not only to their bodies, but to their minds and souls as well. For Verbena and Akashic herbalists, Chorus faith healers and Etherite medical doctors, developing cures for physical damage is easy enough. These days, those who "run the Gauntlet" frequently carry holistic or pharmaceutical restoratives (this is Life magic at its most basic; unfortunately, damage from the Storm is aggravated so the healing magic is always vulgar). A wide range of specialists — monks, psychologists, shamans and others — work to council Storm victims suffering from psychological damage, as well as to develop mental conditioning methods that will help travelers cope with — and withstand the pain and stress of — crossing the Gauntlet (Mind magic, accompanied by Willpower). At times, a Gauntlet runner is so badly injured that her Avatar is damaged. This experience typically leaves the victim deeply scared both emotionally and spiritually. Stormwarden researchers have yet to develop a way to counter against this effect of the Storm, but in some cases Seekings have proven to help the mage heal his damaged soul. Devices referred to as "Storm shields" are the Stormwarden's greatest success to date. These magical shielding devices vary wildly, from energized force fields or Prime-enhanced metal plating to bound spirit guardians or portable Hermetic wards. One Verbena is reputed to coat himself in a thick mixture of mud and herbal paste before crossing the Gauntlet. Although the methods differ, the effects are the same. Storm shields provide the wearer with additional soak dice against the Storm damage.

This is Important

To hear some people talk, you'd think that the Avatar Storm makes even the simplest Spirit 1 effect a game of Russian Roulette and attempting to cross the Gauntlet was an automatic death sentence. For those who might have missed it, crossing the Gauntlet means that the mage rolls his Arete + *permanent* Paradox against a difficulty of six (6). For every success, he takes one level of aggravated damage. This means it is actually easier for Disciples to cross the Gauntlet (they only roll 3 dice) than it is for Masters and Archmages. Yes, there is a risk involved, but visiting strange dimensions, alien worlds and countless hells is a little different than running down to the corner store for milk.

Although Stormwarden is a popular (or at least respected) undertaking among most mages, many Dreamspeakers, as well as Ecstatic, Akashic and Orphan shamans, do not consider the Avatar Storm much of a problem. To their way of thinking, the spirits always demand sacrifices from a shaman as proof of his resolve and as a sign of submission. To these mages, the damage received from the Storm is simply one more sacrifice they must make to prove their worthiness to the spirits.

The Tenth Tradition

At the Grand Convocation, representatives settled upon the number nine because it held mystical and symbolic significance to many of the cultures and factions in attendance. To the Chinese Akashics, Jui (9) is the number of eternity; to the members of the Asthika, the number is a symbol of the universe; to the Verbena and the Messianic Voices, the number represents a trinity of trinities; to the Hermetics it represents a triplication of both the three worlds (the heavens, the earth and the underworld) and of the mind, body and soul. And so it was decided that there would always be nine Traditions.

For centuries, the Council meeting hall in Horizon holds a tenth chair reserved for honored guests. In 1993, a symbol appears upon the tenth chair, corresponding to the symbols representing the nine spheres carved upon each Councilor's chair. Debate rages over just what this symbol means, but many take it as a sign that it is time to admit a tenth Tradition to the Council. But who? Some might say the Hollow Ones are the obvious choice, but stop and think about it for a minute. The Hollow Ones have nothing that could even begin to be called a central leadership. They are a scattered

collection of cliques, united only by their general outlook on life and their eclectic magical styles. On top of that, they are almost unheard of outside of North America and parts of Western Europe. By and large, the majority of mages suggesting the Hollowers for membership have been Americans or Europeans. Their choice is not shared by others around the globe.

Those in the Caribbean and parts of Latin America point to the Bata'a as the obvious choice, but the Voudounista Craft's elders never show any interest in joining the Traditions. African mages consider the Ngoma the best candidate, but few listen to them. Mages of the Middle Kingdom put forth the Wu Lung, but until the Reckoning, the Dragon Wizards care more about regaining their former position of power within China than the Ascension War as a whole. The Web of Faith believes the chair is a sign that the Ahl-i-Batin are preparing to return from their decades-long absence to once again lead the Council. Debates about the possibility of a tenth Tradition still crop up, but in the wake of the Reckoning, some now believe that the symbol was simply an unheeded warning that the Traditions were about to be punished for their hubris.

The Technomancer Revolution

On a whole, the original Nine Mystical Traditions are formed in response to the technologically-minded Order of Reason, so it comes as no surprise that many of the Traditions' older leadership are biased against modern ideas (like, say, gunpowder or democracy). Of course, not all mages share this technophobia and they eagerly find ways to work advancing technology into their magic, and vice versa. Many of these technomancers become the targets of discrimination, ranging from subtle social snubbing to assaults and even accusations of treason. As the Sons of Ether and later the Virtual Adepts join the Council, technomagic becomes more tolerated but never fully accepted.

In the wake of the Reckoning, everything changes. Technomancers appear to have an easier time adjusting to the changing consensus, and they are no longer restrained by the petty politics of aging Archmages who wouldn't know a computer from a toaster oven. Today, every Tradition includes technomancers among their number, from chemists and psychologists to gunsmiths and computer hackers. Their flexibility and creativity gives them a leg up in this rapidly changing world. As the number of technomancers continues to grow, their influence will continue to grow as well.

The Order of Hermes plays home to the greatest number of technomancers. The Hermetics have always demanded the highest level of scholarship from their

members, so it comes as no surprise that many of them have found a way to apply all of those Doctorates in Engineering, Mathematics, Computer Science and Medicine to their Art. House Fortunae has spent almost a century integrating cutting-edge mathematics with their magic, and *House Thig* is founded upon the concept of combining the Hermetic Arts with computer and information system technology. Many of House Bonisagus's esoteric scholars have been forced to come out of reclusion, and as they associate with other Houses, especially Fortunae and Shaea, they begin to gain a new appreciation for modern science and research methods. But the Order's greatest beneficiary of this revolution is House Ex Miscellanea's*Verditius*. The House has always been famous for their work as craftsmen and toolmakers, but after the start of the Ascension War, they lose many potential recruits to the Order of Reason. Even worse, the Hermetic backlash weakens the House politically. Verditius is forced into House Ex Miscellanea and many Archmages consider the craftsmen good for little more than churning out magic rings or wands on demand. House Verditius greets news of Doissetep's destruction with quiet jubilation. Almost immediately, they begin a campaign of growth and modernization and carefully recruit allies among the other technomancer Houses and factions. The days of rings and wands are over. Now members of House Verditius bind spirits of fire and thunder into handguns and use alchemical metallurgy to construct bulletproof cars.

The Euthanatoi *Lhaksmists* — frequently referred to as "Locksmiths" in the West — began as a sect of "luck mages" in Bombay. Since the days of the First Samashti, members of the group have traveled wherever Fate takes them, spreading across the globe to try their luck as gamblers, thieves and spies. Technology often draws them like moths to a flame. To the Locksmiths, high tech security systems and encryption software are challenges to test themselves against, and many earn their living through computers (both legally and illegally). The Golden Chalice also holds its fair share of technomancers. While magically augmented sniper rifles and pistols are almost a stereotype, many within the sect take a guilty pleasure in the use of high-tech spy gadgets that would put James Bond to shame.

The Celestial Chorus's *Alexandrian Society* traces its roots back to ancient Egypt. Members of the Society see science as a lens through which to gain a better understanding of God's creation, which in turn leads to a better understanding of religious truth. Alexandrians practice a diverse set of disciplines, from the mundane (chemistry, medicine) to the esoteric (sub-Quantum physics, chaos theory), often in conjunction with more metaphysical undertakings (alchemy, Qabbalah).

Numerous Ecstatics experiment with synthetic drugs, virtual reality rigs and electronic music as foci for their mystical arts. The only organized (if it could be called that) Ecstatic sect fully devoted to technomagic is Bongo's Rangers. An anarchistic cult, the Rangers are dedicated to the complete breakdown of anything that might be construed as part of an ordered society. Unfortunately, this tends to include things like personal responsibility, coherent communication and even sanity.

The Dreamspeakers are dedicated to the ways of the spirits, and as the material world changes, the spirit world also changes in reflection of it. The first known techno-shamans appear in the American West during the 19th century, gradually forming what is today known as the *Ghost Wheel Society*. Members work to study and contact the spirits born of modern ideas and concepts — electricity, plastics, glass, even atomic energy and mathematics — and bind these and more traditional spirits into modern tools, weapons and other devices. Many within the Society have become urban shamans, adopting a neighborhood, town or even an entire city as their "village" and protecting its inhabitants from supernatural harm while providing spiritual aid and guidance. Many of the city shamans claim to have made contact with bizarre and Byzantine urban spirit hierarchies, often led by a spiritual representation of the city itself.

Verbena technomancers are not part of any organized group (not yet, anyway). They are a diverse bunch — doctors, physical therapists, marine biologists, computer programmers, business women, veterinarians, chefs, blacksmiths, astronomers — united only by the fact that they find ways to tie their modern skills to the more traditional magic the Tradition is famous for. Healers use their knowledge of anatomy, physiology and chemistry to help them find the injuries they plan to heal, as well as to make their magic more coincidental, while fortune tellers use modern astronomical data, mathematics and computer-generated zodiac charts.

Few technomancers have ever called the Akashic Brotherhood home. The Tradition's philosophy views the material world and its tools as a distraction from the search for enlightenment. However, now that the Wu Lung have positioned themselves under the Tradition's aegis (although most Akashics tactfully refer to the arrangement as an alliance), the group is now home to a handful of scientifically-minded Dragon Wizards. These members typically incorporate feng shui into

modern architecture and blend traditional alchemy with high-tech devices. Furthermore, the always-anarchistic *Li Hai* have embraced a great deal of technology side by side with Brotherhood teachings. Believing that wisdom can be found even in that which flies in the face of the divine, the Li Hai happily use the tools that the rest of the Brotherhood eschews.

New Horizon

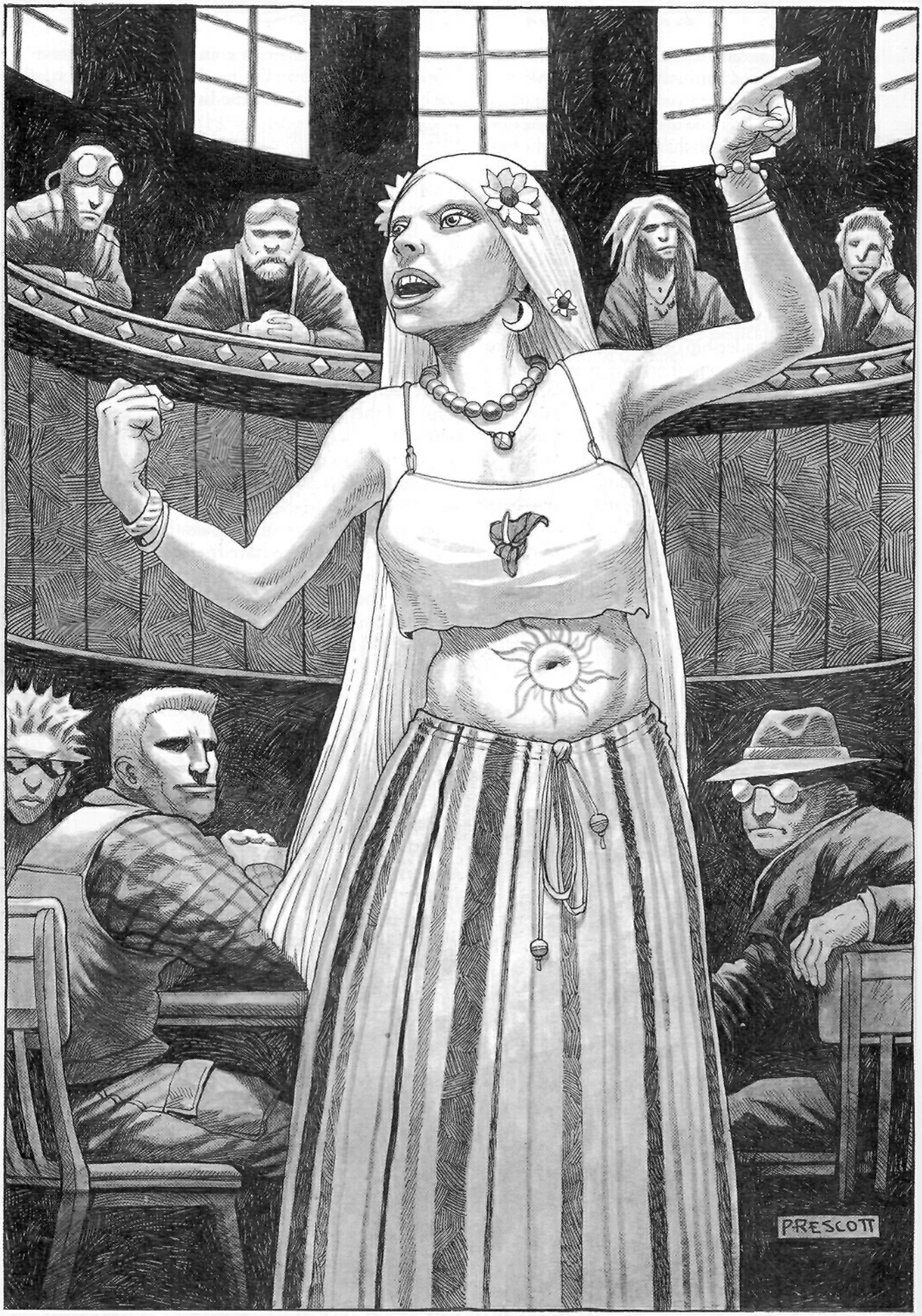
For over five hundred years, Horizon stood as the political center of the Nine Traditions. But nothing lasts forever. Today, Horizon lies in ruins. Its buildings are shattered; its leaders are dead; its denizens are in disarray. Now the leadership of the Traditions falls to the mages of Earth (among them the player-characters). Some voice the idea of rebuilding the Council of Nine and providing themselves a secure place to meet. Although many mages think this is a worthwhile idea, no one can agree on just where such a group should meet. Building a new Umbral Realm is no longer practical. Numerous proposals for an earth-bound "New Horizon" have been put forth — an island in the South Pacific, the Canadian Rockies, the Amazon, the Australian Outback, under the sea — but so far none have gained enough support.

And from an official standpoint, there probably never will be enough support. The decision of where, when or, even if, there will be a New Horizon is entirely up to individual Storytellers. If you want to stick it on top of a New York City skyscraper, go for it. Is a hidden fortress in Antarctica that requires a giant gold key to enter more up your alley? Why not. A thirty-mile-wide space ship that can visit alternate dimensions? Sure. You can even rebuild the old Horizon (as if anyone is actually making you destroy it in the first place) if you want. Drunken hooligans in White Wolf T-shirts aren't going to kick down your door and bash you over the head with a vodka bottle just because you don't toe the line.

The Utopian Conspiracy

The Technocratic Union began, for many of its members, as a dream of building a scientific utopia for all mankind. Needless to say, that dream has gone awry. The Electrodyne Engineers and the Analytical Reckoners both felt so strongly about this dream that they abandoned the Union when they felt it had betrayed its founding principles. However, these two groups were not the only Utopians within the Technocracy. Each of the five Conventions includes Utopian members. While some of these Technocrats have, over the years, decided to join their brethren within the Sons of Ether or the Virtual Adepts, many remain behind. Contact between the two sides is infrequent, but continues nonetheless.

In the wake of the Reckoning, many of the Union's leadership are likewise Missing in Action or cut off from earth on the other side of the Gauntlet. Several of the formerly quiet Utopians have risen to places of prominence, and many former defectors have chosen to return to the Union. Their plan is to take back the organization they feel was stolen from them by bean counters and fascists. Failing this, the conspiracy has a backup plan. If need be, they will attempt to split the Union, leaving en masse and taking as many sympathetic fence-sitters as they can with them to form their own faction. If either of these events come to pass, there are many within the Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts who believe it would be in their best interest to leave the Traditions and either rejoin the Union or join this theoretical third faction.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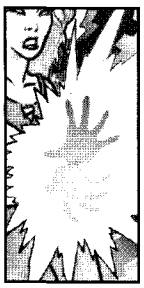
CHAPTER FOUR: PATHWAYS



Lee Ann looks up at Ryan over her sandwich and smiles at him. He smiles back, then goes back to typing incessantly on his laptop. Lee Ann shakes her head and takes a bite of her sandwich.

Ryan is not sure at first what causes her to spit out the food, the sandwich itself or the boy that runs into the deli. Lee Ann looks up at him with a pained expression, though, and he does know one thing for certain. This is not going to be a vacation anymore.

The boy looks wild-eyed, and no one really knows what to do with him. Lee Ann pulls herself together and moves for the boy. Ryan closes his laptop and is behind her. The boy is shaking and looks to be terrified. Lee Ann kneels so that she is level with him.

"What's the matter?" she says softly.

"I — It was going to eat me," the boy whispers. He looks a little sheepish, as well as scared, like he doesn't think they're going to believe him. Lee Ann attempts a little magic to inspire his confidence, but she's too distracted by whatever hit her. Ryan picks up on it and finishes it for her, and the boy relaxes some.

"What was going to eat you?" Lee Ann asks.

"The dr — dragon," he says.

"Where?" Lee Ann asks.

"It was on the clock tower," he says.

The boy leads them outside. He points to the clock tower. Ryan looks, but he can't see anything on top.

Lee Ann looks down at the boy.

"He's gone now," she says, "but he could come back. Go home, and lock your doors. Tell your mom that you heard on the news that a bad storm was coming, so that she doesn't go outside, all right?"

The little boy nods.

"Are you going to take care of the dragon?" he asks.

Lee Ann nods.

The boy smiles and starts, presumably on his way home. Ryan looks from the clock tower to Lee Ann.

"You don't really think that there was something on that tower, do you?" he asks.

Lee Ann nods. "The pepperoni on my sandwich was spoiled."

• • •

Lee Ann doesn't like the clock tower. She can feel that something is off, even before she attempts to look up at it. When she does, she nearly loses what she didn't eat of her lunch. It is like looking at a vortex and it is all she can do to stand back up.

"The time on the clock tower is wrong," Lee Ann observes.

Ryan looks down at his watch, but his smart-ass comment is caught short. The hands on this watch are spinning. He holds it up for Lee Ann to see. She nods.

"This is bad," he says.

"It is starting to look like Milledgeville all over again."

Ryan winces.

"I don't think we can take care of this ourselves," he says. "We almost couldn't last time we had something like this."

"We are more powerful," Lee Ann says.

"Do you really want to take that chance?"

"Good point. We should look around first, though. If we're going to call in reinforcements, then we need to give them a reason to think we need it."

They walk towards the clock tower. It is a records building and museum, from what they can tell. They enter without any occurrence and begin looking around.

It is hard to tell from what they see what might be causing the problem. Of course, this place is ripe for Time altering. It is all about history and the past. Ryan can tell that Lee Ann's ill at ease and decides to follow her intuition. She will probably find the source of the oddity long before his reasoning could deduce it.

"One would think," she says at last, "that great and powerful mages would learn a lesson once in a while."

She stops and looks up to a hatch in the ceiling. Ryan thinks a moment. Given where they should be, he's fairly certain that it leads to the clock tower itself.

"Do we want to go up there?" he asks.

"No," Lee Ann shakes her head. "Not yet. Let's see what we can drum up for help. I think that's the source of our disturbance, though."

Lee Ann and Ryan leave, purchasing a token item at the gift shop counter. They do not notice the man in the black suit and mirror shades watching them leave.

• • •

"I can understand your concern," the woman's voice says through the laptop's speakers, "but we simply cannot spare anyone. I suggest that you go to your cabal for help."

"Don't you think that's the first place we went?" Lee Ann asks the woman, whose face she can see on the screen, though the lips move slightly out of sync with the words. She thinks that it is either the computer having a sense of humor or effects of whatever is happening in town, though she had hoped to get far enough out of town to avoid such problems.

"I'm sorry, but there is nothing that we can do here. We simply cannot be concerned with this."

"Can't be concerned?" Ryan speaks up. "It is right in your back yard. Hell, for all we know, it could have been —"

Lee Ann pokes him before he can finish.

"— a Technocratic experiment," he recovers.

"Then I'm sure that you can handle it, given your experiences with the Technocracy. Now, if you do not mind, I have important Chantry matters to attend to."

Lee Ann sits back and crosses her arms as the screen goes blank. Ryan closes the laptop and leans back beside her.

"Do we want to try it? It could be out of our league," he says.

"I told that little boy I'd take care of the dragon," she says. "I can't break my word."

Ryan kisses her on the forehead. "I know," he says and smiles.

"I guess that I should figure out exactly what we're facing," Lee Ann says. "I'll do some spirit work, see what I can figure out."

Ryan nods. "I'll do some research and see what I can find on the history here. Maybe something there will tell us something."

Lee Ann nods. She kisses him back and sits on the floor cross-legged. She pulls out a pendulum and begins concentrating on it. Ryan watches her for a moment as she prepares her psyche for the experience of the astral plane — the projection of her consciousness, hopefully to a place that holds answers. He then gets to his research and to watching over her, since she's extremely vulnerable, physically, in this state.

The knock at the motel room door startles him out of his research. His first instinct is Lee Ann, but a stray thought reminds him that he did put up safeguards in case something happens with her. The knock sounds again and he goes and checks the peephole.

Outside stand three men in black suits and black hats, each wearing mirror shades. Ryan dislikes this greatly. He looks back at Lee Ann, who sits very still. She's still away. There is no way in hell he's letting MiBs in the room while she's out and away. All they have to do is move her body an inch, and she can be fucked if she doesn't realize it.

He waits patiently as they knock again. When no one answers after the fourth knock, the center one speaks.

"We know that you are in there. Allow us entrance or we will acquire our own entrance."

"Who is it?" Lee Ann whispers behind him.

"MiBs," he whispers.

Lee Ann catches her breath. She motions for him to begin packing things. He grabs the laptop and his gun. She motions over to the window.

"Where can you make that go?" she asks.

Ryan thinks a moment. "I think I can take us to the clock tower."

Lee Ann winces. "Let's go."

• • •

"All right, as best as I can figure, we have a time-bomb," Lee Ann says as she and Ryan crouch behind bushes. The entire place is crawling with Technocracy mages.

"Explain," he says.

"Someone set a complicated set of spells on the tower, to alter the effects of time here. I'm not sure why, but I think maybe they wanted to preserve something here. Maybe the town itself. The boy probably did see a real dragon. Just before he came in, when I bit into the sandwich and it was sour, I felt something happen along the time streams. I think that, at least for a few minutes, the dragon found our world accommodating to it. I think that a slip like that could happen again."

"But —"

"It won't be pleasant," Lee Ann says. "Someone's tampered with it since the original spells were put in place. I'm guessing the Technocracy's work. I can make some counter-spells that I can drop into place, but —"

"But?"

"It could bring down the tower. We have to get people out."

Ryan nods.

"I think I know who did this," he says. "I found an effort for historical conservation about twenty years ago. The man who did it was the chairman of the historical society. I did a little more research. He was also a Free Mason, and guess what else."

"Love me," Lee Ann interjects with a grin, sensing what's coming.

"A Hermetic, from our Don't-Have-Time Chantry."

"I see leverage in our future," Lee Ann says, smiling.

• • •

His name is Hank Morris, and he's not happy. He's going to be expected to help two vagabond Journeymen (forget that they're Journeymen, one of them practically flaunts her dislike of the Order of Hermes), and there's nothing that can be done about it. Why? Because some old man twenty years ago got overzealous.

He always knew the 80s would come back to haunt him.

"Tell me again," he says.

"Simple," Ryan says. "The Technocracy doesn't know you from Jack. You work on some way of getting the museum emptied. Then get the hell away, because we're not sure just what fireworks we're going to end up setting off."

"Sounds easy enough," Hank says. "I think I can get everyone out. I just give them a fire drill. What about you two?"

"I'm going to get us out after Lee Ann sets the spell. It is important, though, that no matter what happens, you do not let the Technocracy there figure out where we are. Both of us are going to be very vulnerable while we're casting. If they interfere, I don't know what will happen. Got it?"

"You have my word," Hank says. "I won't let you down."

Ryan smiles and nods. Lee Ann offers him a nod, but she's still dubious. Something about the other mage....

• • •

Lee Ann and Ryan wait for Hank's signal that all is clear from the museum. They get it slightly sooner than expected and move in, Lee Ann breathing slowly and pushing away her sense of self-awareness to dim her presence and deflect attention.

They make their way up to the clockworks, were Lee Ann says the spells are set. Ryan can almost see them at this point. He sees that Lee Ann's right; if things keep up, this place is going to rip, and he's not sure what will happen when it does.

I wonder what happens when you have a town-sized rip in the Tapestry? *Ryan ponders.*

Lee Ann begins setting the counter-spells. This is very carefully timed. He's to set up a portal out; meanwhile, she'll actually set off the spell. One mistimed step, though, and they could have more problems than they want.

Memories of Wrinkle come to Ryan's mind, and he feels his blood run cold. He really hopes it doesn't come to that.

Lee Ann is almost through setting the last spell when the door to the clockworks bursts open. Three mages and two MiBs enter, carrying guns and other assorted weapons.

"Shit," Ryan yells.

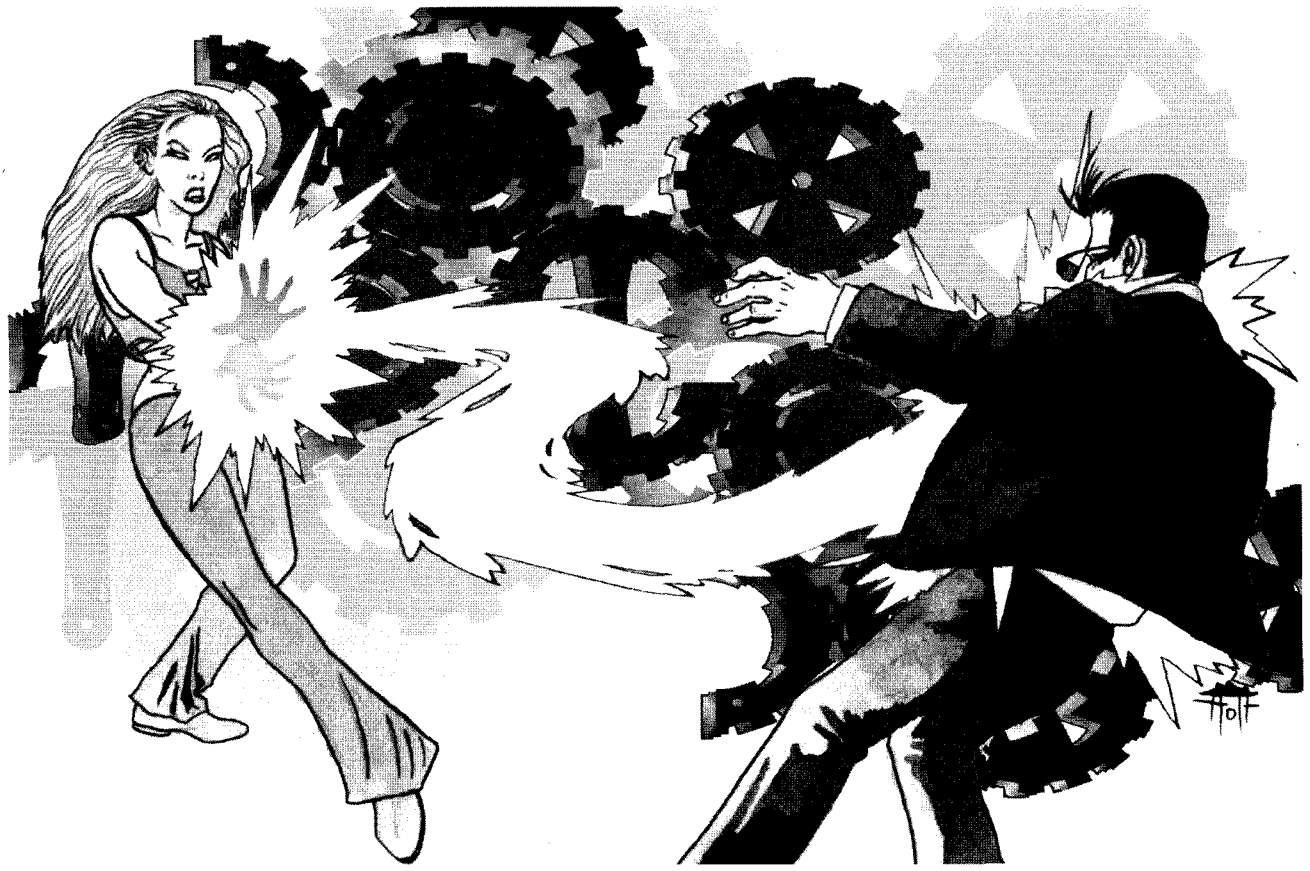
"I'm going to kill that dick-head," Lee Ann screams as she has to drop the last setting or be shot by some sort of Technocratic energy weapon. She tosses a bolt of her own — a stream of her anger and frustration, channeled with all the force of her desperation — and prays that their luck holds out a little longer.

Ryan doesn't have to be prompted. He's already constructing the portal out of there. At this point, he's not really caring where it goes. He only cares about one thing: that it is safe. Safe, sound and as far away from the Technocracy as they can get.

"It is up, let's go," Ryan says.

Lee Ann sends another bolt flying, landing into a mage and sending him into a set of gears. He doesn't move, and Ryan's certain he's out for the count.

"Go," Lee Ann says. "I have to set off the charges. Keep the gate open for me. I'll be right through."



Ryan wants to argue, but there's no time. He fires a shot at the second mage and takes a moment to wonder why the MiBs aren't acting. The answer doesn't come to him until he's stepped into the portal. He stops, trying to figure out how to go back, when he feels something push against his back. It is Lee Ann, yelling startled obscenities.

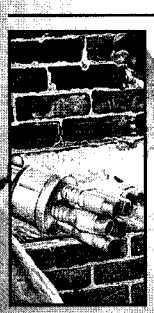
He doesn't have time to think as the blast hits them, propelling them through the other end of the portal and onto a hard stone floor. Lee Ann tries weakly to pick herself up, but she took the brunt of the blast. She manages only a moan before she is out.

Ryan looks up to see the nine faces looking down at him.

"Journeyman Pembrooke," One of the men says. "I trust there is good reason why our Avatars felt it important to let the gate open here and let you and Journeyman Milner pass through?"

Ryan nods. He starts to say something when the exhaustion of what happened hits him, and he passes out.

The War of Ascension



It is not pretty out there, boys and girls. We are at war. Yes, war. And for what? Reality? The world? That's generally the line they sold you on. And if you bought it, I've got a deed here for the Brooklyn Bridge. No, really, I'm serious. I calculated the actual chances of me having a valid deed to the Brooklyn Bridge, then turned them in my favor. That, and a few dishonest deeds that I won't go into here, and voila! I have the deed.

What? You'll forgive me for not always being my normally reserved self, but I did figure out how to do it. I will sell it to you, too. I will also give you the name of a good lawyer. You'll need it. Of course, if you have the money to pay me for a deed to the Brooklyn Bridge, then you can afford your own damn lawyers.

All right, this is not a pointless illustration. There's some bum out there who claims to own the Brooklyn Bridge. I just pointed out to you that such a thing is actually possible to achieve. It is not easy. It takes a combination of magic and ingenuity, but it can be done. Is it real? Does some database out there suddenly say, lo and behold, that this bridge is in fact mine? Maybe for a little while right up until some vigilant realtor decides to paper over my little joke. "Little," heh — just doing this much took quite a bit of work!

That, my friends, is what the Ascension War is — or was — all about. It's having an idea of reality and making it happen through magic and a little real-world work.

Now all of us humans, we're bums, who claim to own one bridge or another. The day that we all figure out how to actually own our bridges is the day that we'll achieve our Ascension, and we'll all live in a much better place because we will all have our ideal existence and we won't try to take each other's existences away.

That's what owning your bridge is all about, my friend.

Okay, so where do you, as a mage — a Warrior of Ascension, if you will — fit into this load of bullshit?

I'm glad that you asked.

No, really, I am. I am, after all, a pedagogue, and without a student, I can't pedago. (That's a little joke.)

As a mage, it is your place to guide humanity to its Ascension. That's what the Traditions say, anyway, and they should know, those know-it-all goodie-goodies. See, humanity can't find its own way to Ascend without us.

That point, I will give those self-same goody-goodies. They — the Masses — can't. Humanity as a whole is caught in stagnation. If you don't believe me, then put down this book, and go ask your folks how their day went. More than likely one or both of them are going to bitch about their job. They will complain about how it is dead-end, and they hate it. If you catch your mom alone, you might even get to hear her bitch about how your dad just doesn't pay the attention to her that he used to, and how she wished that their love was as alive as it was fifteen years ago, ten years ago, five years ago even. If you're real lucky, she might even admit to smelling the secretary's cheap perfume on him, but she pretends that it is not there.

And if you actually ask them why they don't change things?

Well, more than likely, they don't know. It is a cycle that they're in. In fact, they probably will think that you're either nuts or inconsiderate or ungrateful for even asking. It is the way of the world. Some will know why, but they'll still do it anyway. Why? It is the way of the world. Some will be unhappy about it, but unwilling to do what it takes to make things better. Watch out here. These will usually self-destruct.

There are a blessed few who do actually seek to make their world better. Unfortunately, they reach a certain plateau and then stop. They don't understand that when the try to make a move to achieve what they want, they open the door to Ascension. They get so close.

It is not their fault, even the ones who see the stagnation but just accept it, or don't try even when they don't like it. You see, they can't see the path to make it better. Even those that try, they may see a few steps on the path, but it is cloudy to them. They don't understand that the path continues. They can't see it.

It is our job to illuminate that path, to make it shine brightly, so that humanity can see it and walk it and Ascend.

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

Now, each Tradition has its own philosophies for lighting that path. I won't go into all of them in detail because, well, to be perfectly honest, you've heard them all before. If you've heard the philosophy, then you know their take on Ascension and the avenues that they go to bring Ascension to mankind. Capsule version: You know that the Akashics seek it through Zen-like enlightenment where you realize that all the world is connected and one, and that you are a part of the whole. You realize that the Celestial Chorus seeks it through communion with the Higher Power, the Creator, and the unity of all the soul-shards, the Avatars. The Ecstatics seek it through awakening the senses to all the experiences. [illegible] through the acknowledgement that the world is full of [illegible] to discover. The Virtual Adepts through the release of information. The Verbena through the mysteries of life. The Euthanatos through maintaining balance and the rebirth of the cycle. The Dreamspeakers through the unity of physical and spirit. Order of Hermes through seeking knowledge and understanding the mysteries. I would add the Hollow Ones into this, except their take on the Ascension is painfully simple: Why bother?

But I don't want to go into them. All right, so I named them. You should be reminded of them. You see, I don't want to illustrate each Tradition's ways to Ascend. What I want to do is illustrate how things would be if the Traditions actually bothered to work together, illustrate just why they aren't working together and what the result of the faction-fighting is on the real world. Maybe by actually seeing it down in black and white, the rest of you can do something about doing the right thing and working together so that maybe we can wake up this fucking rock and get off of it.

First, where do we go wrong? Well, the key to the problem lies in the fact that all the Traditions think, for some unknown and long forgotten (though I understand that a Hermetic Chantry does have it actually recorded) reason, that their ways are absolutely right and the others are wrong — though they may be close — and they're all hampering each other. The only thing hampering us is being closed-minded. Get it? Hampers have lids? (That was also a joke.)

Anyway. Here's the thing. The philosophies are not mutually exclusive. It is my studied opinion that they are actually just pieces of the whole picture; even the Hollow Ones' apathy plays some role.

Before I start a rigorous digression, let me make a caveat: I don't claim to have "the truth." However, this makes sense to me. Maybe it'll open you up to some other idea that makes sense to you. So, instead of whacking each other on the head with "That's not right, but I suppose I'll just let it slide," maybe we can work up something that fits us all together, right?

The Akashic ideal that we are part of a whole and their idea of a Zen-like existence fit in well with the Chorus' idea that we are all part of a soul that divided at the dawning of time. Even the idea that all but the essential must be stripped away fits with the ideals of most religions of humility, and, if you're a Neo-Pagan Chorister (they do exist, which completely blew my mind when I first found out) then you understand this in the idea that we do not take from the earth except for what we need.

All right, so let's begin there. Well, to experience this oneness, the Cult of Ecstasy's ideal about experiencing all things and opening the senses is important. How else will you experience this euphoric oneness or understand why your Avatar and your brother's Avatar seek to inter-

mingle (a little kinky, but I don't really think I want to think about it, to be perfectly honest). This awareness, naturally brings about a new appreciation of the mystery that is life. Don't even get me started on the mingling of this with the Verbena's philosophy. I have filled entire tomes (I was a junior scribe in my chantry once). Naturally, this has opened us up to the realization that there is, indeed, still much more out there than we know — and more to be discovered, and discoveries to build upon. We have come to understand that in this oneness and closeness to the creator the other worlds between the physical and spiritual must be brought down so that we experience both equally. None of this can be done without the free movement of information, but that information cannot be spread if the knowledge is not discovered and the mysteries are not researched. And, of course, we understand at this point that as wonderful as it is, what makes it wonderful is the balance we can maintain this way and the beauty of a pure cycle. And of course, the Hollow Ones' idea that they have to figure it out on their own — if they're going to — is in fact very much true. We all espouse it. They do have to do it on their own.

So why can't we be this way? Because we don't all buy into our own dogma. The Akashics become so enigmatic that it is all you can do just to have a simple conversation and forget an education. There is a difference between inspiring and sitting too high on the mountain. The Cult of Ecstasy ends up focusing on the foci rather than the magic. The Choristers have so many different dogmas that can't easily work together that they can't even begin to integrate the other traditions' ideals.

The Verbena end up focusing on the powers that their life magics bring. I was told once by a trusted Verbena that blood magic has a very strong call because it is so powerful, and that the more you use it, well, the more you *want* to use it. In discovering the mysteries of life, they end up abusing life for power.

The Euthanatos fall into a similar hole. They end up focusing upon the deeds of balancing rather than watching the balance. Also, work with Entropy does take its toll, and that toll can affect the mind. A Euthanatos fallen to entropy is a dangerous thing. Entropy is not to be trifled with. (This is one of the reasons I worry about Lee Ann, but Ryan and I have already discussed this at length).

The Sons of Ether end up destroying each other's confidences by adding to each other's inventions and, worse, disproving each other's theories. They can say all they want that such things are a path to Ascension, but their pride keeps them from moving forward. I can't say that I blame them. It must be a hard thing. The Etherite that can take it has my respect.

The Virtual Adepts are doing well, so long as someone doesn't figure out their tricks better. Unlike the Etherites, these kids don't think it's better to have someone else one-up their theories. They don't even pretend on that one. But their arrogance is dangerous, almost megalomaniacal in their extremes. I know that Ryan loves Lee Ann very much, but I also know it wrinkles his hide when she figures out one of his tricks on her own. They haven't grasped the fact that information isn't free if they're the ones controlling its dissemination.

The Order of Hermes is equally as bad (I apologize to Ryan and all my other Adept friends for even comparing them, and Ryan: I hope this doesn't keep you from getting laid). They espouse that seeking knowledge is key to Ascension, but they keep their own secrets locked away and protect them jealously. How can we learn it if you hide it away? How can I learn if you lie about it? That goes along with my problem with the Akashics. If I've come along enough to know that you have the answer, I would appreciate it if you'd answer the fucking question.

The Dreamspeakers even have problems. One, many of them feel that they are the ones to deal with the spirit world. Their varied ways also make cooperation difficult. They doom themselves with their own philosophies. Yes, magic is an individual thing, but for those of us who are to be guiding the rest of humanity, we do have to work together, you know.

The Hollow Ones' ideal that humanity should just do it on their own and sink or swim is fine — except that most just prefer to let humanity sink. Decadence is definitely its own set of sins.

None of the Traditions can get it right on their own, so naturally, they can't work together. None of the Traditions think that they are mutually inclusive with others, so they don't even try to mesh. A few cabals do figure it out, and they manage to make amazing headway for as long as they can exist. Unfortunately pressure from peers and superiors can rain havoc on a mixed cabal.

If the Traditions were to realize that each philosophy plays on the other, then they could start calling on the Tradition whose philosophy they need in that instance. By calling on strengths, weaknesses become less powerful. Perhaps in working together, we can learn to get rid of those weaknesses out of necessity. We can at least learn how *not* to have them be exploited.

I do wax hopeful some days. Lord knows, I do need those days.

Well, guys, I hope this suits your needs in this project of yours.

Always your friend and devoted pedagogue,

Sir Lawrence White

The Question of Global Ascension

Is global Ascension real? Is it possible? Important questions... ones to which the Traditions *assume* answers. But perhaps they're not all that they're cracked up to be.

Somewhere along the timeline of the Ascension War, the Traditions decided that not only was reality up for grabs against the Technocracy, but that some master stroke could actually turn the entire world on its head. Somehow, all of humanity could be convinced to embrace a magical world and everyone would Ascend to a better reality. To most Tradition leaders, this seemed a sort of paradise solution: Convince enough people to follow the Tradition's dictates, and the Consensus itself would rise to a new level of enlightenment. The fight for reality would be over, because everyone would be Awakened — *reality itself* would be Awakened.

So what does this mean? Global Ascension, as the Traditions once viewed it, would mean the Masses coming to terms with the magical world that every Tradition mage experiences. What's real for mages would be real for the Masses. In short, it would be a process of reality becoming mutable again, or at least settling into a new, Tradition-friendly form. You wouldn't have to spit, fight and struggle for Ascension, because the fact that everyone and everything around you was Awakened would make the rise to Ascension that much easier: A self-perpetuating process.

In the modern age, most Tradition mages don't agree with the view of global Ascension. The idea seems to have too many problems — how to overcome Technocratic inertia, how to convince the Masses of the wonder of magic, how to even agree on a mindset for a unified global Ascension. Whose magic would the Masses have to accept? They certainly bought into Technocratic dogma, but the world hasn't Ascended and become a wonderful place... or has it? The widespread use of technology, the "magic of science" might well be a step on the road to a sort of global Ascension — just not the one that the Traditions envisioned.

How *did* the Traditions strive for global Ascension, anyway? One way was the whole Ascension War — the idea that, by destroying Technocratic agents and places of power, they'd deny vital resources that the Technocracy could use to convince the Masses of their correctness. Recruitment was the other big angle: Bring in newly-Awakened

mages and teach them the Tradition mindset in hopes of strengthening the Consensus. Young mages often involved themselves in local projects in order to slowly work their magic into the community, in a grass-roots attempt at bringing people to the Tradition viewpoint. Each convert, who came to see the Traditions as a good idea, became another tiny piece of support for a Tradition consensus and thus for a global Tradition Ascension. However, Tradition actions didn't always support the goal of global Ascension, either. Old mages who fled to the Horizon did little to contribute — while some trained apprentices or worked mighty magics, the fight for a global Ascension had to take place on the globe itself. And the constant infighting of the Traditions, with each group squabbling for its own Tenth Sphere or political agenda, drew away many resources that could've otherwise been used for this vision.

Today, global Ascension isn't nearly the golden apple that it once was. While some Traditionalists wistfully remember the days of hope for a global Ascension, most find themselves bogged down in the real world. Since many Masters are away pursuing their own interests, the fight for global Ascension falls to disciples — young mages whose limited but still potent powers must perforce be turned to their own survival, advancement and personal goals. A scant few here and there might still push this goal, but it's dead in the water... the Traditions must *survive* before they can strive for something better.

So what does this mean for your chronicle? Any number of things. Remember, too, that despite the assumptions we'll make below, any range of these things could be true for your chronicle, and even if some of them aren't, your *characters* might believe them to be true. The basic assumption, and a few potential tweaks, follows.

• **Global Ascension may be possible for the Traditions, but not today.** The Traditions don't have a unified idea of what global Ascension would be like if they all worked together. Each Tradition has its take on an Ascended world, but they rarely mesh. The Traditions haven't made a compromise vision of Ascension, and until they do, it will remain out of their reach. Not to mention all the work at overcoming Technocratic inertia!

If you change this assumption, you may have a couple of different results. Perhaps in your game, global Ascension is simply impossible. This may not prevent mages from striving for it, but it will certainly discourage your *players* from doing anything to promote it. It means that many old Masters may have fought and died for nothing, perhaps wasting resources. Maybe the Council even knows that global Ascension is impossible, but hides this fact because they feel that it would hurt morale and fragment the Traditions even more. Or perhaps mages don't fight for global Ascension at all; maybe they never did. In this case, the Traditions formed out of a survival imperative — to keep the Order of Reason from stamping them out — but never evolved beyond that; instead, they are an umbrella for mages to hide and learn under, not a mechanism for bringing greater awareness to the world at large.

Or, perhaps global Ascension is very possible — maybe even tomorrow. Perhaps a tiny shift is all that's needed. Maybe the world rests on a fulcrum of belief and the mages of today have a chance that has never quite existed; globalization of communication could mean that the idea of global Ascension — once triggered in some of the Masses — might spread like wildfire, whereas in the pre-industrial world the idea may have died out before ever leaving its place of origin. The question then becomes, why hasn't it happened already? Maybe it's waiting for a specific preordained destiny or time. Perhaps the arrival of a specific Juncture (a time that releases Quintessence) will herald enough free magical energy for global Ascension. Maybe a specially destined person must lead the charge. Maybe the Traditions themselves have kept it from happening... secretly afraid of losing what little power they have over humanity, or of losing their magical skills to a world where everyone can do magic.

Global Ascension in your chronicle can be a strong focus of hope, but it is typically not something that should be easy — that route risks devaluing its achievement. However, don't feel constrained into denying it. You could run a chronicle that ends with the characters bringing about global Ascension (or failing to stop it). You might even run a story that takes place afterward, with the Traditions trying to cope with a world full of people who have become newly Awakened and enlightened!

Positions

The Roots of Society (A treatise from an Acolyte) Politics and the Magus

The politics of mages is an unusual thing to me. In some places, namely Chantries, it is very thick. In others, it is very minimal. Like any society, you either stagnate where you are, you rise through the ranks, or you branch out on your own.

I, admittedly, don't know much about the inner workings of your politics, but I do know that things vary from Chantry to Chantry. I have collected some information from other mages, either myself or with Tutor White's help.

Charting Politics

	Cabal	Chantry	Tradition/Council
Description	~This is the basic societal structure and the heart of Mage society as a whole. ~Size varies from 3 members to well into the teens. ~Contains the simplest of political interactions. More advanced forms, such as espionage and backstabbing, are rare.	~Consists of either members of the same Tradition and/or two or more Cabals. ~More advanced political interactions presented. ~Rivalries between Cabals more apparent. Espionage and political/literal backstabbing witnessed.	~Highest societal interaction. ~Generally centers around the Council of Nine. ~Politics can be deadly. ~Caution is advised.
Leadership	~Democracy ~Monitarian ~Often, leadership by single strong personality (cabal may fragment after leader's death or leaving). ~Sometimes led by personal power. ~May have a "hidden" or "behind the scenes" leader based on influence instead of personal power.	Democracy ~voting rule all members -or- ~voting by "Ranking" members (teachers) Pedagogical Rule ~Ruling by single Magus. ~Elected or Won ~Real power or Paper Tiger Deacon Council ~Governed by council ~May have chairman ~Elect of Cabals or members of strongest Cabal Triumvirate ~Rule by three people ~May be elected ~May have council ~Advisors or voting ~A single Cabal or elect of Cabals	~Council of Nine — Chosen from among the Nine Traditions. They oversee mage society in general. ~Depending on current make up of council, will either wield real power or be paper tigers.

Charting Politics

	Cabal	Chantry	Tradition/Council
Titles & Positions	~May have a "denmother" who watches over newly Awakened and helps them get adjusted. ~Larger Cabals may also have a separate person to lead rituals and studies. Sometimes called Priests, Prelates, Ritemasters or Elocutors. ~Runners — Mortals who run errands for the Cabal. ~Also: Pigeons Angels ~Custos — Old term for allies and confederates of the cabal, often mortals who are "in the know" and who provide direct support. ~Also: Consors Allies Confederates ~Many cabals have specialized titles for their own positions.	~Deacon — Title for the founder of a Chantry. ~Also: Founder ~Chancellor — member of council (assuming a council in the Chantry). ~Counselor — Sees to psychological needs of the Chantry. ~Priest (see Cabal listing) — Sees to the Spiritual needs of a chantry. May also lead large rituals and have approval-rights over smaller rituals. ~Tutor — name for teachers within the Chantry. ~Also: Mentor Pedagogue ~Justices — Oversee discipline hearings in the Chantry. ~Exactor — Execute Justices' decisions. ~Fellow — General member of the Chantry who is below rank of Adept. ~Also: Student ~Journeyman — Member of the Chantry who is generally a non-resident. ~herald – Messengers for the Chantry ~Sentinel — Guardian of the Chantry who may or may not be a member ~Librarian — Lorekeeper for Chantry. May or may not be mage ~Marat — Messengers and mortal go-betweens ~Also: Pigeons Runners ~General servants	~Primus — members of the Council of Nine. ~Herald — Messengers of the council. ~Generally treated as voice of the council. ~Usually have enforcement powers even when council does not. ~Founder — founder of political faction within a Tradition. ~Justices — Chosen by the Council to judge crimes. Generally one from each Tradition. ~Executioner — executes decisions of the Justices (not always death, never Gilgul).

Charting Politics

	Cabal	Chantry	Tradition/Council
Common Political Interactions	~Mostly centers around cooperation. ~Pecking order defined simply, sometimes with good-natured challenges. ~More serious problems tend to result in members leaving Cabal.	~Rivalries between Cabals. ~Political maneuvering for rank and positions. ~Dueling not unheard of. ~May be to the death in more serious matters. ~Where Cabal members are in Leadership, manipulation of other Cabal members to control them is not uncommon.	~Politicking within Tradition to gain favor of Council or be chosen for Council. ~Bribery of Heralds and Justices. ~Assassinations are often related to politics at this level.

Political Survival

Unless you're a hermit, politics will be vital to your survival as a mage. Once you become a member of a Chantry or involved with your Tradition, you will be exposed to it. You can either be unwittingly manipulated, or learn to swim your way around the intrigue (or even learn to work intrigues).

To survive politics, you must first be able to identify social structures, positions and interactions. The above table is to help you itemize. It is by no means comprehensive, purposely. It is advised that you copy this and add your own findings to this.

Not included in the above table are the ranks of a magus. These are determined by your magical advancement. It should be noted that until the Reckoning it was very unusual for anyone less than a Master to hold most positions with any power or influence. An Adept would sometimes be in the position of teaching and mentoring, but in most instances that is all. The Council of Nine was once only made up of Archmages; however, that has changed over time, especially in these later days. Founders of Chantries do not generally start as Archmages, though quite a few go on to attain the rank —those with the will to found a Chantry often have the discipline and motivation to excel in magical studies as well.

When you first Awaken, you are brought into mage society as an Apprentice. I have seen Apprentices really overestimate what was in store for them. They think that their time is going to be spent experimenting with spells in old tomes or playing in magical arenas to learn their skills. That's not always the case, though. Apprentices are run through the very basics, and generally play assistant to other mages. This can be boring, depending on the mage. You might get to actually do some magic, but more than likely, you're doing grunt work while you learn the basics. Once you learn the basics, though, you become an Initiate. This is the rank most people associate with the beginning mage. You have the basics. You're working on applying those basics, which means you do assist more in magical workings and you do get to practice in the practice rooms (aforementioned arenas). You also seek out, or are sought out by, a teacher. This is an important time, because you have to prove yourself to your potential teachers and prove you have a place in your Tradition.

Once you secure teaching and acceptance into your tradition, you generally attain the rank of Disciple. I've heard stories of mages who stayed Disciples for years. I've seen others speed through it. I suppose it depends on the mage. I compare this time to the years between ages 7 and 15. You've passed the important formative years. Now you are in the years where that formation takes shape. This is the time that your magic and your path really begin to shape themselves out.

A Disciple who has proven himself proficient in his magics attains the rank of Adept. Adepts who are members of a Chantry will either find other duties within the Chantry where their intermediate magics are needed, or they will make their way in the world, using the lessons they've learned in the Chantry. Some seek to unite unaffiliated Cabals either within their Chantry or, if that is not workable, into new Chantries. These Adepts are what are commonly called Journeyman. Some Journeymen may also be chosen as Heralds for the Council of Nine, though only if they prove themselves particularly effective or have otherwise gained influence and positive notice of the Council.

I like to think of an Adept as a young person between ages 15 and 25. This is the time when you prove your ability to handle responsibility. Your initial

learning stages are coming to an end, and you are beginning to discover the avenues through which you will continue to learn in life, or determining that the world has nothing else to teach you. This is the time at which you get noticed for good or ill, and it will shape how you interact with the world for the rest of your life.

A mage who has further advanced himself will attain the rank of Master. These mages are often teachers and may hold positions of leadership and power within a Chantry. These mages may also hold power at the Tradition level. Most Heralds (of the Council) are of the rank of Master. Justices and Executioners will also often be of this rank.

Welcome to adulthood and middle-age. Masters, though, like their middle-aged counterparts, are the body and soul of mage society. They are teachers and leaders, and they shape what is to come. You can wrinkle your nose, but I guarantee you that a Master has impacted your life, for good or ill.

Archmage is the highest attainable rank (it is debated if Oracles are Ascended Archmages or not). These mages are now extremely rare. Even the Council of Nine before the Reckoning was not all Archmages in these later days. These mages are the exalted elders and are often granted a great deal of respect based simply on their rank. It is the rare Archmage who is unheard of. It seems that every mage knows at least one story of any Archmage.

Rank determines how much power you wield, not just magically, but politically as well. Political influence can gain a lot for you — allies, supplies, knowledge, even safety. Learning to use political influence can even save your life. Learning to deal fairly with allies and diplomatically with enemies can be the difference between your success or your failure.

I know I've not been particularly informative about just *how* to use this information. You see, there is one very important lesson that, as a mage, you will have to learn. I will say that many of the so-called teachers have learned this lesson very well. It is the key to keeping the power you have. It is also the key to our success so far toward Ascension.

Never, ever teach anything that will give someone an advantage over you.

That is one person's views on politics. I'm impressed with your ability to get as much information as you did, Tanya. What follows comes from a good friend of mine named Ryan. I hope that you find it enlightening.

SLW

Political Path

Okay, let me lay things out to you this way.

Presume for a moment that my name is Al. Just follow me here, L. My name is Al. I'm this little newly-Awakened mage. Larry and his Cabal find me. Lee Ann takes me under her wing and shows me the ropes. Because I'm newly initiated into magic (i.e. newly Awakened), I'm called an **Apprentice**. We won't go into the vulgars on this one.

After a while, Lee Ann and Larry decide I'm ready to meet my Tradition. I've got an idea what day it is. Maybe they find me a Chantry to join even.

Through her mortal contacts, Lee Ann tracks down the **Marat** (non-magical go-betweens and messengers) of a Chantry. Smart mages are paranoid, so this might not be very easy at all. Once she finds the Chantry, the **Sentinels**, who guard the Chantry, are probably the first ones to encounter us. We will not always encounter them, at least not realizing it. Some of them are extremely subtle. If, for instance, I am being taken to a Cult of Ecstasy Chantry or a Hollow One Chantry, the **Sentinel** that we encounter we might simply perceive as a normal club-goer (I've not been to an Ecstatic Chantry yet with Lee Ann that wasn't in some kind of club or brothel or similar).

Once within the Chantry itself, a **Tutor** or a **Fellow** designated to greet newbies will meet us. Generally, it will be an **Acolyte** that we meet first, though, who will determine the purpose of our visit.

The Chantry's elders test me, and decide that I am ready to learn. I get accepted into the Chantry and become an **Initiate**. That is my Rank, and demonstrates my magical proficiency. As an **Initiate**, I get to secure learning and a place in the Chantry. I got in, but I still have to prove I have a place. When I do prove myself, I become

a **Disciple**. My title is that of **Fellow**, technically, but because I'm a new **Disciple**, I get called a **Student**. This is because many of the established **Fellows** do not want to be equated with the "children." It is completely a matter of status. The established **Fellows** are not the only ones with the attitude problem. **Disciples** get really t'd off when an **Initiate** gets called a **Student**.

Once I'm in the Chantry, my learning and duties begin. As a **Disciple**, I have to learn and improve my magics. **Tutors** teach and guide me and the other **Disciples**. Sometimes learning can be quite the experience as the Chantry's **Counselor** and the Chantry's **Priest** will sometimes be in disagreement about what lessons are important. Sometimes the lessons may change in style if the Chantry's leadership changes.

As a **Student** and a **Fellow**, I will be given duties to perform. Don't get hopeful. These are rarely glamorous, are often grueling, and rarely have any real responsibility. The key to them, generally, is to keep **Students** from becoming idle and causing mischief. As a side note, it is usually not successful. One of the first things you learn is how to pawn your chores off on newer **Students**, **Initiates**, and even **Apprentices**.

Now, I'm new. Cabals within the Chantry are watching me. If I'm useful, I will get invited to join one. If I'm unique, I might have a couple vying for my membership. This can range from gifts to favors, although a few will switch to darker tactics like intimidation or undermining each other. If I'm a threat or useless, they may harass me. If I'm lucky, though, they'll just ignore me. If things get difficult, or I simply don't want to join any established Cabal, I may team up with other newbies and start my own.

I've studied. I've worked. I've improved. Now, I have to prove myself. Once I do, I become an **Adept**. At this point, I may get duties within the Chantry or without that have real responsibilities. I may be a **herald** for the Chantry. I might even run **Sentinel** watches. Depending, I may even begin teaching new **Students**. I won't likely be called a **Tutor**, though. That is a title usually reserved for a **Teacher** who has either a lot of tenure, or has achieved the rank of **Master**. That, by the way, is an important note. You see, once upon a time, a **Master** would have been insulted to have the same title as an **Adept**. Again, it is all politics.

Here's another important note. **Disciples** will sometimes be given the same duties as **Adepts**. When they do, though, they rarely gain the title associated with it. Also, they rarely have the same responsibility. They generally answer to another mage, who in turn answers to the Chantry's leadership. Think of it this way. I'm teaching a class at a college. I can have an intern from the college, who is not one of my students. I can also choose a student to assist me. The intern is going to be answerable to me, but he's probably going to also be directly answerable to the college too. The student, though, is answerable directly to me, and if he does something, I have to answer to the college. Chantries that do give **Disciples** titles are generally either new and small, or desperate.

Now, an **Adept** may stay in the Chantry, or he may do things outside the Chantry. Such non-resident **Fellows** are called **Journeymen**. They can be as vital to the Chantry, but there will often be tensions between them and the resident **Fellows**. One result is the fact that a **Journeyman** is *never* called a **Fellow**, even though he's still a member. If I become a **Journeyman**, I am not known as **Fellow Journeyman Al of Chantry X**, but as **Journeyman Al of Chantry X**.

When I've further advanced my magics, I become a **Master**. If I'm a **Fellow**, I will either be a leader or a **Tutor**. If the Chantry is large enough that there is no place for me, then I will either talk to the elders about branching off into a sister Chantry, becoming a **Founder** (this can be a good thing for Chantries to do, because you are usually guaranteed an ally Chantry). I might also decide to move my works outside the Chantry, but still be a member.

Note: *Any* **Journeyman** who is **Master** or above is *always* called a **Fellow Journeyman**. Ooh. Rank does have its privileges, doesn't it?

Once you're around the rank of **Adept**, you may become more deeply involved with your Tradition's politics. This may lead to interactions with the **Council of Nine** or its officers. Generally speaking, an **Adept** will not become an officer, though. Again, this is because of antique politics where **Masters** and above did not want to be leveled with **Adepts**. These days, though, an outstanding **Adept** can cause them to make exception, but don't count on it. What he is most likely to accomplish is the title of **Prodigy**, which is an assistant of a **Primus** or other officer. This is nothing to scoff at, though.

A mage deeply involved in council politics – generally called a **Niner** in vulgar terms – upon reaching **Master**, may vie for position and title. He can lobby his Tradition for a seat on the Council – assuming there is either a vacancy or the present mage is not an **Archmage**. He can also lobby the council to become a **Herald**, a **Justice** (there are multiple **Courts of Justice**, generally by Region), or an **Executioner**. I should also note here that an **Executioner** does not always kill. He simply executes the decisions of the Justices. That may include death, but he will not necessarily perform Gilgul. He may not have the skills, or the desire to. An **Executioner** who does perform the Gilgul is sometimes referred to as a **Soulrender**. Some do not attain such titles, though, and in fact not all mages seek them. These mages retain the title of **Statesman** and influence politics around the Council from the shadows.

Archmages are generally asked what position they would like to hold. Not all will become or seek to be **Primi**. Some find their callings as **Founders** of Chantries.

Speaking of **Founders**, faction **founders** – those who begin political factions within a Tradition – are very important at this level of interaction. Politically speaking, being one of these is not for the inept. Be careful that you can finish what you begin.

Now, a **Solitary** – that is a mage who is not a member of a Chantry (though he may still be part of a Cabal) rises through the ranks and titles a little differently. How quickly he rises depends on his ability and how much resistance he encounters.

Well, will this do ya, Larry?

Ciao,

Ryan

P.S. Hey, Larry, it's Lee Ann. I suggested to Ryan that he bold all the titles. I told him it would make things easier to follow. He does listen to me sometimes. He doesn't know I'm including this part. Listen, kiddies. Take Ryan's little spiel and photocopy it. Now, white-out all the parts that are bolded in and make more copies. You can play that game where people just name off nouns and you fill them in. It is hilarious.

Love,

Lee Ann

Lee Ann is a charming one. I did find one other response to my query about political interactions:

All right, how about this one. Politics bite. Politicians suck and talking about politics blows. Happy?

Politics and Your Tradition

Different Traditions treat politics and positions differently. To the Order of Hermes, it is extremely important. Remember, they shaped a lot of what you see. They would want the advantages and perks, and most of all — given their nature — they would want their ways preserved.

The Akashic Brotherhood is surprisingly apt, politically speaking. I was actually surprised the first time I saw one in action. I think that he had the Hermetic and Euthanatos quieted within the first five minutes. Of course, in listening to him, I do think that he frightened me a little more than either of the other two could dream of doing.

The Euthanatos have had long-standing rivalries with the Order of Hermes. To see them going in the political arenas is quite the treat.

Most Dreamspeakers and Cult of Ecstasy mages — let's face it — are never going to concern themselves much with the Council. For them, the Council is usually a place to go to if they need help or something really bad has happened but, for the most part, they will stay out of political maneuverings. Position and title simply are not as important to them.

I call the Celestial Chorus, Euthanatos and Order of Hermes the Big Three. Like their other two counterparts, the Chorus can be surpassingly apt. Don't let the dogma fool you. Have you ever seen the religious right go at it? Give these people something to campaign for, and they will take it, to the bitter end if necessary. You have to give it to them for their zeal. Like their counterparts, they tend to be structured so that position and title is more important to them. It decides who listens to you and who respects you.

Sons of Ether are more concerned with inventing toys rather than tactics. Same with the Virtual Adepts. They would rather sit in VR then wait on decisions from on high. At least that is what both will tell you. Admittedly, they don't structure themselves so that rigid titles are as important (for both, it is more what you can do than what people call you), but they're still new enough that the Council's decisions do matter to them. They just invent clever gadgets and hacking maneuvers that let them listen in better.

Typically, the Verbena like to be of the same mind as the Dreamspeakers where politics are concerned. Old wounds heal slowly, though, and they are apt to watch the Order of Hermes and Celestial Chorus very carefully, lest they and their Acolytes find themselves on the wrong side of an Inquisition or some other witch hunt again.

As I said, I won't pretend this is by any means comprehensive. I am only an Acolyte. Hmm, but don't think I don't know what happens around here. I see more than people think, and know more than I'll tell.

Politics and You

Or, "Where do I fit into this mess?"

The notes you've just read describe how politics typically *used* to work in the Traditions. As with all things, though, these structures mutate and pass away with time. The Traditions might have once demanded only Masters to fill some positions, or required years of experience before allowing one to found a new Chantry or faction. But there are few Masters in these days of dying magic and few

Tradition mages with decades of skill. Experience gives way to expedience.

For young, up-and-coming mages, savvy may be more important than magical torque. Desperate Traditionalists need jobs done and positions filled. If you can do the work, or if you can *convince* them that you can do the work, you can get the job. And that means all the perks that come with it. If you are willing to get your hands dirty as a Chantry's Executor, for instance, then you can expect that the Chantry members will teach you the magic you need to know to do your job well, and they'll give you the Wonders that go with the office. If you're a Chantry herald, you get immunity from other Chantries and the ability to speak and wield influence on behalf of your whole Chantry. Does it matter if you're just an Apprentice? If you can do the job, hell no!

Well, of course, there remain exceptions. Magical torque still carries a lot of weight. A Master will not bend knee to an Apprentice just because the Apprentice has finagled some title — and the Traditions will support this. If you're a Disciple and you work as an Executor, you can expect that you will *not* get the chance to execute some Master found guilty of some crime — he will be given the respect of an execution at the hands of his peers.

So, without further ado, here are some of the political assumptions of a Tradition game.

• **A Tradition mage must put up with some politics to advance; the amount increases with rank.** Typically, a Traditionalist can expect the personalities and egos to be stronger at the top, so the political resistance is concomitantly stiff. Since you usually need a tutor to improve in knowledge of the Spheres, you must give at least a little lip service to your tutor's ideology — it's like writing your college papers with a spin that's acceptable to your professor. In some Traditions, politics are fiercer than others: Order of Hermes mages must put up with constant political pressure to ally or side with various power blocs. This is a pretty straightforward assumption; most human groups must put up with special interests and cliquish blocs.

Or, you might decide that politics are the real hell of the Traditions. Every step of the way is political. You must fight for recognition, fight for your title, fight for your training; any magical thing you achieve, someone else tries to take away politically to use in their own schemes. Your Tass is taken to be used for a "better cause." Your Wonders go the same route. Your Library is co-opted for "a promising student." Your Mentor is on the outs or is too busy defending his theories to help. This is a very nasty, backstabbing game, and the other players' characters may be the only ones that a player can trust — if even them! Perhaps fractious personalities and agendas are the major thing keeping the Traditions from achieving their unified goals; they *can't* unify long enough to accomplish anything.

Perhaps instead you decide that politics just aren't an issue in the Traditions. Your mages are too enlightened to care about politicking. They have a united goal and they pursue it with gusto. Maybe the Tradition Council even uses magic to make sure that everyone works together! This flies in the face of common sense, so it's even more worth exploring — what could make such a state possible? Do the mages' Avatars recognize some common goal and push them toward it? Do mages reflect a better state of humanity overall, able to cooperate as long as their basic assumptions (Traditions vs. Technocracy) don't differ?

Or maybe you use a reversed scale of politicking. Competition is fierce at the Apprentice level, as Apprentices vie for mystic resources, training and the best positions. Each Apprentice wants to make a name for himself. They all struggle to gain the attention of the teachers and hope to gain a prestigious place among the Chantries. Since their magical powers are undeveloped, they seek temporal ends. However, as mages gain enlightenment in this game, they become divorced from such petty concerns. The air is pretty thin at the top — how many Masters are there, anyway? If only a dozen comparable mages exist, there's really very little fighting for the resources between them. The Adepts and Masters are mysterious figures, sequestered away, pursuing their own agendas without interacting much in the rest of mage society.

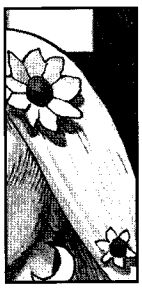
• **Politics can be deadly; the higher you go, the higher the stakes.** Typically, an Apprentice has little stake in Tradition politics, because his limited magical skills mean that he just isn't yet important to the Traditions as a whole. As a mage advances, though, his work becomes much more important. A decision from a Master can have wide-ranging consequences in both mundane and magical society. Concomitantly, a Master's decisions may be fought tooth and nail by other powerful luminaries who disagree. For instance, a Master might well decide that he wants to overtake a specific Node for research purposes, because it has a specific Resonance. Naturally, the Chantry already based there may disagree. If they can't reach an equitable solution, certamen or even assassination may come into play. Both the Akashic Brotherhood and the Euthanatos

have powerful "internal police" who silence those who discover buried secrets or get out of line.

You might decide to up the stakes if you want a really vicious game: Make politics deadly at *all* levels. Humans will kill for whimsical reasons to start with; when the stakes involve reality-shifting and people with voices in their heads, murder may be all too common. Apprentices might actually duel each other for the right to study with a given teacher. Avatars could hold grudges from past lives and push their hosts to murder, much like the Himalayan Wars. Acolytes and consors sneak about looking for Watergate-like scandals and perform wetwork for their mage patrons. You have a lot of work to do in such a game: How would the Traditions survive? Only the most ruthless and proficient would manage to get ahead. How would the Traditions manage to achieve any goals? Power would rest in the hands of those strong enough to weld together warring factions and those who could make others fear them enough to step in line.

Conversely, maybe you don't want politics involved at all. Perhaps your Traditions really are "good guys" who have figured out that unity is what they really need. This is also a hard game to run — why haven't the Traditions won the fight? What is there for players to do in terms of story conflict when dealing with other mages?

Council and Creed



An essay by Acolyte Tanya, student of Tutor White:

Once upon a time, there were no Traditions. It was an early day of magic, when the world was younger. Mages were a solitary sort. There was no mass Ascension, no War. They worked within their own villages, striving to improve life around them. That was their world. It was all that they knew.

I have read that the earliest gatherings of mages occurred in Egypt, under the direction of one of the early Pharaohs. These groupings would later dissolve, but they would be the forerunners to the traditions we have today...a pattern, if you will.

I will brush on history slightly, but I'm less concerned with you seeing the Traditions of yesterday. I'm more concerned with today and tomorrow.

The Dark Ages were not an easy time, for anyone, but magic was much more potent. Still, fear of the unknown would grip men and mage alike. There became very strict divisions between the ideas of magic and religion as espoused by a Church whose influence was increasing. Persecutions would ensue, and myths and traditions would be lost. Still, it would be in these dark times that the Traditions of today would be born and solidify.

The Renaissance opened the world to a much brighter time. Reason would prevail and men would cease to live in fear. It was a better time for men, but for magic, things were changing. The rules were altering. Our Traditions were faltering, and the Technocracy was rising to power. It seemed as if they would win the world.

The Traditions, under the guidance of the Order of Hermes, would band together into the Council of Nine. I won't pretend to understand numerology, but from what I've been told, nine is very potent. I think it has to do with being three collections of three, and three being a completion; therefore it is a complete completion. It could also have to do with the fact that those were probably the strongest organized groupings. Of course, it is like a friend of Tutor White's says, "In Magic, there are no coincidences."

The Council hasn't always been as it is at this time. Two Traditions that helped to found the Council, the Ahl-i-Batin and the Solificati, are gone from it now. The Ahl-i-Batin are testimony to the danger that all of us face if we do not band together. They left the Council to defend their homelands from the Technocracy and are now unknown to exist. The Solificati fell victim to scandal and left the Council after one of its members was sentenced to Gilgul. This was the first justice that the Council had to visit upon any mage.

The 20th century saw new life come into the Council. First the Sons of Ether and later the Virtual Adepts, both of whom left the Technocracy to join the Council. There was a new hope, that perhaps we could yet reap the world.

I am not sure what happened recently. I remember Tutor White waking in the middle of the night, though, screaming that his friends were dying. That they were just fading away, and that he couldn't stop it. It wasn't long after, a couple of months maybe, that contact was lost with the Archmages.

Again, we face dark times, but we are not without hope. I think that that is all you have ever really had, hope and your Will. In the end, I think that is all that it will come down to.

To guide the way to the future, the Council established the Protocols: Laws to govern the interaction of mages and the role of mages in both magical and mundane societies.

Respect Those of Greater Knowledge

Many take offense at this, claiming that the antiquated use it to mean elder, and ignore all others. I beg to differ. Yes, with age comes knowledge, but the greatest knowledge does sometimes come with youth. At our own Chantry, we work much with children to encourage their curiosity and their desire to learn.

The Reality: Most young mages have enough sense to follow this rule, just because those who have greater knowledge also often have greater powers. Some few loose cannons disobey this dictum, but they rarely last long; knowledge very much is power in magical society.

A Tutor's Debt Must Be Repaid

You don't get something for nothing. A single mage, or a Chantry, invests a lot of time in teaching you, and sometimes energy and resources. If they give you work to do to repay, do it, otherwise ask. It is polite.

It is also a way to keep your ass out of the fire. I would be *real* suspicious of any mage or Chantry that was going to take a lot of time and energy to teach me and not ask for anything in return.

The Reality: Many young apprentices learn all they can and then set out on their own. Not all mentor-student relations end peaceably. Some renegades have taken to challenging their tutors to certamen and claiming that, if they are victorious, they are obviously superior and owe no debt. Unscrupulous tutors keeping their students in bondage are a lesser problem, simply because other students are less likely to come to such a teacher and peer pressure from other mages makes it difficult to mistreat one's apprentices without suffering through some sort of investigation from the Traditions as a whole, and risking having the apprentice taken by another mage.

A Mage's Word is His Honor; Break Not a Sworn Vow

Hubris is a very real threat to mages. I've seen some fall to pride, and it is not pretty. I've also seen one common trait. They have a screwed up sense of Honor. The tenets of that honor vary, but one thing remains the same: they almost always do something to break a vow.

The Reality: Mages realize that vows have a very real weight of Fate behind them. Breaking a sworn vow can often mark a mage in ways that can be detected with Entropy magics. Just in very real terms, mages who often break their word don't garner much trust. Of course, there are grifters in the real world, and some mages aren't worth the paper their words are printed upon. Other mages may well be overly idealistic suckers, waiting for a promising ally who later betrays them. Still,

pulling the wool over the eyes of someone with magical means of detecting trustworthiness can be difficult, so only very, very crafty mages can break this rule regularly and get away with it. Typically, mages aren't punished for violation — other mages just won't work with or trust them, a form of unspoken Ostracism.

The Will of an Oracle Must Always be Obeyed

I know a lot of you don't believe in Oracles. Maybe they exist, maybe they don't. Maybe they used to but faded away with the Myths. Maybe they're locked away in the places mages can't get to anymore. Whatever the case — look — Oracles, they're supposed to be very powerful and very wise. *If* one exists, and it decides to speak to you, then shouldn't you heed it? Look, if you're right, this will never come into play. All right, so I'll pose it this way. When did you Awaken? Two, three years ago? Less? Did you believe in magic before that? I mean the kind that can alter the shape of reality itself? I think I made my point.

I've heard mages argue the validity of this Protocol. They claim that this Protocol is nothing more than a way for powerful mages to exact control. They claim that anything as powerful as an Oracle should be powerful enough to exact its own punishments if it is disobeyed. Why then should we worry?

Hmm, well, I would dare say because ignorance is no excuse?

The Reality: Since the Oracles almost never intervene in worldly affairs in this Age, how can a mage heed them? If an Oracle did show up, it's questionable whether or not anyone would recognize it. And, as noted previously, an Oracle is certainly more than capable of fulfilling its own will.

Ideally, an Oracle is a harbinger of Ascension. If an Oracle tells you to do something, it's probably for a good, enlightened reason, right? So "follow along and see what you get out of it" tends to be the typical attitude — at least, among those who've even *heard* of Oracles.

Betray Not Your Cabal or Chantry

Once upon a time, your Cabal and Chantry were the only ones you could count on. Everywhere you turned the tides of Reason were sweeping across the land, posing threats to your very existence. The Technocracy was stamping out the mystics, one by one. Anyone not of your Cabal or Chantry could betray you at any time. Even in the Dark Ages, when fear gripped and a Magic-phobic church was influencing the minds of men, you had to be careful. So, how much more potent is it today? War or no war, you don't betray those who will become like brothers to you.

The Reality: Depends on what constitutes "betrayal." Plenty of mages will just up and leave when they tire of a given group, or they will butt heads with interpersonal politics or exhaust the resources they wanted to exploit. On the other hand, actually selling out your friends to someone who'll kill them? Well... it happens, but it's not all that common. Generally, those who sell out a Cabal or Chantry have nowhere to go: The enemy won't take them in, but they also can't go back to their former friends. Typically, this sort of betrayal happens only in three sorts of instances: When someone's defected to another side; when someone holds a fatal grudge and just *has* to fill it; or when someone's trying to make a huge, terrible point in the fashion of Heylel Teomim.

Conspire Not with the Enemies of Ascension

All right, you've heard the enemy of my enemy is my friend? Well, just because the Technocracy is fighting a Marauder or a Nephandi is not a reason to help them. See, it is also true that the enemy of my friend is my enemy. Sure, you'll be working for a common goal. Yeah, I know that we're not actually at war anymore. Do you really think, though, that that is going to keep them from carting you off and brainwashing you the first chance that they get? Don't be stupid here. War or not, there are some set patterns to our dealings with the Technocracy. If you're stupid enough to work with a Marauder, or lost enough to work with a Nephandi, well...

The Reality: Technically, this applies to vampires and other agencies that harm humanity. Mages are a hungry lot when it comes to supernatural knowledge and power, though. Just witness the second *Massasa* war, where the Tytalus sold out their brothers for vampire power. In practice, mages make and break alliances of convenience with startling regularity. The Traditions allied with the Technocracy during World War II, after all. Since many low-ranking Technocrats seem amenable to limited allegiances, mages sometimes find enough common ground to work briefly with them, especially on causes that cut across sect lines like the Children's Crusade (see p. 143).

Protect the Sleepers, They are Ignorant of What They Do

What this means is simple. Don't hate the world because it hates you. Humanity just does and likes what reality tells it to do and like. Humanity knows no better. Isn't that what Ascension is all about? Getting them to wake up and decide for themselves, instead of

letting a consensus reality decide? Wait until they really are making their own decisions, then be miffed if they hate you. Hmm, am I saying that it will be okay to break this some day? No. What I'm saying is that one day, it won't matter.

The Reality: Awakening doesn't cause you to forget all of your grudges. Hell, quite a few mages go back to "settle up accounts" with people they knew before, using their magic as an edge. Petty, perhaps, but oh so satisfying. Also, while taking the high road may be noble, it's not always practical. Are you gonna protect some cop who's trying to shoot you because he's ignorant of your crusade? Hell no!

Be Subtle in Your Arts, Lest Sleepers Know You for What You Are

Read the last one again. Read this one again. Read the last one again. Read this one again. Okay, now I understand that *sometimes* the rest of us have to know what you are. I'm okay with this, so long as it is not frivolous. See, what's bad is when we find out because you did something so outlandish that we just *knew* it was magic. I've heard mages say that as long as this is followed, humanity will not Awaken. You don't have to look into the sun to see its light, nimrod. Being all flashy and "here Paradox and enemies, here I am, with innocents to boot" is no way to bring the Ascension.

The Reality: Well, most mages are too Paradox-shy to actually violate this sucker. The problem stems from those stupid few who pick *the wrong* ways to go about doing this. You know the types. Showing off spells on cable access, or on the subway, or in a restaurant, or in a room full of vampires. Morons. They make life difficult for everyone. One unsubtle mage draws down Technocracy goons, Paradox spirits and even spiteful Sleeper attention. Oh yeah, let's be honest: It's not just the Sleepers we're worried about. Maybe five hundred years ago the possibility of a witch hunt meant concealing arts from the Sleepers. Today, it's a matter of keeping it under wraps so that some mean-ass cybernetic sumbitch doesn't pop up and cap your ass with a Primium bullet.

The other oddball part of this ruling is that it seems to run counter to the Council's stated goal of bringing magic to all people. If everyone's supposed to have equal access to magic, why hide it away? Why make people even *less* likely to believe? The answer again comes down to politics. The Traditions do want a magical world, but that means taking careful steps toward that world. A deranged mage who creates massive magical disturbances will draw down the quick and deadly wrath of the Technocracy, who'll wipe out his achievements with media spin doctoring while they stick him in Room 101. A unified group of subtle mages who teach a few people secrets here and there have a better chance to avoid notice and to make small, incremental changes — grassroots magical conversion, if you will.

The Council's Parts

They may seem antiquated, but they are important.

The Council of Nine unifies the Traditions. It is an avenue through which you can come together and either set aside, or work out, your differences. We've seen more and more how division hinders. Don't cast this aside just because you think it is antiquated, or power-hungry, or whatever. The Council isn't all politics, no matter what anyone tells you. It can't be and survive. What politician has ever gotten anything done? Tell me, don't you think, after seeing the most powerful mages in the worlds perish or vanish, that they understand that by now?

Heralds are important to the Council's ability to enforce the Protocols. The average mage and Chantry will interact with Heralds far more often than they will with the Council itself. If the Chantry's mages is fortunate and smart (depending on what side they find themselves) they'll interact with Heralds far more than they will with a Tribunal, as well. If the Council is the Legislative branch of our society, the Heralds are the Executive, distributing the tenets and helping the Chantries come up with ways to make sure they are obeyed and enforced. (Oh, it's worth noting the difference between a Herald and a herald. The upper-case types are the Important Ones, who come straight from the Council to hand down pronouncements. The lower-case types are the diplomats who travel between Chantries to make arrangements and carry missives.)

The Tribunals are the Judicial branch, decidedly. The fairness of their decisions and the speed with which they expedite complaints help to determine in any generation how respected the Council and the Protocols are. With the losses we have suffered, the Tribunals are doing the best they can with matters, lest the entire Council of Nine be undermined and unity dissolve into factitious fighting.

Justice

"The Protocols are not for you to ignore," the Justice says, looking down from his seat on the judgement council. The man standing in the center of the room only looks back up at him blankly.

His name is Hank Morris, and he is a mage, one of the Order of Hermes. He is here because he's broken an oath, and he has to pay for it.

The woman seated at the Table of State is Lee Ann Milner. Beside her is Ryan Pembrooke. She's the one who has brought up accusation. She has sowed a breeze. She may yet reap a whirlwind. It is not unknown her hatred of the Order of Hermes, and Hank has attempted to use that in his defense. It helps neither side that the presiding Justice is the Justice for the Order of Hermes.

"My comrade is correct," the Euthanatos Justice speaks up, drawing attention to himself. "A mage's word is important, especially in this day."

"You were aware of Lee Ann's dislike of others of your Tradition," the Akashic Brotherhood Justice picks up. Lee Ann finds it hard to look at him without thinking of Dent. "You say that you reacted out of her prejudice, yet her prejudice did not prevent you from working with her."

"Her prejudices are not what is on trial here," the Celestial Chorus Justice says. "You gave your vow to her and her companion, then left them to the mercies of Technocratic agents —"

"I can't be responsible because she gained their ire!" Hank speaks up suddenly. The Order of Hermes Justice levels his gaze upon him and Hank has to look down.

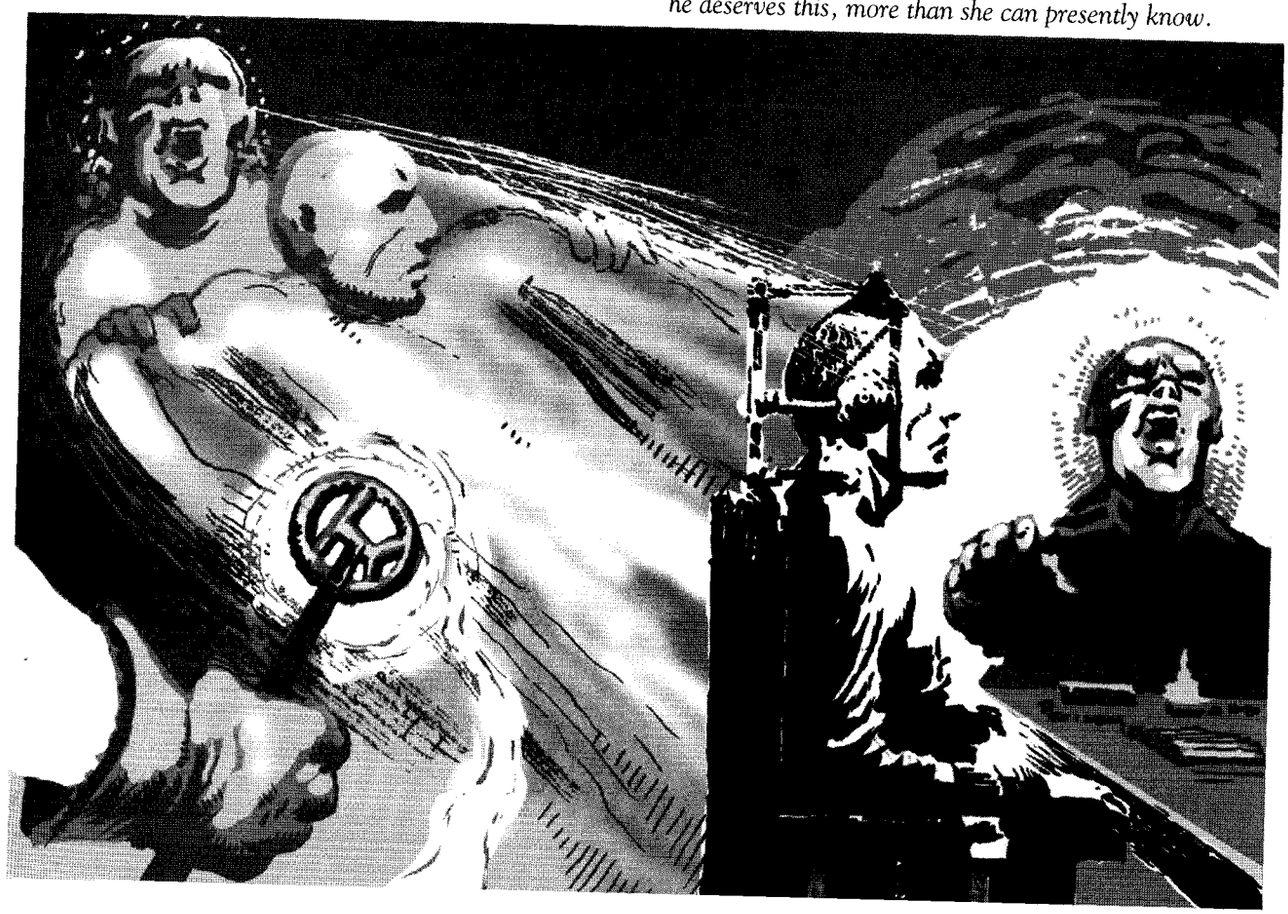
"You were also aware of their problems with the Technocracy," the Virtual Adept Justice says. "You have offered us only excuses — "

"—Not reasons," the Celestial Chorus Justice finishes. "A mage's vow is sacred. To break it, that is an act that carries much weight. You have not offered us any reason that your betrayal should go unpunished. As it is, you nearly cost the life of another mage. Do you understand the weight of your actions?"

Hank says nothing.

"It is the decision of this Justice Assembly that you be Branded an Oathbreaker."

Lee Ann winces and exchanges looks with Ryan. There are murmurs from those present, which the Hermetic Justice silences. She had wanted him to face justice for what he'd done, but she didn't expect this. Something stirs inside her, though, and she keeps silent. Somehow, she understands that he deserves this, more than she can presently know.



Justice Be Done

This little bit caused quite the controversy at several Chantries. I am reprinting it, with my own replies. I find that it is much more effective to answer these things directly than run from them and pretend they aren't there.

Justice is never a simple matter. Still, every society must enforce its laws. We are no exception. While the Protocols are usually open to interpretation, there are certain things that remain constant. You never associate with a clear enemy of Ascension. You never break a vow. You never endanger Sleepers — that includes revealing yourself to them.

So, what happens when you do wrong and it is time to face the consequences?

Well, that usually depends on the transgression. Minor sins carry minor punishments. Major sins carry major punishments. But do these ever go too far?

First, look at your common transgressor. Who is he? What has he done? What happened to him for it?

Look at yourself. When was the last time you broke a promise? When was the last time you made a new ally, a close ally, and you had to reveal what you were to him? When was the last time you had to make a grudging alliance with a Technocracy mage or depend on the significantly potent magics of a Marauder? Can you say, without a doubt, that you have never dealt with a Nephandi? I know for a fact that some mages have worked with hunters to destroy dangerous supernatural creatures. But haven't we been hunted before?

What about punishments issued? Censure, Servitude, Ostracism, Branding? Some mages have faced Gilgul for their dealings with the Nephandi. There is no crueler punishment. Gilgul not only kills the mage, but it completely destroys the Avatar. How can anyone do this and sleep at night? Compared to that, a simple death sentence is kind.

I have watched a lot of judgments, both within Chantries and as delivered by the Council's Tribunal. I have seen Censure given for simply failing to look down when a Founder entered the room. I have seen Branding when a Protocol was broken only once. I have seen death given when they had little more than circumstantial evidence. And, yes, I have witnessed first hand Gilgul delivered to an innocent. I can still see the pure Avatar being ripped away by an overzealous Soulrender.

These things happen, and who is punished for them? Who uncovers them? Who is the Council answerable to? Their own Traditions? Less powerful mages? Our society and our justice are both antiquated, and innocents suffer. Chantries are run like prisons. How can we Ascend if we lock ourselves into old ways that human society has proven faulty or obsolete?

The world has moved on.

So should we.

• • •

All right, to begin an analysis:

"Look at yourself..." *Few will deny that we've had to make our deals, and we cannot always detect the Nephandi before it is too late. However, we never enter into any alliances lightly. We should never do so unless it is the only thing we can do, and no harm is done. Sometimes, it is even necessary to reveal ourselves to some Sleepers to protect others.*

"Gilgul not only kills the mage..." *I will not deny the severity of Gilgul. There is a lot of propaganda regarding it, though. I cannot stress enough: Gilgul is rare. It is not delivered lightly. When we say it is reserved for only the most severe of crimes, we do mean it. You have to do or be something horrid for Gilgul to be performed.*

"I have watched a lot of judgments..." *Many of these I cannot speak for. Chantry politics vary greatly. Sometimes punishment is meted out more based upon affiliations than on crimes. As to punishments of the Tribunal, again, I cannot say that politics do not come into play. I also will not say that they are infallible. Abuses, though, are rare at best.*

"I have witnessed first hand Gilgul..." *I do know this particular situation. The unfortunate mage had a Nephandic Avatar. This does happen, and the Nephandi do not find them all the time. She had caused many problems and sought help. When it was discovered what she had, she understood the fate that awaited her. She spent a great deal of time Questing to her Avatar. When she returned, she asked that the Gilgul be performed, quickly. I also witnessed the state of her Avatar, which is not the state that it had been in when it was discovered what its true nature was. I cannot explain why it died pure. I think that perhaps she had convinced the Avatar that this was the best thing to do, and what should be done, that somehow she got through to the Avatar, and that the Avatar died willingly. I do not know.*

Some, like the Celestial Chorus, believe that the Avatars are soul-splinters, born from the Creator. To them, the idea that an Avatar can simply be evil, and not just corrupted, is heresy. Still, time and again we have seen barabbi that can be brought back to us in the next cycle, and

Nephandi who were lost to us before memory. I know no way to explain it otherwise.

"These things happen, and who is punished..." *This, I cannot answer to. I have not the authority to speak for the Council. I can only say that we are not, any of us, above any laws. We have always had mages fall, whether to corruption or to hubris. Some of them have been very powerful. You do not have to outrank a mage to fight him. We will always be accountable so long as the next generation holds us accountable. That is the way of the world.*

Has the world moved on? Then why do we still strive to Ascend?

A System of Peers and Equals

continuation of Acolyte Tanya's essay:

I won't even pretend that our ways of justice are perfect. Not even close. Whose is? But it is there. Why? Because you should be answerable for what you do, and you should be answerable to those who are like you.

You will never find Acolytes or humans on any Tribunal. It doesn't happen. Not in a Chantry, and not in the Council of Nine. When you face judgement, then it will be other mages. Some will be more powerful. Some will have higher standing, but they were just like you once. If you're powerful enough, maybe they are like you now. Equal or not, they are still your peers.

Punishment you receive goes from minor to severe, depending on the crime. There are guidelines, so you won't die for lying. Remember, these are your peers. They may very well face the same kind of judgement you do. They might even have faced it before. No one is perfect.

Censure is probably the most minor punishment, and it gets used a lot at Chantries. Censure limits your activities for a set period of time. Maybe you cannot travel certain places, or do certain types of Magic. Perhaps you cannot associate with certain people. I like to think of it as variations on house arrest.

Branding is a little more major. Branding is for semi-minor repeat offenders, unless what you did really messed things up. I mean, what if willfully breaking your vow got someone killed, or nearly. Do you really think Censure's going to cut it? But usually, it is for repeats, those who can't seem to learn their lesson from Censure.

Imprisonment is another one used. Jail-time, basically, though you aren't put in some cell here on Earth. Sometimes, you're not put in a cell at all. Imprisonment places you in a Horizon realm of the Tribunal or Council's creation. Here, like with Censure, you're limited in what you can do. It is quite possible that you cannot use your magics, at least not easily. You become

subject to someone else's Paradigm. I understand that this is used to help temper more flamboyant mages.

Servitude is still used, even these days. Like Censure, it will last for a specified period of time and usually to the benefit of the victim or accuser.

Ostracism is pretty severe. It can last for a specific time, or forever. Once you're Ostracized, for the time it lasts, no other mage will associate with you. If they do, they may get Ostracized as well. If the Chantry Ostracizes you, it is probably either from that Chantry or your Tradition. If a Tribunal Ostracizes you, it is either from your Tradition or all Mages.

Some punishments don't affect you directly, but they still affect you. Branding is one, as it is your spiritual aspects that are generally branded. I see few physical brandings, though they do exist.

Mages with Familiars might find those Familiars taken away. It can be done. If you've really messed up, your Familiar may happily leave. In some cases, though, where your Familiar was part of the problem, it will face your punishment with you. If the problem was particularly serious, it may even be killed. I've seen some cases of a Mage's punishment being to kill his own familiar, because it was dangerous and he could not or would not control it.

You might be called to give up Talismans and fetishes or other magical devices that you have, as reparation for what you've done. As with the familiar, if the problem was the item, perhaps a willful talisman with a nasty side effect to its use, then it will have to be destroyed. Depending, you might have to do it yourself.

Death is never called for lightly. You won't always die for killing or getting another killed. Death will be called for if it is determined that you will not learn in this life, though. I understand that more and more the Tribunals are reluctant to call for death. Few Chantries call for death these days in their own Tribunals. If a crime warrants that — or worse — they usually call for a Tribunal Council.

Gilgul is the most severe of all punishments. It is reserved for the Mage who has committed only the most heinous of acts, who will not learn in any life. Gilgul permanently kills the mage, barring him from returning to the cycle, by destroying his Avatar.

Generally, a Chantry will call its own Tribunal to deal with matters within the Chantry. A large Chantry may have its own Tribunals already established. A Mage who has been wronged or has seen a crime can go to the Council to have a Tribunal called. He might not be listened to, depending on the severity or if he has any status to speak of. He might be better to call for a Chantry's Tribunal, but he can only do that if the accused mage belongs to the Chantry. It was decided long ago that a mage's peers would try a him. If a Chantry wishes to bring you up, and you're not a member

of that Chantry, then they either have to go to your Chantry — assuming you have one — or to the Council.

The Council does have permanent Tribunals established in regions. If you have a matter to be heard, either they hear it, or another Tribunal is called. If the matter is within a single Tradition, then a Lesser Tribunal (made up of Mages of that Tradition) will be called. There were once Nine regional Tribunals, but recently that number has been cut back to five. They are, in some ways, pale reflections of what they once were.

Different Traditions look at the punishments in different ways. For the Dreamspeakers and the Cult of Ecstasy, anything that limits personal freedom is harsh. I have seen Ecstatics suffer horribly under sentences of Censure. Verbena, who also value personal freedom, suffer under such sentences. Strangely enough, however, they will be the first to suggest these sentences for their own if the transgression warrants it.

The one punishment that has always been a point of contention is Gilgul. The Celestial Chorus — who believe that the Avatars are shards of one soul, born from the Creator — find it hard to accept that someone can simply be evil, all the way down to the Avatar. As much as they espouse the black and white ideas of good and evil, God and the Devil, one would think, but no. Euthanatos are sometimes divided. Many feel that destroying the Avatar breaks the cycle. Others feel that allowing them to continue through the cycle perpetuates the imbalance.

Either way, I don't think there is a way to win. I don't think it is something we were meant to know. It is a thing that sometimes has to happen, and we have to accept that, just like we do every other difficult decision that we make in life.

The Chantries and Tribunals are not the only places to take out matters. Some are accepted by mage society and upheld by the Council of Nine and its agents. Others are less desirable and can bring punishments of their own.

Certamen is the accepted method of dueling and is still practiced today. Interference is not dealt with kindly. These duels are rarely to the death, so interference is usually a waste of time. The spoils are determined ahead of time. Generally an apology or other reparation is desired. Sometimes temporary servitude is the call, while in others temporary or even permanent exile is demanded. While participation in the Certamen is voluntary (one or the other can attempt to hold out for a Tribunal or come to an agreement with a Chantry), once Certamen is completed, the Council, Tribunals and Heralds will enforce the decisions reached.

Some mages will simply demand other sorts of duels. Not all mages prefer Certamen because it is draining, and depending on how on-the-edge you live, it could put you at risk. They will demand other sorts of duels instead, from riddle contest to death duels if they feel the offense is serious enough. Sometimes the Council upholds these duels, but Certamen is still preferred.

Simple vengeance is not unknown for our kind, and is often the root to other problems and many cases that do reach Tribunal. Sometimes, though, a mage honestly feels that he will not be heard fairly at the Tribunal, and he will wish to take matters into his own hands.

The Euthanatos are rumored to have some fairly nasty ways of dealing with offenders, in the form of Entropy-curses. These curses can range from minor annoyances to the Good Death. More often than not, the idea that they would use such things on fellow mages is propaganda, but it is not unknown. So too can the Verbena be dangerous when they seek justice, as they are often masters of Life magics.

Justice exacted personally can vary with origin too. I have seen mages demand the hand of an offender who stole. The Cult of Ecstacy has been known to entice an accused rapist with senses heightened to the point of pain. Say what you will about them, but they do take care of their own.

Still, the Council and Chantries accept none of these. Mages caught delivering their own justice will be brought to Tribunal, whether in the Chantry or the Council's Tribunal. You are treated as if you visited your justice onto someone innocent, and it becomes difficult at that point to get your own case heard.

No one appreciates a vigilante.

Justice is an important matter, as important as honor. Mages can, in a sense, create their own morality, as they create their own realities. Such thinking, though, can lead you straight into Quiet, as your own reality takes you over. As much as mage society needs justice, so does the individual mage. As you develop ultimate power, you need to be accountable...to someone.

Executing Justice (By Shooting Her in the Back of the Head)

Justice among the Traditions, frankly, ain't always fair and ain't always pretty. In fact, it can be downright vicious. We, the readers, know that Heylel Teomim had the best of intentions when he betrayed the First Cabal to the Order of Reason. He still went screaming into Gilgul. Justice may well be the end of some political squabble — set someone up for violation of Protocol, get a Justice who's sympathetic to your cause (or who owes you a couple favors), and BAM! Instant end to your enemy.

Mages aren't infallible, and neither is their justice system. To this end, here we have (you guessed it) the list of assumptions about the magely justice system that you'll see regarding the Traditions.

• **Justice isn't always fair or impartial, but it is not always corrupt.** Generally, judicial decisions have some amount of political weight. Justices were once apprentices, too, and they owe their share of favors and have their own skeletons and embarrassments to cover up. Swaying votes with influence isn't uncommon. However, Justices also tend to be passionate about their position — they wouldn't be appointed, otherwise. So, they will sometimes act against their own personal interests in order to see a moral point home. Most mages have a fair assumption of innocence, but for particularly heinous crimes, the subject may have a lot of work to do to get out from under the system.

You might decide to run a game where Tradition justice is *wholly* political. In such a system, the courts are a system for mages to use to execute their enemies. Players find their characters dragged before Tradition Justices and made to answer for frame-ups and trivial offenses, or they can use the courts to their own advantage if they get justices in their pockets. Mages are assumed guilty when they come before the Justices.

Alternatively, you might decide that Tradition justice is better than normal human systems. Perhaps, with the aid of Mind magic, justices are better at arriving at impartial decisions. Magical therapy and rehabilitation makes punishment unnecessary. Justices are chosen specifically to be outside the political arena, and while they have power of a sort, it is never used to bad ends, because they are just as subject to the authority of the other Justices. The Justices consider the ends of their deliberation and often hand down results that are designed to educate the offender and give succor to the victim, instead of just meting out punishments.

• **Justice functions with the aid of some magical techniques, but magical evidence can be falsified so it is not wholly reliable.** The Traditions rely on testimony, evidence and magic to garner a result. Testimony is the most valid form of address: Mages make their opinions and deductions known, explain their stance and observations, and speak to the motives of crimes or ferret out the truth through reason. Rank and station plays a big part in this. A Master's testimony has far more weight than an Apprentice's — even in a field where the Apprentice is an expert — because the Master is assumed to have a better grasp of mage society and justice in general. Magical scrying is next; Time senses and various forms of telepathy and Resonance-scanning can gather much information. However, even magical sources can be concealed. Because of the possibility of an expert lying or failing in magical divinations, often only the Justice's own magical scrying — or those works that he specifically allows — can be admitted. Lastly, evidence is taken into account, but since physical evidence can be mundanely tampered with or magically transformed, it is largely considered circumstantial.

Or perhaps magic is used extensively in judicial affairs. If mages have it, why not use it? No trial is performed without extensive Time scrying and Mind reading. Every testimony is cross-checked against a battery of examinations. Mages travel to the High Umbra to find thought-examinations of the case and emanations of Truth. Whatever the magic results in is considered correct — so either don't get caught, or else be very careful to use magic in covering your tracks!

On the opposite end, maybe the Traditions don't use magic at all in their pursuit of justice in your game. Too much subjectivity, too much chance at tampering when prosecuting a master, too much chance of drawing Technocratic attention — the possibilities are manifold. Instead, prosecution relies on testimony and physical evidence. The mages consider deliberation and thought experimentation the most valid way to arrive at a conclusion. Senses can be misled; what is seen in a divination may not be as close to the truth as what one can deduce.

• **Certamen is an acceptable method of resolution, but not to the death.** Traditionally, certamen is an acceptable means of resolving differences. However, it's not acceptable to kill another mage with it — although the loser's outcome might be execution.

However, you might run a game where the Traditions no longer practice certamen. Maybe it's just fallen out of favor. Maybe young Traditionalists don't *know* how to practice it. For whatever reason, justice must be settled differently.

Or, perhaps certamen is all the rage. Someone took your apprentice? Certamen. Killed your familiar? Certamen. Stepped on your hat? Certamen. Nothing really stops mages from using certamen for most challenges, after all. Make it non-lethal, and it's the perfect catch-all resolution technique. Some mages will specialize in certamen so as to be victorious in any dispute — or even pick fights and then use certamen to get what they want! You may even have mages who work as advocates-cum-gunslingers, offering their certamen skills to the highest bidder. If certamen challenges can go to the death, then it becomes a very serious matter — certamen is sure to draw the attention of all surrounding mages.

Killing Your Own Kind

Perhaps one of the most frightening realizations to many Tradition neophytes is the discovery that the Traditions take their work seriously enough to flat-out kill those who get in the way. It's like the worst conspiracies you hear about: The government cell that quietly executes people who stumble too close to the Truth, the fraternal society that manipulates judicial processes to put people away, the mobsters who execute the common people who cross them. The Traditions have handed down the sentence of death before, not only on their enemies but also on their members, and they have carried it out.

Without yet exploring the question of whether the Traditions should do so at all, examine the consequences of this decision in practical terms. Membership in a Tradition is serious business. If you spill the wrong secrets or just screw up too badly, you could very well wind up losing your life.

Let's put that in perspective a moment. Consider your job or your schoolwork. If you botch up your classes, you might be expelled. You'd have to get a real job or find a new school. If you screw up on your job, you will probably be fired; again, you go find a new job, with a black mark on your record. If you mess up something important to the safety of people, you might go to jail. You could be fined and punished if your negligence, or just plain bad luck, results in someone's injury or death.

Contrast with the Traditions. If you let out secrets to someone who shouldn't know them, even if you didn't know better, you might be found guilty of violating the Protocols. If you screw up and lose an important Node or Wonder, same thing. Suffer a bad Paradox backlash that harms a bunch of other mages, you know the drill. You are *dead*. You are killed, returned to the cycle, no more to trouble the world with your hopes and dreams. That's a *harsh* punishment.

Unlike the real world's criminal justice system, you don't have an appeal. There's no governor or President to grant you a pardon, no press to sway on your behalf. There's only an impersonal justice system in the hands of a secret Cabal of conspirators that decides whether you've become too dangerous to the conspiracy.

An entire story could revolve around the justice system of the Traditions and the fight for or against a death sentence. Perhaps just as important, who carries it out? Some old Tradition warriors are all too eager to kill those who cross them. In some cases, the victim-to-be may not be easily accessible, so the sentence could come down from "on high" to an otherwise normal Cabal as instructions for the security of the Traditions.

What do you do when a letter shows up on your doorstep, telling you and your friends that you have to kill one of your acquaintances for the good of the conspiracy?

Often, Tradition Justices send someone to oversee a death sentence, or they require the capture and removal of the offender to a place where the sentence can be carried out. Too many independent Cabals are just a little too squeamish about the idea of rollicking off to kill a compatriot on the receipt of an impersonal message. What if *your* Cabal gets that letter? What if it's someone they know and like? What if they don't agree with the verdict?

And, if your Cabal does decide to carry out an execution, how do they go about doing so? A mage still has ties to the mundane world, usually. In this instance, having real-world connections and friends offers some protection. Consider: A mage who lives as a hermit in the Umbra won't be missed if she suddenly disappears. On the flip side, a mage in the real world with a job and a family will most certainly trigger an investigation from all manner of mundane authorities if he suddenly vanishes. The Cabal must be careful about the use of magic, too, because that could alert any Technocrats who wind up in the murder investigation. For this reason, the most common method is usually to lure the offender away to a secluded place where the execution can be carried out without fear of discovery, and to simply leave the disappearance as a mundane mystery. Still, this isn't always possible. Mages might have to break into someone's home, fight through family and friends, perform all manner of reprehensible acts just to reach the offender...

... it would be a terrible thing to destroy one's own chance at Ascension with the crimes committed in the course of defeating someone who perpetrated ill workings upon the world.

And Morality

Perhaps one of the most serious questions to ask about the Traditions, all other things aside, is: Where do they stand, morally? From this stem many other questions — What is a moral stance for a Tradition mage? How can their actions be justified, and what controls keep them from sliding into degeneration? Exploration of the morality of Tradition mages can take up all of your game time, if you aren't careful...

Players familiar with White Wolf games recognize that the protagonists of each game line turn conventional notions of morality upon its head. Vampires and werewolves are certainly considered villains or monsters in most other avenues of fiction and entertainment. While wizards may sometimes have

had a more sympathetic outlook, they too have had their share of bad press. Let's face it: As written, the Traditions might as well be bad guys in disguise — or, at the very least, sore losers.

At the core of **Mage** (with a bunch of other stuff) is the assumption that you're playing Tradition characters in at least a marginally heroic fashion. Even if they're considered "bad guys" of the setting, they're the protagonists, and their stories are considered worth exploring from their perspective. They've lost a war to guide humanity, the self-proclaimed protectors of Earth are stamping them out and they dwindle in number even as they fight bitterly among one another. Heck, they even promote dangerous ideas and want to bring back monsters, and a bunch of them are elitist bastards who believe that only the few should be at the top!

Honestly, you can approach the Traditions through different lenses, but the ultimate fact is this: All Tradition mages were once just normal humans. They were people not so different from anyone else out there who woke up and realized a different destiny. This changes many of them, but it also means that they should be examined like other people. A Tradition mage isn't automatically the "good guy" regardless of his actions just because he happens to be the protagonist, any more than a Technocrat is automatically a "bad guy." Such arbitrary distinctions fail to highlight the fact that most people do many things, good and bad, throughout their lives. So, Tradition mages have all of the moral quandaries and pitfalls of normal people, but in addition have the questions of the proper exercise of their magic and enlightenment.

There are many, many moral issues worth exploration among the Traditions — the subject of justice is really just a peripheral angle on this. A few include, but aren't limited to:

• **Do the Traditions have the right to decide humanity's future?** The Traditions would argue that the Technocracy wants to control humanity completely — to turn everyone into mindless drones and minions. But if that is what humanity chooses, are the Traditions right to fight it? Or is the moral course to do something hurtful in order to promote what the Traditions believe is an eventual good (the freedom of humanity from stasis)? The whole fight for global Ascension is predicated upon the notion that the Traditions know better than anyone else what's good for humanity as a whole.

• **Do the Traditions have the right to continue to exercise their magic?** Very few Tradition mages would be willing to give up their magic. But humanity has decided that it does not accept magic; the weight of the Consensus is evidence of this. Magic weakens day by day. Should the Traditionalists give up? Are they struggling vainly to glorify themselves and their ego, to justify their own use of special powers that they don't deserve or shouldn't have?

• **Do the Traditions have the right to intervene in individual lives?** Many Traditions take direct action among humanity. Euthanatos police humans for those whose karmic weight is so great that they must move on to a new path along the Wheel of Fate. Virtual Adepts crack and rebuild mundane technology and distribute secrets. Choristers help in the outreach of faith and charity. But do the Traditions have the right to intervene? These mages have been given power, but morally are they obligated to use it? What gives the Traditions the right to play God, to cheat fate, to change the course of destiny and history so callously? The excuse that someone must bear the responsibility could simply be seen as ego — what says that the Traditions must be the ones to do so?

• **Who's to say that the Tradition idea of a "better world" truly is?** Think about the Celestial Chorister who goes out and helps the homeless with charity — he makes a better world, right? What about the Euthanatos who kills corrupt politicians? The Hermetic who binds demons and consorts with the infernal to protect humans from such entities? All of these mages act upon the notion that they make the world better. But who's to say that their vision of a "better world" is any more acceptable than someone else's? Maybe the Technocracy, if it weren't busy wiping out Tradition mages, would be better at rooting out corruption. Or maybe mortals should *have* to suffer to learn. Maybe bringing back magic is just an exercise in futile hubris, an attempt to build the world in the Tradition mage's image.

• **What are acceptable measures in the Tradition quest?** Accepting for the moment that the Traditions have a right to their view and their practices, what measures are acceptable in the promotion of those views? Propaganda? Teaching magic? Using magic? Summoning spirits and dangerous Bygones? Slander? Assault? *Murder?* The Traditions have done all of these, and more. What's justifiable? Do the ends justify these means, or are there some lines that should never be crossed? If the latter, where is that line drawn, and who decides? In the past, the Traditions have accepted anything that did not directly impact the soul — up to terrorism and mass murder, in some cases. Hardly a moral stance... yet, if their actions might save humanity from the extinction of creativity and self-awareness, are they good and just?

Now, we've slammed on the Traditions pretty hard here. Take a step back and look at them as protagonists once more. Moral questions, by their nature, rarely have easy answers. And one person's answer isn't always the right answer for everyone. While many people might question the Traditions' motives, their resolve remains strong. The Traditions fight because they are convinced that they do something worthwhile. Perhaps they're right; perhaps they're wrong. In the world of **Mage**, though, belief gives validity, and as long as the Traditions believe in the causes for which they fight, they have a wellspring of hope.

Structure and Influence

"Where are we going?" Ryan asks. He looks annoyed. Lee Ann doesn't have to look at him to see it, though. She can feel it. Even through her shields she can feel him.

He's irritated. They've been running for two weeks straight. The Technos have been giving them no respite, and it is wearing on him.

I think sometimes that maybe he regrets having ever met me.

Lee Ann doesn't realize that Ryan's stopped until she's past him. She stops, startled, and turns around. When she sees him, her heart breaks, because he's nearly to tears. He's only cried twice that she's known him. She doesn't want to see him cry again.

"I've never — " he begins. Lee Ann holds up her hand and runs up to him.

"Shh," she whispers, putting her arms around him. "Don't talk."

He puts his arms around her and holds her there.

"I'm sorry," she says.

Ryan smells the rosy-sweet smell of her hair. It always soothes him. It is soft, like waves of water.

"It is all right," he says. "I'm... I... we've been running so much, I — "

"I know," she says. "It's not much farther. And we'll be safe there. We can rest. I promise."

Ryan smiles.

Lee Ann's never let him down on a promise.

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A Last Word on Mortals in Mage Society

I do like to hear from Acolytes a lot. The following transcript I had another of my students named Stephen put into essay form (he did his best) from a conversation I overheard between him and a young Disciple. I thought it to be very informative. You must understand, Stephen was one of Lee Ann's finds. He was a boy she found on the streets who, though not a willworker, was talented (I didn't ask). He grew up on the streets for the most part, so he has a unique perspective on how social groups and their fringes work.

SLW

We do have a place in your society. Acolytes are generally your closest mortal helpers. There are others, though they hang on the fringes. Even linear sorcerers, who will group themselves in similar manners as you, are sometimes invaluable as allies. Some, once brought in, will happily fight the good fight, doing what they can to bring the world towards Ascension, or at the very least to make the world a better place. Your creeds, and how you hold to them, will affect how the rest of us react to you, and if we're willing to help you. You might stare down your nose at a mage whose magic isn't as flexible as yours, but I bet you won't after he's saved your ass once or twice.

Mortal allies, from Occult-shop keepers to Mission workers, can be invaluable. In very subtle ways, they can open humanity to possibilities again, so that maybe, just maybe, they can wake up before it is too late. Do you think it is an accident that so many people are looking to New Age for spiritual understanding? Do you think the movement to homeopathic medicine is an accident? These things happen because your allies make it happen, my friend.

The question remains, though, how do we know to act on these things, and what draws us in, in the first place?

Learning Your Mundane Ties

So you want some contacts, some mundanes who can help you out, get you info (maybe the score for the last baseball game)? Maybe you need a place to crash, a car to use. Maybe you need someone quieted, or someone to talk.

Magic doesn't solve all the world's problems. You're not a mage for very long before you figure that one out. Sure, you can do some amazing things, but let's face it: your really cool and incredible Rote isn't what makes the world go round. Okay, if you're really impressive, it might insure that it still does (but don't get your hopes

up on that one). What makes the world go around are the people and the day to day routines that they, misinformed, call lives.

The successful mage is the one smart enough to move through those routines without making enough waves to be spotted. The Technos usually have it down to a science (pardon the pun) but some Traditions can get in on the game too. All you have to do is know what you're looking for, and how to find it.

There are different kinds of mortal contacts that will take you deeper into the flow of society. Pay attention. This could be useful one day.

Acolytes

Don't wrinkle your nose at me. Hermetics and Euthanatos aren't the only ones to use Acolytes, thank you very much. An Acolyte is a direct ally for your magic. They can be instrumental to your magic going right, especially if you're finding yourself low on things like, oh, herbal foci. Acolytes can obtain items and components, and help in preparing rituals (which is why the Euthanatos and Hermetics find them useful). They are also almost always students of the mage they serve. They aren't generally mages in their own right yet, though they will sometimes have other talents.

Acolytes vary depending on the mage's tradition and personal style. A Cult of Ecstasy's Acolytes might very well be hippies or groupies. I've known a few Cultists who gather Acolytes into commune settings. I've heard rumors about *who* some of those might have been, but I don't believe it. Still, as far as general mechanics, they do make for good examples.

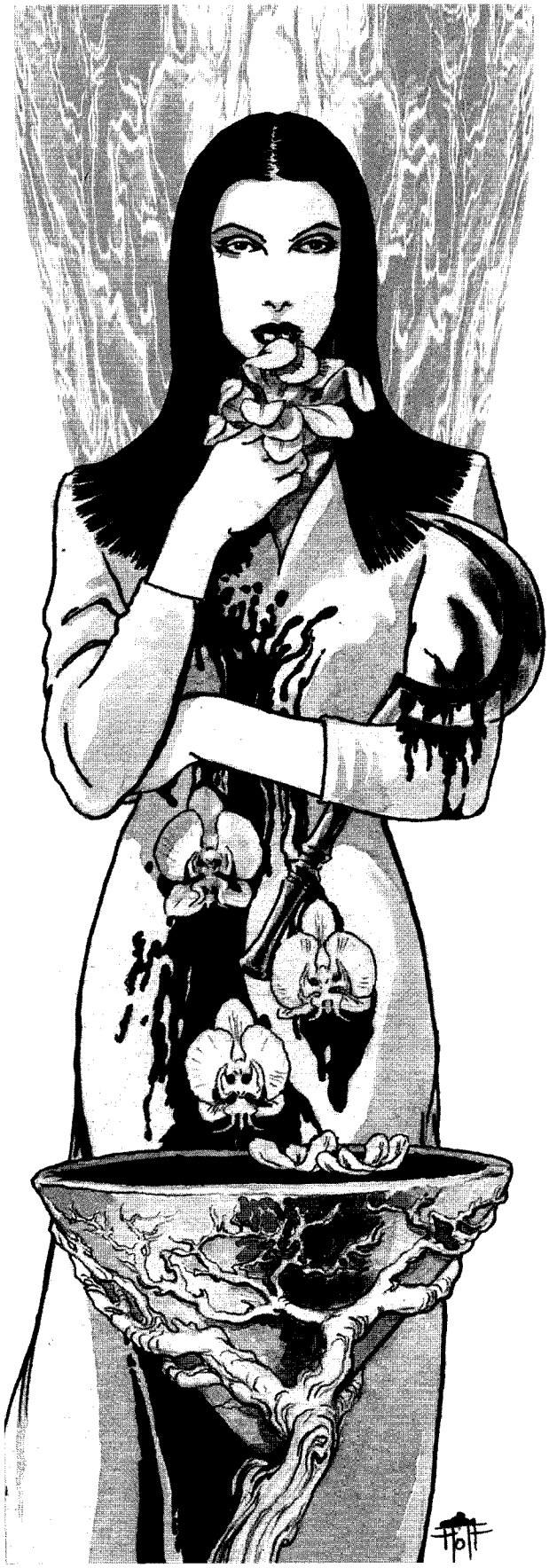
The Order of Hermes will generally keep their Acolytes in a Chantry or school setting. They are probably the most regimental of all the Traditions where Acolytes are concerned. Their Acolytes also tend to be more knowledgeable of at least the mechanics behind magic, if not magic itself. The Euthanatos follow a close second, though I've seen a few that surpass. It all depends on where the Acolyte is to be found, and what his master is like. I also knew a Euthanatoic Acolyte who was an assistant to a private investigator (who happened to be the Euthanatos).

Dreamspeakers and Verbena will generally be your New-Agers and Wiccans, but don't discount the strong undercurrent of people with age-old heritage and real cultural depth. Dreamspeakers will also draw Native Americans to them, training their Acolytes to be shamans and such – a stereotype? You bet; the Dreamspeakers often practice magic that overlaps the animistic heritage of many pre-colonial cultures, so the alliances between the two groups are pretty natural. How easily these Acolytes are spotted – as with Cult of Ecstasy Acolytes – depends on the mage. If he is very obvious in how he teaches his Acolytes and what he has them do, they will be quite obvious. Often, though, the Acolyte is taught to be inconspicuous and even taught how to throw off suspicions about their masters. One Acolyte who *acts* like a mage can draw off a lot of heat from the real deal. Okay, maybe this isn't the most charitable way to treat an Acolyte, but it's a possibility.

Celestial Choristers generally have their Acolytes among the church. That makes sense. What they are depends upon the religion the Chorister practices. I tend to think of nuns and monks, but church deacons and faith healers are also sometimes Acolytes. Members of congregations, teachers, theologians, historians, high artisans and craftsmen make their way into these ranks as well.

For the Virtual Adept, Acolytes are usually the computer savvy hackers who help them out. Ages vary, but I've seen few who aren't geeks. I'm sorry, but these guys are rarely what you see in the movies. I mean how cute or socially apt are you going to be if you spend most of your days staring into a glowing screen in a dark room, never entering the sunlight? Acolytes to Sons of Ether are rarely more attractive. Let's face it, in this world most people are either born with looks or brains, but rarely, it seems, with both. They are smart though, and inventive. They aren't all absent-minded inventor types, but I have seen a few of those.

Members of the Akashic Brotherhood choose those who will follow their eastern ways. Martial Arts is a very important part of their magic and their Acolytes tend to be formidable opponents. You don't tend to reach the Akashic Brother you're going after unless you're damn good at fighting. You've seen those old kung fu flicks where you have to fight through the school to reach the master? Yep, that's the deal. Of course, like all silly stereotypes, exceptions exist, but the stereotype wouldn't be a stereotype if it weren't often true. Akashic Brothers also take Acolytes from among the same sorts of ranks you might find



Mechanical Note on Acolytes

Treat Acolytes like you would a Retainer. These are extensions of the mage, meant to make the mage's magical life a little bit easier. The role they fill should complement the mage's magical studies. If the player is wanting someone who can delve into mundane society, they might want to consider one of the other options below.

Celestial Choristers – not too surprising, considering the strong philosophical and religious roots of both groups. To that end, you'll find chemists, poets, explorers and myth-keepers among the Brotherhood, too.

I don't know many Orphans who have Acolytes. Most of them are too afraid to tell anyone who or what they are. I've seen a few, and they can be as varied as Orphans are. I've noticed that they don't usually surround themselves with many. One, maybe two. A lot of times, as with Ecstatics, these will be significant others. Hollow Ones do take Acolytes, generally from among the Goth subculture that permeates our society.

The important deal with Acolytes is, of course, that they're around to help with things magical. Mundane allies can't always be trusted with magical knowledge or in situations of rituals. Acolytes have learned a thing or two. Even if they haven't had a moment of clarity, they can at least chant, hold candles and otherwise help with the organization. Many Acolytes hope to one day go on to become mages themselves. Some may learn the rudiments of magic, practicing linear spells and a few simple formulae; others Awaken to phenomenal potential – sometimes outstripping the master.

Tradition attitudes toward Acolytes – as a whole – are studiously formal. While an Acolyte doesn't have the recognition of a powerful mage, nothing says that the Acolyte is less of a person. Acolytes occupy that nebulous half-zone between mage and mundane. Maybe the Acolyte believes in magic but just doesn't have the aptitude, the desire or the balls to study it. For whatever reason, the Acolyte plays second fiddle, but that doesn't mean the Acolyte is expendable. Tradition justice mandates that Acolytes be treated much like mages who have no defenses of their own. That is, it's generally safe to discuss Tradition business around Acolytes and to do magic with them (they wouldn't be much help

otherwise). However, they still can be tried for crimes, and the Acolyte's mentor can be charged, too, if he was negligent or abusive and prompted the crime. In fact, Justices of the Council tend to be *harsher* to mages than to Acolytes. At least an Acolyte can always claim that he didn't know the full ramifications of what he was doing, or perhaps that he was supernaturally compelled. A mage should know better, or he shouldn't be wielding that kind of power.

Allies

Mundane allies can be a very valuable asset to any mage. How so, you ask, since they don't have magical power? These are less direct than Acolytes. They don't always know what the mage is. Generally speaking, how much knowledge they have about the mage is dependent on the situation. Sometimes the patron has to fill them in; sometimes it is best that they don't know. (Given the Protocols, the latter is usually safer.)

Mortal allies rarely help directly with any magic rituals that a mage is working on.

So where are mortal mundane allies useful? Generally speaking, mortal allies come in handy when you need a safe house, skilled help (a driver, a courier, cannon fodder), or specialized knowledge (chemical analysis, computer hacking, police investigation). Mortal allies are good for those everyday things that you simply need someone to do, because you can't or won't do it. Favors, if you will.

A mundane ally can do many things you can't but, most importantly, can do them without attracting special attention. While you might be able to face down a gang-banger or a criminal adversary, it'll draw much less attention if the police take care of it. Call up your old buddy on the force and *voila*. Or perhaps you have access to a weird ancient rite, but it's all written in Ayurvedic. Well, if one of your old college friends happens to be working in the linguistics department, he may be able to save you some time and a headache and won't cause all the ruckus of you digging around at the local library and cursing at the stacks.

Unlike Acolytes, there can be one drawback to having allies. You can call on them

for favors, yes. They can also call on you. You pretty much have to answer. To not do so risks losing them as allies. They become less dependable, less willing to help when called on. Can you blame them? No one likes to be taken for granted, used or abused. Even the bad guys have to be somewhat loyal to their allies. I mean, when I'm an evil overlord person, I won't be abusing *my* allies.

Mundanes are also good for something else (which Acolytes can also be useful for): Spin doctoring. Nothing beats a good lawyer to help you out or a cop to turn the other way. The ally running the safe house is generally good at turning attention elsewhere. A doctor you can go to for unusual injuries is invaluable, and the unquestioning landlord is a godsend.

As a rule, these are strictly mundanes. If they aren't, they will generally become Acolytes to a mage; otherwise they become a liability. They rarely learn any kind of magic and don't usually have any special abilities. Their usefulness comes in their mundane specialties.

Contacts

Less personal than allies, contacts are people you can count on to get information. These are always mundanes, are generally non-descript in their area of expertise, and – unless something spectacular happens – easily replaceable. Yes, Virginia, contacts are expendable.

Contacts are people in the know. You want information on something, they can get it for you. Hey, they might already know what you want to know. They're not as difficult to upkeep as allies, and they don't require the attention that Acolytes require. Generally, all you have to do to ensure your contacts' loyalties is simply to keep quiet about the source of your info.

I won't go much into them, because, well, they can be anyone at all. That's the wonderful thing about contacts. That's not to say that they're unfindable, or untraceable. They can be traced and they can be finded...er found, so do use care like you would with allies. You do have to be careful. It is easy to get lulled into their almost Arcane-like subtlety, but remember: These are human beings. Some of them have families. They have lives, and bringing your world down on them is likely to do away with both.

So who *are* contacts? Your allies are people who'll do things for you – old friends, co-workers, fellow club members, folks you've blackmailed... contacts, on the other hand, are your stable of information. Hangers-on. Shiftless layabouts. People you see every week at the nightclub, but otherwise don't know from Adam. Loose associates and acquaintances. Put it this way: Did you know the name of every person in your high school math class? No? Could you still recognize most of them if you'd seen one of them outside class and asked if there was a test that day? Yes? Now you know.

Contacts are, sadly, a two-way street. Any information you gather is automatically information for someone else – namely, that you were digging up a specific topic. Be careful what you ask. These things have a way of getting around. If you really shouldn't be in Milledgeville, then you might try not asking too many questions there, because you might be seen by the people who'll tell the *wrong* people.

Mundane Influences

Mundane Influences are a network of allies and contacts branching out into a particular field of expertise. These mortals can help the skilled mage in dealing with mortal systems that would otherwise hinder or harm him. He can also use these avenues to aid himself, to find items, to gather information or to cover activities.

Such levels of influence are not easily gained. To have one's fingers so into society takes time and care. Few mages can manage much of this to any great degree. Generally, all you can hope to maintain are some useful avenues to help gather information or affect some simple necessities (such as fake IDs or shoving aside of arrests). Having one's finger into media can be helpful too. And don't turn your nose up at the occult ties (duh!) or even high society. Easiest way to get money is to dupe some rich-bitch with a fake fortune.

Be careful, though. Having your fingers in society can be useful, but dangerous. You're exposable here, and that's dangerous for you. It is also dangerous for them. This can be the most dangerous type of contact for the mortals, as those in your network can become targets of your enemies if they're discovered. The Technocracy has a good hold here, obviously. So do some supernaturals. If you step on someone's toes by burying yourself too deep, you're likely to draw out some pretty nasty enemies.

How do you differentiate between your Allies, your Contacts and your Influence? Well, Allies do things for you. They have skills that they use on your behalf. Contacts are just people you know passingly who fill you in on the local gossip. But mundane Influence, that's the area of having *pull*.

Let me put it like this: Say you're a crook by the name of, hell, Capone. You have a bunch of thugs who answer to you and who'll go beat people up – they're Allies. You have a couple snitches at the station house who'll tell you when a raid is coming – they're Contacts. But that guy you know down at City Hall, who will arrange for some papers to get lost or pull for some media attention to a case – even if he never shows up in person to pay respects or tells you what's really going on inside the mayor's manor – that's Influence. That's your ability to have other people get things done indirectly, to alter the outcome of "the system."

Be really, really careful here. The Technocracy doesn't like people playing with their pet governments. Or as the old say goes: "Don't steal – the government hates competition."

Magical Allies

(SLW's notes: We have hit the most of Stephen's knowledge, but he did have a few other notes that Lee Ann did not tell me about, which I will indicate later. He and I have discussed it. What follows is from my own experience.)

So you met this kid, who's an Acolyte in a Hermetic Chantry. You're only an Orphan. Getting information on things can be difficult at best. Even when you do find something, it is rarely accurate. But your Hermetic Acolyte buddy, he can get you all kinds of research. He can also warn you if the Hermies are watching your activities a little too closely.

Of course, you don't worry too much about them spotting you. It is the Euthanatos that you really worry about. They are just down right spooky. And if they think that you're even coming close to upsetting their strange idea of balance, then that's all she wrote. But you have a friend at one of their Chantries, and she warns you when they go a-hunting too. She could get you info, but you don't really know if you want to know what they know. She's nice, but even she scares you sometimes.

And you thought Hollow Ones were spooky. You realize those gaunt gothic vegan freaks are just wannabes compared to these people.

If you're an Orphan, sometimes the Traditions can be scary. Hey, even if you are part of one of the Traditions, they can still be scary. Scoring a contact or two among various ones can be useful. If you're a bit of a rogue, it can even help keep you alive. It can also help you understand them a little, so that you know if you want to work with them or avoid them. Those contacts can also, maybe, help score information on potential allies that you run across. Is this Chorister for real, or did he fall from grace? Nothing can screw your world over quite like associating with a Barabbi. And unless you're in the know, you might not know when you've come in contact with one.

Contacts among the Technocracy are the most difficult to score, and if you're not a Technocracy mage, extremely dangerous. If you get one, keep it secret, or you're likely to find yourself "returned to the cycle" as my good friend Larry says. And watch your back. Until you're sure of them, you could be being taken for a ride. And if your contact does show in a black sedan with men in black suits, black hats and mirror shades to give you that ride, then *run*. Run fast, run far, and don't look back.

All right, Marauders are not contacts that you want. Trust me on this. Yes, even the weakest of them are pretty powerful. I'll give you that. They're also *all* insane. They *all* bring Paradox, and that Paradox is likely to fall on your head. Association with them is a sure way to re-education or death. Be smart here.

I know I don't have to warn you off of Nephandi. Let me put it to you this way. If you go trying to make friends or even contact with one of these slime-ridden-cthulu-fucking ass holes, I will come and kill you myself. Got it? I've seen too many mages fall prey to them, thinking that they were going to come out ahead.

"Other" Allies

The mundane and magical worlds aren't the only places where you will find allies. Wasn't it Hamlet who said that there are more things out there than are dreamt of in philosophy? Well, it was definitely in *Hamlet*, and that's all I care about at the moment. See, old Willie was right. There's a lot more out there, and sometimes those other things can be very valuable allies.

Chances are, your level of contact is going to be limited. You probably won't know a lot about your "Other" friends. But like contacts, they can get you information, and like allies, they can be there for you. Just be ready to have to help them out. Don't expect to get your back scratched without scratching some backs yourself.

Speaking of which, watch out for those scratches. I'm not talking familiars here. I'm talking supernaturals: Vampires, werewolves, fairies. They're out there, and they can be very helpful, but they also have a tendency to either mistrust you or to need help too. Some of those scratches hurt. Never, ever, ever, under any circumstances, for instance, piss off a werewolf. Those are claw marks that don't always heal.

Supernatural allies can be risky. One, you tend to want to keep them secret. If you make supernatural contacts, you have the risks of other mages either not trusting them — and you as a result — or wanting to exploit you and them. Both scenarios are bad news, trust me.

Also remember that they have their own secrets. They won't want you telling other people about your undead friends or about the furry monsters you go camping with. I dare say that they'll kill to protect their secrets, so watch what you say and make sure no one catches you with them.

Another risk is that they have their own enemies. Even if you don't get called on to help them, you could, by association, attract their enemies. Chances are, your knowledge on them is going to be limited at best. If you're lucky, you'll only draw the attention of hunters. But there are worse things out there than gung-ho mortals. Be ready for the fact that if you have any of these as allies you're expanding your world. You have to keep your wits about you and learn on the fly, sometimes even on the run.

Okay, so despite the risks, supernatural allies can be a good thing. Remember, they're super-natural. Like you, they're going to have something special about them and more than likely can do things you can't.

Chances are if you know what they are, they will know what you are. Generally the ways you make contact kinda lead to that whether it is mutual discovery, mutual curiosity, or mutual pulling-your-shit-out-of-the-fire. Don't go trying to exploit them, though. Just because you know what they are doesn't mean that you can go using them to your advantage.

Besides, if you're not careful, you might find that they're the ones holding the strings.

Mechanical Note on Supernatural Allies

A Supernatural Ally can be a potent merit. The mage pretty much *has* to keep it a secret, or else he opens himself to a world of grief that he doesn't want. He can also get easily drawn into their problems. He has to face the fact that his allies' contemporaries may also not approve of him. There's a lot to juggle in these kinds of relationships.

Then there's the flip side. The mage's involvement with the supernatural doesn't have to be through the background. You see, the mage is still a mortal. Chances are, he is involved in some way with the mortal world. Even if he's heavily entrenched in a Chantry, there will still be contact with the outside occult community. The mage may very well be the supernatural creature's puppet, part of its network of allies and contacts that we tend to call Influences.

The Storyteller *might* choose to allow mage characters to have supernatural Allies in place of normal Allies for a Background. However, this is probably better left to developments in the course of play. How many mages out there really have a werewolf buddy? Uh, none, perhaps?

Making it Real

"Okay, so my allies are part of this street gang. I have these contacts with police across town and influence in some of the political arenas."

We've all heard it before. For some character types, it might be okay. If the character was a public defender or a detective, this might make sense. But that's not always the case.

Defining contacts, allies and influences are very important. They help to shape who and what the character is, and how he fits into the mortal world. It can make it a headache for the storyteller, though, who has to juggle this for each player.

But it doesn't have to be.

Look at life.

Most of us (especially, let's admit it, us gamers) tend to have only a few circles we move in. Think about one of your social circles. How might you define it if you were going to turn it into points on a character sheet?

I'll use the regular crowd of an occult store to give you an example.

Joe D'Mage goes to one occult store a lot because he can always buy dependable components there. He can because the proprietor listens to him when he talks about what's important in components and what really works and what doesn't. There's a pretty steady crowd here. There are a couple of kids he can depend on to help him find other things around town and who once in a while help turn the attention of Bible-thumpers and other such away from him, seeing that he's uncomfortable with the attention. There are a couple of others that will get him news about what's happening around town in the occult community and help keep him abreast of non-published happenings and changes. Overall, he has a pretty solid inroad to actually influence the occult community in his area.

The proprietor is an Acolyte who Joe D'Mage has been able to teach enough that he knows how to pick out proper components. He probably knows enough to help him with a ritual if he needs it, and maybe he has before. The first couple of kids mentioned are Allies. They help him scout around to other stores to find things before they sell out. They also play spin-doctor when people he doesn't want asking questions start asking too many. The next couple of people are contacts, who can supply him with very valuable information. Because he knows so many people through this shop, he's managed to have some influence in the occult community. People hear about him and will sometimes listen to what he says. He can affect change. That's Influence.

So, from this what do we know about the character of Joe D'Mage? He's obviously personable, willing to take time to teach knowledge to those open to learning. He is an active part of the occult community and well respected. He's able to make friends in such a way that those friends will take initiative to help him if he needs help or seems uncomfortable.

We've helped to round out a character. By keeping his contacts, allies and backgrounds closely related, while they are limited in scope, they're also stronger. Also, we don't have him spread out thin. He's more real, and a character that we can grasp as both players and Storytellers.

It is this kind of thought that takes a character who is letters, numbers and dots and makes him into something that is living and viable, even if only in our imaginations.

In rounding out the player's character, don't forget to round out the characters around him. These people and/or supernaturals that he has contact with don't just sit around waiting for the character to show up needing help or information. They have lives, jobs and families. Let that show. Does the player fail the roll to call on his contacts or allies? Give him a reason. "Well, I'd love to help, but my daughter's recital is tonight. I can't miss that. I'm sorry." Does he botch? Maybe he tracks his ally to the recital, bringing some enemy with him.

Turn points into story and have fun.

That is what this is all about, you know. Giving these characters life and dimension can open up all kinds of stories, sub-plots and red herrings that will keep you and them busy and enjoying the game.

A Matter of Time

Lawrence sits at the pub and drinks his brandy, looking at the paper.

Sojo Dojo Bombed Three Dead No Suspects

He sighs. He should put the paper away, but he can't help himself. It is damn depressing. As if it wasn't bad enough that he had to kill one of his own for going Barabbi, was losing another to madness, but now the Technocracy has to make Dent an example.

And why? Because Lee Ann and Ryan caught them tagging? Is that what this is about?

Lawrence slams his fist down on the counter top, drawing the attention of people around him. It soon fades, as it usually does, and they go back to their drinking and ignore him.

It is their own damn fault, *he thinks*. Their own fault that they were found out. You go around tagging nodes and someone's bound to notice. What did they think would happen, that they'd just ignore it? And what are they so afraid of. They won.

They fucking won.

Lawrence lays his head down and begins weeping.

The hand touching his shoulder startles him slightly. He had not expected anyone to notice him. He looks up to see Tanya looking at him, worried.

"Tutor White," She whispers. "You should come back with me. It is getting late."

Lawrence attempts to push her away, but alcohol makes the attempt futile. She helps him to his feet and supports him as she leads him out of the bar. He mumbles about a tab, and she assures him it was taken care of.

Lawrence has to smile. Damn it, but if she isn't effective. Tanya always did know how to watch out for him, where to find him, and when things needed taken care of. He lets her support him home, where she leads him to his study and sits him in his chair. She is gone before he can thank her.

"Damn, Larry, but if you don't look like shit," Ryan says. Lawrence opens his eyes to see his friend seated across from him in another chair.

"I am filled sufficiently with alcohol to the point where I can feel nothing, good or ill, so I would not know if I feel like shit or not," he says.

Ryan laughs.

"Pretentious drunk too," he smiles. "Lee Ann was right."

"Where is Lee Ann anyway?" Lawrence asks.

"She's still in Detroit, recovering. She's coming along pretty well, though. The trial was odd, though."

"Oh? How so?"

Ryan shakes his head. "I don't know. I would swear, though, that Lee Ann knew he was going to betray us. Because maybe he'd done so before."

Lawrence shrugs. "It is possible. I've told you before that you and Lee Ann both have very long lives, and a lot of them. You probably did encounter him in a past life. It wouldn't surprise me."

Ryan nods. "It worries me, though," he says.

"Go on."

"I've always kinda chalked up her hatred of the Order to prejudice, maybe just disliking attitudes. Nothing that was a big deal."

"And now?"

"Now, I'm thinking maybe it comes from something a lot more serious. That worries me, because we aren't the types to not have our pasts come back on us, you know?"

Lawrence nods.

"I think the two of you have some work cut out for you."

Ryan smiles again.

"Eventually, but not yet."

Lawrence raises an eyebrow. "What are you up to?"

"Ready for some good news for a change?"

Lawrence sits up as Ryan pulls something from his coat pocket. It is a small velveteen box. He opens it to reveal a small ring with a diamond solitaire. Lawrence stares at it a moment. He knows that there's a smart-ass comment to be made, but he just can't call the words forth.

"I'm going to ask Lee Ann to marry me," he says.

Lawrence looks up at him and, for the first time in weeks, truly smiles.

PRESCOTT

Chapter Five: The Traditions

The following discussions were taken from a series of recent monographs by Cornelius Balt, Lecturer Emeritus, Various:

Individual Contributions: "The Ties That Bind"

What are the Traditions? Why do they remain members of the Council? Earlier authors have indicated that the Traditions are coherent groups of mages unified by their methods. It has also been insinuated that the Council is a benign organization banded together to valiantly oppose the oppressive Technocracy. From certain points of view, these concepts are reasonably accurate.

From other viewpoints, especially those of young mages left abandoned by recent celestial events, nothing could be further from the truth. While internally the individual Traditions have some commonalties, they are perhaps best defined by their inconsistencies. These organizations are better categorized by what they are willing to fight over and for, than by what they agree on. As for the Council, if the only bond that held these weary old mages together was the fear of the Conventions, that bond would have disintegrated decades ago. Indeed, the Council is made up of strong-willed individuals with distinct agendas tangential to Ascension. These personalities remain together because of what they can do for each other, and more importantly, what can be done for them.

Indeed, it is this disunity and individuality that allows the Council to survive. It is through the strife that growth occurs. The contributions of the member Traditions, rather than the unanimous actions of the whole, are directly responsible for the Council's shining moments, rare as they might be.

It should be noted to anyone who reads Lecturer Cornelius Balt's work that the good Lecturer is an unknown quantity among the Traditions. While it is generally agreed that Balt is a benign and accurate source of information for many topics of interest to a young willworker, his origins are shrouded in mystery. Balt is a confirmed expert on history — both mundane and mystic — on the nature and politics of the inhabitants of the Umbral realm and on the politics of the Traditions. He has also given lectures on a number of other subjects with apparent equal expertise. The source of this knowledge is unconfirmed, but he claims to be self-taught.

The man seems equally at home among any of the Traditions but also seems perpetually distracted. He seems to avoid the practice of magic as a general rule. However, there are reports of him practicing under a variety of different paradigms when he deems it necessary. Records of Balt's lectures seemingly indicate a significantly longer life span than his apparent age would indicate. There are those who have attended his lectures over the years who claim that the man does not age. Lecturer Balt arrives for his lectures without warning and leaves afterwards just as suddenly. His mode of transportation has never been determined but is assumed to be magical in nature.

Magus Artus, House Quaesitor

Strife and Fractiousness: "A House Divided"

Given their individual contributions, one might wonder why the Traditions haven't been able to advance the Council's goals further. Perhaps it is because most of the individual Tradition successes have sprung from internal strife rather than any unified efforts. It is insufficient, however, to say that the Traditions are beset with infighting merely because mages are people and thus believe different things.

To a certain extent, the internal strife is due to the effort to shove independent mages into pretty boxes. Some might argue that the Council lost the Ascension War because they played by the enemy's rules. Rather than giving individual mages freedom to practice magic as the see fit, the Council insisted on putting tags on them. By labeling them, the Council placed arbitrary human limits and boundaries upon mages who otherwise had the potential to exceed such boundaries.

This "box-and-definition" effect has recently been intensified by the attempts to integrate the so-called Disparates into the existing Traditions. These are, for the most part, mages that rejected the structure of the Traditions to begin with. Imagine their displeasure: First they are forced, by the aggression of the Technocracy, to align with an organization they already distrust. Then they are pigeonholed into tidy little categories by their new allies. It is little wonder that these indignities are too much for the patience of such mages. If this were the only problem, however, perhaps the fractiousness would be solvable.

Akashic Brotherhood

Though their ancestral feud with the Euthanatos is far from forgotten, the Brotherhood is more often than not the voice of unity within the Council of Nine. When the other Traditions threaten to secede, it is the Akashic representatives that bring them back to the table. On the other hand, when their allies cannot agree on an assault strategy, it is often the warriors of the Brotherhood who see past the complexities of the various plans and who propose the simple core from which the final scheme emerges. The Akashic Brotherhood's inherent desire for simplicity seems to force the inevitable red tape of such a diverse organization to its minimal level.

At the same time, the Council provides the Brotherhood with an anchor to the modern world. It is far too easy for Akashic mages to retreat into Zen philosophy and the simplicity of their isolated monasteries. The overall structure of the Traditions forces these willworkers to interact with not only their colleagues, but also with the sleeping world that surrounds them. They might be happier in isolation, but they would also be much fewer in number.

While the Akashic path works very well for those who understand it, the achievement of that understanding is often the most daunting task an initiate in the Brotherhood can undertake. Cryptic comments may be enticing at first, but can become frustrating to students and allies alike. There are those both within and outside of the Brotherhood who question the traditional training methods in the immediacy of the modern day. Surely students would be of more use to the Council with a more direct method of training. Both young Akashics and newly assimilated members from the Wu Lung and various Disparate groups cry for just this sort of revision.

While the Brotherhood suffers from multiple internal schisms caused by philosophical division as well as by the recent inclusion of the Wu Lung, the Brotherhood must adjust with changes forced upon them by the outside world. Mass media has sent ripples through the mundane world since its creation. It is not surprising then, that it affects the practitioners of magic as well. Film, television and books have mainstreamed the mysterious culture of the East — have almost trivialized that which is at the core of Akashic beliefs. At the same time, the same media have created their own philosophies of the "true warrior" and "philosophic knight." With increasing numbers with each passing years, would-be Akashic adepts come to the Brotherhood with their own philosophies and trainings. The philosophies and trainings may appear superficially similar to the traditional teachings of the Brotherhood, but instead they force older brothers to face a dilemma. Must the young be

taught to unlearn apparently effective kata, or must the old learn to change to adapt to these new traditions?

Celestial Chorus

While the Akashic Brotherhood provides the voice of unity for the Council, it is the Celestial Chorus that provides the vision. The Chorus' lyrical description of a unified humanity has inspired more than one set of representatives to strive for success. Perhaps more important is the Tradition's compassion for Sleepers. It is far too easy for the Awakened to forget the needs of those around them, and it is the Chorus that brings the Council back into line when decisions that threaten humanity in general come under consideration.

Being forced by the Council structure to interact with mages of other ideologies has been extremely healthy for the Celestial Chorus. Chorister leadership has learned to accept willworkers that they might have condemned as diabolists through these interactions. The resulting open-mindedness has trickled down the general membership, allowing members of differing faiths to find a home in the Chorus. Ironically, this has made the Tradition — which was historically most likely to reject, if not outright hate, the Disparates — into the Tradition which has in modern day found it the easiest to integrate them. Thus the modern Chorus, as a group that strives for unity among disparate beliefs, also brings to the Traditions the philosophy of inclusiveness despite disagreement.

And yet, in spite of professed unity to the rest of the Council, the Chorus may possibly have more in-fighting than any other tradition, with the possible exception of the Order of Hermes. All Celestials may agree that there is one deity, but unfortunately they tend to disagree about whom that deity is. Will-workers with Judeo-Christian backgrounds are particularly resistant to those of other religions, echoing closely their Sleeper colleagues. Mages who favor peace are extremely vocal in their opposition to the more militant in their midst. These Choristers question the need for warriors in a Tradition dedicated to unity. The incorporation of Disparates has only accentuated these particular problems. In the case of the Chorus, the reasons the Disparates were separate was that their particular choice of belief structure was too outlandish to fit into the Chorus in the first place. These mages believed in one deity, but their choice of deity was considered to be heretical by one or more of the component religions of the Chorus. Some were even accused of verging on being a Marauder or a Nephandi based on their worship of a gibbering entity in the outer darkness. Others worshiped unique solitary gods, which no one else could agree even existed, much less whether they represented aspects of the true deity.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, there are those who claim that the push for unity of thought, the push for agreement about the One, actually is harmful to the Traditions.

Lack of individuality stifles the creativity that should be at the core of the Council, say these dissenters. They claim that the Celestial Chorus is pushing for a universal song sung in unison. Instead, these mages remind their contemporaries that the Aum was a complex and beautiful song, with tight harmonies and elegant descants. Does the current drive support the Technocracy more than the Traditions? Only time will tell.

Cult of Ecstasy

If the Brotherhood is the Voice of the Traditions and the Chorus is the Vision, the Cult of Ecstasy provides the Drive that gets things done. More often than not, while the other Traditions are still bickering as to how to accomplish a goal, it is a Cultist or a group of Cultists that are already in the process of fulfilling the goal. Despite popular belief to the contrary, Ecstatics do not tend to revel in their image as the "bad boys" or "bad girls" of the Tradition. Instead they see their role as a natural extension of the freedom that being a mage represents. As the saying goes, "If we don't push the boundaries, who will?" At the same time, the Cult serves an important role when the Council seeks to look forward. The Cult serves as a home for seers and for prophets, for those whose vision of the future brings them into conflict with the mundane world around them. These seers and prophets, in turn, bring important insight to the council table. Their predictions help to lay new directions. Their experimental behaviors help those associated with them to break away from the old. In short, the Cult brings progress.

Unfortunately, progress is rarely without a price. Experimental behaviors can lead to destructive habits. Whether these habits manifest as physical addictions or stubborn refusal to accept any tradition, Ecstatics have a tendency to end up as victims to the tools and behaviors that once merely opened their minds. This problem is compounded by its prevalence. As many within the Cult are subject to the same weakness, nearly all are blind to it. There are those outside the Cult who have noted that Cultists have continued to range farther and farther afield in their efforts to create new mind-opening substances. They fear that a wound has developed in the very nature of the Cult as a result of the use of new substances derived from wisps left behind by the passing of Nephandic spirits. While Ecstatic proponents claim that the substance, called "O" by some, is harmless and merely opens their minds to new levels of awareness, some outside of the Tradition have suggested that closer involvement with members of other Traditions may serve to alert Ecstatics to the danger posed by "O" and ultimately to heal the wound it appears to be causing.

While the Cult brings important progress to Traditions as a whole, membership in the Council has given the Cult of Ecstasy a strong sense of identity and unity that would otherwise be weak or non-existent. The Cult might have a long

history, but it is a disjointed one. Incarnations may be identifiable in nearly every region and every historical period, but it was not until their unification under the Council that various factions were able to truly recognition one another as brother and sister. Ironically, given this scattered past, there are those who claim a single guiding force behind the Cult's evolution. Those who support this theory hint at evidence that an individual or small group of individuals has been influential in all of the various groups at key points in their histories.

Ancient Factions: the Aghoris, the Acharnae, the Hagalaz, the Pannites, the K'an Lu, the Klubwerks. New factions have emerged with the addition of the Disparates. Future factions will surely emerge as humanity continues to evolve. The Cult of Ecstasy is made up of many like-minded groups that couldn't be more different. While these groups hold little to no animosity to one another, they also have a hard time understanding one another. Rebellion and chaos are concepts that are intimately tied to times and places. What is destructive and amoral in one culture is often perfectly acceptable in another. Still, with each generation of Cultists, there are those who look to the past as well as to the future. The result is a resurgence of old practices infused into the post-modern. The catacombs modeled on ancient Greek maps may one day be home to Hindi rituals and the next host to a bleeding-edge rave. Ironically, this tendency to look backward may ultimately serve to help reconcile the Tradition with the rest of the Council. There is a small, but growing contingent amongst the Ecstatics that claims that order and responsibility may prove to be the ultimate in chaos. Nicknamed "Nerd Cultists," and as excessive in their drive for order as other Cultists are in their pursuits, these clean cut mages are easily identifiable at any Ecstatic orgy, both in style of dress and in mode of behavior.

Dreamspeakers

While some might claim the Dreamspeaker tradition represents some of the most limited of the mages in the modern day, nothing could be further from the truth. These mages serve as a primordial, basic foundation to the Council. The Dreamspeakers will carry on the good fight long after all others have been washed away by the tides of time. The spirit-walkers are the Soul of the Council. They have learned a force tolerance. While their individual best interests may not be optimally served by being lumped together, they understand from the ancient wisdom that this union will provide the most universal benefit. They have learned to cling to personal identity and to primal goals in spite of phenomenal hardship. The Dreamspeakers provide a spiritual center when lesser things distract their allies. They alone hold the whole history of the Traditions, and they are the most willing to welcome new mages and new ideas into the Council. They have seen true suffering and know that they and all mages are agents of a greater will. The reasons the shamans remain a coherent Tradition, and indeed why they remain a part of the Council, are their own. When pressed, the answer is always the same cryptic one, "We remain because we must."

The Dreamspeakers' greatest weakness is perhaps the lack of a true set of traditions. They hold the history of the Council but have little unified history of their own. These shamans hold more unity with the spirit world than with one another. Dreamspeakers would perhaps be better served to travel and train with those of their own choosing than they are served by being lumped together. Shamans — while they share more methodology than, say, the Sons of Ether — do not necessarily share short-term goals. They may all tap into secret goals of the spirit world, but they do not necessarily interpret those goals in the same way. As a result, it is only rarely that the Dreamspeaker representative to the Council truly represents her colleagues' views. This sense of disunity has been true since the Tradition formed and has only increased with the addition of the Disparates. Even more perspectives on the spirit world have been added to the Tradition.

Unfortunately, the added confusion of individuality is not the only flaw the Dreamspeakers struggle with in the modern world. In addition, the bonds shamans have to the spirit world represent another weakness to these willworkers. With the strengthening of the Gauntlet and the arrival of the Avatar Storm, Dreamspeakers find themselves tied to the mortal world. It is not surprising to learn that, as a result, no small number of these mages have dedicated themselves to weakening the barriers to the spirit world. It is perhaps disappointing, however, that in their zeal they ignore what good they might do in the modern world.

Euthanatos

The Euthanatos serve as the Conscience of the Council. They carry the conviction of morality. They are willing to become damned in order to save others. They are willing to make tough choices and follow through on them, even if they will be shunned or killed for those choices. Though the rest of the Council would not likely admit that the Euthanatos serve this role, it is the rare mage who will speak openly against their inclusion.

Perhaps ironically, Euthanatos seek to maintain their ties to the Council out of a sense of their own mortality. They do not fear death at the hands of the Technocracy, though they recognize that without the Council, they and any other organization of mages would quickly fall to the Convention. Instead, they fear their own Resonance. They fear Jhor. The Euthanatos rely on their fellows to deal with them if they become a danger to themselves or others, but they recognize the threat the Tradition may pose as a whole without proper checks and balances. Indeed, other Traditions have fallen prey to the temptation of vampiric blood. The Euthanatos want to be certain that if they fall — as a whole — to worse temptations, there are those in place to put them down.

The Euthanatos suffer the most from who they are and the magic they practice. Even a Sleeper finds it easy to understand

that those who dwell in, on and with death cannot fail to be touched by it. The Resonance from these masters of Entropy makes them particularly susceptible to Jhor. This tendency not only plagues the mages themselves, but also causes additional distrust to be directed at them by their fellows in the Traditions. Can a mage who considers herself to be the personal servant of death be expected to work willingly with the living? Even today, many willworkers think not.

Even if they do not fall victim to Jhor or worse, the Euthanatos can still suffer from the nature of their chosen tradition. Whether they choose to follow the route of assassin or researcher, of healer or gambler, it is easy for the death mages to lose themselves in their tasks rather than in their goals. Assassins begin to kill all who "deserve" death, regardless of the affect on the Wheel. Researchers recover all the knowledge they can, not just what should be recovered at this time. Healers and gamblers ply their trades excessively rather than sparingly. In the end, other Euthanatos must come in and undo what their colleagues have done, simply to maintain the Wheel.

Order of Heritiers

The Order of Hermes, appropriately enough, brings structure to the Council. One might think of them as the Skeleton of the Council. The Traditions were organized following the model of the Hermetic houses. The example presented by the Order's construction is carried forward to the organizations that do not have a long enough history to have created their own rules for government and self-discipline. The Order is also willing to provide aid to the other Traditions in putting down internal corruption. This aid has been accepted more than once in the past.

So if the other Traditions are so dependent on the Order for structure, why do the Hermetics remain? Pure and simple, it is pride that holds the Order of Hermes at the core of the Council of Traditions. They feel that they are uniquely responsible for the creation of the Council. They feel that they alone understand how best to hold the Traditions together as a whole. As a result, they feel that without the Order, there can be no Council of Nine. In the end, the Order of Hermes will stand behind the Council until there is no Council to stand behind.

The Order, like the Chorus, suffers both from internal fractiousness and from a push for unity. Unfortunately, these flaws, as well as the Order's sin of pride, also affect the Council as a whole. The Hermetics' sense of rightness insists that there is a place for everyone and that everyone has a place. As mages join the Traditions from the outside, the Order will happily provide them a role, often in their catchall House. However, House Ex Miscellanea seems insufficient to hold the variety of Disparates that seek to join the Order's ranks.

Further, the pride of the Order was such that it forced its own methods and ideals on the other Traditions. The Council can

easily be described as a larger scale reflection of the Order of Hermes. Rather than encouraging creativity, the Hermetics inflicted their politics on mages who were unused to such complications. As a result, young dissidents within the Order's ranks are clamoring for a restructuring of not only the Order of Hermes, but indeed of the entire Council of Traditions. There are rumors of militant Hermetics from all houses who plan an overthrow of the current Order hierarchy. Disparates and formerly loyal mages alike are frustrated at their impotence against the Technocracy and feel that if they led, things would be different. Would an Order of Hermes led by these willworkers be any more effective? Could they institute change for the better in the Council? These things are unclear, and if anyone does know the answer, they are not talking.

Lecturer Balt is perhaps unduly harsh in his criticism of the Order of Hermes in this passage. While it is indeed true that the Order is uniquely responsible for the structure of the Council of Nine, their own records indicate that their involvement was not dictated by pride. The founding Hermetics merely recommended the patterns with which they were familiar and which had been successful for them. It was the other Traditions that chose to follow that pattern. At the same time, however, Cornelius Balt is correct in recognizing the dissension in Hermetic ranks. My own investigation has confirmed the discontent and desire for change in the more recent additions to the Order's ranks. Older Hermetics are perhaps unaware of the extent of the seething rebellion. For bringing this problem to our attention, and for previous service to the Order of Hermes, I recommend that Lecturer Balt's overeager criticism be discounted at this time.

Magus Artus, House Quaesitor

Sons of Ether

The advantages the Etherites bring to the Council are twofold. First, they provide vast insight on the Technocracy. While this was certainly true immediately after their defection, it remains true today. To best adapt what technology and ideas are cast off, the Sons must stay in touch with the state of any and all scientific arts. In addition, the Etheric mages may be the most responsible for helping technology come full circle. The sciences started as just another type of magic, and with the continued successes of the Sons of Ether, they seem to be returning to that state. It is worth noting that while a focus on Victorian science may have been the rule in the past, modern Etherites represent a fairly evenly split focus on so-called retro-tech and trail-blazing alternative sciences.

In addition, the Sons of Ether find a unique freedom within the Council of Traditions. Certainly, there are still those among their colleagues who view them as dangerous technocratic madmen. As a whole, however, these mages find an acceptance for their theories in the realm of magic, where they would be rejected out of hand in the realm of scientific thought. As a result, such 'neo-sciences' as holistic medicine have found their way back into the sleeping world. The relationship between the Etherites and the Council may be the healthiest and the most balanced in terms of how much each gives and how much each asks of the other.

Originally labeled as 'Mad Scientists' by the other members of the Council, the Sons of Ether still labor to gain true acceptance from their allies. If this wasn't bad enough, the internal communication difficulties that stem from their diverse studies only serve to amplify the doubts of the other Traditions. The few Etherites who do gain recognition do so owing to their flamboyance, which also only adds to their image as crackpots. Further, since the Gauntlet has strengthened, the Sons who remain on this side are uncertain how to proceed. Their most luminous members had retreated to the aether previously to practice their science, and thus the youngest — and ironically most modern — of their Tradition remain behind, alone and unguided.

While the Sons of Ether are struggling with building a reputation, they also struggle with internal difficulties. Not only are there the generational communication problems that seem to be standard to all of the Traditions but, even within a generation, the sharing of information is hampered. The paradigm and research of every Etherite is unique. They may draw on a common stock of cast-off theories, but every Son approaches them differently. Perhaps the first thing the Sons of Ether should develop a theory for is a unified communication structure.

Verbena

Passion for life is perhaps the greatest asset the Verbena bring to the Council. They live life to the fullest and provide an anchor to the flesh that is so easy for some mages to neglect. They, perhaps, have the most positive outlook on the current dark days. In the eyes of the Verbena all things must die and pass away, so that the next generation might grow up strong and true. They may also have the greatest following among the Sleepers, with the current yearning for spiritualism in the modern world and the growth of Neo-Paganism and Wicca. As such, the Verbena may represent a strong recruiting contingent in the days to come.

While some young members would argue that the Verbena could stand alone, these primal mages still need the support and guidance of their fellows on the Council. Acceptance in small circles of the sleeper world is not enough to stave off the effects of Paradox. An understanding of how the primal beat drives the modern urban world is only a start to shaping that beat and that world. The passion of the Verbena may drive the Council forward, but the Council provides the tree that gives the Verbena a place to set roots and to find shelter against the winds of technology.

While there are factions of modern society that are open to the primal magic practiced by the Verbena, these mages still get combined with "Satanists and witches" by popular culture. Most modern Sleepers understand more about the technology of the Virtual Adepts and the Sons of Ether than they do about primal magics. As always, the beliefs of the Sleepers are echoed in their Awakened brethren, or perhaps they echo the beliefs of the willworkers. Either way, this misunderstanding and discomfort tends to make the more conservative members of the other Traditions uncomfortable around members of the Verbena. Unfortunately, the tendencies of Verbena mages toward bloody sacrifices and disturbing rites tend to support these opinions. Willworkers and mundanes alike are more comfortable with magic based on words or symbols than they are with magic that demands bloodshed, regardless of the result.

In addition, their ties to the primordial tend to distract them from the importance of immediate problems. When a Verbena is listening to the pulse of the city, she may not hear the honking of an out of control bus. The lack of strong organization within the Verbena only intensifies this disconnection. While in many of the Traditions, potent factions tend to cause dissension and weakness, it is argued that the Verbena would only be strengthened by a broader sense of comradeship, even if the larger groups couldn't agree. Some younger members of the Verbena have gone as far as to start organizing proto-factions without the permission of the elders. Only time will tell if these extended Cabals of young willworkers will evolve into mature factions.

Virtual Adepts

In some ways, the Virtual Adepts serve a similar role on the Council as do the Sons of Ether. They, like their more eccentric allies, provide insight on the Technocracy, its tools and its methods. While their information is often more up-to-date and relevant, their role as techno-spies is of – perhaps – lesser importance than their role as virtual explorers. The hope of finding or creating "Reality 2.0" may represent the greatest hope the Traditions have in finally defeating or escaping the Technocracy's aggression. If the Virtual Adepts can find an alternate reality more accepting of Tradition paradigms, then every mage will finally have the freedom to realize his or her own vision. In addition, the Adepts find themselves being called on more and more frequently to design and provide the Council's infrastructure. Communication lines, transportation modes and security efforts are all within the purview of the modern Adept. Some members of the Traditions have begun to wonder if perhaps it is not a "Reality 2.0" that is mankind's last, best hope, but instead a "Council of Traditions 2.0".

Though they hate to admit it, the Virtual Adepts need the protection of the Council perhaps more than any of the other Traditions. Not only do they face the same threat of extermination that all non-Technocrats face, they face an increased threat because of their betrayal of the Conventions. The memory of mankind is long and made longer by the advent of electronic storage. Many among the Technocracy still hold great bitterness toward the Adepts. Many of these train their students and minions to hate the Adepts, often without detailing the reasons. Further, if they were to leave the Council, the Virtual Adepts would bear the stigma of twice-betrayers. Truly they would be more alone in the world than even the most isolated of the Disparates.

Virtual Adepts are the metaphorical teenagers of the Council. Rebels for rebellion's sake, they may inspire growth and change, but they also cause dissent. Not only do the Adepts tend to disagree with the other Traditions, they also often bicker among themselves. With all the arguing, they often lose sight of the very Sleepers they claim to want to help. The Virtual Adepts must learn to temper their rebellion with maturity and wisdom.

The Adepts also recently suffered a great loss of influence with the latest crash and whiteout of the Digital Web. They must now vie with Sleepers and Technocrats in what was once their undisputed domain. Perhaps this new struggle will remind them that they should herald the new rather than dwell in what they have mastered. The Virtual Adepts were accepted into the Council to inspire growth and change and, to maintain their place, they must continue to grow and change themselves.

Tradition Mixing

Given the strife within the Traditions one might wonder how and why mages of different backgrounds could communicate, much less work together. Nonetheless, in this modern age of magic, the practice of cross-Tradition alliances seems to be becoming significantly more common. Across the globe, even members of Traditions that were once deadly enemies are clasping hands in friendship. To understand why, let's examine the reasons for these allegiances and attempt to discover what the mages involved might learn from one another.

Location

Whether it results from living in the same city, going to the same clubs or being stranded together in an isolated geographical location, it is easily argued that most Tradition mages associate together due to proximity rather than any ideological training. Such mixed groups draw strength from common backgrounds and common struggles. During the recent isolation of the Russian willworkers by Baba Yaga's Shadow Curtain, those mages unaligned to the ogress bonded together not only out of fear, but also because only those who had grown up in the

region could understand the trials it represented. Their experiences are not unique. Willworkers often have an easier time understanding mages from the same neighborhood, state or country than they ever will have understanding foreign mages of the same Tradition. Unfortunately, while perhaps the most common reason for cross-tradition alliances, these reasons may also be the least enduring. As anyone who has observed small town politics knows, even locals are more than happy to turn on one another when no other foe presents itself.

This phenomenon is not a new one. Consider the case of World War II. Mages of the same tradition were at one another's throats on opposite sides of the war. Japanese Akashics killed their Chinese colleagues while German Sons of Ether fought their American allies. Cultural identity is a more powerful formative factor than magical tradition because it impinges upon the mage's life in more ways.

Religious Identity

While the founders of the Council of Traditions felt they had designed the most effective division of philosophies, time has proven otherwise. Alliances form among members of Sleeper religions or among those who disagree with how the Council runs things. Not all staunch Christians are members of the Chorus. There are Dreamspeaker, Hermetic and even Verbena Christians. As a result, it is not uncommon to find bands of mixed Tradition mages who gather behind a religious banner rather than a Tradition banner. There are also groups of rebels within the Council who seek to reshape the Tradition into some new configuration. They argue, perhaps rightfully so, that the practices of the past led to the loss of the Ascension War. If such bonds can gain enough strength, who knows what shape reality will take in the future?

Common Goals

Similar to some other reasons for cross-Tradition alliances, mages often gather together for religious coherence or reasons of common social or political goals. Mages support such activities as the Children's Crusade, environmental activism and big business just as Sleepers do, though perhaps a bit more effectively. The practice of Voudoun and other religions has also caused mages to form allegiances across Traditions. Whatever mages are interested in, they work on.

Political manipulation is a favorite hobby. Willworkers manipulate all sides and levels of the election process. Mages of several traditions, including Choristers and Hermetics, provide funding to their parties and candidates of choice. Akashics often maneuver themselves close to personalities they feel strongly about, to act as guardians and advisors. Some mages, particularly Cultists and Euthanatos, are even more brazen, subtly (or sometimes not so subtly) adjusting election results for their own purposes. A recent election fell victim to the manipulations of two such cross-Tradition factions. Each side supported a separate political candidate for a high office. Each side brought all of its mundane and mystic powers to bear to give their man an edge. In the end, the two sides canceled each other out, leaving the ultimate decision to the Sleepers.

More commonly, however, such activism is subtler, and more effective. Whether it is Virtual Adepts and Ecstasy Cultists working together against Internet reform laws or House Fortunae and Lhaksmist mages attempting to shift international banking laws, willworkers typically start in the same way their sleeping colleagues do. Using the relative anonymity of the UseNet, critical posts are made for or against potential laws. A subtle influx of will ensures that the right people read these posts. For those mages who have the financial means, lobbyists represent a more direct approach. Others gather Sleepers together to form action groups, often acting as advisors rather than leaders.

For every goal that Sleepers find to bring people together, mages have at least as many or more. With so many reasons to form alliances, how powerful must a common goal be to forge a lasting relationship? Fairly powerful, for mages are individuals just as Sleepers are. For as many goals, there are ways to reach them. Most alliances that form for such political reasons end up sub-fractioning and losing influence — at least until the next big thing comes along.

Education

Education is a double-bladed sword as a reason for alliance. In this modern day, mages need to learn wherever and from whomever they can. If this means studying at the feet of a mage of another Tradition, so be it. At the same time, there is every day a greater urgency to find and train the newly Awakened before the Technocracy can get their steel probes into them. These education-based groups range from occult self-help groups to the Charleston Private Academy, an isolated estate dedicated to the protection and education of Council mages, not necessarily mages of any one Tradition. Unfortunately, such groups require stable meeting places, which in turn represent a weakness to the groups. If your members can find you, so can your enemies. Only the strongest and most well defended cross-Tradition educational organizations have any chance of surviving.

Response to Tradition Failings

By combining forces and cross-pollinating, some mages seek to counteract the failings of their parent organizations. An Ecstasy cultist and Euthanatos working together may see the other entering a dangerous spiral, where a member of the same organization may not recognize the symptoms. The Euthanatos might recognize the Cultist's over-dependence on some substance or practice and call him on it when another Cultist might not see anything wrong with it. Similarly, the Cultist might be able to draw the Euthanatos back to humanity when the killer becomes a little too obsessive, while another Euthanatos might merely applaud the fallen mage's drive.

Similarly, a Virtual Adept frustrated with his Tradition's lack of respect for the past might turn to mages whose training has tradition at its core. A Verbena might teach that Adept about the value of the natural rhythm of life while learning the place that technology holds in that same rhythm from her student. An Akashic Brother could teach and learn from both. The Brother could learn about all aspects of the Western world from these mismatched allies, while teaching his allies about the Zen philosophies and histories of the Eastern world. Together, this unlikely trio would gain a fuller understanding of the world around them than they would gain from their respective traditions, or alone. Further, with that greater understanding, they would better be able to fulfill their personal responsibilities.

Groups in these categories also include mages seeking to write "how to" books. "True Magic for the Stupid" may never show up on the shelves of your favorite book store chain, but certainly young Akashics and Dreamspeakers would benefit from reference materials. Less rebellious mages seeking to redefine the Traditions can also be included in this list. Rather than change for change sake, such mages bond together to change the Council from within. One must ask the question, however: Even if change is achieved and the current failings are successfully addressed, what new failings will appear and will they be any better, any less crippling than the current batch?

Common Methods

Similar to ideology, some mages may find themselves working together through the process of pursuing their individual goals. Willworkers who seek to change reality through force (by taking the battle to the Technocrats) often accept others who are equally militant, regardless of their background. One should not be surprised to find a mage strike-force made up of Akashic Vajrapani, Knights Templar and Knights of Radamanthys working together. As a unit these warriors can be more effective than any number of mages of a single faction or Tradition. Similarly, a team of Chaoticians, members of House Fortunae and Lhaksmists might eventually begin traveling together after repeatedly running into each other in the world's major gambling houses. As long as their goals coincide and their efforts are successful, such alliances are likely to continue — through social inertia, if for no other reason. On the other hand, once disagreements or failure begin, these groups tend to fall apart quickly, or they at least splinter, only to re-form with different members and a new agenda.

Technology

As much as it annoys some, mages often find themselves allied due to the effects of technology. In a world where there are cameras, telephones and even internet access almost everywhere, a mage can't help but be suddenly much more aware of everything outside of her own little burgh. Alliances may form between mages of different Traditions who have never even met. Bonds may form through written missives, telephone conversations and exchanged photos. Ironically, if these groups survive their initial face-to-face meetings, they can be among the strongest of the cross-Tradition organizations. If all the members are honest with each other, they can know more about each other than mages who train under the same master for years. Perhaps the best example is the Iar'i Magica, a group of willworkers whose entire organization is founded on a series of friendships built through communications on a carefully secured chat server. Other examples include groups who maintain constant communication through Ether-based wireless PDAs and Hermetically-augmented mainframes buried in forgotten caverns.

Orders From Above

While most of the master mages have died or been effectively banished by recent events, enough remain to make strongly worded suggestions to lesser members of their Traditions. Such suggestions may represent the second most common form of cross-Tradition alliance. Masters may nominate members for such groups as California's Gamble House Chantry — or other prestigious posts — for various reasons. Enigmatic wisdom may guide such decisions, as may politics, or any of the reasons listed above for groups forming on their own. These groups, unfortunately, while very effective, tend not to last beyond the loss of strong personalities or the completion of a pre-assigned task. Those that do survive tend to be small, tight-knit groups unlikely to ever evolve into full factions.

Lecturer Balt's assessment of cross-Tradition relations is particularly accurate. There are indeed a large number of good reasons for mages of different backgrounds to work together. However, it is my belief that he is overzealous in his definition of cross-Tradition factions. If indeed there are as many organizations as he describes below, we are in danger of an over-population of Awakened in the modern world. According to Hermetic definition, there is a certain membership threshold that a group of mages must pass before they can accurately be considered a faction. While the organizations mentioned by Balt are certainly of interest, they are positively not registered as official factions on Council rolls.

The so-called Slayer Proposal is a perfect example of just such an organization. While the number of mages who might consider themselves member of such a group may well be numerous, there is no true organization to unify them. This group is best considered a loose alliance of bickering Cabals than a true faction. At the other extreme is the Matthias Brotherhood. While strongly organized, the Matthias Compound is not likely ever to attract a sufficient number of mages to warrant faction status. A unified front alone does not a faction make. Indeed, I believe that this group of stubborn neo-Luddites is likely to go the way of the dinosaurs, much like any of the Sleeper equivalents that proceeded it.

Magus Artus, House Quaesitor

A minor allegiance that prospers might eventually develop into full faction status. Since it is a matter of debate among experts what the exact definition of a faction is, we shall — in the name of intellectual and creative freedom — ignore this particular issue. Instead, we will focus on some established cross-Tradition factions and on what led to their evolution. All factions start as a small group of like-minded mages, and cross-Tradition factions are no different. Any of the reasons listed above can bring a group of willworkers together, but what keeps them together and what draws others to their cause? Most typically strong emotions provide the basis for lasting organizations. Death, friendship, fanaticism. All these can provide the metaphysical strength a group needs to grow into a faction.

Clan Impossible

Clan Impossible started as a group of young London club mages with no other purpose than to give their mentors fits. They earned their name from their attitude: "Those children are impossible to work with!" However, until the strengthening of the gauntlet, this group of willworkers was little more than a band of acquaintances. Once the Avatar Storm essentially separated them from their mentors, however, Clan Impossible got serious. Some of the original Impossibles died at the hands of the Technocracy, having been caught unaware at a favorite nightclub. The remaining members got organized and started a recruitment drive. Now, the remaining original Impossibles act as a miniature Council of Traditions, directing unorthodox cross-training and orchestrating guerilla strikes on Technocracy interests.

Individual Impossible Cabals tend to number four members, with any additional members being the students of the core mages. Each of the core members is assigned a category from a set of four assigned to that Cabal. What these categories include vary from group to group, but they tend to be related. Some include the four inner planets, the classic Greek elements, the compass points and the four seasons. Each of these categories is assigned a set of responsibilities within the Cabal. From time to time, the core members of the group re-choose their assignment to keep themselves sharp. How these assignments are redistributed also varies from group to group, with some voting and others drawing at random. According to Impossibles' history, the original Impossibles were four regulars to a counter-culture club in England who liked to play at being the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. If the stories are to be believed, they could never agree who got to be which horseman and so would trade off roles from night to night.

Factions and Genre

Mage is a game about consensual reality. All roleplaying games provide the players and the Storyteller an opportunity to explore alternate realities and specific genres. However, **Mage** also provides that opportunity to the characters. On one level, Ascension and the practice of magic are all about crafting the reality in which the willworkers live. As a result, cross-Tradition factions represent a unique opportunity for genre tuning. If, for instance, your playing group wants to play a Hong Kong action-style chronicle, then instruct them to make characters for a cross-Tradition faction that supports that sort of game. An Akashic martial artist is an obvious choice, but the character ideas don't stop there. Consider an Ecstasy cultist as a drunken master. Or a two-gun wielding Euthanatos assassin who wants to go straight. How about a maverick cop who is also a member of the Virtual Adepts? The ideas go on.

But your genre tuning doesn't have to stop there. If all of the mages in a region agree about how reality should work, they are going to have an impact on the Sleepers. So, as Storyteller, you have an opportunity to decide what constitutes coincidental or vulgar magic in your setting. If you want an action movie style game, then let magic and stunts that fit your vision be coincidental. So, superhuman leaps and impossible gun fights can be coincidental, while magic that doesn't fit your vision, no matter whether or not it is coincidental, is treated as vulgar. It's your game, have fun!

Neo-Tradition Reformation Front

Several factions are devoted to reforming their Tradition into something more modern: the Akashic Li-Hai; the Chorus's Latitudinarians; the Dreamspeakers' Ghost Wheel Society; Etherite Progressivists; assorted Verbena and Hermetics. This movement is echoed in the Neo-Tradition Reformation Front. Members of this group have an interest in modernizing the Council of Nine and the entire Tradition structure. In the past, the NTRF has been effectively crippled by a lack of uniformity of vision. More recently, though, strong leadership has corrected this weakness. The NTRF now postulates that the loss of the Ascension War is a direct result of the inflexible definition of the Council. As an initial move, they actively support cross-Tradition training. Members of the NTRF commonly refer to

themselves as Akashic-Virtual Adepts or Dreamspeaker-Sons of Ether, if they claim any Tradition allegiance at all. Their long-term goals, however, are a bit more drastic. They wish to see the current Council structure torn down and completely replaced with a more open structure. They believe that the Traditions should inspire creativity and flexibility in their members, not close-minded allegiance to a particular social organization. Fortunately, the NTRF is currently working through legal means and negotiation, but if these methods don't succeed, who knows what they will try next.

Geographic Liberation Movement

Whether you talk about mages in the recently liberated Russia (liberated from Baba Yaga, as well as from Communism), or willworkers from Cuba, a lot of mages are starting to think of "us" as being more a regional definition than being based in Tradition. A Chorister, Akashic and Etherite from Australia (or China) are much more likely to have goals and concerns in common than three Choristers from India, Argentina and Ireland. This observation has led to rumors of a second cross-Tradition dedicated to the reconstruction of the Council of Nine. Unlike the NTRF, GLF seems to have a very specific re-organization in mind. Though no one, as yet, has actually claimed membership in the GLF, propaganda from the organization has appeared. Early manifestos argue that the Council should be divided along geographic lines and bases that argument on tenuous proof indeed. It is postulated in the flyers that an alternate reality exists where the Council organized along geo-political lines and that, in that reality, the Technocracy is a significantly less powerful threat. So far, no mage has been able to track down that reality.

Alternate Realities and Cross-Tradition Factions

In the world proposed by the **Mage** game, the Umbra could hold an infinite number of alternate realities. Some might argue that these realities represent the various chronicles that different Storytellers create for their troupe.

When considering cross-Tradition factions, another interpretation presents itself. Perhaps these organizations are shadows of alternate realities where the Council of Nine organized along different lines. How would the World of Darkness have evolved if the Council was formed earlier or later in time? What if the Council was divided along geographic or task-related lines rather than by paradigm? And possibly more interestingly, what if one of those realities discovered the reality your game is set in?

Charleston Private Academy

The Charleston Private Academy started small — a single master mage training five young mages who went unclaimed by other Traditions. Mages that would have otherwise become Hollow Ones and died at the hands of the Technocracy were able to distinguish themselves in the Ascension War. Alas, their efforts were too small to prevent the Technocracy from winning...or their master from being one of the first victims of the Avatar Storm. A handful of Council trained mages, recognizing the success of the Academy's training methods, joined the original five students as instructors and turned the small training facility into a full-fledged educational institution. This group, now numbering thirteen, recruited Hollow Ones, Disparates, and newly-Awakened mages alike for training. Experienced mages are also welcome to study at the Academy, but all who take advantage of the Academy's resources must use their skills to protect the Sleepers and further the Academy's aims. The curriculum for fulltime students is designed to maximize their natural inclinations, rather than fit them into a specific box. In addition to a full curriculum of mundane subjects, students learn from mages of all Traditions and are encouraged to develop their own methodologies and paradigms. These arrangements are not entirely one-sided. Graduates and instructors of the Academy have limited access to the organization's Sleeper and mystic resources.

Rumor has it that the original creator of the Academy had a close relationship with a high-ranking member of the Technocracy. Though these rumors cannot be confirmed, the story goes that they were friends before either was recruited to their particular sides of the Ascension War. Each tried to convince the other to see the wisdom of his methods, but in the end each declared himself a victor. The Technocrat survived their lifelong debate, while the Traditionalist left a legacy that will live beyond the war. Who is to say which was correct?

Matthias Brotherhood

Even in this modern electronic age, there are still some mages who think that technology of any form will be the downfall of humanity. The Matthias Brotherhood is a band of just such mages. Composed of former members of the Kannagara, Children of Albi, Baruti and other inter-Tradition factions who originally left their individual allegiances for not moving against technology quickly or decisively enough. After securing an isolated compound outside of the direct influence of modern convenience, the initial theorists behind the Matthias Brotherhood began accepting additional members. All members had to voluntarily be bound against the use of any form of labor-saving device they did not create themselves and to protect the compound and the Brotherhood with all their skills. There has been a rise in membership in recent months and the compound has been expanded several times. Current Matthias members include, oddly enough, a Son of Ether whose methods

and paradigms focus on handmade tools and crafts. Life with the Brotherhood is strenuous, but fulfilling.

Slayer Proposal

There is no shortage of mages who hunt monsters. Vampires and zombies alike must be wary of such Tradition-specific factions as the Akashic Vajrapani and Wu Lung Tiger Warriors, the Chorus' Knights of St. George, the female Sisters of Gabrielle and Knights Templar, the Euthanatoi Golden Chalice and Ta kiti, the Etherite Adventurers and members of House Flambeau. However, as stated earlier, every Tradition has its own weaknesses and the established demons have their own databases. With a modicum of warning an ancient vampire can escape even the most diligent of the above factions, or even, with a little planning and luck, wreak massive damage on his would-be attackers. The Slayer Proposal is an organization of mages who recognize this. Drawing on mages from the obvious factions, as well as on Virtual Adepts, Dreamspeakers and Verbena with the proper attitude and skills, the Slayer Proposal was organized by, and run in part by, several younger mages of House Tytalus who turned their backs on their fellows in the aftermath of the fiasco of the Second *Massasa* War. It is postulated that the organizing mages seek to redeem their reputation through the destruction of vampires and other supernatural threats to mankind. The Slayer Proposal seems to be quite popular among the newly-Awakened. The Technocracy does not hold the same sense of threat that monsters do.

Specific Cabals within the Slayer Proposal may attempt to focus their efforts. There is no small number of Cabals inspired by the remaining members of House Tytalus to hunt vampires and their minions exclusively. However, there are others who hunt wraiths and zombies and still other less numerous Cabals who seek to exterminate shape-changers or troublesome faerie folk. Not all Cabals are so focused, as such focused Cabals often find themselves overwhelmed by monsters who pretend to be one thing and turn out to be another. In addition, some Slayer Proposal Cabals make what purists would call unholy alliances. A particular group of willworkers might invite one or more of the shapeshifters or changeling folk into their midst to facilitate the extermination of a greater threat. It may not be surprising, then, to discover that Slayer Cabals often find themselves in conflict with one another over prey. It seems unlikely that until such conflicts can be overcome the Slayer Proposal will have any lasting influence over the Council.

Iar'i Magica

The Iar'i Magica originated as a social organization for technology-savvy Tradition mages. Even before the crash of the Digital Web, its membership of regularly active willworkers expanded to include Disparates and Hollow Ones. But even at

that time, it is little more than an Internet chat room for the exchange of ideas and the letting off of steam among like-thinkers. Because it was originally built not on the Digital Web, but instead on the mundane Internet, the Iar'i chat server weathered the recent whiteout with minimal loss of connectivity. Secured by the efforts of mages from nearly all of the Traditions, it has also proven to be impervious to Technocracy intrusion thus far. Over its history, Iar'i Magica has become much more than just a group of net friends. Several face-to-face meetings have been arranged and strong friendships have emerged. Though possibly the smallest cross-Tradition organization to qualify as a faction, Iar'i may prove to be one of the most influential in coming days.

The Iar'i Magica is perhaps unique among technology-associated Cabals and factions in that it does not seek to push the edge of technomagic. While they do not hesitate to protect themselves and their virtual Chantry in any manner they are able, they shy away from advanced science. They feel that existing technology is sufficient to their needs and that anything more would attract attention. Arcane handheld PDAs may be appropriate for other mages, but not Iar'i. They are happy to communicate through a server humming quietly in a computer room filled with dozens of other machines dedicated to even more mundane purposes.

Voudoun

With the addition of some Bata'a, the practice of Voudoun has gained significantly more influence in the Traditions. These former Disparates have many allies among the formerly strictly loyal Council members. The Dreamspeakers and the Verbena both have Voudoun practitioners and related types as members. The Ecstatics have the Erzuli Jingo and the independent Houguns and Mambos. The Euthanatoi have the Ta Kiti. In addition, there are the Bata'a who have recently splintered, with many joining four separate Traditions. The Akashic Brotherhood has accepted Akashic Capoeira practitioners who apply the principles of Do to Brazilian and Caribbean cultures instead of Asian mysticism. The Celestial Choristers include Voudoun practitioners who believe all spirits serve a single divine entity. The Hermetic Ex Miscellanea House includes Voudoun priestesses, the Virtual Adepts have "cyberhouguns" who serve Electric Loas, and even the Sons of Ether have among their numbers Voudoun practitioners with an interest in dimensional entities and parapsychology. It is not surprising that members of these various subgroups are petitioning the Council for full recognition as a faction, if not a full Tradition in their own right. In the past, the Council has been Eurocentric; perhaps the inclusion of a Voudoun-based Tradition with help create a more globally-oriented Council.

United Traditions Organization

Supporters of Aram Marangoudakis of House Tytalus have taken his beliefs in a cross-Tradition ambassador program a step further in the modern day. Joined by former members of the Albireo faction of the Euthanatos, members of the Celestial Chorus' Monists and the Utopians from the Sons of Ether, they have developed the United Traditions Organization, a faction dedicated to inter-Tradition diplomacy and cooperation. Modeled on world government organizations such as the United Nations, the UTO is not interested in how and if the Council makes reform. The UTO does not care about investigating internal corruption. Members of the UTO, however, are almost certain to show up when there is internal strife. UTO members will do almost anything to prevent members of different Traditions from fighting. They will even go so far as to provide resources and even personnel to deal with crises that cause cross-Tradition discord. There are those who worry just how far the UTO will go to forge unity in the Council. Will there come a day when the UTO will take up arms against their brethren in the name of unification?

Sim Ascension

There are rumors of a highly complex modeling package being developed by a small faction within the Virtual Adepts and in conjunction with members of the Cult of Ecstasy, the Euthanatos and the Sons of Ether. Originally postulated by a young Virtual Adept as part of his initiation process, the project, now code-named "Sim Ascension," was originally designed to explore the results of a single willworker's decisions along the path to full enlightenment. Since that time, the algorithms involved have been refined, expanded and had their processing time reduced. While the original package operated on a mundane desktop computer using a text-based interface, the current version — according to rumor — operates on a custom built bio-organic mainframe using an advanced graphical interface. It is claimed that "Sim Ascension" can now model the decisions and interactions of dozens of willworkers and that it runs fast enough that 20 years of accurate simulation data can be produced in a matter of hours.

If these rumors are true, and if predictions of Sim Ascension's development rate are accurate, the package could become much more than a modeling tool within a few short years. It seems surprising that full virtual interaction has not yet been implemented, given the natural inclinations of the Adepts. Full virtual interaction with the package seems a natural next step. From there, anything may be possible. The members of the project may soon be able to project their minds into the simulation and experience an entire lifetime of decisions and reactions within a matter of minutes. Incredible numbers of possibilities will be able to be tested and discarded in the course of hours. A strategy for redefining reality might be available to the project members in a matter of days.

Then again, these might all be rumors — False hopes spread by Technocratic agents hoping to distract their remaining opposition with a virtual holy grail. Or worse yet... the project has been completed and Tradition mages everywhere are all just electronic bits in some test scenario. If that's the case, how much longer will the programmers leave this possibility running before re-booting and trying again?

Factional Character Creation

Rather than taking the free Sphere dot normally granted by their tradition, players may, with the permission of the Storyteller, have their characters take a set of traits that is more in line with their Faction. For instance, a Faction based on statistics and chaos theory might choose a dot of Entropy, while a well-funded group of academic mages might take a free dot of Intelligence and two dots of Library. We recommend that combat skills not be included in these faction packages, but it is your game, so use your best judgment. As always these, and any alternate rules, must pass the final approval of the Storyteller.

Suggested starting packages for the factions named in this section:

Clan Impossible — Streetwise 2, Survival (London) 1, Contacts 1. Players who create a Clan Impossible Cabal should define the four categories that their Cabal uses, including the tasks assigned to each category. They should also choose a category for each character. If their group has more or fewer than four members, they should explain why. Some more ideas for categories might include the core classes of old fantasy games or the professions named in nursery rhyme or book titles. For example: Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy. The character assigned the role of Tinker would be in charge of equipment, the Tailor would be in charge of day–to-day supplies, the Soldier would lead combat missions and the Spy would be responsible for collecting information for the Cabal.

Neo-Tradition Reformation Front — Etiquette 2, Law 1, Influence 1. Players who create a NTRF Cabal should consider what two or three Traditions each character claims tie to. By choosing their Tradition, the character chooses their paradigm or paradigms. For instance, a Virtual Adept/Hermetic might use high-tech implants that are maintained and acti-

vated through the use of arcane symbols. (The *Dual Traditions* Merit is particularly appropriate.)

Geographic Liberation Movement — Expression 2, Arcane 3. As discussed in this book, members of the GLF would never acknowledge the existence of the GLF, much less their involvement. As a result, this may not be the best choice for a PC Cabal. If your players do express an interest in it, however, they should play it as a highly compartmentalized organization and pick another faction or factions to feign membership in.

Charleston Private Academy — Academics 2, Allies 1, Library 1, Node 1. Charleston Private Academy Cabals are most often well-organized affairs. The membership is chosen to balance abilities and gifts and can be changed when new Academy graduates present themselves or existing members cease to pull their weight. This might be an interesting faction to explore when you have multiple playing groups or players with irregular availability. Different game sessions could include different sets of mages based on player availability.

Matthias Brotherhood — +1 Stamina, Survival 1. Choosing to play a Matthias Brotherhood chronicle will likely mean one of two things. One possibility is a very reactive chronicle where the Brotherhood compound is constantly repelling threats of physical and mystical natures. The other possibility is a highly political chronicle focused on the internal and external politics of the scientifically-primitive Brotherhood and its relationship to an increasingly more technological world.

Slayer Proposal — Alertness 1, Cosmology 1, Occult 1, Arcane 1. A chronicle based on the Slayer Proposal is likely to be an active and combat filled one. Players should design combat-capable characters and avoid stepping on the shticks of their fellows. The Storyteller should consider tweaking genre as discussed elsewhere in this book toward a more action movie oriented reality. Let loose and have fun! On the other hand, this might be a dark and bloody chronicle. If this is more the feel you are interested in, check out **Hunter: The Reckoning** and its supplements for ideas of theme and opposition.

Iar'i Magica — Computer 2, Expression 1, Allies 1. Unless you want to run a globetrotting campaign, membership in the Iar'i Magica faction is likely best limited to only one or two members of the playing group. As described in the text, Iar'i members, while good friends, only meet rarely and probably serve the campaign and the characters better as an information source rather than a chronicle basis.

Voudoun — Occult 3, Dream 1. Chronicles based around voodoo and other social, religious, or political groups should be prefaced by significant research by the Storyteller and players. Few gaming supplements can do such organizations in-depth justice. Still, if you are familiar and comfortable with such groups, they can provide an extra level of depth to a chronicle.

United Traditions Organization — Charisma 1, Etiquette 1. This is another faction that may lead to a highly political game. Entire chronicles can be centered around a playing group of UTO negotiators attempting to defray inter-Tradition conflicts or rooting out the external sources of the same. If the militant aspects of the UTO are of more interest, you may instead rapidly find yourself in a chronicle where the PCs and their UTO allies are trapped between the Council they are trying to reform and a Technocracy eager to exterminate an unsupported band of willworkers.

Sim Ascension — Computer 3, Wonder 1. All members of the Sim Ascension project pool their Wonder points toward the project. We leave it to the Storyteller to imagine what sort of Chronicles might be run around this modeling group.

Using Cross-Tradition Factions in Your Game

Note that any or all of the Factions presented in this chapter may be completely fictitious in your chronicles. In fact, they may not exist in mainline World of Darkness reality, except as rumors. As a result, you should feel free to treat them as such. If your players' characters go looking for the Matthias Brotherhood, they may find themselves literally on a wild goose chase. On the other hand, if they ignore the rumors of the United Traditions Organization, they may find themselves embroiled in UTO affairs without knowing it.

As a Storyteller, you have many options with your game. You may choose to run your Chronicles straight from the books, so to speak, or you may set them in a completely alternate reality. If your players are resistant to your thoroughly designed alternate reality, you may still have another option. As noted in an earlier sidebar, any set

of cross-tradition factions may be echoes of how the Council was designed in another reality. So, consider making the bulk of the cross-tradition active factions in your chronicle based on the reality you originally designed.

Consider a reality where the Council was designed along geographic lines. The resulting cross-Tradition factions in your game might include a Russian faction, an Asian faction, a European faction, a North American Faction, a South American Faction, an African faction, a Pacific Islands faction and a Virtual Reality faction. If you explore the histories of the factions, you might hint that the Virtual Reality faction was originally a Hollow Earth faction. You might also hint at an additional secret faction based in, on and around the Umbra.

Of course, the various factions in your game need not even been related. You might just create your factions around ideas, causes or hooks you think are cool or that you think might interest your players. Start working on one faction at a time, defining additional factions as you need them. Note the key premise they are based on. Look back at some of the ideas suggested earlier in the chapter for general jumping points, but always try to get more specific. Once you have the core concept, think about how members of the various Traditions might fit into them. Don't be trapped by stereotypes. Not all Akashics are Asian. Not all Euthanatos are cold-blooded killers. Don't feel like you have to include members of all the traditions. Two or three might be sufficient for your concept. Once you have worked your way through the Traditions, think about specific members. If you were designing three or four different player characters for this faction, what would they be like? What would bring them together and keep them together? This should help you design the history of the faction. Finally, go back and look at your original concept in light of what you have created. Rewrite the concept with everything you've done in mind.

Rather than designing a faction around a concept, you might consider designing a faction around the traditions you want involved. This is particularly useful when starting a new chronicle with players who have strong character ideas. Noting that not all cross-Tradition factions include members of all the Traditions, you might pick your favorite four or five groups to design a faction around, or work with the Traditions your players choose for their characters. However you choose the Traditions you include in your new faction, the next step is to consider why members of these groups would work together. We have given you some opinions in this chapter, and your players may give you more. What do the factions have in common? What can they learn from each other? What weaknesses do the individual traditions have that the others can offset? Once you figure out what brings them together, you have your core concept. Then you can work through and flesh out the rest of your faction with your players and their characters in mind.

One final thought for the inclusion of multi-organization factions in your game. The Council of Traditions and the Conventions of Technology have existed for a long time, at least in the mind of younger willworkers. There may be mages on both sides of the war who are not only tired of the fighting, but who don't understand why the fighting started in the first place. Such mages would look to the increased spirituality in the increasingly more technological world and recognize that mysticism and science are opposite sides of the same metaphysical coin. Is it possible that a faction made up of active members of both the Technocracy and the Traditions could form? What would the goals of such an organization be? These questions are yours to answers. It's your game after all.

Templates

It happens to all of us: The Storyteller caught on the spur of the moment without a character to fill in. Or perhaps you're looking to see the "average power level" of some familiar Tradition faces. The templates presented here may help to give some insight into typical Tradition mages. Furthermore, the templates illustrate how a given concept might fit multiple Traditions — perhaps the Traditions are more similar than they think.

Groggy Freshman

Background: He has a normal life, is working on a college degree and has some hopes for the future. Or rather he did. Now everything looks different, smells different, is different, and he really needs a new teacher.

Image: The groggy freshman is unremarkable. He could be any young up-and-comer from either side of the ocean. However, weird stuff always seems to find its way to his doorstep.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a normal life and are desperately trying to keep it that way. Unfortunately,

these "things" keep happening around you. And somehow, the Men in Black who keep showing up don't ease your concerns any.

Tradition: Akashic Brotherhood or Virtual Adepts
Nature: Traditionalist
Demeanor: Loner
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Talents: Awareness 1, Expression 1, Athletics 1, Alertness 1, Subterfuge 1
Skills: Drive 1, Performance 1, Technology 1, Stealth 2, Etiquette 1
Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Enigmas 1, Investigation 1, Science 1
Backgrounds: Avatar 3, Destiny 3, Resources 1
Spheres: Correspondence 3, Mind 3
Arete: 3
Willpower: 7
Quintessence: 3
Paradox: 0

Disregarded Academic

Background: She was certain she could make a name for herself in the ivory tower of academia. There were abandoned research directions she was certain could bear fruit. Unfortunately, her peers disagreed.

Image: The academic looks more like an escapee from some counter-culture movement than an Ivy League professor. Her worn bag may contain any number of bizarre items. She is eager to share knowledge, perhaps uncomfortably so.

Roleplaying Hints: You are on the cutting-edge of your field, no matter what your peers say. You routinely explore cast-off or lost theories to advance the body of knowledge. Unfortunately, your research leaves little time for a 'social life'.

Tradition: Sons of Ether or Euthanatos
Nature: Judge
Demeanor: Deviant
Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5
Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 2
Skills: Meditation 2, Stealth1, Survival 3, Technology 3
Knowledges: Academics 5, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Science 2
Backgrounds: Avatar 2, Wonder 2, Library 2, Resources 1
Spheres: Matter 2, Entropy 2, Time 2
Arete: 2
Willpower: 7
Quintessence: 2
Paradox: 0

Cyber-Pagan Ganger

Background: Once, he was a directionless teenager looking for someone to blame. Then he woke up to the truth about reality. Now he knows just who to blame, what to blame them for and just what to do about it.

Image: The Ganger wears the uniform of anarchists everywhere: leather and denim, grungy shirts and sturdy boots. Of course, his gear is more likely to be covered with runes and pentacles than most. And don't forget the weapons....

Roleplaying Hints: Once upon a time, you raged against the machine because the music told you to. Now, you feel the heartbeat of the street and have a specific target. If someone gets hurt along the way, so be it.

Tradition: Verbena or Virtual Adept
Nature: Bravo
Demeanor: Rebel
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Streetwise 3
Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Melee 2, Survival 2, Technology 2, Stealth 3
Knowledges: Computer 2, Occult 3
Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 2, Contacts 3
Spheres: Correspondence 2, Life 2, Forces 2
Arete: 2
Willpower: 6
Quintessence: 2
Paradox: 0

Green Trainee

Background: The trainee just experienced awareness. Fortunately, there was someone there to help her. Unfortunately, in this day and age, the only training there is time for is field training.

Image: The trainee tries to project her best image, dressing nicely but not too nicely. She knows that something big is going on, but not exactly what that is. She is nervous, but is doing the best she can.

Roleplaying Hints: The world is far bigger and weirder than you ever imagined. You have a lot to learn but have noble goals. Hopefully those goals (and you!) will survive trial by fire.

Tradition: Dreamspeakers or Order of Hermes

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Conformist

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Dodge 1

Skills: Etiquette 3, Meditation 3, Crafts 1, Drive 1, Performance 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Science 1, Language 3, Investigation 1

Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 4, Mentor 2

Spheres: Forces 2, Spirit 2, Prime 2, Mind 1

Arete: 3

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 4

Paradox: 0

Humanitarian Volunteer

Background: A stint in the Peace Corps taught him just how much help humanity needs. The volunteer dedicated his life to providing that aid. Awakening just provided more tools toward that goal.

Image: Traces of an early sense of helplessness line the wrinkles in the humanitarian's face. But now a new confidence shines through. He moves efficiently but is always willing to pause and share a kind word.

Roleplaying Hints: Rebuilding people's lives is what you do. You make friends easily and take time to stay in touch when you can. Healing bodies and building homes is easy; patching reality is much more daunting.

Tradition: Celestial Chorus or Dreamspeaker

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Caregiver

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Dodge 2, Expression 2, Leadership 1

Skills: Crafts 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 3, Survival 3, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 1, Law 2, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Avatar 2, Contacts 4, Arcane 1

Spheres: Prime 2, Spirit 2, Matter 2, Life 1

Arete: 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: 0

Exo-Reality Ranger

Background: The Ranger started by exploring and experimenting with MUs, alcohol or both. With time, the easily attainable lost its charm. Now Awakened, the ranger explores alternate worlds her Sleeping peers can't even imagine.

Image: A convenient wardrobe is the hallmark of the exo-reality ranger. She is as likely to show up in a nightshirt and shorts, as in jeans and a T-shirt. After all, this reality is boring, so why bother cleaning up.

Roleplaying Hints: You've seen most of the alternate realities that the sleeping world can create. Now you want to see everything the Awakened world can create. You love to share your experiences with others.

Tradition: Cult of Ecstasy or Virtual Adepts

Nature: Thrill-seeker

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Awareness 4, Expression 1, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Meditation 2, Performance 2, Survival 2, Technology 4

Knowledges: Computers 3, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 2, Occult 2, Science 3

Backgrounds: Avatar 3, Dream 3, Wonder 1

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Spirit 2, Time 2, Mind 1

Arete: 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 3

Paradox: 0

Secret Renegade

Background: Always disappointed with the state of things, the renegade was thrilled when his Awakening gave him the ability to change those things. While he supports his Tradition's goals, he disagrees with its methods. So he works from within to change those who seek to change reality.

Image: The renegade does his best to work inside his tradition. Discovery would be more trouble than it is worth. He is quick to volunteer for duties that will further his actual goals.

Roleplaying Hints: To everyone in the Council, you are helpful but unassuming. When working toward your ultimate goal of rebuilding the Traditions, you struggle to keep your excitement from shining through.
Tradition: Celestial Chorus or Order of Hermes
Nature: Fanatic
Demeanor: Traditionalist
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 4, Expression 3, Subterfuge 5
Skills: Etiquette 3, Performance 2
Knowledges: Academics 2, Investigation 3, Computer 2, Enigmas 2, Law 2, Cosmology 1, Science 1
Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 3, Mentor 3
Spheres: Prime 3, Forces 3
Arete: 3
Willpower: 6
Quintessence: 3
Paradox: 0

Council Assassin

Background: From the moment the assassin Awakened, she was trained to be the ultimate weapon. The assassin was taught all of the skills necessary to infiltrate and strike with surgical skill. Whatever her past life was like, that's forgotten, along with every other life she has taken on as part of an assignment.

Image: The assassin appears outgoing and genial. She has attractive features and a pleasant demeanor. Her garb is always appropriate to her role, with no hint to her true function. When she commits the ultimate betrayal, however, her features are cast in stone.

Roleplaying Hints: You serve the ideal of the Council and the Traditions. Although you are extraordinarily congenial, you have a distinct disdain for those who fall for your wiles. Unfortunately, you are also starting to think about the impact of your actions.
Tradition: Akashic Brotherhood or Euthanatos
Nature: Loner
Demeanor: Perfectionist
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 4, Melee 1, Performance 2, Stealth 3, Survival 1, Technology 1
Knowledges: Computer 2, Investigation 3
Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Avatar 1, Contacts 2, Mentor 2, Resources 2
Spheres: Mind 2, Entropy 2, Correspondence 1, Life 1, Time 1
Arete: 2
Willpower: 5
Quintessence: 1
Paradox: 0

Primal Aesthetic

Background: The modern world is very draining on young mages, but those who hold tight to the past may have the best chance for survival. A study of the strengths and traditions of the past goes a long way toward providing stability in the present. The primal aesthetic preaches looking to core essence reality, rather than merely its current trappings.

Image: The aesthetic wears only utilitarian clothes. Much more than a crude robe can only serve to distract from the ancient truth of reality. He walks with a gnarled staff, not as a crutch to support himself, but as a weapon to act as guide to others in need.

Roleplaying Hints: You are stern and silent, but more than able to defend yourself and those around you. You are slow to talk, but your sparse words speak volumes to those willing to listen. You have no ambition beyond your own progression along the path of understanding.
Tradition: Verbena or Akashic Brotherhood
Nature: Pedagogue
Demeanor: Martyr
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Leadership 1
Skills: Crafts 1, Meditation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3
Knowledges: Academics 1, Cosmology 1, Enigmas 1, Linguistics 1, Occult 1
Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 5, Dream 1
Spheres: Mind 3, Life 3, Spirit 1
Arete: 3
Willpower: 7
Quintessence: 5
Paradox: 0

Surviving Master

Background: The Surviving Master has watched his peers rise to power and fall to the rigors of the Ascension War. Some call him a manipulative plotter, others call him a coward for not standing on the front line with his colleagues. He believes himself incomprehensible, and the only hope for the next generation of the Traditions.

Image: The Surviving Master appears in whatever appearance he desires. Some mistake him for a doddering old fool, and he does nothing to correct them. Even those who know he is a master are uncertain which Tradition he hails from.

Roleplaying Hints: Your concerns are far greater than those of humanity, or even those of your fellow mages. You try to guide both without drawing the attention of their many enemies. When you must invoke your power, you do the minimum you must to achieve the effect you desire.

Tradition: Cult of Ecstasy or Sons of Ether
Nature: Competitor
Demeanor: Caregiver
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Dodge 5, Expression 4, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Etiquette 2, Stealth 4
Knowledges: Academics 5, Cosmology 5, Enigmas 5, Linguistics 5, Occult 5
Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 5, Wonder 1
Spheres: Time 5, Matter 5, Correspondence 4, Prime 4
Arete: 9
Willpower: 9
Quintessence: 5
Paradox: 0

MODERN
ALCHEMY
CHANTRY ARCHITECTURE
PRESCOTT

Chapter Six: Building Character

Every mage is a unique individual — Traditions, Crafts and factions are all simply ways to put similar people into familiar groupings for ease of identity. While some conservative mages might claim that the formalized roots of training in a Tradition place a signature stamp on mages of that Tradition, exceptions do — and always will — exist. Indeed, the Traditions themselves are not immutable; in time, other societies may rise up or engulf the Traditions in change. Because every mage is an individual, no group can claim a total rigidity of structure and history. Mages *must* be flexible enough to accommodate new beliefs and new ways of doing things.

With the Final Nights here, the Reckoning come and Armageddon potentially at hand, the Traditions are desperate for members. Recruitment brings in old blood that once scorned the organization and new mages who don't quite fit all of the familiar molds. Some practice magics rather far afield from the Traditions' original systems. Others have bizarre quirks or manifestations of magic that defy any supernatural understanding. Most find a home in some Tradition or another — nobody can afford to turn away allies.

Given the disparity of different mages, strange characteristics might crop up on any practitioner of the Art. Some or all of the curious developments included here might show up in your story... as a plot twist, a new arrival or even a curse upon your characters....

Additional Concepts

A couple of added concepts bear exploration for Tradition mages. Some mages have undeniably magical histories that eschew the mundane realities of most people. While these concepts aren't appropriate for every game, they can open the door to unique characters in high-magic games or chronicles with a flair for whimsy.

Construct

Your mage is not exactly human... well, sort of. Somehow, he was created in something other than the usual birds-and-bees fashion. While he may seem pretty normal, there's an undeniable twist of past there... of which he may or may not be aware.

A construct character can vary widely between many possible origins. The character is a magical entity created with the Spheres of Life, Mind, Prime and Spirit. The *form* of creation could be just about anything: A clone, a double made from the air, a statue given life or a sentient computer in a flesh-like body.

Constructs often have specific Flaws relating to their type of creation. A construct might have a vulnerability to being dispelled or unraveled! Some constructs might seem a little "more than human" in some ways (with a Legendary Attribute) or have odd quirks or problems (such as the *Amnesia* Flaw). Constructs often have some level of the *Notoriety* Background or *Enemies* (because people may be out to destroy them, and artificial beings don't always have standing in magical society when compared to "real" people).

Magical Heritage

No, your character isn't the Dolly Homemaker of the Traditions — a magical family isn't often a *normal* one. Rather, this sort of character comes from a family whose entire lineage, or at least a significant part of it, has magical characteristics. This doesn't necessarily mean that the character has any sort of "genes" for Awakened potential, but certainly the family has always had some errant quirks. Perhaps every third son of a generation winds up Awakened; better hide that trait from the Technocracy! Or maybe a powerful curse haunts the entire family and everyone in its line can see ghosts or has some supernatural catastrophe befall him or her. Perhaps one of the family's scions is actually a vampire or werewolf... and the budding magician had best step carefully lest Uncle Lester pull him aside for a few "lessons and favors."

Characters from a magical family may have a quirky history that leads to special knowledge — if Uncle Lester is a vampire, after all, and decides to take his budding nephew with special talents under his wing, your mage might learn a few things about the undead. Similarly, a magical family might have members who all share the same sets of Merits and Flaws: perhaps everyone in the family is a *Medium*, or all lineal members have a *Curse*. If other members of the family are full-on mages, then Tradition training may not be a problem: The character's relatives will see the mage through the Awakening and the harrowing magical studies beyond. Members of such a family will often be *Allies* as the Background, and distant relatives or family connections or servants could be *Contacts* or *Retainers*. On the flip side, some families are dysfunctional and might serve as Adversarial Backgrounds, as well.

A magical family could also have a *Chantry* or *Sanctum* in the form of an ancestral home. Magical relatives, because they share similar upbringing and background, often have similar or identical Resonance, too.

Neo-Traditionalist

The Traditions, as examined, must change and flex to accommodate new times and emerging trends. A neo-Traditionalist is on the forefront of such change, espousing new ways to do magic and breaking from the old mold of the nine members of the Council. Such a character may bring a new spin to an old Tradition, like a techno-Dreamspeaker, but more and more often these individuals are mages who place a specific faction or agenda ahead of any old Tradition. Indeed, some of them might well be considered Orphans who are members of factions that also have ties to the Traditions.

A neo-Traditionalist character could have any variety of capabilities. Check out the faction-specific mages described on pp. 201-202. Neo-traditionalists may, eventually, become new Traditions, but such an evolution would probably take decades or centuries.

Neo-Traditionalist characters should set up a set of Traits consistent with the neo-Tradition's agenda. For instance, a neo-Tradition based around the spread of Green economic policy probably has members who all have some degree of Academics and Politics. The Storyteller should come up with neo-Traditions that focus on the impetus of the chronicle, and build a "purchase package" that reflects the interests of the neo-Tradition.

Additional Abilities

While the thirty Abilities in **Mage** can host a wide range of capabilities and education, a few little things might slip between the cracks — or perhaps you simply want to use an Ability that's not quite analogous to something in the core book. That's fine; you can build and tweak myriad Abilities to suit a character specifically. Often, you can simply take an appropriate specialization of an Ability. Just note down a specialization that reflects your character's skill: Perhaps the Expression Ability with a specialization in Poetry. (You can even take a specialization if you don't have four dots in the relevant Ability; you just don't garner the benefit of re-rolling 10s.) However, the Storyteller may well decide that some special Abilities — like the Akashic Brotherhood's signature Do — deserve their own categorization.

The additional Abilities included below are a bit narrower in scope than the usual Abilities for a **Mage** game. As a result, the Storyteller may rule that using an especially appropriate Ability mitigates difficulties somewhat — using the High Ritual Ability to perform a rite is better than just using generic-brand Occult.

As always, consult with your Storyteller before you choose any of these Abilities.

Empathy

Concern furrowed Lee Ann's brow as she watched Kyle struggle to move. Pushing the worst of the debris out of the way, she reached down to help him. She new from her own experiences that the backlash injuries would heal in time, but that the real damage would be in the painful memories and the fear of failing that might cause him to forsake magic altogether.

With the Empathy Ability, your character has a sense of other people's feelings and emotions. Perhaps your character is naturally "in tune" with others, or maybe she can remember similar experiences of her own and identify with the crises or joys that face another person. Either way, she has some insight into the motives and feelings of people she deals with.

- • Novice: You can at least tell when someone's joking, really sad or utterly pissed off.
- •• Practiced: You have an uncanny sense for when your friends are unhappy or keeping a secret.
- ••• Competent: Even those who try to act or fool you often betray subtle hints that you notice.

•••• Expert: People aren't just open books to you; it's like their actions and words tell you exactly how they feel.

••••• Master: You're so sensitive to other people's feelings that some people think you're a mind reader.

Possessed by: Mothers, conniving businessmen, psychics, psychologists

Specialties: Subtext, Withheld Information, Psychological Trauma, Psychic Connection, Sensing Lies

High Ritual

Carefully placing the final candle at the edge of the thaumaturgic circle, Peter exhaled slowly and straightened in a deliberate fashion. Not just the placement, not simply the drawings, not merely the materials — but the very act of putting them together, the means of mindful use, all came together in a statement of power.

In. Out. He breathed in time with the universe.

Step. Step. Place. In. Out. Step. Step.

As an apprentice, he'd made the mistake of thinking that the chanting and invocation was the important part of the ritual. It wasn't until many years later that he'd realized that life itself was the ritual.

While just about every mage learns some minor rites and tools to perform magic with ceremony, this Ability covers the nuances of putting on *big time* rituals. The mage learns everything from how to dress, to what colors match with the spell in question, to how to cut a few corners or eke out a little extra power. A leader of a High Ritual casting may not be the best public speaker or the most charismatic leader, but he knows exactly how to project, move and motivate so as to put every piece into just the right place at the right time.

With High Ritual + Stamina, a mage can continue casting a strenuous chant or rite for several hours, or even for a day or more (at 5+ successes). High Ritual + Intelligence allows a mage to accumulate extra successes on the ritual beyond the normal Arete x Willpower limit (although the High Ritual roll itself cannot be extended; you have one roll of the Ability to increase the cap for your casting). Particularly specialized High Ritual casters may excel in specific situations as well.

• Novice: You've seen a couple of impressive rites.

•• Practiced: With a couple tries you can edge your way through a simple one.

••• Competent: Practiced and confident, you can lead or participate in a variety of short rituals.

•••• Expert: Your rites carry the strength of conviction and countless hours of study.

••••• Master: Not only can you perform the most demanding rituals, you can fill in missing parts or build your own new sacraments.

Possessed by: Various mages and sorcerers, priests, hip neopagans

Specialties: Extending ritual, hurried, improvised, massive (more than 9 participants), by specific Tradition style

Additional Backgrounds

The Backgrounds presented in the **Mage** core rulebook cover a great many social and supernatural ties that any mage character might have. Still, some mages have their own special benefits that aren't widespread outside of certain groups. For instance, the Technocracy relies on special mental training — *Hypercramming* — instead of tapping into the universal subconscious (*Dream*). So, too, do the Traditions (and allied Disparates) have magical Backgrounds too valuable to be found among solitaries and too mystical to be found in the Technocracy.

Blessing

Leaning back against the bar, Jamie watched the passing club-goers. Dressed sharply and vibrant with youthful expectation, they danced and whirled in the darkness of the early morning musical pulse. Even as he watched, a small group of women returned from the dance floor to their table, trailing their dark skirts and Gothic attire. All of them regarded Boyle, a couple of them smiling demurely — or deviously — in his direction.

Jamie regarded his smartly dressed friend. Sure, Boyle had money and a good wardrobe, and heck, even a good haircut. But this was the sixth looker tonight that had made eyes at him. He wasn't that handsome.

"What is it with you, anyway?" quipped Jamie.

Boyle raised his drink slightly. "Oh, you know... some of us just have the mojo."

Somebody up there, or down there, or out there, likes you. Maybe you did him/her/it a favor, or it's a relative, or you're its devoted servant and it's given you a perk to help you do your job. Maybe you've made an amazing discovery on your lonesome (not that you're able to recreate the experiment) and you've still got the dividends. No matter. You've been given a taste of power (possibly with a few strings attached) and now it's time to play.

What this means is that you have some ability that other mages don't, and one which most of the creatures of legend don't, either. Miraculous strength. Immortality. The ability to summon the fires of Hell to your hand. Any or all of these and more... and possibly a few odd problems, like those inconvenient little horns on your head or your newfound craving for spinach. (After all, some blessings can be mixed.) Likewise, cyberware, mystic rubies for your forehead and/or navel, demonic investments and the magically grafted skeletal hands of ancient lich kings also count as *Blessings*. Pretty much, if it's a *Wonder*, but you can't take it off, then it's a *Blessing* (or a mixed *Blessing*). If you can trade it with your friends, or hide it under the bed when the MiBs come to call, then it's just a *Wonder*.

As with the empowerment of *Wonders*, simply go to the lists of Merits and magical powers and select what you want. Calculate the Rote cost of any unlisted capabilities and double it if the effect is permanent, taking no more than one-third of the Blessing's total value in Flaws (if you want a mixed Blessing) with an eye to who or what Blessed you and what they want in return (if you even know). Alternately, you may have your Storyteller choose a few mystery Flaws or negative Backgrounds, which you may discover over the course of the chronicle. For example: Say you want the *Blessing* that you can always sense the flow of energy in all living things (as per the Life 1 Effect **Sense Life**). Since it's a one-dot power, made permanent, it's a two-point Background.

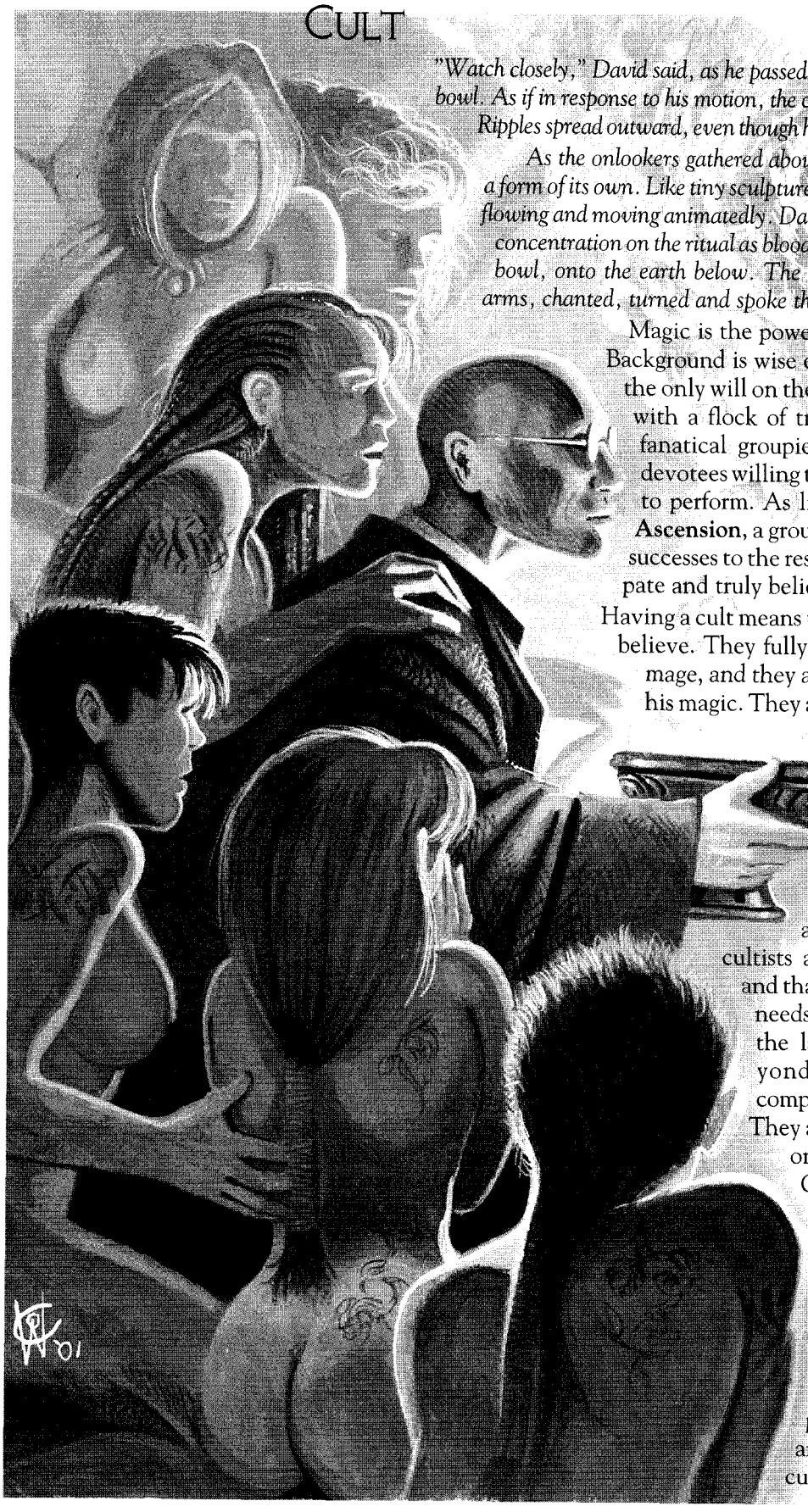
Common origins for *Blessings* include benevolent ancestors, demons, devils, gods, Totem spirits, saints, ghosts, faeries, powerful mages or groups of mages (your superiors at Iteration X, for example), random accidents, strange mysteries and occasionally irreproducible personal discoveries. All of these sources have limitations inherent in them and this will often be the source of your Flaws. Demonic investments generally won't work on holy ground or when church bells ring, faerie gifts tend to short out when touched with cold iron, miraculous discoveries often have equally unusual limitations ("Kryptonite? What's Kryptonite?"), and the power passed out by master mages generally works against everyone except them. ("I taught you every trick you know, but not every trick I know.") The *Conditional Magic* Flaw covers many of these problems, and *Geasa* and *Crucial Component* take others into account. Similarly, adversarial Backgrounds like *Uncanny* and *Notoriety* may be appropriate, since even if you are the apple of dear old Uncle Scratch's goat-pupiled eye and he overlooks such shocking behavior as his great-grand-nephew joining the Celestial Chorus and using his Hellfire birthright to warm soup for the poor, your superiors in the Chorus may not be quite so tolerant as Uncle Scratch, and you might have to ask Uncle Scratch for help before your brethren decide to "beat the devil" out of you.

Typically, a *Blessing* is some property that's inherent to you, which grants good luck or a single supernatural capability. You might have the *Blessing* that your clothes never get dirty, but you couldn't have the *Blessing* that you own a very powerful magical item (that's the *Wonder* Background). However, you might have a *Blessing* that powerful items tend to pass through your hands or come within your grasp — a mixed *Blessing* indeed, since powerful items tend to be followed by powerful enemies. To generate a dice pool for a *Blessing* — say, the aforementioned Life Sense power — use an appropriate Attribute + *Blessing*. So, if you have a two-point *Blessing* of constant life sense, you would use Perception + *Blessing* to determine how much information you can garner from a look at a person. If you have a *Blessing* that your skin is tough as iron (giving you an extra soak die), no roll would be necessary as a permanent *Blessing*. As a non-pemanent *Blessing*, you would roll Stamina + *Blessing* to activate it use the successes to generate duration. Activating a conscious *Blessing* like this typically requires a full action, although it might be reflexive (as in the iron skin case).

Your *Blessing* may also be in the form of the Fates, or faeries at your Christening, or even some old woman (with Entropy 5) smiling and weaving the threads of your *Destiny* into a happy pattern — like never losing at cards or always being lucky in love. This is not the same thing as the *Destiny* Background itself, which is an earmark of someone being Fated to do something *important* in the grand scheme of things. While being a whiz at poker and always being able to get a date are extremely *useful* abilities, they're generally not anything that the Fate of the world hinges upon. If your *Blessing* is a matter of a happy Fate, design it yourself using the following as benchmarks:

- • You always find a parking spot right in front of your destination with money still left in the meter.
- •• No matter how much you drink, you never get a hangover.
- ••• Everything you buy outlasts the warranty by at least 10 years.
- •••• Every one you dislike moves away within the week.
- ••••• No matter how badly you screw up, no lasting harm comes of it, and no one finds out unless you tell him or her.

Cult



"Watch closely," David said, as he passed his hand over the still waters of the bowl. As if in response to his motion, the crushed leaves stirred in the waters. Ripples spread outward, even though he did not touch the water's surface.

As the onlookers gathered about, murmuring, the water took on a form of its own. Like tiny sculptures, figures formed out of the water, flowing and moving animatedly. David held the bowl carefully, his full concentration on the ritual as blood seeped, from the hand holding the bowl, onto the earth below. The observers knelt, then raised their arms, chanted, turned and spoke the words he had taught them.

Magic is the power of will, and a mage with this Background is wise enough to know that his is not the only will on the planet. Such a mage is a priest with a flock of true believers, a rock star with fanatical groupies or a guru with a gaggle of devotees willing to believe any miracle he deigns to perform. As listed on p. 154 of **Mage: The Ascension**, a group of believing acolytes can add successes to the results of an Effect, if they participate and truly believe in your mage's power.

Having a cult means there are Sleepers who actively believe. They fully expect grand things from the mage, and they are willing to help him perform his magic. They are not Awakened, nor do they know anything of magic beyond what they're told — if you want a truly skilled helper, get a magician's assistant for a *Retainer*, have a few *Allies* or take a young mage as an apprentice. Nevertheless, cultists are devoted and enthusiastic, and that enthusiasm is what the mage needs. The higher the *Cult* rating, the larger the cult. However, beyond their belief, the cult is composed of plain, ordinary humans. They are not exceptionally powerful or useful unless you buy *Allies*, *Contacts* or *Retainers* as well.

X No cult: No special followers and assistants.

• Tiny cult: 3-7 people. Add one success to any rituals cast when the entire cult is gathered.

•• Small cult: 8-12 people. Add two successes to any rituals cast when the entire cult is gathered.

••• Moderate cult: 13-17 people. Add three successes to any rituals cast when the entire cult is gathered.

•••• Large cult: 18-22 people. Add four successes to any rituals cast when the entire cult is gathered.

••••• Huge cult: 23-27 people. Add five successes to any rituals cast when the entire cult is gathered.

Chantry

Gazing about the house in wonder, Kyle wiped his shoes absently on the rug. He felt vastly out of place, as if the manor were some place that he really shouldn't be.

"Remember, don't touch anything. Until you are Initiated, you are Lee Ann's responsibility," a dour, middle-aged magician intoned.

Kyle shook his head. "I won't. It's... it's incredible! Where did all this come from?" His gaze darted from a painting of a stern-looking figure in armor, to an expensive vase, to a bookshelf filled with various ancient and cracked tomes.

"Many years of work," the mage answered cryptically. "Come along. Lee Ann has run off and, though she has rights to the materials of this chantry, I do not need to play shepherd to an un-Initiated apprentice."

There is no great shame in being a solitary practitioner, but there are many advantages to being a member of a witches' coven, hermetic or shamanic lodge, software design studio, assassins' guild or just a really cool rock band.

Contrary to popular belief, a Chantry is not just a secret clubhouse or spooky house on the hill, though many Chantries own such real estate. Rather, a Chantry is a mage's commune, a pool of joint resources that all the members may draw upon. That is to say, a Chantry is just as much a building with four walls as the people who dwell within those four walls. With Chantries, the membership roster may change over time and the physical structure may change form and location, as with fraternity houses and churches in the Sleeper world, but the history and identity remain.

Chantries may possess physical wealth, such as *Resources* (and thus real estate, like the aforementioned spooky house on the hill), *Libraries* and vaults filled with *Wonders*. By their nature, many Chantries also have supernatural amenities such as *Arcane*, *Destiny*, *Nodes* and *Sanctums*; useful (or dangerous) associates such as *Mentors* (and apprentices), *Familiars* (and *Gremlins*), *Allies* (and *Enemies*), *Retainers* (and *Wards*), *Totems* (and *Nemeses*), and *Cults* — as well as social perks such as *Influence*, *Fame* and *Status* (or *Notoriety*). Chantries may also bestow on their members certain Social Merits and Flaws, such as *Prestigious Mentor*, *Reputation*, *Blackmailed* or *Infamous Mentor*. The prestige or notoriety applies to the House as a whole due to the deeds of former members or the current Preceptor (assuming the *Chantry* has the *Mentor* Background invested). The resulting social modifiers apply to all current members for as long as they claim membership.

For every two points in Chantry, as derived from contributions by the players' characters and Chantry Flaws (seven points of Flaws maximum), the players may pool a point in another Background for the Chantry as a whole. Chantries that do not possess *Resources* are tree houses in vacant lots at best, and Chantries that do not have *Mentors* will be viewed with suspicion by mages who live in ones that do. The advantage to the Chantry is that all of its members can draw upon its resources. Often, a Chantry will have other members than the players' characters (especially if it has a *Mentor*, *Cult* and so on), but the points invested into the Background represent what the players can access. Naturally, since a Chantry has so many tangible advantages, it usually has a corresponding location or physical place, and that's the site of the Chantry as such, where the mages meet to trade their benefits.

Remember, players aren't obliged to have access to a Chantry. Furthermore, the benefits of a Chantry tend to fall most on the character with the most dots — that individual is the favored son (or daughter, or pet) of the Cabal as far as the Chantry's concerned, especially if none of the other mages have the Background (dratted freeloaders). Also remember that a Chantry often has more members than just the players' mages, and that the Background dots taken represent what the players' characters can access — it's possible to have only a couple shared dots of the *Chantry* Background but still be part of a very prestigious and powerful Chantry; in such a case, the mages are simply minor members who aren't given access to the whole package (which could justify the addition of more *Chantry* dots later).

Note also that Chantries of the modern age often reside on Earth in physical space; many Chantries do not have any Horizon Realm location associated with them. If you want your *Chantry* Background to have an associated Horizon Realm space, then the Background must cover not only the earthly Chantry space, but also the the Horizon space (same cost-to-size ratio) and the Node that powers it!

X No access to a chantry

• A pitiful chantry (the Nightmare Theatre)

•• Small chantry (the Sepulcher)

••• Strong chantry (the Lodge of the Gray Squirrel)

•••• Powerful chantry (the House of Helekar)

••••• Inestimable chantry (the New Council)

Demesne

A *Demesne* is much like a *Sanctum*, except it doesn't exist — at least not in the physical world. It is a personal Heaven, a private Hell, and the world of a mage's imagination — his own private Idaho, as the Hollowers say. It also exists in the realm of Dreams, an islet in the Dreaming, and mages who can find it have a land where they are king and make all the rules.

A mage's rating in *Demesne* doesn't show how grand or glorious this world of the imagination is, merely how much control the mage has over it. Personal dreams exist there, yes, but so do private terrors and horrible nightmares that embody a mage's darkest fears. Mages with a low rating in *Demesne* are occasional conscious (albeit sleeping) visitors to the land of their imagination, while those with a high rating are the absolute lords of all they survey, if they so wish it. (A dream lord does not *have* to appear as a king to rule his own realm, after all.)

This Background is particularly useful in combination with a *Sanctum* with a Shallowing — specifically to the mage's own dream world — and the **Body of Light** Effect; for in a mage's personal demesne, the Body of Light is the form that manifests, not the mundane identity. Then again, mages who spend too much time in their *Demesne* are often viewed with suspicion, because anything can happen in the subconscious — and mages who spend too much time focused inward have a tendency to lose touch with the outside world. *Contacts*, *Allies*, and *Retainers* — particularly sentient dream-entities or ghosts that visit dreams — are also useful.

Because a *Demesne* has no physical existence, it's hard for it to interact with the "real world." Still, the mage can sometimes pull bits of useful information or assistance from the dream world. The mage doesn't physically travel to the *Demesne* (at least, not usually); instead, his consciousness forms a body of sorts (the aforementioned Body of Light) to interact with the locale. Some entities have a dream-form, while others exist physically or solely in dreams. Individuals brought into the mage's dreams with Mind magic also form versions of themselves based upon their idealized personal image. However, once in the mage's *Demesne*, they are subject to the whims of the mage — at least as far as the mage's tie to dreams allows.

While a character with the Skill: Lucid Dreaming can control dreams to some degree, the mage with a *Demesne* has dreams with special properties. The mage's dreams literally exist as a spiritual dream realm; for most dreamers, this happens only rarely and only when the dreams intersect with the Umbral Dream Realm. As a result, the sleeping mage literally reshapes a portion of the dreaming Umbra to his whims. However, the stuff of dreams is insubstantial and fades with morning light.

A mage can't just step into a *Demesne*, create wondrous effects and artifacts, and expect to take them out with Spirit magic. Such things ultimately have no more substance than the mage's own imagination.

A *Demesne* can be useful for spiritual travel — mages who project their consciousness into the Dream Realm in this way do not physically pass through the Gauntlet and don't suffer the effects of the Avatar Storm. With sufficient power, the mage could then send his projection into other parts of the Umbra. Also, dreams hold significance and overcoming dream-problems and adversaries can prove useful in the struggle for enlightenment or for Seekings.

In game terms, when the mage dreams he creates a pocket Realm tied to the Dream Realm, a small corner where his will reshapes the place without recourse to magic, because it is literally formed of the mage's consciousness. A roll of Perception + *Demesne* can determine hidden emotional difficulties and sublimated problems; the mage can root out and confront his own internal issues. Wits + *Demesne* rolls enable the mage to alter the dreamscape; use the magical success chart (**Mage** p. 208) for guidelines on severity. In theory, a mage *could* trap someone else's consciousness in his own *Demesne*, or even destroy it outright — a shattered mind is treated as one that "died" in a mindscape (**Mage**, p. 201), while a trapped mind would require careful rescue by clever dream-travelers.

X No special control over your dreams.

• Occasional visitor to the Demesne; at least knows its name, as well as a few of the perils and virtues.

•• Regular sightseer in the dream world. Haven't seen all of it, but can easily lead a tour.

••• Resident of the *Demesne*, at least when the dreamer is asleep.

•••• Minor Lord of the dream world, commanding great respect if not absolute obedience from the creatures of the isle.

••••• Lord or Lady of the *Demesne*, with almost absolute knowledge and control of his or her islet in the Dreaming.

Familiar

Still wondering where Lee Ann had run off, Kyle peeked into a couple of the disorganized stacks of the store. Knick-knacks of every sort vied for space on the shelves, in something almost like a war of antiquities and arcana. Kyle almost imagined that when people weren't looking, the devices and objects would skitter about and fight for new positions.

In the third aisle, looking over a silver-plated music box, he spotted a slender girl in spidery black lace, with a basket dangling from her arm. Resting in the basket lay a large cat with a disturbingly Cheshire-like grin. Kyle gathered the sense that it was scrutinizing him as much as he scrutinized it.

"Um..." Kyle began, wondering perhaps if this stranger knew Lee Ann, who seemed to have a disproportionate number of odd friends in unexpected places. "Nice cat."

The woman glanced up with a bored expression, then looked down at the cat. "I don't think that Mr. Mistopheles likes you very much," she opined to Kyle.

"No, I must say that I don't," added the cat with a yawn.

A mage and *Familiar* hold a special bond. Generally, the mage gives physical form to some spirit, enabling that spirit to manifest and enjoy the fruits of the material, living world — but some powerful spirits or pre-existing creatures seek out mages on their own. In either case, the mage forges a potent spiritual bond with the *Familiar*. The two souls become intertwined; the mage benefits from the *Familiar*'s special knowledge and capabilities, while the *Familiar* garners magical energies and vicarious experience through the mage.

While many *Familiars* follow very archetypal forms — black cats, bats, hawks, ferrets and other similar small animals — modern mages create or entice *Familiars* of all kinds, including golems or robots made by the Sons of Ether, self-aware computers of the Virtual Adepts and even mythic beasts like tiny dragonets or djinn summoned by the Order of Hermes.

Often, a mage simply uses Life or Matter magic in conjunction with an appropriate ritual to create a form for a prospective *Familiar*. Usually such a relationship is exclusive — a *Familiar* will not serve more than one master, and a mage rarely takes on multiple *Familiars* at once. However, nothing prevents a *Familiar* from doing a little moonlighting, if its pact doesn't specify total loyalty, or even from turning coat if it finds a loophole and a suitably juicy incentive. This isn't to say that all *Familiars* are lawyers, but ruthless and vicious spirits (such as those that serve Nephandi, murderers, oathbreakers and general asshole mages) will tend to take advantage of the mage as much as possible.

Like a *Wonder* or *Blessing*, a *Familiar* provides specific benefits to its patron mage, but with a specific price attached. Whereas a *Wonder* or *Blessing* simply manifests from an item or heritage, though, a *Familiar* is a spirit in a material shell, capable of self-will, moderately independent from its mage and probably ambulatory. Since the *Familiar* bond literally ties the spirit to the mage's soul, the two share an inextricable bond. Anything less than Spirit 5 won't be able to sever the mage's link to the *Familiar* from an outside attack. Conversely, if the *Familiar* dies, the mage automatically loses a

number of points of Quintessence equal to the Background value, and the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5+ Background value) or else the mage is stunned for an equal number of turns. Mages who deliberately engineer the deaths of their *Familiars* also lose one dot of *Destiny*, which shows up in the form of Fate marks — scarring of the mage's soul. (If this takes the mage below zero *Destiny*, then it can become an adversarial Background.) On the other hand, subject to meeting the terms of the *Familiar* pact, a mage can dismiss the creature at any time without further consequences. Future relations depend upon the previous circumstances of association.

Most often, a *Familiar* grants the following automatic benefits and difficulties:

Arcane Connection: A *Familiar* has an arcane connection to its mage. This means that anyone who can catch the *Familiar* can exploit this connection, but conversely, anything that the *Familiar* touches is also considered touched by the mage.

Pact: The *Familiar* offers its services, knowledge and powers, but in return requires certain concessions of its mage. The mage typically must provide some sort of perks appropriate to the creature's physical form. For instance, a cat *Familiar* like Mr. Mistopheles may demand that it be fed, petted and otherwise cared for like a freakishly pampered cat. The more esoteric the *Familiar*, the more egregious the pact: some might require the mage to make songs and poems to their greatness, or demand jewels and gems to devour, or want the mage to swear never to perform certain tasks (such as ever harming or killing a creature of the *Familiar's* type). If the pact in question requires specific actions of the mage, then the Flaw value of those actions counts against the cost of the *Familiar* — so a mage can gain a strong *Familiar* so long as he's willing to suffer under the weight of several restrictions and requirements.

Paradox Absorption: The *Familiar* can take on the burden of the mage's Paradox, but doing so tends to be strenuous. Most *Familiars* will be loath to do so unless they have other powers to mitigate the injury in question (see below), and many will demand specific points in their pact regarding the absorption of backlash energy.

Thaumivorous: A *Familiar* devours Quintessence in order to support its continued existence on the material plane. For most small critters this isn't too egregious, but powerful ones may be very demanding. A typical price is one Quintessence per dot of the *Familiar*, each week, or an equivalent sum.

Furthermore, a *Familiar* may have other capabilities, based on the dots spent on the Background. The mage can use the dots of this Background to garner the following abilities for the *Familiar* (and, therefore, for himself):

Communication: A *Familiar* typically communicates empathically with its mage. For one dot, the creature can speak aloud, using any language the mage knows. For two dots, it may communicate telepathically with anyone in sensory range without regard to language, although this does not permit it to perform telepathic attacks or distractions.

Countermagic: Each dot spent garners one die of countermagic. So long as the mage is actually physically touching the *Familiar* (not using an arcane or Correspondence connection), the mage gains this benefit as well.

Information Source: The *Familiar* can seek through the Umbra or query other spirits for specific information and lore. Each dot allows the *Familiar* one die on a special roll to do so; difficulty varies with the complexity of the question ("Is there magic here?" would be difficulty 3 or 4, while "What specific sigil can ward against the unnamed demon that haunts Melisande's dreams?" would be difficulty 9.) This takes the *Familiar* at least a turn and may require an hour or more for a very obscure question. Successes indicate the general degree of knowledge, so a low level information source in unlikely to garner much of anything but a high level one will usually be able to secure at least a little information about anything. Think of this much like a supernatural *Contact*.

Paradox Nullification: Each dot spent allows the *Familiar* to nullify one point of Paradox per game session. Most *Familiars* cannot nullify more than one or two points, regardless of their strength. Generally, this requires the *Familiar* to take on the Paradox itself, then send it off to the Umbra; the *Familiar* is usually occupied for a full turn for each point of Paradox carted off in this fashion. Some *Familiars* actually enjoy "eating" Paradox, while others consider it a burdensome chore.

Paranormal: Most *Familiars* resemble normal creatures, although they're generally rather resilient. For one dot the critter has some sort of special form or capability beyond usual for its creature type: A cat with opposable thumbs, for instance, or an extra-large bat. For two dots the critter's clearly supernatural, such as a dragonet or winged dog.

Knowledge: For each dot, the *Familiar* has three dots in Knowledge Abilities that the mage doesn't have. The mage can use this Ability, but only if the *Familiar* is present to advise and consult; thus, if the mage and *Familiar* are separated (it's hard to smuggle your pet dragonet into a hospital emergency room, for instance), then the mage won't be able to use this information.

Resilience: A *Familiar* has the statistics and health levels intrinsic to its shell, but for one Background dot it can have two extra health levels or two extra dots to improve its Attributes (although no Attribute can be more than two dots above the shell's normal value). A *Familiar* may automatically have an Intelligence at least equal to its mage, at no cost. (You may choose to have a dumber familiar if you wish, at no benefit.)

Size: Generally, a *Familiar* runs in size from rat to large cat. For one dot, the *Familiar* may be up to the size of a horse.

Legend

Surrounded by the various Hell-spawned servitor things, Hank crouched and spread his hands. Samantha and James had his back, but overcome by the sheer terror exuded by the tentacled, oily-skinned hexapeds, they barely had the presence of mind to whimper.

As two of the hexapeds charged in with a keening, screeching cry of hunger, Hank grabbed them by the bony neck-protrusions. He crushed the throat of one with his hands, then slammed it into its compatriot and whipped them both around into the air, crashing them sideways into a third as it advanced from the side. With a mighty kick, he crushed the skull of the dazed hexaped and stepped forward with a low bellow.

The hexapeds knew a stronger predator when they saw it, and fled.

"Damn," James observed breathily, "that was positively Herculean."

Hank nodded with a bit of a grin. "Yep... it certainly was."

To be a legend is to be something larger than life, with tales and stories surrounding you and dreams of which you are the center. King Arthur. The Queen of Sheba. Jack-the-Ripper. Objects can be legendary as well: Aladdin's Lamp. The Bronze Head. The bullet that shot JFK. Likewise *Familiars*: Puss-in-Boots. The Salmon of Wisdom. Dolly the Sheep.

The collective imagination of the world concentrates in you and on you, making you, in effect, a living *Node*. Individuals whose Avatars make them the reincarnation of great luminaries of the past can tap into that power and those dreams, gaining Quintessence. To be Puck or Oberon is to gain the power of that legend. You recharge your Avatar not through meditating upon yourself but by being who you are — rescuing maidens from dragons if you're St. George (though they needn't be literal maidens or dragons), being the consummate spy if you're Mata Hari. In short, the collective imagination of the world replenishes your power when you live up to your reputation, granting you a measure of Quintessence whenever you do some great deed in keeping with your *Legend*. Likewise, your power fluctuates based on the community in which you reside — everyone in Tokyo knows who Amaterasu the sun goddess is, but you'll find considerably less who know in Pocatello, Idaho. Consequently, your kickback from the collective unconscious will be less there, even if you *did* just fry five vampires into little piles of ash. On the other hand, eight-year-old Georgina Knight will find her ability to whup-ass kicked up a notch in England and considerably more than that in the St. George Young Ladies' Preparatory Academy, where all the girls are looking at pictures of St. George all day long.

Others cannot recharge their own Avatars merely by basking in your presence, but Storytellers may allow this if they actively become part of your story. Being the lover of Don Juan, the audience to Scheherazade, or being chased with an axe if you happen to be with the reincarnation of Lizzie Borden might all qualify — *Nodes* are much more convenient, generally speaking. Similarly, those items you touch become Tass in much the same way a *Node* charges matter — locks of hair from Rapunzel, arrows from Robin Hood's quiver, etc. This Tass resonates with the power of your Avatar and the *Legend* of who you are, and as such, may be useful in any spell in keeping with it.

Legendary objects, such as Aladdin's Lamp, are often *Wonders* as well, recharging their mystic power from the legends spun around them and the tales that keep their memories alive. Such items need not be stored in *Nodes*; if their batteries run dry, they will recharge wherever they are, at the same rate as they would in a *Node* equal to the strength of their *Legend* Background. Legendary *Familiars* gain enough power from their stories that generally speaking they don't need to take a job with a mage unless it suits them.

This Background works well with the *Primal Marks* Flaw, the *Destiny*, *Familiar*, *Past Lives* and *Totem* Backgrounds, and the *Hobgoblin*, *Nemesis* and *Throwback* adversarial Backgrounds. *Dark Fate* is also advisable, though not mandatory. *Immortality* or *Anachronism* are also not out of the question, since many heroes and figures of legend are said to either never have died (as is the case with the Wandering Jew, Lazarus, Utnapistim and the Eight Immortals) or be lying asleep until the hour when they are most needed (as with King Arthur and the Seven Sleepers).

Your difficulty to recharge through your *Legend* Background varies according to the location and potential mythic threads of your location — as noted earlier, it's far easier to refuel in a place where the legend is strong instead of a place where nobody's heard of your legend. Roll your *Legend* Background with a minimum difficulty of 6. Each success refreshes one

point of Quintessence to your pool, just like using a *Node* (you do have a strong *Avatar* as well, right?). You may do this once per story. You can generate Tass equal to your *Legend* rating during each story from items associated with your myth, although in some cases there may not be any easy way to do so or any associated item that would be appropriate — in which case, you're just out of luck as far as Tass goes. Would-be hangers-on who hope to benefit from your *Legend* count you as a *Node* if they participate in some fashion directly with the course of your *Legend*, as adjudicated by the Storyteller.

X No Legendary characteristics

• An Obscure Legend: Clever Gretel, Abou Hassan, Pomona

•• A Minor Legend: Mata Hari, Roger Bacon, St. Catharine

••• A Known Legend: Guy Fawkes, the Red Baron, Rhiannon

•••• A Major Legend: St. George, Baron von Munchausen, Brer Rabbit

••••• A Popular Legend: Cinderella, King Arthur, Thor

Past Lives

Floating in the nothingness of the Akashic Record, Xiao Mengli observed as Peter dove from image to image. Here a too-young Chinese man in second-century military splendor held a dao loosely at his side; there, a swarthy Polynesian danced in an offbeat rhythm.

"Most unusual," murmured Peter.

"That's what they say every time," quipped Mengli. "But will you find anything?"

"Too early to say," Peter replied; his voice held a surreal sort of reverberation here in the nothingness of the mental plane. "I only have a little recent experience with previous incarnations myself. The idea of using an incarnation to look for an incarnation is still pretty novel to me."

Mengli nodded and bit back a snappy retort. Best to use the resources she had. Even if she really had no prior incarnations, perhaps both she and Peter would learn something from the trip through their Avatars' memories.

The Avatar tends to collect experiences from the incarnations with which it associates. In mages, these sometimes appear as flashes of memory or sudden insight. While reincarnation of human souls remains a hotly-debated topic, most mages who study Avatars agree that Avatars tend to spring from some source in the distant past (the legendary primordial "One") and that experiences from lives with which they were once attached can sometimes provide valuable insight, or even memories of things never known to the mage.

Such *Past Life* experiences can be unsettling, but in time a mage can learn to harness these memories and insights through meditation and internal exploration, in a process similar to a Seeking. In some ways this is similar to the *Dream* Background, but the mage pulls out moments of former personal lives instead of cosmic subconscious knowledge.

Exploring a *Past Life* may take some time and concentration (a turn or more of meditation), or it may happen in a spontaneous flash of insight — at the Storyteller's discretion. The player rolls dice equal to the dots of *Past Life* at a difficulty of 8; each success grants one die to a subsequent roll, on one Ability. Unlike *Dream*, these dice *do* add if the character already has the Ability in question — but there's no guarantee that the player will score any successes. Success generally indicates that the mage found some snippet of wisdom to guide and assist in the current endeavor.

You may use your *Past Life* once per game session. Botching tends to put the mage in a Mindscape relating to a *Past Life* trauma. Once you use *Past Life*, you should record the names and events of the ancestor, so that you can use them in your mage's character history and development.

You don't need the *Avatar* Background to have *Past Life*. Even a very weak and slumbering *Avatar* might have snippets of memory.

X No Past Lives: For some reason your Avatar has no memories at all.

• Faint Past Life: Every once in a while you feel a sense of déjà vu.

•• Weak Past Life: You have an inkling that you've done this before...

••• Moderate Past Life: You definitely recall other times and places, and vague flashes of former habits and beliefs.

•••• Strong Past Life: You possess clear memories of other existences, which you can summon up almost at will.

••••• Overwhelming Past Life: Sometimes you're not sure which life you're living.

Sanctum

"Don't touch that," murmured Professor Savante. Kyle, hands firmly ensconced in his pockets, glanced over to the professor. "Hmm, sorry," murmured the professor. "Habit."

Threading past huge bundles of cable and between arcing structures of metal, plastic and stranger materials, Kyle followed the professor closely through the room. "Ah, while you're here, I should show you something amusing," the professor said with a sparkle in his eye. "Take a look at

this..." he gestured to a small steel orb festooned with cables. A disconcerting hum emitted from the orb. "Go ahead, take a closer look. It only emits as much radiation as your average microwave oven."

Kyle looked a bit skeptical, but dutifully leaned in. The cables themselves didn't have any sort of shielding; they seemed made of a grayish plastic. The orb occasionally emitted a small burst of soft light from one point or another, with no apparent source.

"What the heck is it?" Kyle finally asked.

"Just a trinket. One of the hundreds of toys I keep around. Outside, in the harsh conditions of the real world, a light capture and redirection device like this would sputter and fail in minutes. But here, in the carefully controlled environment of my laboratory, it works wonders... along with its hundreds of cousins."

Kyle craned his neck about, giving new regard to the stacks of boxes, spheres, components and less-identifiable works of impossible physics. "Not bad."

Young mages often have a spark of creativity, from which they imagine their own places of mystery and influence. Like a *Bridge to Terabithia*, the mage steps across a threshold and enters a realm where her will defines the course of nature. Older mages may spend years working in the same place, shaping it with their desires and their magics until it becomes a private haven of possibility. Unlike a *Demesne*, though, this is no dream realm, but an actual physical location where the very laws of reality that hold sway there all follow the mage's decree.

The *Sanctum* Background represents the mage's special workshop. Within a *Sanctum*, the mage's paradigm rules. Here, anything that follows the mage's rules of magic functions naturally, while anything from a different paradigm — be it super-science, high ritual or faith — is vulgar.

In game terms, your mage can perform magical effects of his paradigm in a *Sanctum* without garnering any Paradox at all. They're coincidences in the location. Only on a botch would the mage suffer Paradox, and even then it would be for a coincidental effect. Witnesses have no effect on this!

Naturally, there are some limits to a *Sanctum*. First, the level of the Background determines the maximum size of the area (see below). Second, a *Sanctum* doesn't just spring up over night; it's a secret grove, a hidden room, a moldy and forgotten tower or other place hidden from prying eyes where exposure to the mage's magic has bent the Tapestry for decades until finally it's become

pliant to the mage's beliefs. (Generally, assume that it takes at least *five years* of work per dot for a *Sanctum* to form.) Third, *Sancta* aren't just free for the taking. One mage's *Sanctum* doesn't automatically accommodate other mages' paradigms. Usually, an owner of a *Sanctum* can't just hand it over; only an apprentice or someone who directly shared the owner's paradigm could benefit from it. Last, and perhaps most importantly, the benefits of the *Sanctum* only cover effects cast within. If an effect reaches outside the *Sanctum* (perhaps because of Correspondence), then it suffers the full effects of Paradox, very likely unraveling the effect (although the mage himself won't suffer the Paradox directly). If the mage casts a powerful effect and then takes it outside with him, the effect will quickly erode due to Unbelief if it violates the Consensus. So, it's quite possible for a mage to remain immortal so long as the individual stays in the *Sanctum* — but upon leaving, the mage would quickly age and crumble to dust!

A *Sanctum* is, naturally, a perfect place to keep a *Library* or other useful implements of magical practice, and the Backgrounds may be tied together. A *Sanctum* can also have an *Arcane* rating of its own, showing how hidden it is from prying eyes; this costs points from the Background's size but gives it effective *Arcane* (and also cloaks anything within its boundaries, so the owner is hidden while within — this *does* stack with any *Arcane* that the mage personally has). In some ancient and ancestral Chantries, a few mages might have small *Sancta* in various rooms.

X No Sanctum: You have no secret place of power.

• Tiny Sanctum: As long as you're in your secret closet...

•• Small Sanctum: A very small room bends to your will.

••• Moderate Sanctum: You have a workshop, and maybe an associated small bedroom, in which you practice.

•••• Large Sanctum: A small house or set of rooms all hosts your magic.

••••• Extravagant Sanctum: An entire manor, a series of catacombs, a castle or faerie forest... and it all works as you desire.

Adversarial Backgrounds

Mages get enemies. It's that simple. From the dynamic of Tradition versus Technocracy to the simple fact that witch-hunters and evil spirits just *won't leave them alone*, almost all mages have to deal with some sorts of adversaries and problems.

The system of Backgrounds in Chapter Three represents the various advantageous connections and the magely heritage that a given willworker might possess. However, the unlucky, the obdurate and the just plain mean tend to pick up specific problems that mirror those Backgrounds — adversarial situations that represent reversals of such.

Adversarial Backgrounds are a *wholly optional* rule system for advanced character creation. Because it's possible to build a very abusive set of Backgrounds — problems that don't really hinder the character much — it's incumbent on the Storyteller to keep a tight reign on these difficulties. Still, they go a long way toward fleshing out characters.

A character can have up to seven points of adversarial Backgrounds. These grant freebie points that can be used for other purchases later. Such points do count against the character's total Flaws, if you allow Merits and Flaws. Therefore, you can only take five points of Flaws if you take two points of adversarial Backgrounds.

Note that a character usually *can* have a Background and its adversarial counterpart at the same time! For instance, just because you have some helpful friends (Allies) doesn't mean that you don't also have some people out to get you (Enemies). Such combinations even go hand-in-hand — you befriend one side, you piss off another. Of course, some combinations can get silly, and again it's up to the Storyteller to defend against abuses and absurdity.

Reducing an adversary requires a great deal of roleplaying effort, and it requires triple the Background's next lower rating in experience points. It takes less effort to get the minor problems under control once you've taken care of the monumental ones. Thus, lowering a five-dot Adversary to four dots costs 12 experience. Removing the last dot costs 3 experience.

Apprentice (Adversary to Mentor)

Almost every Tradition mage goes through some sort of mentorship program. Usually, a ranking Master or Adept takes on the duties of teaching apprentices. However, a Disciple might teach an apprentice for any number of reasons in unusual or desperate circumstances. The teacher might have some interesting tricks

to pass on, or he might want a later ally. Likewise, the apprentice might have nobody else to whom to turn. Whatever the case, an apprentice is often a significant drain in time and resources. Most Tradition mages feel duty-bound to bring up apprentices properly — by the Traditions' standards, at least. Educating an apprentice can take a lot of time, especially if the apprentice is uncooperative, unskilled and always around with annoying questions or problems.

The *Apprentice* Background measures the sort of magely millstone with which your mage has found himself saddled. The value of the apprentice varies according to her skill. A reasonably competent initiate isn't as much trouble as a totally wet-behind-the-ears and psychologically dysfunctional student. If your mage is extremely solicitous (and he lives his life around the pupil's education) add one dot to this negative Background. If the apprentice is an ungrateful little bastard who kicks your mage in the shins and sets fire to his cat, add another point. That is, your character gets extra points if the apprentice is always underfoot or causes lots of problems (beyond the usual trouble that a novice mage causes). If you are distant and you begrudge the apprentice his time, deduct a point. (If you only tutor your apprentice occasionally, he's less of a drain on your time and resources.)

Like *Allies*, *Enemies* and *Mentors*, *Apprentices* should not be collections of dots on a sheet. Though he should not overshadow the player's character, an apprentice should be a colorful person in his own right. Take Merlin and Nimue or Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi as examples. Their influence was more important than their presence, and they all had personality to burn. This Background is not a free ride or free points: *Apprentices* have motivations like anybody else, and they may refuse certain training, fail to grasp the consequences of magical actions or just draw down danger on the heads of their trainers. This danger could be as simple as screwing up a library order or as dangerous as bringing down the attention of the Technocracy. An *Apprentice* may occasionally be helpful, perhaps as a ritual assistant or to accomplish some banal task. In general, though, an *Apprentice* takes far more time from a mage than she gives back. Remember, also, that Tradition heritage demands that a mage treat an *Apprentice* appropriately and see to education — now more than ever, with the Traditions needing all the help they can get. An *Apprentice* who winds up dead or worse may turn into Adversarial Background dots in *Enemies* and *Notoriety*.

- • Fellow Student of the Arts
- •• Bright-Eyed Acolyte
- ••• Precocious Kid
- •••• Rank Amateur
- ••••• The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Blacklisted (Adversary to Certification)

While a few lucky mages manage to have regular careers — as doctors, lawyers, truckers, what-have-you — a few manage to *really* get on society's bad side. Some actually are criminals. Others ran afoul of the Technocracy. Either way, some nasty paperwork makes life difficult for the mage.

Your *Blacklisting* indicates that you're barred from certain practices and, furthermore, known for your ineptitude, illegal practices or general stupidity. Hell, they've got papers to prove it. The value of the Background depends on exactly how bad your *Blacklisting* is; at the high levels, your mage could suffer serious social consequences.

- • Trivial Blacklist: Prior traffic offenses; banned from a local union
- •• Minor Blacklist: Misdemeanor criminal; suspended license
- ••• Moderate Blacklist: Disbarred lawyer or AWOL military
- •••• Major Blacklist: Felon (can't vote or own firearms) or unlicensed doctor for malpractice
- ••••• Overwhelming Blacklist: Convicted sex offender or legally insane

Debts (Adversary to Resources)

Although it's easy to make money with just a few simple magic tricks, it is also possible for a mage to be in *Debt*, whether to student loans, loan sharks, Technocratically-tampered records or ridiculous credit card bills. *Debts* require monthly payments equal to the allowance that the character would get with the same level of *Resources* and a total sum equal to the liquidation value of the same rank of *Resources* to pay them off. The mage could have *Resources* and *Debts* both, with money coming in one hand and going out the other, or he could be destitute and on the run from creditors. A mage who doesn't pay debts can face legal actions, legbreakers or just the problems of living on the street.

As with any adversarial Background, overcoming this Background isn't easy. Even if the mage coughs up the money to clear up the debt, he may have to fill out interminable paperwork, explain himself to some less-than-upstanding loan organization or just be haunted with bad credit. Therefore, overcoming *Debt* requires good roleplaying, hard work and the expenditure of experience.

- • Trivial debt: Pay $50 per month. Clear debt for $1,000.
- •• Moderate debt: Pay $1,200 per month. Clear debt for $8,000.
- ••• Major debt: Pay $3,000 per month. Clear debt for $50,000.
- •••• Crushing debt: Pay $9,000 per month. Clear debt for $500,000.
- ••••• On the run: Owe $30,000 per month. Clear debt for $5,000,000. Good luck.

Enemies (Adversary to Allies)

Enemies simulate favors owed and offenses to be repaid. For example, one point of the *Enemies* Background represents one newborn ghost who's haunting your mage constantly, two werewolf cubs who beat him up whenever they find him but don't make it a priority, 10 important favors owed to 10 different starting-level characters or two master magicians who have him down on their "naughty" list. *Enemies* gained and favors owed after character creation may be recorded in the same fashion, but you don't get points except possibly as another Background. (That is, if your mage steals an Etherite's five-point ether *Wonder*, he'll probably have a very angry scientist as an *Enemy*.) Storytellers should also note that *Enemies* have different beliefs in what makes a proper revenge. A vampire might believe death to be a perfectly suitable revenge, while a rival mage would settle for nothing less than a mage's absolute ruin in terms of Tradition society. A teenage runaway, however, might have particularly persistent parents, who'd be far more trouble than your average werewolf. At least a werewolf might listen to reason....

- • One enemy of strength similar to your own; or, two starting level characters as occasional antagonists; or one opponent somewhat above your capabilities as an occasional enemy; or about five major favors owed by you (or minor grudges held against you).
- •• One individual somewhat above your own capabilities as your mortal enemy; or two of the same as occasional antagonists; or around ten major favors owed by you (or minor grudges held against you). Or mix and match options from the list.
- ••• One significantly dangerous individual as your mortal enemy; or, two of the same as occasional antagonists; or around 15 major favors owed by you (or minor grudges held against you). Or mix and match.
- •••• One very potent individual as your mortal enemy; or two of the same as occasional antagonists; or about 20 major favors owed by you (or minor grudges held against you).

••••• One legendary opponent as your mortal enemy; or two of the same as occasional antagonists; or about 25 major favors owed by you (or minor grudges held against you). Or take your pick from the list.

Gremlin (Adversary to Familiar)

Persistent *Gremlins* are merely familiars gone bad — the goblin that ruins your mage's experiments; the spectral hound that howls outside his door; the Nephandic imp who keeps trying to tempt him to the Dark Side; the clumsy and maliciously destructive robot that he can't bear to dismantle because it was his first science fair project and he has sentimental feelings for it (even though it doesn't have the same for him).

Gremlins may be taken as an Adversary at character creation. With long roleplaying — and Storyteller approval — a *Gremlin* may be turned around, possibly even becoming a *Familiar*, while with neglect and mistreatment, a *Familiar* can become a *Gremlin*.

Gremlins are built on the same point scales as *Familiars*, but they work against the mage in question. Obviously, you can't take familiar advantages like Paradox Nullification for a *Gremlin* Background, unless the Storyteller can think of a clever way to make it work against you.

Infamy (Adversary to Fame)

Your mage enjoys widespread recognition in mortal society, but not in a good way. People do not send free theater tickets to Charles Manson or the I.R.A., and your character is in the same class. If you are also wanted by the law, this makes it that much more difficult to hide. Though rare, it is also possible to have both Fame and Infamy. O.J. Simpson, for example, would have four or five points of both. The Storyteller might use a roll of a Social Attribute + *Infamy* to determine if your ill reputation comes to bear.

- • You're known to a select subculture — the local PTA or animal rights activists, for instance. Or your ill deeds are old news, like a child felon twenty years later or a junior officer of the SS.
- •• A majority of the populace recognizes your face and chuckles, like a former mayoral candidate with a sex scandal or an actor who's known for some curious peccadilloes.
- ••• You have statewide renown, like the acquitted-on-a-technicality real estate swindler or the bimbo of the year from Jerry Springer.
- •••• Nationally infamous; everyone knows something about your ill deeds.
- ••••• You're an internationally infamous media icon, the latest crooked politician or philandering archbishop.

Jinx (Adversary to Wonder)

A mage may take a *Jinx* (or *Infernal Contraption*); that is to say, a magical or technological object that is more trouble than it's worth. A *Jinx* may be nothing more than a pile of Flaws, negative Backgrounds and other curses, but the more interesting *Jinxes* are the ones that have some useful powers — though over twice as many Flaws to balance them out. To calculate up a *Jinx*, a Storyteller should total up the Merits and special advantages the player desires, then secretly add twice that or more in Flaws, adding in special wrinkles like having the object be a unique focus or something that the owner can't just throw in the trash bin, like a clan sword. Or the *Jinx* may be mixed with the *Wonder* Background, making it some mighty wonder of magic that unfortunately has a few drawbacks.

Jinxes, unfortunately, will attract min-maxers, who will try to use Flaws like *Heirloom* and *Conditional Magic* in particular to create items like flamethrowers that only work in their hands and don't burn members of their own Tradition or small children and puppies. A *Jinx*, however, is intended to be more trouble than it's worth. If a player designs such a flamethrower, the Storyteller should require that it be a unique focus, then let him deal with rivals in his own Tradition and their children and packs of rabid Pitbull puppies. Storytellers should not let characters simply ditch a *Jinx* when it becomes inconvenient or hide it in the back of the closet. Such items either have great personal importance (It may be haunted by demons and eating your soul, but it's your *Phylactery*), social significance (You do not toss the sword of your ancestors into the nearest trash dumpster just because you realize it's cursed and haunted by the ghosts of your enemies), moral responsibility (God gave you this item as a cross to bear, and you can't leave it where it might corrupt some innocent), or the item may be subject to carefully worded *Geasa* (You cannot be rid of the cursed doohickey until you sell it to someone for less than you paid for it...and give them full knowledge of the curse); You can't ditch the damned thing until you complete the task that is its *Destiny*; the *Dark Fate* will only befall you *after* you lose the item, etc.).

The rating for a *Jinx* varies with its total power. A two-point *Wonder* that has four points of problems is effectively a two-point *Jinx*.

Notoriety (Adversary to Status)

Your mage is well known in her chosen mystic social circles, but not in a good way. She may have had an infamous, insane, or diabolical *Mentor*, belonged to an unpopular *Chantry* (or even have attended the Devil's infamous Black School), come from an infamous family ("How nice to meet you, Miss Borgia"), had a former

Apprentice try to assassinate the Council, or be an Awakened creation ("I'm sorry, but toasters are not allowed to address the Symposium"). She may have earned this reputation herself via crackpot theories, accusations of plagiarism or going Rogue. Perhaps she got a bad rap from something really flamboyant, like being a former Marauder or recanted infernalist, or just having the *reputation* of being a former Marauder or recanted infernalist. (Fly one dragon over the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and people will never let you live it down. And that cloven-hoofed guy whom you were kissing on the park bench was a *satyr*, dammit, not the Devil, and no, you're not going to produce him to prove it. He was an asshole anyway, and you broke up, so good riddance.)

At the higher levels, this rep also extends to the spirit world, and the mage still has to deal with the mystical gunslingers, not because she's the best-of-the-best and the woman to beat, but because she's the worst-of-the-worst and everybody's favorite whipping girl. Besides these problems, she also has to fend off Nephandic recruiters, Marauder talent scouts and even more dangerous types. Old chums from the Black School may come sniffing around, or worse yet, relatives — it's hard to keep Wicked Uncle Frederick from coming to your wedding, and you really don't want to slight him.

It's incumbent upon you to flesh out how the mage acquired a *Notorious* reputation. The Storyteller may well bring down harsh consequences on a player who tries to duck out on it! These things have a way of coming out....

- • The village idiot
- •• Rube Goldberg's apprentice
- ••• Damon Hellstrom
- •••• Alumnus of the Black School
- ••••• Sauron

Rival House (Adversary to Chantry)

The *Rival House* Background refers specifically to rivals of a given Chantry, not of an individual mage. Thus, to take this Background, your character *must* already have the *Chantry* Background as well. The *Rival House* defrays the cost of the *Chantry* and thereby increases its power, but also that of the *Rival House*. *Rival Houses* may be at war, or on terms of uneasy peace, but will never be friendly to one another, and members who "fraternize with the enemy" will have to deal with the fallout at their own *Chantry* when they get back. The *Rival House* is built just like any other *Chantry*; if multiple characters in the group take the *Chantry* Background and the *Rival House* Adversary, then the enemy *Chantry* could be just as potent as the characters' *Chantry*, and out to get the Cabal, too!

Skeptics (Adversary to Cult)

When taken in as the reverse of a Cult, the *Skeptics* Adversary means that your mage has attracted the attentions of a group of Skeptics, who not only think she's nuts, but actively go out of their way to convince everyone that she is. If she attempts a ritual while they're around, they give you (the player) an automatic botch for each point that your mage has in the Adversary. Because of whoever they happen to be, they are not easily avoided. They may be co-workers, members of your mage's congregation, fans, or even (gasp!) friends or family members. Alternately, they may be the Cult of a rival mage who *does* believe in your willworker's brand of magic, but whose cultists actively pray that she won't be able to pull it off (with the same net effect as regular Skeptics). Whatever the case, they're not easily avoided, and they cause real problems with willworking.

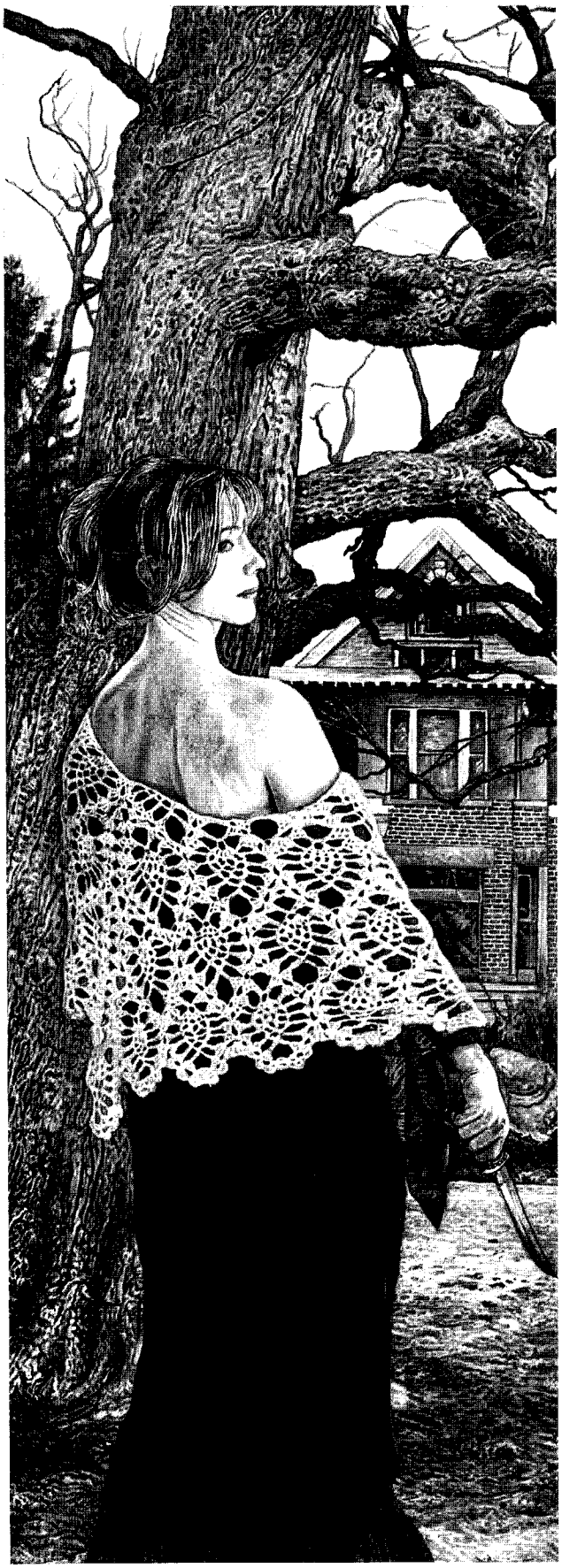
The rating in Skeptics corresponds to the number of Skeptics who tend to trouble your character, as per the *Cult* Background. Note that you only suffer the penalties for however many Skeptics are about — if your mage happens to find herself trapped alone in a basement, then she can at least do her magic without worrying about them.

Throwback (Adversary to Past Life)

The Avatar keeps memories of former incarnations, but it doesn't necessarily discriminate in favor of useful or pleasant memories. The *Throwback* Background illustrates insane, unpleasant or just plain nasty people your mage used to be, whose traumatic deaths, nefarious deeds, and/or outdated worldviews ("Adulteress! Stone her!") come back to haunt him and make his current life a living hell. This Background may also be used to simulate the misspent centuries of incredibly old mages. (Rape and pillaging were *de riguer* back in the days you went a-Viking.)

If your character has a problem with old memories, then once per game your Storyteller may roll your character's *Throwback* rating, difficulty 8. Your Storyteller will give you bad advice or unpleasant memories from a past life of your character. (You love Evelyne, even though she killed you, and you'd do it all over again!) The more successes the Storyteller scores on the roll, the more he skews your character's current perception of what's going on — and with a particularly nasty flashback, you might have to use Willpower to suppress a reaction.

- • An occasional disturbing flashback to a single event
- •• Occasional flashbacks to several troubles
- ••• Regular memories of misery
- •••• Entire lives of brutality and horror
- ••••• Hundreds of years of utter damnation



Uncanny (Adversary to Arcane)

For every mysterious mage, there is another one who is strange or spooky or surrounded by weird occurrences, whose mere presence causes talk and whispers long after he's left the room. Your character might be Uncanny because of your appearance — being unusually tall or having startling witch green eyes or a hunchback. It could be something about his aura that gives people the creeps or makes them take notice, the eerie presence of a vampire or the surreal quality of the fae, or perhaps just some strange otherworldly taint of sorcery, marking him as *other* from the rest of humanity no matter how normal he looks. Or the mage may be perfectly ordinary and unremarkable, but whenever he comes around, strange, uncanny and (worst of all) *memorable* things occur — often echoes of his spells or experiments — and everyone talks about the day the magic man walked into their lives and made it so much more interesting.

Uncanny people will always be remembered and remarked upon, and not necessarily in a good way. This won't make a sorcerer any more noticeable in combat, but it will make him the one that witnesses remember and describe first and that strangers go out of their way to talk to. Those who look for the mage will have an easy time tracking him down, and he may have to become a recluse to avoid this, though everyone will know where he lives. Stories get traded, children sing songs, and tabloid reporters have leads just dropped in their laps. These effects just occur as well.

Whatever effect the *Uncanny* curse takes — outlandish appearance, otherworldly aura or supernatural manifestations — it adds its dot rating to any Perception or Investigation Dice Pool used to find the mage. It also subtracts its rating from the character's Stealth attempts — the purple-haired giant with the peg-leg is *not* going to be as unnoticeable as the average Joe and neither is the ordinary girl being followed by the pink, winged kittens. However, *Uncanny* characters may roll Intelligence + Subterfuge to disguise their uncanniness for one scene, difficulty 5 + their rating in *Uncanny* — witch green eyes are easily covered up with sunglasses, but it's hard to keep people from noticing a ten-foot-tall cyborg. However, *Uncanny* does not detract from die rolls in Social interactions; after all, the purple-haired peg-legged giant may be quite handsome and personable or even have strong animal magnetism. *Uncanny* by itself merely implies weird, freaky and memorable. If you want your *Uncanny* aspect to also be hideous and/or disturbing, take the *Disfigured*, *Deformity*, *Monstrous* or *Horrifying* Flaws. If you want it to be beautiful and/or striking, take some degree of enhanced Appearance.

This Background is often used for *Familiars* as well. A black cat is typically *Arcane* but a pet dragon is notably *Uncanny*.

- • Hard to miss
- •• Whoa! Check him out!
- ••• Damn! Is the circus in town or what?
- •••• Quick — someone call the **Guinness Book of Records!**
- ••••• Shit! I thought the **Weekly World News** made this stuff up!

Wards (Adversary to Retainers)

Wards are people whose welfare is your character's responsibility, whether they are her children, her elderly parents, her clueless roommate or her brother — or even her employer if she happen to be a chauffeur or bodyguard. Wards make your mage's life more complicated, expecting you to pick them up from soccer practice and so on, and moreover are easy targets for your Enemies. A Ward has a tendency to get underfoot and isn't particularly competent or helpful (if the Ward were helpful, he wouldn't be a problem). Like Retainers, Wards can vary in competence; one Ward may be fairly independent but also a troublemaker, while another may be quite sedate but also totally helpless. You should come up with a story-related reason that your mage can't simply dump the Ward and be done with it — otherwise she'd have done so long ago. You take the disadvantage, you get the points, but you have to stick with the responsibility.

- • One Ward
- •• Two Wards
- ••• Three Wards
- •••• Four Wards
- ••••• Five Wards

Additional Merits and Flaws

As with all Merits and Flaws, the following additions are wholly *optional*. They may not be appropriate for all games and all characters.

Many of the Merits and Flaws included here are far more supernaturally oriented than those found in the core **Mage** rulebook. This gives you a wider spate of toys with which to play, but be careful not to go completely crazy. If you try to run a gritty street-level **Mage** game, your game mood may suffer if every character has some sort of highly improbable magical Merit or Flaw.

Claws/Fangs/Horns/Hooves/Barbed Tail (3+ pt. Merit)

Witches have always been known for their beautiful fingernails and iron teeth, and your character lives up to this reputation, since coming from her, "I'll scratch your eyes out!" is not an idle threat. Or perhaps she has the horns of the devil or the hooves of a centaur, or something more mundane yet cooler — like a surgical steel plate in the skull with bolts to screw spikes on.

For three points, you may buy one type of attack; for five points, two. Seven points allows you to buy three, and nine points allows you to buy four. For eleven points, you can go for the full devil package and have claws, fangs, horns, hooves, *and* a barb at the end of your tail (though it costs an additional three points for your tail to be prehensile).

Maneuver	Difficulty	Damage
Bite	5	Strength +1
Claw	6	Strength +2
Kick	7	Strength +3
Gore	7	Strength +2 (Strength +4 after a charge, if you've just moved 10 yards or more)
Tail Strike	6	Strength +1

Claws, fangs, horns, hooves, and tail barbs come in varying sizes. The above list assumes you've got the smallest gauge. For an additional point, you can get a somewhat larger size, and another point beyond that gets you *el grande*, each size larger doing an additional +1 point of damage. However, this is not necessarily a great idea. Wolf claws can be painted and passed off as an expensive manicure, but vulture talons are a bit harder to hide, and a set of giant bear claws are not only incredibly conspicuous but will prevent you from doing things like typing or driving. Likewise a nice pair of goat horns can be hidden under a top hat, but a set of oryx horns will need a sombrero, and there's no hiding a full rack of stag antlers, especially if you've got two points for every year of your age.

At Storyteller option, claws and so forth can be made retractable for an additional +1 per unit of size, like vampire fangs can be pulled back in for one point; for two points, jumbo fangs (the type that stick down over your lip) can be pulled back into line with regular teeth, and for three points, even boar or walrus tusks can be made to disappear — though there will have to be a good explanation given for why this works.

Anachronism (1 to 3-pt. Flaw)

Your mage was raised in another time and hasn't quite caught up to the present. Maybe she traveled forward (or backward) in time, or sideways from a parallel universe. Maybe the Awakening made her recall one of her past lives so vividly that she thinks she's supposed to be in 10th century Egypt. Or maybe she's from one of the few quaint backwaters of the present day and everything in the modern Western world might as well be Mars for all the sense it makes to her.

For one point, the character is just a little out of sync. Pick any decade from the 20th or 21st century, excepting those on both sides of the current one, and set your attitudes and beliefs accordingly. For two points, pick any decade in the 18th or 19th century (or 22nd or 23rd). For three points, pick any decade from the 17th century or before, or any particularly well insulated backwater of the present day (if any still exist), or just some totally weird social behavioral construct. The character has a two-point difficulty penalty when dealing with anything outside this cultural identity. Thus, a character used to the 1800s has trouble with computers but understands light bulbs; a character from a hypothetical 23rd century parallel universe might have trouble with telephones, which never existed in her world experience!

This Flaw can be bought off over time and with roleplaying. In the mean time, culture shock can be fun.

Personal Talisman (1 pt. Merit or Flaw)

Though a master mage may have helped (and probably did), your character has done one of the great and mighty deeds of magecraft and created a Talisman. Well, he may not have created it, but he was there for the crucial and literal willworking — he invested a pawn of his own Willpower into the Talisman and now it is tied to him.

If this is a Merit, you still have the Talisman, and so long as your character holds it, you have an extra point of permanent Willpower, as well as a point of temporary Willpower that cannot be spent. (You must also take at least one point in the *Wonder* Background if you intend to keep it.)

If this is a Flaw, however, you do not possess the Talisman and the related Willpower point. Mark off one of your permanent Willpower points until you get the Talisman back or somehow gain it from its rightful owner (which should be you, but isn't). If this drops you below five Willpower, you'll never become a Master until you get it back or you purchase another point. (Your invested point of Willpower still counts as part of your total for purposes of purchasing more, however.)

Nine Lives (6-pt. Merit)

Dame Fortune has favored your mage with the ability to come as close as possible to mortal peril and still to survive. When a roll occurs that would result in your character's death, the roll is made again. If the next roll succeeds, then your mage lives — and one of your nine lives is used up. If that subsequent roll fails, then another re-roll is made, until either a successful roll occurs or your nine lives are used up. The Storyteller should keep careful count of how many lives the character has remaining.

Resistant Pattern (7-pt. Merit)

Aggravated damage means nothing to you, at least personally. Enchanted weapons, vampire fangs, deadly spells and toxic waste can still harm you, of course, but this damage is no worse than that dealt out by ordinary weapons, cat claws, car crashes and sports injuries, any of which can still kill you. You take only lethal damage from attacks that would normally score aggravated wounds, including the Avatar Storm.

Immunity (Variable Point Merit)

There is one peril to which your character is completely immune, even to the magical versions. Perhaps, like Mithridates, your mage slowly built up an immunity to all poisons, even those concocted by the Euthanatos. Perhaps he had an accident in the lab and now all metal phases harmlessly through his body, even magic swords and comic-book alloys — or it bounces off his chest. Perhaps it still cuts, but the wounds don't bleed and they seal up immediately.

However, this invulnerability is only to the particular thing, not to any secondary or tertiary effects — Fenris may have blessed your character so that he is unscathed by the teeth and claws of wolves, even werewolves, but that does nothing to stop the werewolf's silver sword or even the damage when the werewolf pounds your mage's head into a wall. (Fenris, after all, said you'd be unharmed by wolves, not by architecture.) Likewise, even if metal doesn't exist for your mage, it does for his lab coat, and a bullet's going to pack quite a wallop before it shreds the cloth. And even if the faeries at your christening said that no mortal man could ever harm you, that proviso doesn't apply to vampires, or the magics that mortal man might command, or even — for that matter — to his 1957 Chevy Bel Aire.

Your mage might be immune to all physical harm, save one thing, like beheading, incineration or being stabbed through the heart with a dagger thrice blessed by three separate Popes; or he might be immune to all things save in one spot, like Achilles' heel or Siegfried's shoulder. However, this will not prevent him from being turned into a rutabaga, having his soul stolen, being sealed in Lucite or

sent into orbit, though his body (if not his sanity) will withstand all these things. He'll merely be an invulnerable soulless rutabaga orbiting the earth in a Lucite block while his enemies look for a third Pope to bless a dagger.

Immunities vary in price, depending on their lethality and their frequency, much as *Vulnerabilities* do. You must buy each *Immunity* separately, although the Storyteller may allow a number of similar *Immunities* (basilisks, snakes, toadstools, iocaine powder) to be packaged as one more common *Immunity*. Total immunity continues to go up in price depending on the size of the chink in your armor.

Alternately, for half the price of any given *Immunity*, your character may be *Resistant* to a particular bane — taking only half damage, rounded down, or reducing your soak roll difficulties by 3...your choice. Anything doing only one die of damage, you ignore.

2 points — A minor nuisance (poison oak, common cold) or a very rare threat (basilisks, the Ebola virus)

4 points — A major threat (disease, hunger, supernatural evil gook), or a moderately rare threat (poisons, extreme heat or cold, raw magic Levin bolts, death spells)

6 points — A terminal threat (asphyxiation, drowning), or a common threat (fire, metals)

8 points — Invulnerable to all physical threats, but with one large weak spot (the head, the neck, the chest) or one common bane (fire, edged weapons, drowning)

10 points — Invulnerable to all physical threats, but with one tiny weak spot (Siegfried's shoulder, Achilles' heel, the spot where the third eye would go) or one rare bane (silver bullets, mistletoe, deadly nightshade); one common bane in one large spot (edged weapons vs. the neck, i.e. beheading), or one common bane in a specific circumstance (a gun fired by a woman). Or immune to all physical threats save those which inflict aggravated damage, or immune to all physical threats save oneself — can be strangled with a rope made of own hair, mentally commanded to gnaw own arm off or destroyed with own Phylactery. Alternately, mage is invulnerable until Phylactery is destroyed or Phylactery is invulnerable until mage is destroyed.

12 points — Invulnerable to all physical threats, but with one very rare bane (the bite of an Egyptian asp, nuclear radiation, a specific ritual cast by a master mage), one rare bane in a tiny spot (a stake of twisted rose briars through the heart), or one rare bane in a very specific set of circumstances (poisoned with belladonna by a beautiful woman)

14 points — Invulnerable to all physical threats, but with the bane being an *extreme* rarity (a dagger thrice blessed by three Popes, the elixir of eighty evil essences), or one very rare bane in a highly specific set of circumstances (dragged through the streets of Baghdad by wild horses during the month of Ramadan)

16 points — Invulnerable to all physical threats except one *unique* bane (the Holy Lance of Longinus, the Sword of Roland) or invulnerable until *Phylactery* destroyed, requiring an equally unique bane.

This Merit may also be taken in conjunction with the *Vulnerability* Flaw, especially if the *Vulnerability* is something common and not usually deadly, such as water. Thus, it costs only three points total to be the Wicked Witch of the West, *Immune* to every variety of harm *except* being doused with a cleaning bucket. ("I'm melting! I'm melting! Oh who would have thought a good little girl like you could destroy all my beautiful wickedness!")

Objects, especially *Phylacteries*, may also have *Immunity* to physical perils, but Storytellers should impose some limit on size so min-maxers will not use this Merit to create invulnerable dreadnoughts and impenetrable fortresses. The larger the object, the less of it can be invulnerable. You can have an indestructible moped, but your '57 Chevy won't have puncture-proof tires, and your Winnebago of Doom can have the tires blow out and the windows smashed even while the rest of it remains unscathed. Likewise, your cozy witch's cottage will just need to be rethatched after the dragon attack, but your mansion will be gutted with nothing left but smoke-blackened walls. However, you can have the last laugh by making your *Phylactery* your castle, and making the one way to defeat your castle's *Immunity* being your own death. That way, if your enemies ever sneak into your inner sanctum and kill you, they get to deal with the castle collapsing on their heads — a common staple of sorcerous fiction.

Need we even mention that this Merit can be phenomenally abusive?

Cast No Shadow or Reflection (1-pt. Flaw)

There are many explanations for this phenomenon, and no two agree: Your mage may have attended the legendary Black School, where the Devil who runs the place took the hindmost as payment — in this case, your character's shadow. Or maybe it got trapped in a mirror or left in a little girl's bedroom somewhere — which is better than the alternative, for some believe if it escapes, it runs around as your evil twin. In any case, your character casts no shadow or reflection (your choice), and this may cause many problems, especially because this is a common Flaw among the Nephandi.

Touch of Frost (1-pt. Flaw)

Plants wither at your character's approach and die at his touch. His touch is as cold and clammy as a corpse — a refrigerated one at that. A common Flaw among Euthanatos.

Vulnerability (1 to 7-pt. Flaw)

Your character possesses a *Vulnerability* — a substance, element, or power that can harm or even kill him, like Superman's problems with Kryptonite or the Wicked Witch of the West's aversion to cleaning buckets. The level of this Flaw depends on whether his weakness can fatally injure him, or simply weaken him, and on how common the substance is. Damage caused by a *Vulnerability* cannot be soaked, except by Armor, assuming it's the right sort of Armor (the Wicked Witch of the West would have survived if she were wearing a hazmat suit or just a raincoat and umbrella).

A normal, weakening *Vulnerability* causes one health level of aggravated damage per turn of contact. A mortal peril causes three health levels of damage per turn of contact. If the slightest drop of the substance is certain death, instantly bringing your destruction, this Flaw is worth an extra point beyond that. If merely being in the presence of the substance causes you damage — being in the same room as the Emperor's perfume or standing in indirect sunlight — or the most infinitesimal drop causes you harm, this Flaw is also worth one point more; while if you actually have to be damaged by the substance — stabbed with the Lance of Longinus, beaten with an iron crowbar — this Flaw is worth one point less. If taken at the full seven-point level, this Flaw means a single beam of moonlight or the mere sight of a drop of blood can instantly kill you.

Examples:

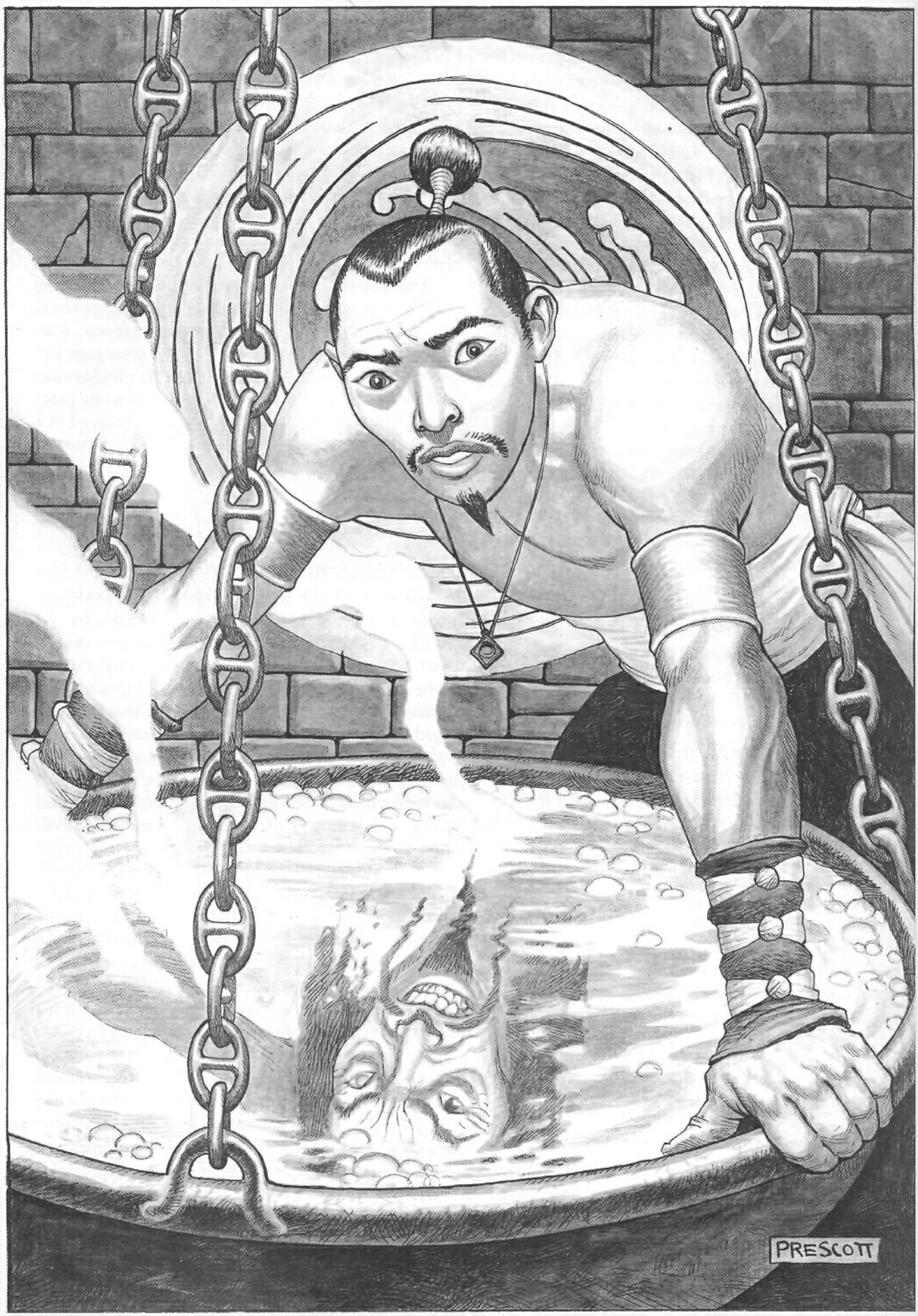
Flaw	Weakness
2 points	You can be fatally injured by something that's nearly impossible to acquire (the Holy Lance of Longinus, the perfume of the Emperor of Cathay), or weakened by something very rare (dragon's blood, naphtha, the bite of an Egyptian asp, panther's breath).
3 points	You can be fatally injured by something very rare, or weakened by something moderately rare (mistletoe, garlic, the sight of your reflection, silver, magic).
4 points	You can be fatally injured by something moderately rare, or weakened by something common (iron, sunlight, fire)
5 points	You can be fatally injured by something common.

Beast Within (5-pt. Flaw)

The Beast is awake within your character! He is prone to frenzies, just like a vampire or werewolf. These are caused by situations of intense emotions: fear, anger, hate. Your character is a figure of great rage and fear to the rest of humanity, much like Charles Manson or Mike Tyson. Your mage automatically has one extra dot of Dynamic Resonance, and whenever placed in a stress situation, you must roll your mage's Dynamic Resonance, difficulty 6 — with any successes, your mage flies off the handle into a frenzied rage with all the same qualities as the *Berserker* Merit. This Flaw is especially appropriate to *Ghoul* and *Kinfolk* mages.

Bedeviled (6-pt. Flaw)

Job — that guy in the Bible — was a whiner. Someone or something is watching your character and ruining his life. Your mage has no idea who or what it is but knows it's responsible for all the things that go wrong, or at least the big ones. When things are just starting to look up, it socks him with another personal tragedy, but instead of letting him die, it always seems to save him and take someone close to him instead — just so it can watch him suffer (or so he thinks). The Storyteller must decide why you are being watched and what is watching you (it is not necessarily the Devil, despite the name).


PRESCOTT

Chapter Seven: Storytelling

What is there, you ask, that can be said about Storytelling a Tradition game, that isn't already covered in the core **Mage** book? Glad you asked. Everything from tips on common problems to variations that run wildly afield from basic **Mage** is worth exploration. Naturally, we can't print eight thousand different versions of **Mage**, but we can give you some advice and ideas from which to spring off and form your own chronicle directions.

Player Input: Group vs. the Storyteller

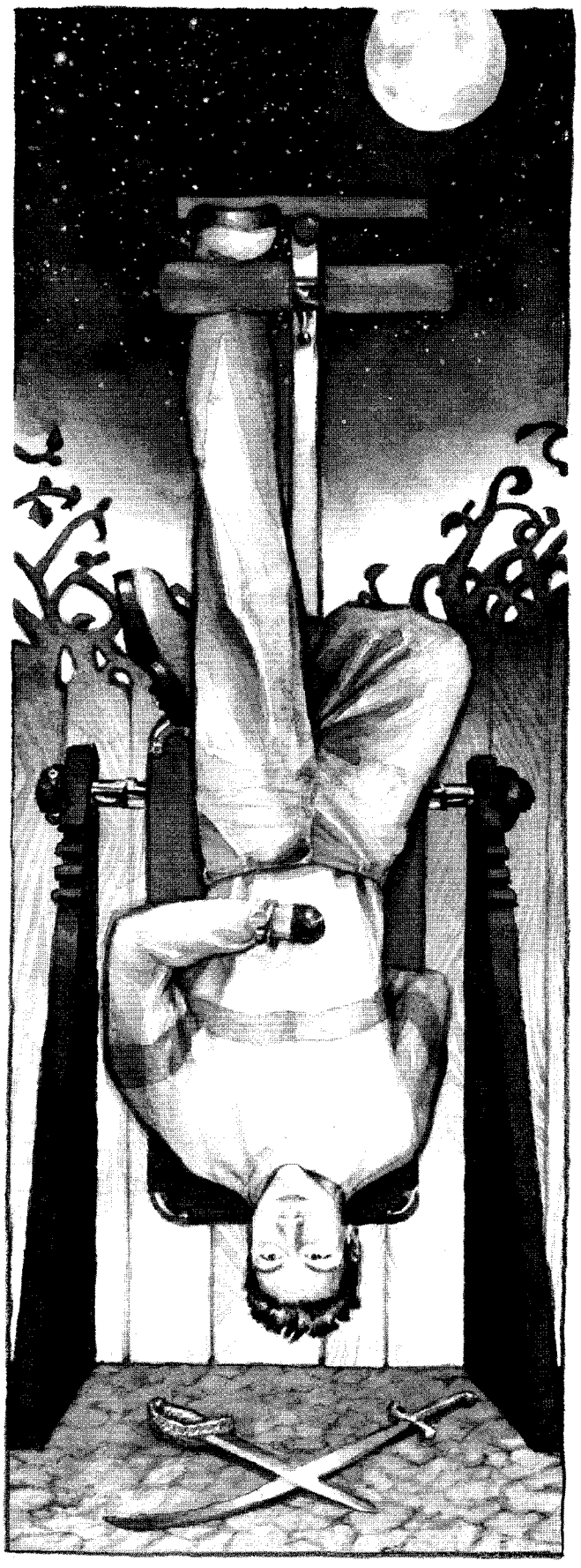
Many a Storyteller picks up a game book, comes up with a unique idea and decides to run with it. Characters are built on the spur of the moment (or on the spur of a couple hours, as the case may be), the Storyteller sets the scene, everyone dives in and... the game collapses. The characters don't fit. The players don't like the theme. The Storyteller's at a loss to get around the special capabilities that the players brought to the table.

While the purpose of the game is to have a good time, and that means throwing the players a bone now and then, there's a limit to how much a Storyteller can allow. If you're trying to tell a good fantasy novel in the tried-and-true Tolkien style, you don't just arbitrarily drop in a character with ray guns and a spaceship. The same holds true for role-playing games: The players and Storyteller must come to an agreement about the style of the game, and then the players must agree to play within the boundaries of the Storyteller's chronicle—otherwise, they risk breaking the

chronicle completely, and then nobody has a good time. The Storyteller needs to work with the players to make sure that each player has a character that both fits the player's vision but coexists functionally with the game's style.

Players always want to play the most unique character, the one that breaks the stereotype. Rogue Tradition members are difficult to play out — a rogue character usually bends away from the goals of the group with distaste for the status quo or just has so many problems that the character hinders game play more than contributing. Try to find the right Tradition for the character your player has designed. Listen to the things they want to accomplish, either when they are talking to each other while they are paging through the source material or when you have one on one sessions. Players sometimes hold back what they really want to do, or they simply don't yet know before play actually begins. Either they don't want to be told that they cannot play the character they have in mind, the Storyteller shows some negative opinion of their choice or it may be necessary to see how the player responds to the other members in the group. A rogue character — a mage gone wild with powers, Flaws or unusual knowledge — can derail a planned storyline without advance consideration and planning. Dark Secrets, past performance issues and personal agendas aside, a Tradition would reasonably take a long look at welcoming Adepts into the fold without some idea of how they would conform. Nephandic, Marauder or Technocratic type infiltrator characters are best as Antagonists or as temptation devices to sway Tradition characters. There's always the player who wants to play something wildly "outside the box," but sometimes that just isn't right for the game — in some games, a Marauder may never show up; in others, perhaps the appearance of some minor Craft forms the crux of a storyline. The trick is to give the player an angle that still fits the game without making everyone the "special exception" in every game.

Gently suggest a more appropriate Tradition for what the player wants to do. Do not deny the validity of the player's wishes, but suggest perhaps their original idea needs a little finagling or rework. A combat Cult of Ecstasy member might be best in the Akashic Brotherhood, or even a throwback Euthanatos from their warring days. Find out what the essence is of the character. What are the goals that really matter? Try to find a more appropriate niche that the character would fall into. One good way to start this off is by asking some basic questions of the player to find out what he is looking for in the game. That way you can determine how to adjust your storyline or see if the character concept is just too disruptive. But also don't be afraid to say "no." You want everyone to have fun, yes, and you are running the chronicle for



others not just yourself, but if you feel a Satanistic Celestial Chorus member might simply disrupt the entire game or you find you have a combat Akashic killing everything in sight, say so. Don't be afraid to talk to the players and let them know some of what you intended for the game. They will be understanding — most times.

Of course, every once in a while, it's fun to break with Tradition and make a character that just doesn't fit the mold. Even so, you should strive to encourage stereotypes at least a little — they wouldn't exist without *some* basis. A character's clever, unique power usually substitutes for lack of in-depth background. Often, you should suggest that the player think about the possibility of the character's unique story angle as an eventual goal rather than a starting trait. Give the character something to shoot for and room to grow!

There are several methods, tried and true, to use in helping you as a Storyteller figure out your players' goals. Understand that your players might not have fully developed the background and future direction of their characters. It is your responsibility as their Storyteller to try to help them formulate and develop the personality and back history of their characters. Much like in acting, there are many methods and exercises a Storyteller can use to help her players learn to develop fully dimensional character concepts. Besides nature and demeanor, pay special attention to concept. The concept could be one to a few words describing the type of job the character has or has had (Lawyer, Spy, Armed Services, Politician, Scholar, etc.); or it could be a persona archetype (Hard-worker, Retentive Organizer, Lazy Slob, Researching Cultist, etc). The concept can be used to help choose the most appropriate Abilities, Backgrounds and even Merits and Flaws. Remember, a concept is a summation of what the character typically does and lives — you're not bound by the list in **Mage** itself — nearly any brief phrase will suffice. The second method to use in conjunction with this is to ask what is the character doing currently, day to day. Is he at a job? Is he between jobs? Studying? Raising a family? In the military? Eschewing mundane society entirely in favor of magical work? Trapped in a Quiet? With this, you will begin to see where your players intend on going with the character and what sort of background he might have had.

One-on-One Sessions

Small vignette storylines, or back-story, can help to define the roleplaying direction that your chronicle will be headed. It also helps the player understand more clearly where he sees the short term and, sometimes, the long-term goals of the character. These sessions can easily be held during your first normal session while the other players are still creating the final touches of their characters or if they are looking up information for their own backgrounds. It doesn't take a long time to do, and it will establish a strong sense of history and pre-life with your players. Each player should be allowed about the same amount of time. Approximately an hour with each player is enough time to allow the player some idea of where the character is going. These sessions can also be done individually when each person has free time and can then run a little longer. The important thing is that they are done before you start your main story line and that each player gets a chance to go through it.

The beginnings of the characters can be solidly forged with these sessions: their Dark Secrets, obsessions, addictions, or anything else that is created by the player can come up for the first time — or come back to haunt them for the first time — and it gives them a chance to play out the character's reactions. The reasons for those personality foibles and their repercussions can be played out here. It is even possible to lay the groundwork for character histories interacting with each other so that before present day play (or whenever you choose to set your story), some of the characters have a sense of familiarity, likes or dislikes of the others in their group — whether they are thrown together through orders of their Traditions or if it is by necessity, survival or another motif.

Several one-on-one sessions can be played out to better saturate your story with history and character development; however, only one or two sessions are needed. The first session should focus on the Awakening of the character's Avatar and how the character is brought into the Traditions, who his Master is and how he found her. This will establish how easy or difficult it was to go through the Awakening, why he has the Spheres he does and why the Tradition chose him. This also helps to establish any periphery abilities or knowledges, either known previously or learnt by his Mentor. Several years can pass in this session to establish the formative years as a mage. **Initiates of the Art** is an excellent supplement to use for this, as it goes through all of these beginnings.

The second session should be an important moment in her life after the Awakening but sometime, even years, before she meets the other characters. This session is more concerned with a specific moment or event where you can tie the character into your story. It can be anything you wish, ranging from the Mentor's death or a Tradition celebration, to an enemy's resurgence or the first successful completion of a difficult rote. This helps to establish an important moment with the character, something she can use to base her character's desires and goals from. It also helps to establish, at the outset, the character's individual past and a sense of what the character values — which assists in fleshing out later roleplay.

After Game Sessions

A helpful trick in a **Mage** chronicle is, after the formal game session, to sit around and take time to wind down. Have your players mull over what was accomplished and if it met with the goals outlined by their characters, so they can clearly see how far they have progressed. They will be able to check their notes to see if they met with all of the contacts they wanted to, or if they used the abilities they wanted to use to gain specific pieces of valuable resources or information. They might also want to check and keep track of what abilities they found they needed during the session and either learn the ability themselves or take note to try to find someone to assist them for next time.

For the Storyteller, it recaps what clues and information the players have found so far and how far they have progressed in the storyline. It allows you to gauge whether they are moving too swiftly or if they need more help or more blatant clues. This is essential for keeping the players interested in your plotlines. It also allows you to address any of these concerns, during this 'wind-down' period, where it does not interfere in game play and you can listen to the players and resolve their concerns. It is an excellent time to go over experience points, recognition for good play, clever innovation and roleplaying. It's also a good way to gauge how interested and excited the players are — listen to the stories they like talking or joking about; those are the ones that caught their interest.

It is a good time to find out how the players intend on proceeding so you can prepare before the next session. You know what they have found out, you know if they have misunderstood a clue or other important information, now you can prepare their next bout of creatures, dilemmas and encounters with an idea of which way they will jump. It is a very good idea to know if any research might be needed before your next game session, so the players' time is not wasted as you pore through books and your favorite reference manuals. They will get bored and possibly whiny. It is difficult to Storytell for whiny players, trust us.

Take Notes!

Taking notes is key to doing later research or even including little events or situations in play. You cannot always remember your most inspired ideas or the creative plans of your players. Jot them down on a small pad during play, and flesh them out a little more at breaks or when time permits, so you can remember them later on. These things can be used to add a little more depth to the world you are creating with your players. Balance between Storyteller and player control.

Creating the Novel

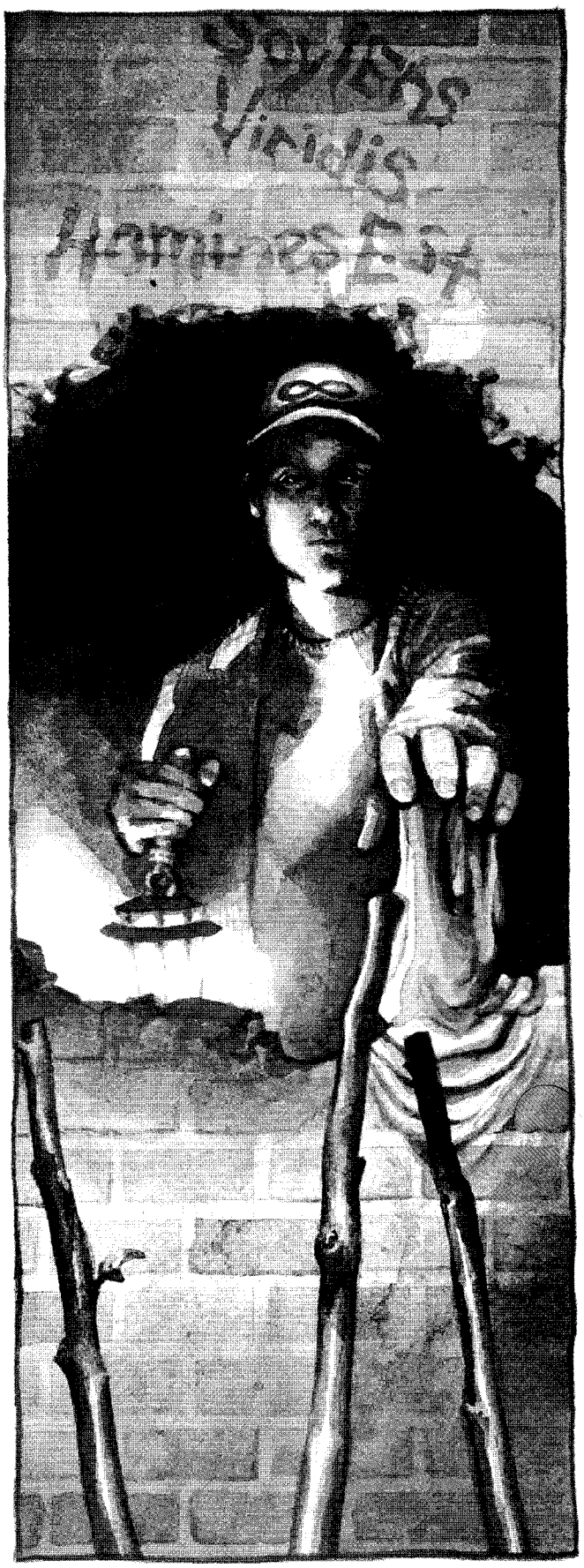
The creation and design of a chronicle is a collaborative art, or at least a collaborative effort. From the players in the design of their characters to the Storyteller in the design of the game world, each adds to the efforts of the other to create a dynamic and interactive game setting. Some views of Storytelling believe that the players should be the ones to decide and run how the game sessions play out, while others believe it is the Storyteller, with knowledge of the story to present, who has the final decision-making in what the players go through. Regardless of gaming philosophies, both views are valid and equally regarded in gaming. In effect, the players with their design of their personas and the Storyteller with her design of the game world together create a story, or novel, wherein the characters take actions and reactions and the Storyteller presents obstacles and adjudicates how well the players resolve their problems. At the end of a session, a chapter (or several) has been written, with dialogue, personal conflict and revelations on the nature of the world or a particular situation the storyline is to revolve around. With these sessions and chapters, a novel is created depicting the adventures of the characters and their successes and losses.

This is not a bad way to view roleplay gaming, and it helps the players get a feel for the characters they are trying to design and the personalities they wish both to portray and encounter. A good movie or book has well-developed and dimensional characters and a world in which they live and interact. This should be the same for that of a chronicle. With this in mind, it also is very helpful to the Storyteller to tell a better story, with all of the depth and feeling that she wishes to convey to the players. The players should be encouraged to write several paragraphs of story relating their characters' backgrounds to develop these personalities. You may even suggest several paragraphs to be written as a journal to help players, or you as Storyteller, to get a good feel of how the players are reacting within your game world. These are the thoughts and impressions of the characters of your novel and as the story unfolds you will be able to see their reasons and interactions between each other and the characters you yourself develop.

Concept, Atmosphere and Mood

Deciding on where and when your players' characters all meet together or where they will be wandering will help define the tone of the game and the atmosphere you want your players to feel. Should they be desperate, intrigued or confident? Will they know what is going on or be flying by the skin of their teeth (seat of their pants)? You have all of the timeline of the World of Darkness from which to choose, whether you choose to set your game pre-Ascension War defeat or even earlier on. Don't limit yourself. Consider playing out the events of the Ascension War itself, with the players' characters part of all that transpires. It will make the game an epic experience for them and will set the stage for the theme of your game. You might even run your prelude as the wrap-up of the Ascension War from the perspective of the characters' Mentors, which gives everyone a lot more insight into the formative personalities that taught the characters!

Regardless of when you choose to start the atmosphere of the setting is important to give a proper dimensional feel to the game. Setting is important, but having some ideas for current events for your game world is helpful too. This will fully flesh out your concept for your chronicle, and your players will react accordingly. Now that doesn't mean that it is a static world. If your players have decided or asked about something you had not yet designed or decided upon, let them go with it. They are creating the world they interact in as much as you are. Let their imagination help define the setting. Think of it as a brainstorming technique, only you don't have to tell them it was not designed until they had asked about it. Storytelling is a dynamic, flexible endeavor. There is a balance between player and Storyteller control. A useful trick is to take notes on the various theories that players come up with to explain bizarre events in the game. Toss in the occasional weirdness that has no obvious tie to anything else; then, listen to the players hash it out, and pick whatever theory sounds most intriguing, far-fetched or appropriate to the Chronicle. There's nothing wrong with letting the players' inspiration help in guiding the chronicle — and they'll feel a sense of accomplishment from "figuring it out."



Theme and Agenda

Player's agenda versus Storyteller concept is an important balance that must be struck as the game progresses. Although you may know your players very well, they will always come up with something you did not expect — as the old saw goes, no story survives first contact with the players. It is important to develop a theme for your

storyline. The theme can change as the story changes or it can retain several themes to keep the players busy, but regardless you should have some story-arc themes that the players can readily distinguish. This is more than "What is our mission?;" it is the type of adventure and the implications behind it. Thus, if you're running an adventure centered on the consequences of the Tradition failure to (say) influence the development of a small town, many of your story elements should tie back to this theme. Even if the players decide to head afield, some elements of the story should remind them of this central piece, the place that essentially forms the core of your game. Let them come back to it until they resolve the issue or abandon it (the latter may be better if the players just aren't biting on your hooks).

Special Atmosphere Elements

Costume, make-up and props can always add to the atmosphere and mood of a mage game. Candles and incense are some of the better elements, especially if you have Ecstatic Cultists, Chorus members or Dreamspeakers in the group. Costume pieces or small props might be encouraged so that players get a feel for the setting, both the setting you are trying to develop and perhaps how that setting interacts with them as well, such as the players holding their personal props of calculators and beakers in a candle-incense setting. They will begin to feel their similarities and differences to the settings you define. There is no need to go overboard, but one or two items for each character and for each setting will add to the overall session. You don't have to go all-out into live action. Just remember to stimulate senses besides the imagination. Consider playing a specific piece of forbidding music when the characters first encounter a powerful adversary; if you play the music again later, they'll associate it with that adversary. Similarly, you can rely on different colored lights, types of candles or scents to associate different locations. A peaceful Chantry might smell of rain while an exotic Sanctum has heavy incense. Use these senses as keys and clues to the players. Let the players' senses associate with specific chronicle elements, so you need only pull out a simple prop and the players' imaginations automatically carry them to the place you want.

Length of Chronicle

The length of a chronicle may be decided by how much the players can actually achieve in any given session or by a certain amount a sessions the Storyteller wishes to run. It is somewhat important to take this into account since players can get bored if it feels as though your chronicle is never-ending. If you wish to run several stories,

separate your chronicle with lengths of time in between so that the players can take time to develop during downtime.

Remember, a strong story has a beginning, a middle and an ending. Stories shouldn't always go on forever. While an individual's story may continue, the resolution of an important arc should signal a sort of closure. Yes, people do live past their stories, but that doesn't mean that you should feel compelled to follow a Cabal from Awakening to grave. Sometimes, if the Cabal achieves what it sets out to do or fails in its overreaching goal, it may be time to set the group aside. Consider that once the Cabal has "done it all," there's little room left except to slide into mediocrity...like a television show that's outlived its originality. Try opening a new chronicle and perhaps playing with a few leftover elements from the old story as part of the backdrop — or making something totally unique and new.

Creating the Group

The reason to work together — this alone can cause more headaches, and potentially offer more story seeds, than just about any other factor of a Cabal. Without a strong reason to work together, the Cabal may fall to petty infighting, bullying or just boredom as some people hog the spotlight while others feel that their desires are marginalized.

There always must be a need for your characters to be together. One way to satisfy this need, other than the stereotypical "thief, fighter, wizard" combinations, is to know what Spheres each character — and player! — has strengths in. Knowing this during character creation will allow the players to decide what type of character they want. Everyone wants to be unique and have something no one else does; this is one way to accomplish that. The choices of Spheres can quickly determine who has strengths in specific roles and who's doing back-up. Also, a player who's particularly clever with applications of a given Sphere will really shine compared to other players; try to peg who can really work that Mind magic, the Forces or the coincidental Correspondence, so that you don't run into the problem of people competing for attention. A good group is one that has a role for everyone. In a Tradition game, the Spheres often define these roles. The Storyteller will know the strengths and weaknesses from this and the players will learn how to work together. The players don't have to know the powers and abilities of the other players; that is up to your group and their style of play, but it is important for the Storyteller to know. If you know that certain abilities will be needed for your storyline, suggest, either to the group or to individual players, to try to fit in other Spheres or abilities. Don't hesitate to ask players to bend their concepts a little just to make sure that they can survive the story! If nobody in the group has Resources, for instance, your game may inadvertently become a gritty street survival story, even if you didn't want to do so. If nobody has the Sphere of Prime, the group will suffer from a lack of skill with Quintessence, Tass and Nodes. Try to cover the important bases — but don't overdo it! Leave a little room for everyone to improve.

The best way to bring a group together is to create an overwhelming need to work with one another. Each member of the group may have had a dream bringing them to a spot where they all meet, or each has been handed down an artifact or mystery phrase from their Mentors and they must come together with each of their pieces, or their Tradition superiors have conferred and have decided that a party must be put forth to succeed on a specific mission. Whatever the reason, it is important to create a purpose to work together, otherwise your players will just decide to go off on their own ways. The most effective is to simply order them to work together by their Tradition, whether they are from a variety of Traditions or from the same Tradition — but this isn't always the most appealing. Shared adversity usually does the trick; this is one reason that many movies start with an action-oriented opening: Set the group into a conflict, have them work together to resolve it, then let them stay together and build characterization after the conflict. Once they've explored what it's like to work as a group, throw them into another whirl and you should find yourself with a solid team in no time.

Same Tradition Groups (Same Chantry Groups)

There are many interesting stories that can be created from same Tradition groups and there is the added bonus of having your group want to work together. After all, internal strife tends to be a little less common than inter-Tradition conflict. The focus of the sub-plot — the inter-relationships of the characters — is the personal experiences and histories and not so much their beliefs, since their common Tradition will give them a great deal of paradigmal unity. The real chance here is for everyone to shine based on personal character differences instead of any Tradition "shtick."

This sort of group can be difficult to keep entertaining, especially if the storyline is not fast-paced or if you as

a Storyteller like to consult your material as you go. The players are less likely to take the initiative of conversation with one another except to speak on the reason they are together and what they have accomplished. There will be less inter-character activity and more focus on the mission. After all, they're probably not trying to convert one another (since they're already in the same Tradition), and they likely have similar methodologies, which means less work hashing out their worldviews. Conversely, tiny points of dogma will eventually crop up, and different factions can come into play as each character interprets the Tradition's agenda differently.

Multi-Tradition Groups

Groups with many different Traditions are the norm for Tradition-oriented **Mage** games. You as the Storyteller are responsible for making sure that the player's concepts do not overtly contradict each other. Unless you're looking for a high degree of internal strife, you don't want to have the Celestial Chorus purist and the rogue Akashic in the same group; they may kill each other before real game play starts. Of course the best groups are ones where their ideologies intermingle; the key is always the reason they are thrown together.

For multi-Tradition group games you can develop and portray the many different beliefs and ideologies with each of your players. This is a good idea if you want there to be debates and conflicts of differing views or to really show your players the different methods of magic from each of the Traditions. You could accomplish this with your own background characters, but your players will have a stronger sense of the differences and the debates if they are the ones defending the differing viewpoints of their Traditions. This also gives you a good selection of differing Spheres in your group, so you can pretty much throw anything at all at them — although it is more difficult to predict how your players will overcome an obstacle, since they have so many different methods to choose from.

Opposing Tradition Groups

This can be just as fun and debate-oriented as a multi-Tradition group, but remember there will be more vehemence and vengeful conflict than friendly debate. Old feuds, unjust persecutions and unaccounted-for crimes will be the main conflict of this group. It creates interesting tension when the party wants to take sides against one another or otherwise destroy or discredit each other; however, that can easily become the main focus and leave your storyline untouched. Keep in mind the reason they are together. This has to be a stronger or more necessary condition than in the other groups. Also you can use this type of group for each of the characters to find absolution, atonement or even understanding in the other Traditions' methods and past misdeeds. For instance, the Euthanatos and the Akashic Brotherhood have a long history of animosity, but the Euthanatos also recognize the importance of Fate — if Destiny indicates that the two must work together, then differences may be set aside briefly to solve a common problem. Similarly, a highly conservative and heritage-minded Verbena probably takes exception to the Celestial Chorus, and as such will provoke debate and perhaps even violence at every opportunity — unless you bring out a larger conflict that forces them together. The formula for a pair of partners who can't stand each other certainly works for countless Hollywood police movies; you can make it work for you, too. Of course, you don't have to have a foregone conclusion of everyone putting aside their differences and having a happy ending — you could well let those differences come back out in the end, and motivate the next story.

Resolving Inter-Tradition Issues

Whether from a multi-tradition game or from one singular tradition, the Storyteller can and should use the politics and social protocols of the Tradition to affect the characters. This is less about the characters themselves and their own experiences, but more about their Mentors and the interplay between Traditions. Invariably, one Tradition's goals will be at cross-purposes with that of another — an artifact uncovered, information about a newly discovered Node or anything else. The beliefs of the Tradition, its methods and its representative Sphere can be a wonderful way to weave in underlying subplot or even for your main storyline. In this case, your internal conflict becomes a matter of seeing how far the characters will compromise their Tradition, their loyalty and their beliefs in order to reach what they deem an equitable resolution.

Resolving these issues can be for the players to decide, at least amongst their own group. Discontent can be bought off, Spheres or knowledges can be taught, even Wonders and Quintessence exchanged. Pacts made in this way are held to just as strongly as an oath to a Tradition or a Cabal. For many mages, the chance to overcome issues of belief helps in Seekings, as it's a form of personal resolution. Plus, it's an interesting bind to place the character's many loyalties — to friends, Mentors, Tradition-mates and idealism — all at odds, and see which way the character jumps.

Creating the Cabal (In the Game)

The Cabal is a special coterie of mages bound in a common purpose or event. It is increasingly important to younger mages since the development of their Spheres or even the compiling of resources is increasingly difficult in the modern age. A common purpose can include a common enemy: Nephandi, Marauder group or even an upset spirit; or, it can include some event or tragedy that has occurred either in the character's backgrounds or during game play: A chantry attacked by the Technocracy, an arcane device stolen from a Mentor or even a new evil out to destroy several Nodes. Whatever the circumstance, there must be a tight bond that will overcome the differing styles and dogma of each of the Traditions for a Cabal to work.

The players can start as a Cabal before game play or through their actions in a session before the main story has started; however, it can also be a wonderful sub-plot as the group gets to know one another and work with each other. Every group is not a Cabal, but maybe over time strong emotional events can form a Cabal out of the group. Exploring this as a real option can be done at an after-game session when a player (or a Storyteller character) brings it up as an option to consider. The players should look at their benefits in coming together, what sort of trust they must now either achieve or decide they have, and what sort of resources they are willing to allow the group to access. Typically a Cabal should be made up of those individuals who can offer resources, arcane access, even teaching Spheres (Mentor or otherwise) to the greater benefit of the Cabal, but sometimes a member is along just for the sake of personality or unique viewpoints without necessarily bringing any magical torque to the table. If the members wish to be secretive and selfish it is probably best to wait. As a Storyteller, this should tell you quickly that a Cabal will not work for your players and that they will be concentrating on each other instead of your plot or story. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but a group built around internal strife has a way of becoming unappetizing for the players who wind up on the short end of the stick; it's usually best to help motivate them in the direction of forming a Cabal.

Protagonist Storyteller Characters

Be prepared to come up with appropriate protagonist characters to help the players' characters out with the things they have no ability in. You don't want them to get bogged down in fixing a car or finding a good scrounge. The players will usually try to cover everything with their own characters' abilities, but they can't possibly foresee everything you will throw at them. You will have a good idea of the types of characters you need based on the finished characters, even if it is a Warrior or Sneak or 'Fixer'. These can be a nice diversion conflict — how to resolve this problem, without bogging them down with it. The players have to do a little roleplay to figure out what the Storyteller character wants and how to secure the right sort of help. Just make sure that the story advances! You don't want to keep them from the main story over the matter of a stubborn character.

Remember that Mentors and teachers can also help in your plotline quite a bit as well. Not only will your PCs be willing to spend time researching for them – an excellent sub-plot — but also they will use them to get information and knowledge of their problems. Don't be afraid to allow their use, but also don't allow the players to become dependent on them. Come up with reasons for the Mentors to be traveling to a dangerous spirit realm or in a very important negotiation with other Chantries and Tradition leaders. As a Storyteller, you will find that a balance can be achieved while allowing the players hints and clues. The Mentor is a good character to develop to teach the characters about the world around them as well. Not only in teaching Spheres and Lores, but also simply in teaching about the Avatar and about magic. It better defines an atmosphere of the World of Darkness for your players and also your particular game setting.

Combats and Challenges

If you are feeling experimental, try narrating a combat, instead of adjudicating the dice rolls. If your players are particular about every dice roll and every game mechanic, then this might not be an option for you nor any fun for your players, but it might be a nice change from the monotony, just once. Have your players roll dice before hand. You roll for your antagonists, especially if you feel that you still need that element of uncertainty and randomness. Start narrating the scene, speak the parts of the antagonists, guards or whatever they encounter, describe everything as it unfolds, down to the bullet reports, near misses or incredible timing of the swordplay just before it reaches a character's throat. You have the dice rolls, so you know the outcomes, but it adds a cinematic flair that the players will remember and might enjoy. This way, you don't interrupt the flow of the story every thirty seconds in order to do some trivial math.

Since each Tradition has a specific take on the world, each one also presents an individual theme. While you can always break stereotypes (and probably should every once in a while, just to keep people on their toes), you'll want to make sure that there's enough reason for the stereotype to exist!

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

With the extensive learning of martial arts, Do and many Eastern philosophies, the Tradition is focused on individual choices as its path to Enlightenment. Therefore, many character types are possible. Preventing someone else's path choices is a strong crime to the Akashics, however there are those young and hot-blooded fanatics who might try to force their own views upon others — or at least have disdain for those who do not attempt to self-actualize. There may also be strong hatred for Western methods. Acolytes might have Mentors in this Tradition, but most of their advice will be in the form of the Acolyte making his own decision and looking within himself for truth. Designing a story within the Tradition could include the interaction or conspiracy between differing schools of thought along with the new inclusion of the Wu Lung Craft — of which many other Traditions might be jealous. Many interesting scenes between players can come from debate and conversation about the Traditions' philosophies, but also players of this Tradition will want to take actions on their own away from the main group, in order to reflect their personal direction.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

The intense diversions of religious thought are as much outside this Tradition as within it. The Choristers are perhaps one of the most adversarial mages to portray and the most difficult. Debate with other Traditions will usually come around to religion, the One and the mages' places in the universe. The Choristers' every action and choice is governed by the views of the Tradition as it would be by the morality of the church (almost any church) following religious law and doctrine. Apart from the differing hierarchical religions within the Tradition, it is not set in stone that every one of them is a religious fanatic. However, they usually do have a common bond of discrimination and prejudice against those mages, and others, who have disdain for the importance of Prime and the totality of the Universe. While they certainly do have their fanatics, both militant and philosophical, the Celestial Chorus is primarily concerned with protecting the Sleepers and teaching them through the morality of the One. In this, they do tend to force their beliefs on others and feel that their way is the righteous way. For multi-Tradition games, this Tradition can cause the most problems within a group and most disrupt the cohesion of the group dynamic, though the Tradition's specialty Sphere is one that comes in very useful to younger Acolytes. Dynamic Avatars might be less than usual, while — obviously — Pattern is the most prevalent.

CULT OF ECSTASY

The Ecstatics are the most open of traditions. Not only do they accept everyone's view and philosophies, but they also use the most diverse form of foci and methods. Though the principle tenet is enlightenment through ecstatic elevation, all sorts of methods and styles are used and encouraged. Most Pattern Essence Avatars might not be as comfortable as any of the other Essences, but diversity is the very spice of life. Also there are not as many adversarial divisions within the order. Although there are factions and there are differing methods, most accept one another on however they choose to delve into their experiences, either alone or shared. Characters will tend to be compassionate and accepting, possibly even optimistic — even when dealing with a frightful enemy. An Ecstatic does not tend to be vengeful or hateful, except where something may happen to them personally (like the loss of family or loved ones due to some tragedy). Most Cultists tend to be non-militant, since they recognize the unending flow of time and also the need for personal elevation in experience. It is always an interesting event when an Ecstatic brings a little of her methods to share among a multi-Tradition group; this alone will give you plenty of story material as an Ecstatic tries to convince other mages to break on through and explore new directions — but the real conflict lies in the lines that the Ecstatics draw about whether they should be allowed to force others into situations that push their boundaries.

DREAMSPEAKERS

Arguably one of the most difficult Traditions to portray, the Dreamspeakers' use of Spirit is extensively lessened with the strengthening of the Gauntlet and the rise of the Avatar Storm. Because of this, Dreamspeakers tend to stay within their own sanctums and around the lands that they know, not traveling beyond or into regions where the Gauntlet is even stronger. Players who want to do a lot with this Sphere may find it frustrating if your story is in the modern age with the Technocracy

winning the Ascension war, although this in and of itself can be a wonderful epic storyline. The establishment of a large region to the Umbra or re-establishing a connection to the spirit worlds provides a strong motivator for the guardians of Spirit. A Dreamspeaker must now rely on other Spheres and abilities to help the group and find personal Ascension, at least partially. Still, Dreamspeakers aren't paralyzed. Pre-existing spirit pacts remain in force and many Dreamspeakers deal on an individual basis with spirits much more equitably than other Traditions do. This gives the Dreamspeakers a decided advantage because they still gain some use out of a Sphere that many other Traditions might consider compromised.

Euthanatos

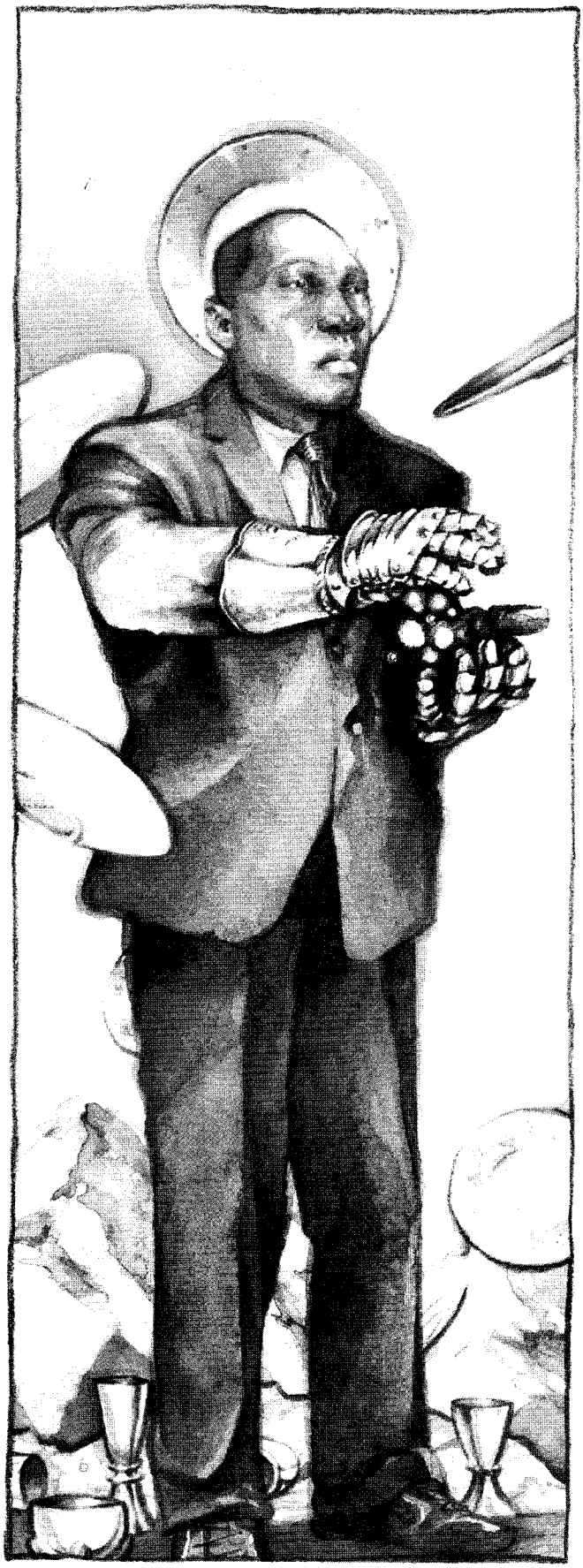
One of the most controversial of Traditions, the Euthanatos inherently brings a sense of apprehension to other Tradition mages. Their methods are all aligned toward the Wheel, regardless of the method, and some even go so far as to act as assassins, bringing about the continuation of the cycle for their own ends. Although this Tradition is one of the most warily-regarded, it is also one of the most varied. Any concept and Essence is possible without difficulty, as long as an interest in the Wheel and balance is maintained. Interests and styles in death are even more varied than life. From Rebirth and reincarnation to crossing into the Underworld, death has many forms and outcomes. The other aspect of entropy is perceiving the outcome before hand, knowing that all things breakdown eventually. This can be seen as luck to some mages, though it is a natural end to a cycle for the Euthanatos. As a result, most Tradition groups will tend to look askance at the Euthanatos, both because of the suspicion that every Euthanatos is a potential killer and because the Euthanatoic tie into the karmic cycle means that a Euthanatos rarely shows up without some momentous event in the offing.

Order of Hermes

Arguably the most structured of mage Traditions, the Order is also perhaps one of the most easily understood. Concepts of Hermetic magic are known well throughout the world as magic: runic, formulaic, alchemical and defined systems as well as many, many other styles. Mage personas follow any number of study techniques and styles. Most need to follow the rigid hierarchy of the Order. However as long as there are results in the interests of the Order, anything's acceptable. While mages of many other Traditions might uphold the precepts of the Tradition, though not be part of one of its internal factions, the Hermetic Order has most — if not all — of its members associated with one House or another. This not only helps to define the way the Spheres are used, but also the style in which the mage performs. Each House specializes in the use of the specific Spheres, like different schools in a university, and thus creates a place for itself within the Order. These different goals create the tone between Houses within the Order. Their magic is one of those most at risk for it entails many esoteric, cultic teachings. The Order is one that also espouses the loudest voice in taking action to preserve magic for their mages and so can be found more easily and hunted. For this reason, Order of Hermes characters provide a great deal of impetus, because their Order gives them structure, political backing and the freedom to pursue agendas that may advance the Order's overall standing and goals so long as the mage makes at least a token display of loyalty. The tendency may be to use the Order as a bunch of political bastards, but remember, the Order's in the whole mess along with everyone else — Hermetic mages need to keep other mages alive, too, so that all magic can thrive and bring their magic back into prominence with it.

Sons of Ether

From the magic of comic book science fiction, the Etherites use the creations of imagination in theories and technologies *just* beyond what is possible. They don't just use science that has not yet been uncovered; they use theories that fly in the face of conventional science, but use the same honed standard methods. Flubber was created in a lab and likewise an Etherite's creations come from such a structured, inquisitive environment. The dynamic of quantum science, chaos math and fringe theory helps to keep the Etherites from becoming as static as the Technocracy. They are, however, far from stable-minded individuals. Although many a deranged mind is considered on the cusp of genius, a Son of Ether often acts as unstable as the substances he tries to create — the Etherites tend toward this sort of behavior because their experimental paradigm encourages going beyond the boundaries of conventional thinking. A Storyteller should always be supportive and encourage creativity; however, Etherite players can and will come up with the most outrageous toys. The magic is less situational and more a laborious quasi-scientific method. Design and testing of a useful device or substance is time-intensive and often requires some sort of lab (though the items used as tools in the lab may not be standard equipment). Players who wish to create all sorts of devices should be allowed to do so between downtime or they will need to take time away from the group if they are in the middle of a story. In this day and age, they also might be tempted by the Technocratic Union, which would allow them to continue their study for the good of humanity. Remember, though, that



a Son of Ether needs to be able to "MacGyver" from time to time, just to pull an effect off the cuff so as to make a contribution to the game in an immediate sense. Still, the laboratory or study area is where the Etherite really comes out, and this is where the Tradition theories and practices come to the fore — a tight Cabal might play out an entire story in an Etherite's lab, batting around strange ideas and playing with the bizarre toys that the Etherite inherited from a Mentor or deceased Master.

Verbena

The Verbena are strongly linked with Wicca, druidic circles and all sorts of nearly cultic covens. They practice old ritualistic ceremonies and seasonal rites, with beliefs in preserving and relishing life, in all of its forms. The different factions have wholly different worldviews, and not just in methodology. The uses that their Sphere can perform are varied and sometimes extreme. The Verbena have been known to commit live sacrifice and not be affected by the viciousness of the act. They do tend to seek the preservation of all life and show compassion, both in healing and understanding; however, they are also distant in caring, sometimes apathetic to the uncomfortable feelings of others about their bestial rites. Verbena may act more animalistic in their philosophies of survival and protectiveness. This mindset is less inhumane and more primal or elemental. Use the Verbena as a symbol of natural cycles. The Verbena can remind players of the ruthlessness of nature, but also of nurturing, motherly instinct. Let the Verbena draw characters into a Primordial state, so that the mages acknowledge their suppressed desires and forbidden fetishes.

Virtual Adepts

The newest of Traditions and the closest faction to the Technocratic Union, the Virtual Adepts excel beyond the Technocracy in their cutting edge research and half-assed methods of getting there. While the other Traditions worry and scrabble to protect older mythical knowledges and methods — including shamanism, animism and Hermetic practices — the Adepts have gone forward past the theories of the Technocracy and faster than the Technocracy can codify and properly test these theories. Any suggestion of a new scientific or digital theory launches the Adepts into a whole new aspect to explore. Computers and the Internet — the Digital Web — are the main tool of the Adept, and they are able to run rings around Technocracy foundations. These mages tend to be younger and more energetic, possibly arrogant even, about their own ability and their familiarity with the world. They certainly have more confidence than many other Tradition mages, for their magic is wholly steeped in

the modern and future world. While they are confident they also tend to be disrespectful and belligerent to older or conceptual mages. Traveling the 'Net and hacking — à la the *Matrix* or *Lawnmower Man* — can be fun, but only for the Virtual Adept. This sort of scene is good for a one-on-one session with the Virtual Adept players. Instead, contrast the Adept with the more conservative elements of the Traditions. The Adepts are the latest heralds of change, signaling the new directions of the Traditions. The Adept characters can help to push other Traditions forward by suggesting new directions or just acting as examples for the older members to follow. A young Hermetic or Chorister at a loss for how to survive as a mage in the modern world would do well to consult the Adepts; these technomancers can help in the merging of modern science with mysticism — but only on their own terms, which tend to be rather snide to the "less gifted."

Avatars and Essences

Essence is the concept of the mage's Avatar itself. It defines the style underlying a mage's power and choices, even in learning new skills. This is what truly can define the differences between same order mages and their slightly differing views of the path of Ascension and, sometimes, how they might react to an Epiphany. The Avatar itself is the link to the reality-altering power that a mage has; the Essence colors how that power is employed and adds the mage's personality quirks into the mix. Besides the challenge of Tradition ideologies, differences in Essences in a group of mages also affects their dynamic with one another. The Storyteller should keep this in mind in watching the players roleplay their characters' choices and actions. Also, when events occur that are related to the Essences, mages that share that Essence might be aware of its familiarity to them. Use this to give hints; they are, after all, very aware and magical beings. They should see aspects of their Essences in the world around them. Take the time to direct descriptions and explanations toward mages whose Essences reflect the events going on. A mage with an Essence that matches the surroundings may have more intuitive insight into the situation.

Dynamic

A Dynamic Essence is one that is constantly shifting and moving from one focus to another. This does not mean that the mage has attention deficit or that one project cannot be completed before another is started; it does however imply a certain drive for inspiration and discovering new boundaries. The Dynamic might feel the rush of impatience from his Avatar if a project is held up, or when it is close to being finished. The sense of completion felt over an event or duty is quickly replaced by the sudden interest to delve into a wholly new and possibly unrelated field. Anything that might spark new creativity or inspiration is the focus of the day. If a particular topic is getting boring for the character, there is a good chance it will be left behind for a more exciting, often visionary, one.

Pattern

The Pattern of reality is everywhere, now more than ever. A Pattern Essence mage will be regarded as one who acts more rational, patient and even stubborn, unwilling to change a style or method if it is established to be clearly practical and works. Characters should also exhibit slight annoyances with other Essences that directly grate against the established way of things. The things that exist are those that should be made stable. New things do not need to be brought into the world, especially now. These mages will be uncomfortable in new, strange surroundings as well.

Primordial

Primordial Essences are steeped in the powers and events of creation and destruction — the wheel turns and the cycle comes and goes. All things either happen for a reason, or they will find a way to survive and come around again. Mages of this essence would at first sound apathetic and laze about watching the Technocracy go by, but this is only half of their true nature. The experience of creation, witnessing the birth of volcanoes, the change of seasons, even the rising of the sun become wonderful life affirming effects. They are comfortable with knowing that all of creation does not end with the time they live; they are optimistic and always looking to heighten their views. These mages might even feel they are the catalyst to bring about changes in the cycle — this would be true for Life as well as Entropy — hastening its natural course.

Questing

Different from the Dynamic Essence, the Questing Essence also is driven and visionary, however it is prone to affect a more stable foundation, building upon the other Essences and binding them in a common purpose. The Questing Essence is strictly goal-oriented and not as

impatient or 'flighty' as the Dynamic. The goal will be completed regardless of consequences — sometimes, with dire results — so the mage might be more callous or stern than his compatriots and almost certainly more focused. Mages from this Essence might exhibit the same impatience as the Dynamic, but that is more inherent with the goal, not the drive to complete it. They are aware of all of the resources at their disposal and are readily willing to coordinate efforts of mages from each of the Essences to help in succeeding at their goal. Once the Goal is accomplished, the mage is pulled to seek another goal, possibly through visions from his Avatar.

Symbolism in Seekings

An Epiphany is accomplished when a mage goes into a Seeking attempting to unravel the deeper mysteries of his Avatar and the universe of magic. Upon successful resolution of a Seeking, the mage may increase his understanding and thereby expand the limits of his consciousness — in game terms, he may increase his Arete. Your power-seeking players will want this more than anything. Unless you start them at high levels of Arete, they will need to roleplay a Seeking to increase any of their Spheres. Generally, Disciples have gone through a Seeking once already and are at a higher Arete, or they may have failed; that will depend on the creativity of your players. This is one of the events in Storytelling a **Mage** game when you want extra preparation.

The One-on-One Seeking

The Seekings for any given character are rare (unless they fail over and over), and this is a wonderful opportunity to add more design to the scene, using music and lighting to create the mood and atmosphere. The Seeking happens within the mage's soul, or some other spiritual part, so imagery and action can be as conceptual and ephemeral as you wish. Some of the best scenes are sometimes without a group around; the same is true with a Seeking. You may wish your players to be involved, perhaps taking up other personas and images during the player's Seeking to give the scene more dimensionality. This is an excellent way to keep the scene dynamic and to show your new players what might be involved.

It also may be just as useful to keep the scene down to one-on-one with the player involved. This then adds more mystique and possibly suspicion among the group, when the other players do not know the outcome or even if the character has really been on a Seeking. Or, just as valid, you as Storyteller, with the player in question, may wish to narrate the Seeking in character to the group to keep the flow of roleplay character to character. Again, mood is important, so consider lighting, music and the use of props — even sitting position might help the mood: cushions or pillows make a difference from chairs and changing the usual seating order can shake up a game when certain people are used to playing off other players adjacent to them. The starting can be any number of ways, from smoke-filled dream visions to believing they are awake and meeting old friends, even enemies; take some of your favorite dream sequences and try to incorporate the techniques of the game into your scene. Take into account the character's Tradition, his Nature and especially the Essence of his Avatar. These are very important aspects to how the character experiences the world around him, and this is an exploration into the universe and of magic, and the mage's relationship with it.

A Dynamic Avatar could be seen as mutable: Force, shape, creature and texture, altering and as it alters the world about it altering. The mage sees himself as altering with the Avatar and the world, sometimes in response, sometimes as the catalyst — altering his Avatar. This sort of Seeking might involve accepting the changes the mage makes in affecting the Avatar and world or, as equally important, being affected by the dynamism of the Avatar changing the mage. A successful Seeking will see that the mage balances the imperatives of the Avatar with personal development. The mage also initiates personal changes, by accepting this as a sort of duty or responsibility and understanding the truths that the Avatar brings out in each change.

For the Pattern mage, images such as a web or crystalline lattice — possibly suggesting the Digital Web or simply the grid work of modern buildings and roads — might form. Stable and familiar people — Mentors and adversaries that he must come to terms with, resolve or move on from — appear. The mage might be compelled to solve a labyrinth or other symbolic key of structured self-exploration. Succeeding comes at the end of the maze, a completion of a pattern, or the solving of a missing part. The clues are shown on the pattern and it is known to the mage — all that he must do is see the pattern and finish it — adding to the flow of magic and as a symbol of completing himself and his Avatar.

The Primordial Essence is one of Destruction and Creation, but in the Seeking it can be difficult to find the right path for that time. The mage will usually have three choices for completion: understanding the destruction, understanding the creation or combining the

forces of both to see his place in the cycle. Images can be anything, the pure creative forces of the universe, solar flares, erupting volcanoes or even the natural flourish of life, plants blooming and budding. Destructive imagery should be that which comes from natural erosion, decay or entropy, not necessarily the forces created by other creatures or mages — unless it is something the mage is to stop, although those forces could be seen as accepting the way of the world and the mage's place in it — those can be powerful imageries.

For a Questing Avatar, the advancement of a goal is always in the foremost of its being. The mage may see himself on a road, climbing a mountain, or something as patterned as scaling a Pyramid or other symbolic structure. The imagery of the journey and the possible encounters and obstacles along the way are reflections of obstacles encountered for the mage with an added difficulty — his own hesitancy and refusal to resolve the problems, whether within himself or his group, or with people and events he meets along the way. The image of the pyramid creates the strong sense of Ascension with its sloping sides reaching up to a pinnacle — the goal. Its tiered levels define many plateaus — smaller goals — on which the mage may find completion, even solace.

STORYTELLING CHALLENGES

With time and experience, a Storyteller learns to fit stories into the flow of the group and rely on special techniques — but what do you do when you really want to throw a curve into your game? While we can only offer a few bits of advice, the Storyteller who wants a flexible chronicle should be sure to explore and note every idea that comes to mind. Even discarded thoughts can spark inspiration at a crux of the story.

TRADITIONALISTS AS ADVERSARIES

With the Ascension War over, many of the older Masters (those that stayed or were caught on the material side of the Gauntlet) still believe in their old ways. The older and wiser of the Tradition mages have been fighting the Ascension War for countless decades, if not centuries — staying alive with Life magic and other elements. They

are not yet ready to give up and agree that they have lost and the Technocracy has won. The implications of this alone drive them mad, perhaps even driving them to join some other groups they used to fight, like the Nephandi. Not only do they feel they must do anything to keep magic alive, as that is the next step in the schemes of the Technocracy — destroy all other styles of magic, by proscribing only technology and science based paradigms — but also they must protect themselves from the increasing Paradox that results from the use of their magic in such a paradigm. The Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts are not as worried about the shift to a technology-based paradigm as the Dreamspeakers, Ecstatic Cultists, Hermetics and others, but the threat is still there. The Virtual Adepts have less access to the Virtual Web with the increased Gauntlet, for instance.

The Traditionalist mages will become more threatening and maddened with the truth of their loss becoming more and more pronounced. Magic as they have known it will change, and they are not ready for it. The structured mind of the Hermetic might snap as he attempts to develop alchemical formulae that will preserve magic itself. Or Dreamspeaker shamans might attempt to breach the veil more and more, attempting to create a place where spirits can freely come and go and shattering the barrier between worlds and letting loose the Avatar Storm. The Traditionalists who attempt this tempt Paradox more and more and the backlash, if unchecked, can become catastrophic, destroying more than preserving.

Some Traditionalists will know deep down in their psyche that they have lost, but with this realization they know the world has no place for them and the deep depression or horror to them might be too much and they will snap, their minds cracking under the truth — perhaps taking out their melancholy, anger or hubris on those around them. This insanity can also be a foothold for Nephandic influence to slowly corrupt the older, powerful mages towards darker goals in a mad attempt to stop the Technocracy. However, should you choose to show this side of losing the Ascension war, These Traditionalists can be just as much the enemy as Paradox and the Technocratic Union. Their goals and attempts at preserving the Traditional roles can undermine and harm the Traditions from within, perhaps even more insidiously than even infiltrators and infernal influences.

And, of course, a Tradition mage might well be an adversary for otherwise totally mundane reasons. Competing for similar resources or having a paradigm that grossly conflicts with the group, a Tradition mage can make a bitter adversary — and an all the more difficult one, because it's harder to justify simply killing such an enemy out of hand. When the group catches a Cultist pushing people beyond their limits without their consent or a Verbena who still practices sacrifices for yearly fertility while terrorizing the local populace, they may feel that they have no choice but to intervene.

In either case, you can set up an interesting dichotomy. Play up the fact that the Traditions aren't all just good guys. Indeed, you can seed some dark elements from the Traditions and let the players try to change them or come to grips with them. Just be sure not to beat the players over the head with the flaws of their respective Traditions. While a few individuals may be sour grapes, casting the entire Tradition in a villainous light can cause a bit of unrest among players who want to feel like they have a contributing or protagonist's role.

Storytelling Paradox

Paradox is a mutable, ever-changing wonderful response to chaotic magic that springs forth in defiance of Consensual reality. Little Paradox effects can be annoying or even cute, while large backlashes can cause anything from rips in the Gauntlet to massive implosions of objects and people around (or inside) the mage. Small Paradoxical events happen frequently and it is a good idea to have some common effects listed for you to choose from. Some Storytellers allow these little effects to be chosen by the players, however if you have a list created and decide when the Paradox will affect the group, it can create anything from a small annoying happening to a major plot diversion — and how would the players know any differently? For all the group knows, this could well be part of the planned story. Suddenly, one member of the group feels as though they are being watched, or they have gone inexplicably blind. The players will realize, perhaps slowly, that these are the effects of Paradox and are very real concerns to their characters, possibly even heralding Quiet for the mage.

Players will have to consider early on how they are going to tackle Paradox, especially if it can be easily confused with actions from their intended adversary or other elements in your story. Even more dangerous is when a member in the group, perhaps out of embarrassment of a miscast rote, chooses not to announce to the rest that there may be a Paradox event occurring in the vicinity because he screwed up some complicated casting of Sphere magic. This can be a tool at the disposal of the storyteller, based on character actions. Paradox can be used to heighten the danger of magic used without consideration. True, it is perhaps more dangerous to younger Acolyte characters; however, as their magic becomes more versatile, even Disciples can cause irrevocable damage with Paradox. Be careful with it; unchecked Paradox can destroy an entire group of mages and that would just simply end your chronicle. The idea isn't to use Paradox solely as a punishment or

hammer to discourage mages from magic. Rather, let it take the role of poetic justice. Sometimes, the players shouldn't know whether something resulted from Paradox or from the machinations of other mages. Try to reflect a character's Resonance and use Paradox in the form of anything from a minor quirk to a problem that can require the group's efforts to solve mid-game.

One particularly nasty trick to pull is to set up a "Paradox storyline" ahead of time as a sort of sub-plot — perhaps even involving a Paradox Realm. Wait for the inevitable botch or just let a character stack up Paradox inexplicably until you're good and ready. Then, blow it out and stick your Paradox subplot right into the middle of the ongoing story. This adds another level of complexity to the existing game, and having two or three threaded goals and problems can give players more to do and a better sense of having non-linear challenges. Just be careful not to excessively frustrate the players or drop in an effect that makes the storyline moot; you want Paradox to augment the story and shine on the characters' achievements so that they cast looming shadows over the chronicle.

Using the Technocratic Union

Science and Technology is the basis for both world economy and day to day modern living. Tradition Mages are hard pressed to find the cracks and pockets in the Consensus that allows for their magic and philosophies to take root. The Technocracy is still the leading threat to the Tradition mages, even with the loss of the War. The mystical and fantastic simply has no place any longer and nothing will stop them from completing what they started, even if they can't agree on how to finish it.

The Technocratic Union is not the only threat, however. With the loss of the war, the Sleepers who now fully accept science and technology are also a threat. It is their Consensual Reality that prevents magic from working as it once did. Not every Storyteller wants to run a Technocracy-heavy plotline or to deal with the uber-technology magic of the Union, but it should always be somewhere in the background, making the movements and actions of Tradition mage players that much more dangerous. Most any use of magic, or especially effects of Paradox, in and around major urban areas and cities should bring the Technocracy snooping to find the deviant, the virus in their otherwise solid reality. As a Storyteller, you do not have to use this as your major story element or confrontation, but use of the Technocracy is part of the world now and the threat of Technocratic intervention needs to exist to remind the mages that they're aliens in this modern world. The **Guide to the Technocracy** has in it many simple, or even complex, elements to use in your game.

The knowledge that the Technocracy might locate every use of magic in highly technologically developed areas should not hamper your game either. It *will* make your players rely more on their abilities instead on flinging around their rotes and spells without a second thought. They will quickly learn that although they have the power to shape reality, reality will not only strike back if it is too vulgar, but there are also agents of Reality waiting to hunt them down even after they have handled Paradox. They will feel that they are constantly on the run and looking over their shoulders, but this is the way of the Tradition Mage in the "New World." Obviously, this impression isn't always true. Some Technocrats may not be entirely convinced that Tradition mages just have to go. Others may not really care what the Traditionalists do, so long as they don't upset the status quo. However, most often the Technocracy should *seem* to give off the impression of being a monolithic, terrifying and efficient organization that won't hesitate to squash the errant Traditionalists. After all, they've worked on that image for a few hundred years. It's a tough one to shake, especially after a mage has had one run-in with a militant Technocrat.

Marauders

Marauders are no longer as prevalent as they once were. With the hardening of the Consensus, many Marauders have been locked away from this world, but they still wander the fringes of the Spirit world and await those who would travel there or attempt to cross the Gauntlet. The few who remain on Earth usually have at least some semblance of stability and the capacity to deal rationally (mostly) with the world as it is, but they're always wild cards.

Not necessarily to be used with novice mages, Marauders can be a good enemy to overcome in a final confrontation. They are increasingly rare, but it is possible that with help and mistakes from inexperienced Initiates, they might be able to breach into this world and be a true threat. Ultimately, Marauders aren't something to base your first chronicle around — they're simply too complex and chaotic for players to easily get a grip on them. Instead, wait until your players have established their character motives and views. Then, drop in the Marauder that represents pure dynamic change and the rejection of sanity. The Marauder can showcase what happens when mages go too far in the direction of the mystical and lose themselves in a world that doesn't make rational sense. To fully explore this theme, you must have a group that already has opinions about its place in the magical world. Therefore, don't feel compelled to drop in a Marauder in every game — instead, use them as a rare counterpoint to the

Traditions, to show what happens when a mage goes totally haywire and to have the players questioning what's too far in the quest to return magic to the world.

Nephandi

Once a Nephandus, always a Nephandus. Once a mage starts down this dark path of destruction, the Avatar is permanently changed, unhinged and corrupted. Even the Technocratic Union will fight alongside Tradition Mages to fight the Nephandi. They do not believe in a different reality, they believe in the destruction of reality and despite the calcification of reality can still be very potent enemies to deal with. With the desperation from the loss of the Ascension war, mages might believe this to be another way to reach their goals, but they are wrong and once they are influenced or tempted, they will slowly try to convert others to destroy and corrupt their Avatars.

Much like Marauders, Nephandi aren't something to throw right into the beginning of a story. Most Nephandi should be crafted as individuals, who have a personalized approach to damnation. Before a Nephandus can be an effective tempter, you need to know what makes the characters (and players) tick. To do that, you'll have to establish the characterizations firmly — which generally means going through several game sessions. Remember, a Nephandus isn't just the Oogie Boogie man. He or she is a crafty and conniving villain, one typically convinced of personal and ideological superiority. You should take notes on how your players justify their actions, then think about ways to twist these to the Nephandus' ends or even break them altogether. A cunning Nephandus will watch and learn from the group's mistakes before making a move, and you should do the same.

The Lost Ones, Crafts and Disparates

The other individuals and smaller groups can be both protagonist and antagonist. As protagonist, members of a Craft might be trying to survive and willing to help a group rest or research in exchange for protection or the elimination of a threat. You can use these groups as part of your main storyline, assisting the players along the way, or they can be a diversion sub-plot, attempting to waylay the players for their own selfish needs — or simply in trouble with a separate problem, which can lead into your future story ideas.

As antagonists, they can be a strong force. They are not as powerful as Traditions, of course, but since the Traditions themselves are in a bit of trouble, they can use any help that they can get. The Crafts' members tend to work together toward common needs and goals and can be quite an obstacle. Most Tradition characters will know very little about most Crafts or Lost Ones, so one of the

biggest threats is lack of knowledge in what to expect. Since the Technocratic Union has moved to wipe them out as well, they might simply react out of self-preservation no matter who comes to interact with them. Using them will give a good rounded view of the world to your players, showing them exactly the effect of the lost Ascension War and the consequences of increasing Scientific Paradigms.

Certamen

Certamen is the ritual of mage dueling. This can be a very difficult aspect to roleplay, if you even want to attempt it. It is not just the rolling of dice versus one other mage opponent. This is the legendary "duel in the skies" fight between mages — your character's Spheres and rotes, wits and wisdom, against another mage. Similar to running cinematic combats, you should try to keep all of the technical rules out of the scene. Either make pre-combat rolls or measure the skills and Spheres of both opponents to come up with how close the battle is going to turn out — or do it arbitrarily. Remember though that players will tend to fall back on rules if they feel they have been shorted. "I would have been able to do this and that, and such and such should have happened differently." Don't hesitate to exercise your Storytelling discretion. Sprinkle in just a couple of dice rolls to give the appearance of making certamen hang on the crux of some chances — but for something this monumental, you should have a pretty good idea of your preferred outcome in advance.

Next, set the mood of the scene. Change lighting, sitting positions — standing or whatever — putting the character sheets to the side. These are now for reference and the main battle is the roleplay of the scene between mages. Be sure you know the effects of the opponent's rotes and Sphere levels so that you can describe the effects and counter-effects without breaking the scene. Notes are excellent for this as well. You might want to describe specific effects such as the blue crackling of electricity from a Forces discharge or the massive growth of weeds under the combatants, or anything else that would add to the scene.

Most of the scene will be narrated, such as; "I use my Mind Sphere in combination with Enigmas ability...," but the stare down can be still roleplayed out. The grim determination and nervousness of the opponents might allow the battle to turn one way or another. Be sure to describe in high detail the actions of the opponent while recapping the actions of your players. Describe the surrounding effects, even any Paradox that might come from the duel. This is an excellent way to bring the players into your gritty world of magic, especially for the player involved. The players' characters will then come away from the experience, perhaps a little hardened, fearful or even less confident.

Plot Ideas

These are only some of the ideas to the various elements in the **Mage** and World of Darkness games. Not only can any timeline be used, but also any genre or setting from any of the supplements, and your own creativity can tweak and bend these to make for a colorful **Mage** game. These elements can get you started on a few small plotlines or launch you into a full epic story. Keep in mind consistency and the darkness, the grit that the World should convey, or not, as you choose.

Cross Chronicle (and Cross-Genre)

Other creatures exist in the World of Darkness alongside the Mages. Most times, mages are simply more powerful than these other supernaturals; however, with the Technocratic Union searching for wayward mages and the ferocity of some of the other supernaturals, mages still must take stock of their own abilities when confronted by other creatures.

Hunters, changelings and wraiths can all be used as protagonists or antagonists as the story allows. The mage might work with a hunter for some information after he has helped hunt down a vampire or other creature. Or, finding changelings all but extinct in the world, a mage might help generate a bit of creativity in a world becoming more and more banal. Always be aware of the nature of other creatures so that your chronicle does not take on an aspect of the impossible — although all things are possible, there still exists common conceptions of each type and their general attitudes. Don't go too far afield with keeping in game, but use these conceptions to add flavor to what is occurring to each of the races in the World of Darkness. Each is going through rough times, and while other creatures sometimes cause that, some difficulties are the effects of the World itself. The central theme of a **Mage** game should always be mages, so remember that any details of other creature types are subordinate to that first need.

While ghosts and faeries tend to present enigmas, the predatory types — shapeshifters and undead — are more straightforward threats. Werewolves and vampires have the advantage of speed and strength innate to their species. While the mage might be able to simply remove himself or destroy such creatures, there is still the risk of Paradox and the problem of reacting too slowly. And regardless of this, the mage might not have all of the Spheres necessary for

spontaneous implosions. He may need to rely on other skills, such as trickery and negotiation. Furthermore, these creatures need not all be antagonists. Dreamspeakers might very well find themselves speaking to, or even working with, shifter spiritualists on a common problem. Tytalan mages have allied with vampires in the past. As usual, don't feel constrained to the limits of the other game lines. It's less important that you try to shoehorn vampire Disciplines into the game than that you create interesting and exotic contemporaries. Like any good Storyteller character, the predators of your **Mage** game should simply have whatever capabilities will forward your story.

The Tremere in particular also make good adversaries and can even be made into the main villain. Mages can work with other vampires and even other creatures to attack these undead. The supplement **Blood Treachery** will assist you with handling current outlooks on the Tremere and the Order of Hermes' fight against its former brethren. Although most of the history is lost to both Mages and Tremere, the underlying hatred and fear can be a wonderful theme, matched only by a Technocracy-collaborative storyline. They both make good enemies, but sometimes the best storyline is the one where they are forced to, begrudgingly, work together toward a common aim. Remember, too, that this is just one possibility. The same spark that ignites tensions between the Tremere and the various magely groups can also be applied to other groups, if you feel so inclined. All you need do is invent a little back-story, some sort of secret conflict (and goodness knows there's enough backroom papered-over secret conflict in the World of Darkness) and you can have two or three sides going at each other full force — even if the whole thing is actually a big lie or misunderstanding!

Mage versus Mage

Besides using other supernatural creatures, use of mages as antagonists is always a good common theme. After all, who better to understand the problems — and possibilities — of reality-bending than another willworker? It's this theme that was central to the whole conflict of the Ascension War. This could be from internally within the Traditions, or from without. There are many types of mages that the Tradition Acolytes will find out about soon enough. The Crafts listed in the **Sorcerer** book and the **Mage Storytellers Companion** give a very good account of the Disparate and non-Tradition groups after the Ascension War and Avatar Storms. They are just as formidable as Tradition mages should it come down to a duel and, in some cases, even more specialized in their rotes and methods — pity the mage who has to face down a Taftâni with fire magics. The Craft mages are also trying to survive, staying close together and fighting off mage attackers. Perhaps the Disciples and Masters left have decided to attempt to bring these groups into the fold, or get rid of them once and for all out of fear that the Technocratic Union might find them to be allies. Or you can even say screw it all to the idea of Tradition and Craft mage conflict, and explore the possibilities in mages whose factions take second seat to their personal goals. Regardless, the conflict of someone who can match the characters' abilities one on one presents somewhat predictable powers, but an entirely nerve-wracking confrontation — anything the characters can do, the adversary can learn. In some ways, a mage versus mage conflict is a mirror battle, as both sides struggle for the tiny, un-deflectable advantage that might bring victory.

Attack on Paradigm (Ideology)

The "coming to grips" with ideology storylines can be somewhat pedantic and cumbersome, but if you have a group of players willing to take the time to sit the session away conversing with, or even interrogating, other mages about their ideologies and world-views, it can make for a very challenging story. Actually sitting down with Technocratic mages or Craft workers and trying to convince them of Tradition ideology will be as difficult as proselytizing among the Traditions themselves. In a world where magic is rare and difficult to cast, there must be a better or right way to believe in order to make magic stronger. Belief is the basis of possibilities and magic is the incarnation of those possibilities — the sculpting of reality. This sort of storyline needs more than just debate back and forth, it requires learning of differing mind-sets in character and beginning — scarily — to see the point of view of the other, the antagonist. This sort of storyline challenges the beliefs of the characters, to possibly consider differing methodologies and changing their own world-view, thus altering their magic. Only by understanding what the enemy believes, and deconstructing it, can the mages hope to enter the minds of the foes and then change them from within.

Technocracy Converts

In homage to George Orwell's "1984," your little group of Tradition mages could attempt to go on the inside and corrupt from within. Although very difficult and extremely dangerous, this tactic can meet with long-term success if the group manages to play on the sympathies of the Technocrats who still believe in all too human sentiment and especially those who doubt the mission of the Union. The **Guide to the Technocracy** gives details on all factions of the Technocratic Union and their chief goals and places within the Union; from there you can work up what it would take to shake someone's faith in science — or even if it would be possible, for some.

If not confronting them directly or in raids, the Technocracy will continue to chase your group of Tradition mages until they are caught. This paradigm is theirs and Consensual reality works in their favor. Insiders have an even harder time, since they're constantly trying to hide in plain sight. The mages can't rely on their magic for anything more than concealment and the occasional emergency. Instead, they must work to change the Union from within, by finding the members who don't accept the Pogrom and might be willing to compromise or defect. This is an excellent vehicle for true gritty cyberpunk, à la *Logan's Run*, *Blake's Seven* or *Blade Runner*. Always running, just to stay alive, until the end.

Tradition Pedantry

It may seem obvious, but besides the debates on ideologies and the need to survive the hunt of various enemies, the Traditions themselves still vie for internal controls. They have been cut off from Horizon and the Masters are few and far between. Who leads the Traditions? The Disciples may politick and negotiate for support within their Tradition and try to lead the members to what they feel should be their current goals — beyond simple survival. Perhaps the players are adept enough to make a bid for themselves, or perhaps they see that a fanatic is trying to take control, changing the entire ideal of the Tradition should he succeed. More than this, the Traditions may also begin to attack each other, their alliances fallen — again — for survival or for needed resources (Tass or other items).

Because Disciples must take up the mantle of leadership, they must also manage to convince other Traditionalists to support their views and back them up. A Tradition mage who can't convince the rest of the Traditions of the correctness of his views won't garner any friends. This means traveling from place to place, meeting with other Disciples and finding ways to merge worldviews or convince others of the "correctness" of the player group's way of thinking. Some mages might enforce this through certamen, or through favors; others will relish the ideological conflict. Either way, this isn't directly an adversarial relationship with the Traditions *per se*, but it is one that requires some careful stepping. Alienating other Traditionalists can be risky, since the whole Tradition leadership and justice structure is in turmoil. The mage you anger today may be your superior tomorrow. On the other hand, the Traditions dogmatically cling to their beliefs (or they wouldn't still be fighting!), and getting one to change his mind can be more difficult even than converting some borderline Technocrats.

Older Tradition Members

There is always the standby rogue or infiltrator mage that needs to be rooted out or stopped somehow. This is a good internal storyline and pits the characters against their own Tradition members. Whether it be the old Traditionalist who cannot contain his magic's effects of Paradox any longer or a difference of ideologies within the Tradition; within the Order of Hermes, it could be the belief that perhaps the Tremere were correct in becoming vampires to protect magic and the wish of some to follow them; The Sons of Ether members believe so strongly in science and technology that they begin to understand and agree with the Technocratic Union's ideals, contacting them to join up; or different methods within the Celestial Chorus begin to break up the tradition from within, creating factions, even Crafts.

Apprentice Games

The **Mage** game assumes that many characters are or recently were Apprentices, or otherwise newly-Awakened mages. There is much for an Apprentice mage to learn and do, and the challenges are high. Most, if not all, of your beginning characters will be Apprentices, if only because it's so hard to find someone to recognize a character's achievements or teach enough to graduate to true Disciple level. There are always Apprentice-specific adventures and stories you can plan for your characters: A message a Disciple might need delivering, either to another Tradition or another Disciple within his Tradition; a Chantry might need to be secured or checked on; or it can become more complicated — deliver messages to all of the other Traditions for a meeting; secure a Node; Search for lost artifacts or even create a Cabal. All of these things, though common, can be the main story for your Apprentice game.

The idea with an Apprentice or Initiate game is to *start small.* You may be tempted to have a huge back-story, elaborate characters and a multi-layered plot. Avoid this. Instead, send out the Apprentices on "milk runs" — small, easily-completed tasks that give them a chance to earn a few experience points, ones that let them flex their capabilities and learn to work together as a group. The so-called "UPS quests" — deliveries of items or people from place to place — work well for this. The mages might have to travel a little, confront a hostile party that doesn't want the job finished, then finagle to collect their reward, but it's very linear and straightforward. This is just what the Apprentice ordered for starting characters, who don't yet have the characterization depth to have highly complex motives or bizarre sub-story arcs.

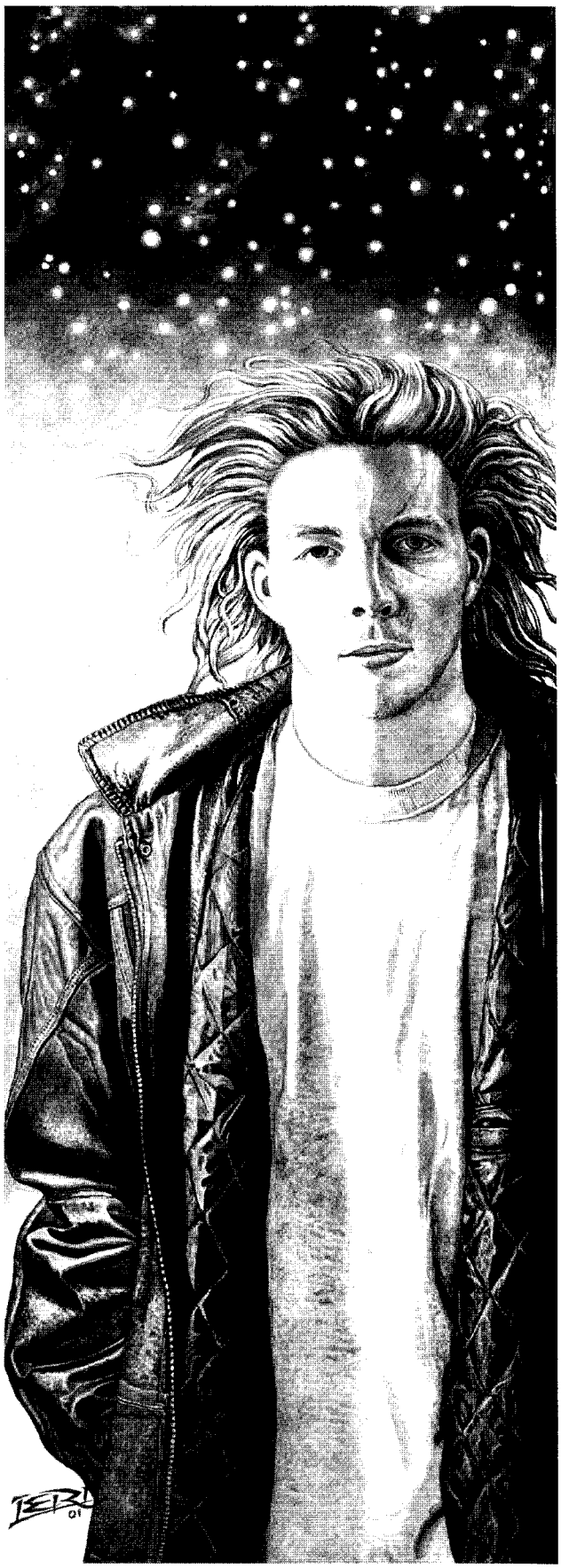
Disciple Games

Disciples, once the "common folks" among mages, are now a special class. These mages have survived pitfalls, survived the Ascension War and are now left with the

daunting responsibility of keeping the Traditions on track. Older Disciples will be responsible for upholding Tradition policy, even drafting new policy. Younger Disciples still can go on their adventuring ways, but they are the Mentors now; they can't be as carefree, if ever they were, as they had been. If you want to start your players out as Disciples to get to the bigger stories, you can do so, but there is something to be said about experiencing a character built from the ground up. Not only is the player more familiar with his character's rotes and Spheres, even some of the more complicated abilities, but also your players have developed a certain style with their characters and a rapport with each other. Their techniques as a group have been put to practice. If you do choose to start them off as Disciples (for more experienced players), you *might* consider giving them a few extra experience points, but it's possible to build a Disciple-level character with the starting **Mage** build allocations without any modifiers. Don't fall into the temptation to make the characters even more powerful. It's easier to scale back to easier adventures than it is to take away powers that are too great.

Disciples are the mentors and icons for the younger apprentices in this crazy world and they are needed for the more dangerous adventures: Searching for a Master — The potent Masters have gone to ground, becoming hermits to protect themselves from the outside world. Disciples will need to search for their Sanctums, pierce the Arcane shrouding them and overcome the Wards to search out the Masters of magic. The Crafts — Search out and bring into the fold the separate Crafts, as it is appropriate to the goals of the Traditions (right now survival); convince them that alliances can be formed and make those alliances stand. Disciples might need to come together to form an Earth-based "Council of Nine" to make decisions on hiding their potent magic, bringing together their brethren, Awakening the Sleepers and battling the Technocratic Union...if they can stand each other's company first. Their ideologies are not yet ingrained, though, and fear is what drives them now; if they let slip their beliefs, even momentarily, they might be subsumed into the Consensus. These are the mages of action, unlike the Masters sealed away from earth or hiding in remote places.

Ideally, your group can work its way up to Disciple level with a few simple Apprentice/Initiate games. Once you've arrived there, you'll have a handle on how the characters work, the players should be familiar with their capabilities, and the group should have a definite dynamic and personality. It's from this point that you can explore the more complex themes of **Mage** as presented here and in the core book.



Advanced Games (Masters)

The Masters are largely barred from Earth, prevented from crossing the Avatar Storm, locked away in their Horizon Realms. Or for those few left on Earth, they are hermits, tucked away in remote places on the planet, trying to keep their Sancta and magic preserved. There are few Masters left, and running a Masters game can be difficult — if not hazardous to the characters. Madness is just around the bend, magic is difficult to cast, and they light up like a beacon bringing the Technocracy to eliminate them once and for all. However, this is a good story to tell if you have very experienced players and they want to play more of the personalities and spiritual hardships that these character-types will go through. They are unquestionably powerful, but they have lost the War. Theirs is an ideology that is incapable of changing with technology. The ideology itself could create Paradox. Their actions in the world should be towards large events: crossing the Gauntlet to get to Horizon or any of the other realms, possibly even attempting to solve the problem with the Avatar Storm itself; coming to grips with his Hubris or the effects of Gilgul; creating magic-safe zones to allow the contacting of spirits and the use of that Sphere; retaking a major Node from the Technocratic Union and protecting it with Arcane and magic that the world cannot deny might exist. Otherwise, Masters should be kept in the background, omnipresent when the Traditions need them most in the direst of hours.

It's really not for Masters to make this world. They had their time, and they've grown old and outdated, but have refused to move on. **Mage Revised** centers around the imperatives of young, modern mages. Still, it's not inconceivable that, over time, characters might work their way up to Mastery (and beyond). Don't discourage this. Rather, it's a long-term goal, and it opens the door to the exploration of what **Mage** will be about tomorrow: When new blood takes the reins and achieves Mastery, what will become the new direction for the Traditions? Or is there even room for the Traditions any more at all?

Seasonal Play

Most Tradition chronicles will be fast paced affairs. The pace of the modern world is relentless, so your players' characters may have little time to relax, much less study and train. However, if your playing group decides to slow things down a bit, the following rules for seasonal play are available at the Storyteller's option. These rules are intended to supplement a regular chronicle. Any mage who thinks he is going to hide himself away and become a master through pure study is sadly mistaken. The addition of a critical set of books to your library can be an exciting focus for an entire story or chronicle. Ideally, the use of seasons of play should help to build bridges between stories and hooks into new episodes.

When attempting to expand understanding of the Spheres, mages have several resources available to them. Their Avatar, their library, their mentor and even the Quintessence from an available Node might provide the insight they need to master elusive secrets. To master other abilities they have a smaller set of resources at their disposal. Tutelage from the Avatar or study with a Master may help in the quest for Arete. A Mentor might be able to train the mage in talents, skills or knowledges, if that Mentor is sufficiently skilled himself. Generally, a library is useless for increasing your talents, but can provide books to help you master skills or knowledges. Entirely at the Storyteller's option, an Avatar might train you in any ability that a previous incarnation had mastered.

The Seasons

A season of study represents the Hermetic tradition of representing cycles with the natural order. Each season has a specific set of associations. Mages will find that the world around them changes to accommodate varied seasonal impetus. This means that a mage's studies, being intimately tied to the metaphysics of mood and the flow of eternal cycles, also reflect the seasons.

The seasons have no beginning and no end, but they follow a regular progression. Generally, the seasons represent three-month periods — they hail, after all, from the seasons of the medieval Order of Hermes' studies, which in turn were influenced by farming and day-to-day life in the Middle Ages. Sometimes the Order also uses seasons to describe other cycles, like the life of a chantry, but for purposes of downtime play a season's a space of time.

A season may describe the phase of a specific project — for instance, an old and well-established chantry that has little new growth but is stable and strong may be referred to as an autumn chantry. Modifiers for seasonal activity apply in the literal season — that is, during the spring of the year, it's a good time to start new projects or create new organizations, because of the metaphysical energy of birth and creativity.

Spring is the season of birth and renewal. Old or dying structures become revitalized. New ideas come to the fore. Creativity and energy are at their peak. This is

the best time for dynamic growth activities, like starting new research or founding a chantry. All Dynamic-related seasonal activities gain a one-point break on difficulty.

Summer is the season of vigor and fullness. In summer, projects reach their peak, organizations become vibrant and full of membership, and groups succeed in many of their goals. All Questing-related seasonal activities gain a one-point break on difficulty.

Autumn is the season of stasis and maturity. Growth has stopped and structures are well-established. Focus turns inward, to maintaining power structures and bulwarking existing orders. All Stasis-related seasonal activities gain a one-point break on difficulty.

Winter is the season of decrepitude, decay and death. The weak pass on and the strong survive. Groups buckle down to survive harsh conditions. Stores are broken out and used, and activities come to a halt. All Entropy-related seasonal activities gain a one-point break on difficulty.

The Systems

For any of the study methods described below, an entire three months must be dedicated to the research program. Basic life activities — eating, sleeping and the like — are assumed. In addition, seven days out of each month may be taken as a break from the studying, but even then, they should be spent in relative relaxation. Combat, lengthy travel, massive magical workings and other stressful endeavors can throw off an entire season of training.

Each of the training methods provides experience toward a specific goal, which must be determined before the season begins. If the goal is not reached through a combination of already earned experience and seasonal experience, the seasonal experience is lost. That's right, studying can be effective, but the retention curve is steep. Use it or lose it.

The basic system is as follows. Choose your training method and its associated Background or Backgrounds. Your die pool is equal to your Intelligence plus the Backgrounds of your chosen training method. The difficulty is also based on the training method you choose. In general, if you choose a method that involves more than one Background, the resulting difficulty is equal to the highest difficulty of the chosen Backgrounds, but you may gain a break on difficulty for having multiple sources of information — if a *Library* doesn't have answers, a *Mentor* might, for instance. The number of successes is the number of experience points gained toward your training goal.

When studying under a mentor, that mentor must have the Trait at a level at least equal to the level the character wants to learn. If the mentor has not previously been specified, the Storyteller has final say as to whether or not the mentor is qualified to teach the student. Similarly, the Storyteller determines whether or not the Avatar is qualified to teach the student anything. Similarly, no Trait may improve beyond the limit of the training Background — if a character only has a one-dot *Library*, he won't be able to learn secret knowledges from it. Except where noted, Backgrounds cannot be shared or traded for the purposes of seasonal training.

Training

The mage spends the season studying under her mentor. At the end of an uninterrupted season, roll Intelligence plus *Mentor*, difficulty 8. A single mentor might train more than one student. However, for each student after the first, each student's roll increases in difficulty by one. Training under a mentor can provide experience for any Ability the mentor knows, any Sphere the mentor knows or for Arete.

Lecture Series

The mage spends the season studying a specific series of texts under the tutelage of a teacher or teachers. At the end of an uninterrupted season, roll Intelligence plus *Library* plus *Mentor*, difficulty 9. A lecture series can teach any number of students. If multiple students study in together in this way, each of them must use the lowest *Library* score of any of them (the slowest student holds up the group). On the plus side, each them also gets the highest *Mentor* score that any of them possess (they can all attend the best lectures). In addition, they must all attempt to learn the same level of the same trait. A lecture series can provide experience for any Ability or any Sphere.

Library Research

The mage spends the season studying in her library. At the end of an uninterrupted season, roll Intelligence plus *Library*, difficulty 6. Library research can provide experience for Skills, Knowledges or Spheres. Possession of a specific book good for the job — a book on Matter written by a Master of that Sphere — may provide an extra die or a one-point drop in difficulty.

Learning Rotes

The mage spends the season working on rotes, either by practicing theories or by studying from books and other mages. For study from books, use Intelligence plus *Library*, difficulty 6, just like library research. For personal development, use Intelligence + the lowest Sphere involved in the rotes, difficulty 6.

Avatar Insight

The mage spends the season opening herself to the insights of her own Avatar. At the end of an uninter-

rupted season, roll Intelligence plus *Avatar* or *Past Life* (whichever is higher). With Storyteller permission, the Avatar can train the mage in any Trait except Attributes.

Studying Quintessence

The mage spends the season studying the nature of the Quintessence of her Node. At the end of an uninterrupted season, roll Intelligence plus *Node*. Any tens rolled while studying Quintessence may be re-rolled and counted toward additional successes (and experience) as if the character had an appropriate specialty. Any ones rolled while studying Quintessence reduce the character's temporary Quintessence roll by one each at the start of the next story. If the study check is botched, the character's Node may be damaged and Paradox may strike (see sidebar).

Intelligence Matters

It's notable that Intelligence, foremost among the attributes, shines in extended research. This is deliberate: The process of study, insight and memorization requires intelligence first and foremost. That doesn't mean that other attributes aren't important, though.

Remember that accessing a given resource may require the use of attributes besides Intelligence. For instance, convincing a mentor to give up a season of his valuable study time may require some roleplaying in conjunction with some Manipulation + Expression rolls. Figuring out how to use an arcane library's shelving system might test a character's Wits + Academics. Spending days at a time hiking up and down the mountainside where a Node resides could call for a Stamina + Survival test.

Also remember that, most of the time, a mage won't be able to maintain an artificial, magical boost to intelligence long enough to justify a full season of improvement.

Using Quintessence While Training

When using any research method except Studying Quintessence, a character may, with the Storyteller's permission, spend temporary Quintessence to reduce the difficulty. Even when not specifically studying the stuff of magic, Quintessence can provide insight. Each point of Quintessence used while studying reduces the difficulty of the roll by one and reduces the Quintessence available to the mage at the start of the next adventure by one. The mage must have the Quintessence on hand at the beginning of the season, of course. A mage can't use a *Node* to justify having hundreds of Quintessence during a season — that sort of study is direct *Node* study and uses that Background as previously described.

Using Quintessence in this manner is not without its hazards. Any botch incurred while using Quintessence to study invokes Paradox. The mage gains an amount of Paradox equal to the level of the desired trait being trained times the number of Quintessence points used to reduce the difficulty of the roll. So, a mage spending two Quintessence while trying to learn Occult 3 would gain six Paradox. Naturally, this Paradox probably discharges over the course of the season — long before the next story session starts. The Storyteller should therefore determine the nature of the drawback that occurs. Typically, a research Paradox can destroy work and materials involved. The character might lose Background levels in a *Library* or *Node*, suffer from new Resonance or take on a Flaw or injury. If you simply want a random solution, try the following table.

Quintessential Research Paradoxes

1, 2 — Utter disaster! The mage suffers a new permanent Paradox Flaw. The Storyteller chooses a Flaw of point value equal to one-half the Paradox invoked (round down). This won't kill the mage outright but could cause a great deal of pain and suffering. Furthermore, the mage's study Background loses one dot.

3, 4 — Resonance. The mage gains one dot in a Resonance Trait. Either choose a new Trait, or add to an existing Trait, depending upon what's appropriate to the research at hand.

5, 6 — Incidental damage. The backlash damages the mage's study materials. Reduce the study Background by one dot — books are destroyed in a *Library*, a *Node* has its Quintessence flow altered, or a *Mentor* becomes more distant and less helpful after the student's disaster.

7, 8 — Injury. The mage comes into the next story suffering from wounds resulting from the Paradox backlash. Treat as a normal backlash's damage. Thus, the mage may come into play with a few bruises of bashing damage (for a minor Paradox effect), or with serious Paradox burns of aggravated damage (for a botched major project).

9, 10 — Wasted season. The mage loses the season and the Quintessence used but suffers no other severe effects.

Chantry Resources

One of the great benefits of a chantry is the ability to share useful research resources. A cabal with access to a chantry has a far better opportunity to undertake seasonal study. So long as the chantry's paid for and the mages otherwise have their day-to-day living expenses covered, the cabal members can expect to use their chantry to everyone's benefit.

The major advantage of the *Chantry* Background in seasonal play lies in its flexibility. The mages can all make use of their shared chantry, but can divide up its resources in *Mentor*, *Library* and *Node* as they see fit — not everyone need rely on the same study style, or on studying the same topic.

Of course, characters who rely on the resources of a chantry must also be willing to expend some of their own effort to help keep the chantry functional. A character may be called upon to serve as a mentor to other mages in the chantry, or to improve the chantry with donations of books, time or money.

Assisted Learning

Multiple mages can combine their efforts on a specific research topic, if so desired. Typically, only the primary researcher makes the breakthrough, but a group of researchers with similar levels of skill might all benefit.

The group chooses a research lead, who makes the various decisions regarding study time and style. The player of that lead makes the necessary research rolls. Each assisting mage grants one extra die to the roll, so long as the mage has at least some knowledge of the topic in question or some way to contribute meaningfully to the research.

Generally, a group of mages can only work together on a topic up to a limit of mages equal to the Background involved. That is, if studying from a two-point *Library*, only two mages can combine their efforts — the library simply doesn't have enough materials to allow additional mages to help.

If the research roll is successful, not only does the head researcher gain valuable study that cuts the costs of improvements, but each associated researcher gains one point toward the same study. Thus, the assistants can garner a one point break on the cost of the study material. Say a group all works together to study Forces 3 — the lead researcher gains a cost break as normal, and all assistants gain a one experience point break on the cost of learning Forces 3.

Obviously, if assistant researchers don't have the requisite abilities to learn the trait, or enough experience to complete it, this does them little good. However, if they're willing to spend their time in assistance, they can substantially improve learning for the research lead.

Note that mages of differing Traditions may impose a +1 penalty to the difficulty of the research rolls, due to the need to translate systems and magical understanding between different paradigms.

Library Building

Mages who spend a lot of time studying tend to take notes. Eventually those notes become books, the books become libraries and the libraries attract younger mages.

Spending a season on research and collation is a perfect way to justify an increase in the *Library* Background. Such an increase isn't automatic or guaranteed. After all, a good *Library* not only includes a mage's research notes, but also materials that detail things the mage doesn't yet study or understand. Similarly, the player may need to expend experience points for the library improvements.

As a rule of thumb, improving a *Library* requires that the mage accumulate new books and notes over the course of the season, which costs money or favors. The mage must use an appropriate Attribute + Ability/ Background, such as Perception + *Resources* when buying new materials or Charisma + Subterfuge when convincing allies to help supply books.

On some occasions the Storyteller might decide that only a specific book will do for a given project — for instance, if a Hermetic mage wants to learn the true name of a demon so as to command it, then the Storyteller might decide that only one book written contains that name, and the mage must discover it. This is, of course, more fodder for a story! Such books tend to be hoarded in libraries of mages who already have uses for them.

By the same token, a mage can write down personal experiences, magical knowledge and advice in book form over the course of a season. In general, a mage can't write books that will bring a *Library* Background rating any higher than the writer's Expression Ability. A specific book — for instance, a treatise on the application of Forces under the Verbena paradigm — might, as noted above, work as a special component to help in research or a requirement for special spells or rotes. Similarly, a mage can write down rotes into book form, and trade such a book to other mages for study purposes. Seasons spent learning rotes or doing library research can especially benefit from the appropriate books.

Seasons and Bookkeeping

Seasonal study is something best done at the beginning or end of a session, but the troupe can easily devote an hour or more to such projects. Any time between stories, when the mages have a few months to kill, a season of study time presents an ideal chance to segue into the next story.

Each player should fill out a short paragraph or two of study goals and means. Simply noting "I want to study *Forces* with my *Library* Background" is sketchy at best. Look again to the mage's paradigm: What sorts of study and materials are likely? Will the mage be performing experiments in the basement? Looking for rare items to research? Spending a lot of time at home involved in personal projects and meditation, waiting for the inspiration of the Avatar? Remember, tangible study benefits aren't the only result of research.

Materials are used up. The mage must study *somewhere*, so the cabal needs a chantry or at least someone with the *Resources* to cover costs of living. Does the mage call on spirits? If so, what kinds of spirits, and what are their names and agendas? Is the mage studying from a *Library*? What are some likely tomes, and what sorts of unusual little side-knowledge does the mage pick up while reading? ("Hey guys, while I was looking up fourteenth century art to polish up my Academics, I discovered a reference to a magic painting in France that was apparently the inspiration for the portrait of Dorian Gray...".) Remember, a season of study isn't just a few lines of character improvement — it's a chance to look at *how* a mage studies, what the character believes is the road to improvement, and also to seed in new story ideas.

Make sure, of course, that all players record their seasonal works at the same time, and give them to the Storyteller at once. It's not particularly fair or exciting for the players to have to wait on each other to get their results.

Seasonal bookkeeping works most effectively when done at the end of a story. Have the players all spend an hour or so discussing study plans. Then, let them submit their seasonal plans. Between game sessions, the Storyteller has time to write up a description of what happens during the study session. Also, this gives the Storyteller a good opportunity to work the season into the game. You can spend a whole game session just recounting or roleplaying things that happened during the study period, or even taking a few of the days in the middle to let the characters talk about what they're doing, the progress they're making and what else might be on their mind.

Resonance Revisited

The rules for Resonance in **Mage** are deliberately vague — Resonance is ultimately a very personal affair, and its manifestations will vary from mage to mage. However, some additional guidelines may help to make Resonance more useful.

Resonance traits almost always reflect a mage's personal emotions, experiences, fears and frustrations. Often, this sense of Resonance gives an idea of a mage's personality long before new acquaintances have had a chance to learn much about the individual. A pleasant, well-dressed mage with a *Sinister* Resonance almost certainly has some secret to hide; a shabby, mumbling mage with a *Healing* Resonance is probably a good friend.

Choose your starting Resonance carefully. It'll always come across to the people your mage meets. Find ways to input Resonance into your character's description. A character with *Electrifying* Resonance probably has frizzy hair and a jumpy personality, of course; a mage with a *Grating* Resonance might have an unpleasant voice or a constantly dusty appearance. Ideally, when you describe your character, at least one sentence should stem from the Resonance of the mage.

Resonance Fluctuation

Resonance tends to increase when a mage undergoes a powerful magical experience or suffers through a deep emotional crisis. Such an increase must tie somehow into existing Resonance. For instance, a mage with the Dynamic Resonance of *Fiery* may gain Resonance after barely surviving an experience of being trapped in a burning building. For a mage with a different emotional focus, such an experience might be harrowing but not necessarily Resonance-worthy. It's incumbent upon the Storyteller and the player to decide on the sorts of events that would reflect the mage's inner character and, thus, cause it to manifest more strongly.

Resonance increases are most common under stressful magical events such as:

- Going into Quiet
- Finishing a Seeking (whether successful or failed)
- Losing permanent Willpower
- Learning a Master-level Sphere

These are not, however, the only circumstances under which a mage might garner more Resonance. The key is to determine why a mage manifests certain qualities in the first place, and then to figure out what would amplify this. A mage might, for instance, be a naturally compassionate and warm individual — someone with a *Caregiver* Nature and a *Nurturing* Static Resonance. Likely this stems from the mage's upbringing, perhaps influenced by a choice of career. The mage will tend to manifest stronger Resonance when magical experiences directly challenge or reinforce these personality Traits.

Note that, with only very rare exceptions, Resonance generally doesn't go down. A mage might temporarily suppress personal Resonance, but a permanent decrease is very unlikely. The rare occasions where a mage's Resonance goes down seem to happen when a mage spends a great deal of time away from magical life, instead simply keeping a mundane profile and avoiding mystic events or magic use.

Chapter Eight: Treasures

While many mages count their treasures and Wonders by the places important to themselves — their Cabal and their Tradition — the Council of Nine counts several locales and artifacts as treasures to *all* mystics. In some cases, these are simple tools used by one Tradition but of value to all. In others, such Wonders or places may be of significance to the unified Traditions as a whole.

Of course, many of the greatest magical treasures have passed from the world. Such fabled artifacts as the Peaches of Immortality or Excalibur no longer have a physical existence on Earth — at least, not that any mage is aware of. Still, the Traditions try to collect as many potent Wonders as they can, partly for use in conflict, partly to reaffirm the continued existence of magic and partly as a means of continuing their own identity. Of course, few people can say with certainty what the treasures of tomorrow might be... that's for today's apprentices to decide.

And then there are the legends of places or things that the Traditions would prefer *not* to see resurface....

Inspirations

The places of power and treasures of note in this chapter aren't simply designed as things for you to take canonically and thrust upon your chronicle. Rather, they're inspirations, designed to give you some ideas that might help your game along. Don't hesitate to take them and turn them around for your game. Stick Broken Tracks, spirit of Death Valley, in the vicinity of your game, in some other desert, swamp or desolate land. Change the Staff of Heralds to function as a cloisonné pin. Remember that magic can settle anywhere, in the most mundane-appearing of forms.

The most important thing to do with your game's treasured locations and wonders is to make sure that they are distinctive and memorable enough for the Traditions to stand up and take note. Sometimes, that means they should break a couple of rules or do something totally unique. That's fine; they are, after all, treasures. These aren't simple, straightforward magic items so much as they are remnants of magic with their own individual stories to tell.

Death Valley

In man's earliest days on the North American continent, great spirits roamed the lands. Often a spirit of power and malevolence would menace the growing human population. Those we would now liken to Dreamspeakers eventually learned how to bind and seal away these dark spirits from the Earthly realm, banishing them to the depths of the earth or into the Umbra.

Such evil often leaves a permanent trace on the land and its people. Trees grow twisted, the land hostile and angry. Wildlife, normally found abundant, never wanders within view. Death Valley is one such place.

Lost deep in the middle of what is now desert is a powerful Node, all but forgotten by the peoples who once tended to it and the spirits trapped beneath it. Age upon age has passed; the bindings on the spirits trapped within the earth grow as brittle as the sun-baked earth. Whispers call upon the wind for someone to break the bonds while shadows in the sun beg for their strengthening. Each voice calls out to any who might hear, those gifted in listening to the voices of the spirits.

Those investigating deep in the desert find the trapped spirits angry and fierce, all protesting their innocence of the wrongdoing that warrants such imprisonment. The voices shout loudly from their cages, demanding freedom and offering favors in return. Only one voice speaks against the spirits. It describes evil upon evil done — lives ruined, land wasted, creatures corrupted, tribes destroyed, each act done by those bound. To prove truth it offers itself up for binding in a fetish it will teach — Combined with the mage's powers the bindings will be strengthened enough that the spirits can never escape unaided and never call to the outside.

The free spirit speaks in half-truth. Broken Tracks is a twisted spirit of creation, harmed by the coming of progress and its twin, destruction. It has spent lifetimes holding the spirits within the Node, waiting to find someone strong enough to perform the ritual it offers to teach. This ritual, once performed, would weaken and bind the animal spirits separately, outside of the Node, where Broken Tracks could feed on them, growing in strength with each angry badger and cougar. While the Node aids in trapping the animal spirits below, Broken Tracks was unable to corrupt the Node and use its power to absorb the strength of the trapped animal spirits.

Broken Tracks' error was in binding the spirits *en masse* to the Node. His greed did him in as the spirits' strength bolstered the Node, preventing Broken Tracks from corrupting the Node and eating the spirits. The prison itself is too great for him to break alone. First the prison must be cracked, releasing one spirit at a time. In

turn each spirit is individually bound again, separating each spirit's power from the collective mass.

Death Valley's Inhabitants

The spirit Broken Tracks is, of course, quite sly in its deception, and inexperienced mages that take Broken Tracks at its word will certainly have their work cut out for them — if aided by a mage, the spirit will gain enough power over the next year to leave Death Valley and become a tremendously potent adversary with the power that it will drain from its prisoners.

A few rare other mages pass through Death Valley. Dreamspeakers sometimes use it as a test of survival prowess, and the occasional Taftâni also visits (see **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin and Taftâni**).

You Can't Stop Progress

Before the European settlement of the eastern seaboard, there were many places of power to the shamans of the Algonquin peoples. Not all were near settlements. Thus, the shaman doing any periodic purification or strengthening had to do so from a great distance away. Kept secret and revealed only to apprentices once they were learned enough to care for the site, it would only take one ill-timed death to lose this bit of knowledge to the ages. Such unknown power left sleeping, or angry and bristling to be found, can be a dangerous thing in the wrong hands — or the right ones. The shaman of the Lenape village of Allegheny was responsible for one such site. In September of 1755, he was en-route from the nearby village of Kittaning when British forces razed it, leaving the site that has come to be called The Strip unattended.

In the first half of the 19th century, Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities grew at an extraordinary rate. The War of 1812 helped pushed the industrialization of the region into full stride: First excelling in glassmaking due to abundant local resources, and then moving to the iron industry by the start of the Civil War. By the end of the war, a sizeable portion of the country's glass and ironwork came from the region. Pittsburgh's place in history further expanded when the first commercial oil wells were struck just north of the city. Industrialists such as Westinghouse, Carnegie, Mellon and Schwab built their fortunes in the Steel City. Westinghouse himself was responsible for over 60 companies in the area. Each left sizeable contributions to the community: positive and negative, commercial and philanthropic.

One of the many painful side effects of this growth was the establishment of the Strip District. The Strip is a flat expanse of land east of downtown Pittsburgh, on the bank of the Allegheny River. Long a cornerstone of the industrialized Pittsburgh, it was the home of a sizeable majority of the factory and warehousing space from the early 19th century well into the modern day. Work was everywhere, and difficult. A shantytown ran along the border, housing much of the immigrant community that had come looking for employment.

The Strip has transformed a great deal in the last half century. As the industrial base in Pittsburgh began to shrink, the Strip began to empty. To date, most of it has been reclaimed. Converted into other purposes, from museums to restaurants, the Strip continues to be a buzz of human activity.

The site has not slept well these past 250 years. At first, the spirits were puzzled by the loss of the caretaker. They managed, fighting off invading spirits alone. While able to survive, their strength diminished over time. When the Europeans began settling in the area, the Umbral battles shifted. No longer the morally unambiguous battles of ancestor spirits aided by those of turtle, wolf and turkey against encroaching evils and totems of competing tribes, the number of competing interests grew with each passing decade. Early during colonization, the spirits of chaos, greed, and disease invaded, eventually joined by sand, iron, and smoke elementals with the industrialization of the Strip. As time advanced, the battle became muddled. Later immigrants brought many of their own guardian spirits and a different breed of ancestor spirit. For the Algonquin spirits, losing strength with each decade of the invasion has left them weary and hostile, making few allies with the newcomers and multitudes of competitors — and more than a few outright enemies. Dreamspeakers coming to the area in search of spiritual aid should be prepared for an unpleasant greeting. Woe to those of Lenape descent....

Still, there is great power sleeping below the Strip. It holds a great link to the Umbral realms — and, in that, perhaps a key to solving the Avatar Storm.

An Urban Shallowing?

Given Pittsburgh's long history as a spiritual battleground, the war between ancient spirits and newcomers has provoked an unforeseen effect — the Strip, once a barren place visited by the occasional shaman, now teems not only with those making historic visits, but also with the spiritual strength of the growth of the modern city. As a result, the rapid changes and back-and-forth development reflect in the Umbra almost like they do in the city. Someone who finds an ancient sacred place and remembers the old ways might well be able to pass into the Umbra, but only with an appropriate ritual to draw the attention of the ancient guardians.

Mages in Pittsburgh take advantage of this tie to step into the Umbra at their convenience, though always at sunset. For now, the Traditions consider this a useful and valuable location, one guarded by the mages native to the region. However, it's possible that some invading mage — Technocrat or Traditionalist — might see fit to change matters. Then, the Traditions would have to band together to defend this location, lest they lose an important waypoint to the Umbra.

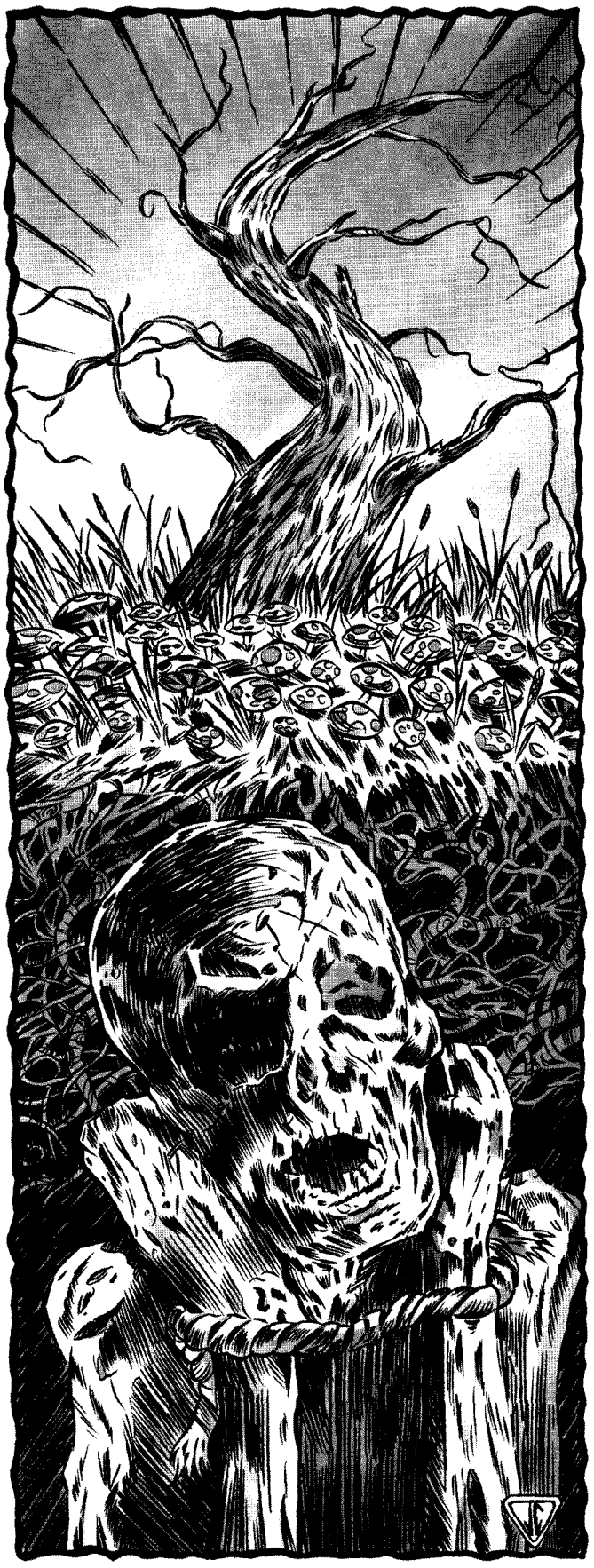
This same phenomenon happens in many places where a convergence of ideas leads to rapid change, flux and integration. Mages in modern cities across the colonized world might well find their own Shallowings, if they know what to look for.

An Aged Curse

In the late Second century BC a Nephandus known as Domitius Tanicius Linus lived among the Roman occupational army as an advisor to a minor garrison leader. Having spent the last forty years traveling the lands of Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, Persia and those places between, he had little trouble convincing the garrison commander that his experience would make taming the local populace easier. His talent for the local tongue — "a gift from Mercury," he would claim — lent credence to his apparent competence. For two years, he worked with the Romans — easing tax collection and stifling the occasional desire for rebellion — all the while tending to his own agenda. He was certain he sensed a quiet power buried somewhere in the nearby earth, a hidden Node of a strength he'd never known.

Domitius was half right: The Node was of great power, but had long since been found by a local Cabal of willworkers. With careful wards guarding the Node, the Cabal was certain none would ever find their sacred place. From a distance, Domitius probed and prodded at the edge of the wards, evaluating the challenges that lay within. Domitius could not handle the four members of the Cabal alone. Nor would he have to — a skillful advisor to the Roman Legion was rarely alone, making him a far more capable opponent.

With a fake report of a growing rebellion in the Cabal's home village, it was easy to mobilize enough legionnaires to distract the Cabal. Moving to protect their family and friends, they left the Node unguarded. Domitius pressed his advantage, able to shatter the wards and seize the Node as the legionnaires slaughtered the village defenders to the man. The Cabal escaped with the women and children, guarding those



who could not fight, destroying those who dared attack their wives and daughters.

The Cabal returned to their retreat the next week, finding their wards gone and new ones in place. Drunk with power, Domitius marched into view challenging the Cabal to take back the Node. It took only a moment's conference to plan their attack. A single motion, a handful of words, and it was done. Domitius was cursed to live so long as the Node held strength, his darkened Avatar broken and shattered, its pieces scattered to the Umbral winds. His body fell to the ground, limp. The rending of his Avatar from his body left him alive, but in shock. The Cabal buried him deep in the earth and left him, certain he could never recover enough of his Avatar to move again. His Avatar's pieces spread about the region, their corruption slowly affecting the Sleeping minds of the surviving locals, just as Domitius' corrupted soul began to affect the Node to which he had become bound.

As the thoughts of Sleepers form the consensus, their actions and emotions shape the world. There is a reason places such as this cannot seem to find peace: violence creates violence, hate creates hate. As these actions compound, so does their effect on the local Resonance. The strength of the Node in the region feeds on and, in turn, reinforces the negative emotions in the region.

From the second and first centuries BC, Bosnia has been occupied, controlled, or otherwise manipulated by outside rule. Despite fleeting degrees of self-rule — under the Romans, the Franks, and others up to the Ottoman Empire — the region has rarely had any real control over its own destiny. Manipulated internally and externally, subjected to religious conflicts, conscription, imbalanced taxation, numerous failed reforms and the failure of the feudal system, the region could not expect to escape turmoil. This turmoil both fed on and reinforced the Node and the surrounding lands' corruption, creating an inescapable Möbius strip of anger, hatred and violence.

Domitius' body still lays two paces down, two paces west of the Node he once coveted. Two thousand years without sleep has not worn easy on the Nephandic soul. Through manipulations of Sleepers' dreams he has been able to gather all but a few of his pieces. Even with these efforts and this span of time, his work is incomplete, leaving him aching for his Avatar. Only with complete recovery of it can he break the curse and finally die in peace.

Responsibility and Wrongdoing

Of course, the lone Avatar of a single mage cannot be responsible for all of the wrongdoing across a country. It is a spark and a catalyst — the wedge that drives open the wounds. Still, the mysteriously tainted Node continues to tantalize mages who pass through the area, and the constant strife surrounding Domitius' gravesite definitely stems from an unnatural Resonance.

The Traditions themselves have only scattered records of Domitius' history; the Euthanatos recognize that a powerful being of some sort is trapped in the area, but many mistakenly believe it to be a potent spirit or some sort of outer entity. Should Domitius finish reuniting his Avatar, he could work a spell to free himself from the tainted Node. While his essence is incomplete and tied to the fate of the Node, though, he cannot be destroyed. Not only would the Traditions have to do his dirty work for him, they'd have to know what they were dealing with in order to fight him off!

On the other hand, the Node still generates a tremendous amount of power (treat as a level 4 Node). Above Domitius' gravesite grow edible mushrooms that serve as Tass; perhaps one in every twenty distills out a full point of Quintessence. Of course, these mushrooms have a highly dangerous and twisted Entropic Resonance. Mages who rely on them often suffer dementia and delusions. No one alive today would recognize it, but the Resonance is in fact a by-product of Domitius' own Resonance, which has slowly poisoned the Node itself. Given time, the Node might be cleansed and returned to a more wholesome state, but so long as Domitius remains trapped there, he will continue to infect the wound.

A God-Fearing Community

Save perhaps the Dreamspeakers, the members of the Celestial Chorus show the most variation in their beliefs. Perhaps the least seen of the Choristers are the declining Amish. Small in number, they center their practice in a township settled over a Node a few dozen miles northeast of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They live quietly among the local community, with simple lives that draw little attention.

Truthfully, these Awakened are only Choristers by proxy. They rarely interact directly in the affairs of the Tradition as a whole, instead focusing on helping their individual communities. Most concentrate on acting as communal healers, using the guise of braucheri to lay hands on the sick, as midwives or even as veterinarians. A smaller number have turned to influencing the weather, a practice they keep secret from the community. In all, their activities are focused on aiding the community itself. Efforts are made not to call attention to their acts — vanity being a sin — while making

certain they are a constant active presence for the betterment of the locals.

If pressed by outsiders to join a Cabal, they refuse. The community always comes first. The Ascension War passed them by and they are content with that. It was God's will.

If asked for aid, they are generous to those nearby. Traveling great distances is not unheard of, but still considerably rare; on occasion one or two will sojourn to a place in dire need of help, but only briefly. Mages finding themselves stranded in the township are well aided and quickly sent on their way; disturbing the community status quo is something to be avoided.

As with any strong Cabal, the mages of the township keep their homes around the area's Node. The Node itself sits several feet below the town square, in the center of an underground lake that supplies most of the town's water. Years of exposure to the community have given it an affinity to calm, peace and harmony. Mages find normally vulgar effects to come with ease, so long as their magic promotes peace, calm or community spirit: the perfect place to calm down an angry mob if ever there was one. Water drawn from the central well provides potent, refreshing Tass.

A Lifestyle in Danger

Sadly, the Amish lifestyle and ethic — stressing hard work and simplicity — increasingly erodes in modern times. More and more people eschew the Amish way in favor of technological ease. Children in Amish families, exposed to a brilliant world that's denied to them, often rebel and show high incidences of drug use and other escapes. While the power of the community helps to keep the locals tied together, they can't resist the strong social pressures to modernize. In a generation, if something doesn't change, they'll be gone.

There's no great evil or spiritual malaise to blame for this tragedy. It's a solely human one. Fighting it will require similarly human measures. The Amish themselves are at an impasse. While many are passionate about their beliefs, others just as firmly believe in the need to modernize. The youth don't always embrace their elders' choices, but outsiders looking to partake in the simple life aren't made a part of the community.

For its part, the Tradition Council (such as it is today) has little opinion on the trouble of this single community. Mages everywhere have problems, reason the ranking members of the Traditions: why should the simple social unrest of this community take precedence over others? The Chorus hasn't yet realized that if they don't do something, they may lose the Node and community entirely within a few years. For a Node of such surpassingly positive energies, this would be a terrible blow. The death of the community itself might alter the Node's Resonance, making it unusable to later Tradition mages.

Problems such as this face mages everywhere, but such social issues have greater weight among the Traditions today. A mage who benefits from the hospitality of the community may well desire to return the favor — but this problem won't be resolved quickly or simply. In some ways, it's almost a microcosm of the Tradition problem itself: These people don't accept the modern world, but in return their rejection of it causes it to be inimical to their lifestyle. It will take more than quick panacea of magics and fisticuffs to strengthen this bastion of peace.

Oyama Station

In the closing days of August, 2000, Mount Oyama on the tiny island of Miyake Jima, some 120 miles south of Tokyo, erupted. This forced the evacuation of the island's inhabitants. Among those forced to leave were the members of a Void Engineer construct disguised as a monitoring station at the base of the volcano. Unable to completely scuttle the site in time and maintain their cover, their base was left virtually intact. A combination of bad luck, slow recovery time, and aggressive hounding by Strike Force Zero investigators prevented the construct's earthbound inhabitants from reclaiming their lair until after it had been claimed by another group. Claiming to be supplemental specialists in seismic and geological sciences, a crafty Cabal of Virtual Adepts and Ecstatics took control of the facility and the powerful Node it was built over. The eruption weakened many of the Technocrats' defenses, enabling access to most of the facility's hidden rooms and storage caches.

The weakening economy and near self-destructive state of the Japanese political system have allowed many self-appointed watchdogs on the loose. These watchdogs, combined with the daily-decreasing value of favors owed, increased difficulty in applying bribes and chances of being caught in these situations have made all manner of business very difficult for the Technocrats. They sit for the time being, watching for an opening — either political or geological — that allows them to retake their construct, or to destroy it and its contents.

The new residents, primarily made up of Virtual Adepts, a handful of technologically inspired Ecstatics and an even smaller number of Orphans, have just begun to fully explore the place. Careful to quickly disable the various destruct sequences and countermeasures, they've since had their time to explore. A combination of luck and caution has prevented any serious injuries from warding systems beyond singed hair and a lungful of smoke.

The construct descends far below the surface, deep into the earth's mantle, leaving uncounted rooms still unexplored. To date, only the first three levels have been cataloged to any real degree, each still having chambers yet unopened. The exact depth of the bottommost floor hasn't been divined; the Cabal concentrates its efforts on comprehending the tools and equipment left behind and has made deeper exploration a lesser priority.

The Construct's facade was built above a complex cave system going deep into the island and well below sea level. The construct itself is a series of enhancements of the existing natural rooms and corridors. Most of the corridors have been enlarged, making it easier to move large equipment to the many larger chambers. Pipes snake along floors and ceiling carrying electricity, water and data to the individual chambers.

Lucky Break? Or Fire Zone?

Oyama Station represents a major breakthrough for the Traditions. Here, the Traditions not only have access to a once Technocratically-controlled Node, but also a chance to study firsthand a recent Technocratic Earth base and all of the specialized tools therein. Members of the new Cabal gain significant prestige, both from their understanding of cutting-edge Technocratic materials and from the cunning with which their plan allowed them to swoop in and overtake the facility.

Of course, like any center of prestige and power, Oyama Station's a matter for contention. Members of just about every Tradition clamor for the chance to examine some of the Technocratic equipment that was left behind — or even to have it shipped to them for analysis, in some cases claiming that their own laboratories are better equipped to decipher the varied tools. On a few occasions, challenges of certamen have erupted over the right to the station's contents and data.

And, naturally, the Technocracy wants its property back....

Chantries

Increasingly, the Traditions must rely on Earth-side Chantries for their work. Umbral travel simply proves too difficult and dangerous to spend excessive amounts of time in Horizon Realms — besides which, mages who spend all of their time in the Umbra aren't involved in the important battles on Earth.

Old Chantry houses have been refurbished and new ones opened. Often, a Chantry can garner respect even if it doesn't have a powerful Node — and some Cabals build wholly mundane Chantries with no resident Node at all.

The Pleroma Project

Housed outside of New Madrid, Missouri stands a squat, brick cinderblock building. Aside from a large radio tower a few dozen feet away, nothing else but the lone road to the state highway breaks up the countryside. Inside, several banks of computers and graph printers stand ready, monitoring what seems like the most unlikely of things in the region — fault-line tremors. While the equipment is neither ancient nor bleeding edge, it does the job admirably according to the site manager.

The building is a functioning façade. It has no direct link with the Cabal that built and funds it, but instead is staffed solely by Sleepers. The Cabal operates some sixty feet below the building, entering by way of massively warded tunnels beneath the surrounding countryside. Situated in the bedrock, the large, multi-chambered complex houses the joint Son of Ether/Virtual Adept Cabal, their labs, and the accumulated equipment that comprises the Pleroma systems.

Established in the early part of the 19th century, the Pleroma system began as a test of a theory that seismic forces and properly stabilized quartz crystals could produce a never-ending supply of electricity. It worked, leaving a handful of bored, Awakened scientists looking for something to do with all that power. Technologically-minded mages devised a theory that with enough power — something they now had — it would be possible to send messages directly from person to person through the penumbra. Years of testing proved the theory sound, but dangerous. It seemed that the average man, Awakened or otherwise, could scarcely handle the amount of power needed to transmit the message. It was a few years later that a Sleeper provided a simple solution: transmit pulsed signals from machine to machine. It wasn't long after that ether telegraphy was in place in several of the major Electrodyne Engineer and Difference Engineer facilities around the globe. The equipment changed much in the following years, adding voice and visual data paper facsimile transmission as the theories evolved.

It wasn't until the Sons of Ether left the Technocratic Union that it evolved cipher capabilities. Compatible equipment in Technocratic facilities worldwide made open broadcasts a very dangerous thing, even with the direct contact nature of the Pleroma system. As communication theory has grown in the Sleeper world, so has the Pleroma system grown and adapted. Pleroma began interfacing with the early computational talismans by the middle 1950's, eventually growing to be the backbone of their usage. Since the late 1980's the focus has been on expanding the number of compatible interfaces for the Pleroma system, increasing its robustness and decreasing its dependence on any particular piece of hardware.

Many of these devices are simply modified off-the-shelf hardware or the housing of such, to appear less out of the ordinary in the world of Sleepers.

To access Pleroma one needs two things: A talisman dedicated to accessing Pleroma, created with one of two rotes, one for individual access and another for Cabal or group access; and the rote must be performed in the presence of someone already accessing Pleroma.

Pleroma provides, at modest cost, modified off-the-shelf PDAs that are well suited for Pleroma use and blend in when researching arcana while on public transit. Pleroma services include access to the Digital Web, Sleeper networks, the Sophia library and technical support provided by animated tech-worker corpses. No particular Tradition, House, or path requirements are known; there are even a few Orphans and Disparates among the user-base.

Gaining physical access to the Pleroma site is a bit more complex. Considered to be among the more highly guarded Etherite Facilities and tempered with the Adepts' desires to protect a facility with a critical interface to the Digital Web, getting access requires at least two respected referrals...especially so for the internship programs. The physical plant aboveground isn't significantly secured, but the subterranean sections require passage through airtight, air-locked corridors and some hefty physical locks. While very 19th century, they'll still dissuade any intruder short of a small group of HIT Marks.

Typical Pleroma PDA

A typical–Pleroma-equipped PDA is indistinguishable from any man-on-the-street PDA — because they are the selfsame equipment. Any standard PDA capable of networking can be modified to access Pleroma. Great care has been made to disguise the interface so that it appears like a standard add-on for the PDA. Be it a card, a chip upgrade or an external modem, all variations look like a natural expansion to the handheld. Earlier models had simply disguised themselves as an expanded battery pack. Twice they nearly fell into Technocracy hands — quickly teaching the lesson of subtlety.

Simply plugging a Pleroma interface into the handheld is not enough to get on the Information Ether. The would-be Pleroma user must first be confirmed by two existing Pleroma users who're already connected at the same time. Long-term Pleroma users learn a special rote to validate new users — this rote functions on the principles of 19th century Etheric body electrical auras, so the mages in question must combine fair knowledge (at least two dots) of Forces and Prime to read the individual's personal body voltaic charge and transmit it in data form through their PDAs. This validates the new user, but the on-site staff of Pleroma still has the ability to shut out problems or Technocrats who manage to weasel their way in.

Sophia

Sophia started as a simple project in the days of the late 19th century. Theorizing that information transmitted as electricity could be stored in the same manner as electricity is, researchers developed a series of information arcologies based on their new principle of the voltaic information battery. To prove the value of the project, the researchers began by attaching a series of batteries to a telegraph receiver and paying a rather confused worker in the next city to tap in the first three chapters of *Tom Sawyer*.

Once it was proven the researchers could retrieve the text in excess of a year later, the team began filling the batteries in earnest. Reams of wild theories, notes — anything they could get their hands on — were crammed into the batteries in a stress test. The project was determined to be a success 15 years later when all of the original material could be retrieved, less a book or two that had been charged onto faulty batteries.

The voltaic information battery has improved in size, capacity and reliability in the years since. Pleroma continues to use it as a primary data source, not only due to its proven nature, but also for the additional layer of security resulting from its uniqueness. Since most nonmages don't know of or understand the device, it's difficult for them to tap into its repositories.

Naturally, as the quantity of available information grew, the need for a system to manage, retrieve and sort the information became necessary. Sophia grew from information storage and retrieval hardware to a system of software, hardware and, eventually, Pleroma interfaces.

The current Sophia system in many ways resembles a modern server environment mixed with a safety deposit box. Public information is shared in one of many "reading rooms" — information batteries that are available to all at all hours. Private batteries are kept disconnected from the system. When a user connects via Pleroma and requests a private battery, an automated system retrieves the battery from secured storage, verifies the data integrity, and then adds the battery to the system.

Sophia's Public reading rooms are vast. This is partly due to the number of wild theories dumped to storage over the years and partially in attempt to discover the true limits of the system. Despite Sophia's software, the information stored is somewhat disorganized due to haphazard categorization of the various documents. As other Traditions began using the system, the breadth grew to include copies of many — now believed lost — tomes and lorebooks from scattered chantries, including Doissetep. At this time, the Sophia system may not be the largest library of Tradition information or the repository of the greatest wisdom, but it's far and away the first place that a Tradition mage should check to find references to any kind of Awakened or mundane research, or even to look for a place to go for more specialized information.

The Memory of Ignatius

When the Society of Jesus was allowed to return to Brazil in 1842, their few Convention members felt it necessary to prevent an expulsion from happening ever again. Ten years were spent selecting a location that was both remote enough to prevent easy intrusion and accessible enough they would have little trouble resupplying. A quarter of a century was spent building up their presence in the region, assembling facilities, developing their cover. Concern for a second expulsion before they were ready led the order to disguise the location as a more mundane Catholic Church.

The church quietly grew for the better part of the 40 years, the guise of a regional church protecting the Jesuits within from any lingering political resentment. With time the expulsion was forgotten, the church was

able to make their affiliation public — but chose not to. They continue to maintain the cover, despite the lack of need in the modern age. Every staff member of the church, from the priests down to the groundskeepers, is a magic-using member of the Jesuit order. Every member performs necessary duties to maintain the church's façade, some more mundane than others. Chorister string-pulling in Rome has carefully maintained this façade by preventing mundanes from being assigned duties at the church. In the time since, the church has maintained its size and its simple goal. Should there ever be a reason the Society would be expelled from Brazil — or other parts of South America — this church would be a haven for the Awakened.

Until the time of the military coup in the 1960s, the church continued a quiet existence of study, communication with regional Chorister chantries — regardless of denomination — and quiet solitude. The Church's location is still quite remote, giving those Chorister members needing time to contemplate their place in the grand scheme of The One one of Creation's more perfect locations. Those feeling they need to toil physically as part of their spirituality will find no end to the number of chores that need doing on any given day.

Choristers not of the Society are welcomed for short stays, so long as they do not break the order's few rules and make no efforts to expose the true nature of the church.

Awakened outsiders, or members of other Traditions, are rarely allowed long-term stay, though short-term assistance is provided with few questions in cases of obvious emergencies.

Compass of Sanctuary

This small wooden amulet is in the shape of a cross inset on a circle. Each arm of the cross bearing a letter, matching the cross to the cardinal directions of a compass rose.

When suspended, the amulet will gently swing towards the nearest Church-run Chantry. With an expenditure of 1 Quintessence and the use of a simple Forces 1 rote it will open any warded door or gate needed to gain admittance to the Chantry (see below).

Sanctuary's Embrace

This ward is placed on doors, gates and similar closures — intended to let in only those seeking Chorister sanctuary. The ward — when met by Compass of Sanctuary and the appropriate rote — will open any attached locks, allowing entry. The person who placed the ward is, at the same time, informed of the entry so that no surprises or presumptions of invasion occur. It's not so much a physical barrier as it is an alarm system, but in conjunction with a stronger Ward can provide at least warning of when someone arrives in need of help — or with darker intentions.

Liquid Gold

When the Solificati collapsed as a Tradition in the late 15th century, many former members of the group found themselves lost, without direction and, in some cases, questioning their beliefs. For a time studies languished; the attempts to find students to learn from the Masters lost momentum. Once, such a Cabal operated on a quiet estate just outside the University in Louvain, Belgium. Firmly entrenched in the daily life of the university, its members distracted themselves from the former Tradition's troubles by concentrating on their teaching, studying and experimenting.

In the early part of the 16th century, a rogue physician and alchemist, Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus V, a dabbler in several of the Traditions — caught the fancy of the Cabal's remaining younger Masters. Finding those of similar enthusiasm in several newly-Awakened students, the Masters took to a new focus on the Cabal's traditional goals.

The search for physical immortality and transcendence took several twists as thoughts shifted in this new age of alchemy. Failure to date has not been due to pursuing an impossible task, as they had once believed; instead it came from reaching too high in the first step. To make the body immortal, to make it transcend, it first must be perfected. It must reach the pinnacle of form. While mankind cannot reach this step without divine aid, God left the necessary tools in the world. The next few decades were spent researching and re-cataloging the affects of numerous herbs, minerals and potions. Expedition after expedition was sent to the known edges of the earth: looking for that perfect flower or beetle shell, that when ground had the most wonderful effect on the human being.

There was success and there was failure. The Cabal dwindled over time. Attrition due to apathy, changed views and disasters of a mortal nature left them with but a handful of faithful by the start of the 20th century. When a potion for enhancing the mind was mistakenly tried on one of the Cabal's members, he went mad, the rapid loss of control and faculties costing the lives of all but two of his former compatriots before he fled. The Chantry in shambles, it was locked up and sealed away by the survivors. They felt duty-bound to correct their mistake, to either heal or put down the newly created Marauder. It is unknown if they found success.

Since that day the chantry has remained untouched, relatively speaking. The German advances in the following world wars destroyed much of the surrounding town. The Chantry's upper levels, those above the cellars where the Cabal worked, were flattened when the war pushed through. Warehousing now stands over the old site, the cellar door hidden by protective magics, still awaiting its master's return.

Cooking Tass

This process makes it possible to include Tass as an ingestible component of any recipe. Distilled water must be bathed in the power of a Node for a full day. Then, in series, it is slowly boiled down over a period of 10 days. Done properly this produces approximately a tablespoon to the gallon of white granules. These granules can be added into any recipe with sufficient liquid to dissolve them, adding 1 Quintessence per tablespoon to the food. For reasons not fully understood, the Quintessence may only be used if the food is ingested.

Naturally, many Tradition mages rely on edible Tass, but the ability to distill it out in this fashion isn't widely known. A restructuring of the Solificati academy — perhaps under the aegis of the Solificati who recently formed a House of their own in the Order of Hermes — might bring this technique back into popular use.

Area 38

During the early years of the American Secret Service, a vast number of unexplained and unexpected cases fell across their desks. What few of those hadn't already hit the US Marshals were often shared with them. It was later decided that progress and the increasing enlightenment of the common man might be hindered by public knowledge of these mysteries. Quietly they were shuffled off to a hidden research institute in the remote lands of the Washington territory. Bizarre animal specimens, strange devices, documents in undecipherable languages and other evidence of all bizarre sorts found its way to the remote enclave.

It took little time for the Electrodyne Engineers to work their way into the facility, using it both as a cover for their own work and a base of operations for gathering the most farfetched new theories of the Age of Progress. After a time, it became difficult to tell the lines between their case investigation and their own research. Given a free hand and a near limitless budget, the Engineers made great progress at taking apart, analyzing and reconstructing devices from their own Convention, their "competitors" and the few nearly mad, progressive Disparates.

Soon after opening, the military applications of the research available to the Area 38 scientists became apparent to the armed forces. Citing the advances of Edison, Tesla and their ilk, the researchers, Awakened and Sleeper alike, were expected to produce results. In the following years, the Electrodyne Engineers created dozens of nearly unduplicable devices, each more fabulous than the last. Their inability to create anything reproducible helped lead to their eventual downfall.

In 1905, when the Electrodyne Engineers, now the Sons of Ether, left the Convention and joined the Council of Nine, Convention leaders decided the knowledge in Area 38 was too dangerous to stay in Etherite hands. Using political influence, they quickly forced the closing of the facility, shunting its duties to their own "modern research complexes."

Within hours of the ordered closing, a borrowed US Army special infantry squad — armed in Clockwork Convention HydroGear suits — arrived, slaughtering those still inside the facility. Heavy charges were placed in the surrounding hillside, a violent explosion the last known testament to two decades of research.

Syndicate agents quickly went to work disposing of all information on the facility. Only their own older archives contain references to "a destroyed Son of Ether facility." In recent years, some external caches of puzzling equipment is rumored to have been found, finding its way into the hands of a Sleeper covert conspiracy. Who knows what else they have uncovered, or what still lays undisturbed.

HydroGear Armorsuit

The development of the Clockwork Convention's HydroGear Armor is merely a footnote in the Convention's technological history. For something so unknown, it had a profound effect on several basic Technocracy inventions. Many components of the early 20th century HIT Marks came straight from the Armorsuit.

The Armorsuit itself is a rather odd looking apparatus. At first glance, it is a set of plate armor with a bizarre assortment of hydraulic pistons, springs, cogs and gears. This isn't far from the truth. The basic framework for the armor came from a custom-fit set of bullet-proofed armor. Several sets of self-resetting springs, assisting gears and amplification pistons powered by a backpack dynamo are mounted on the suit, amplifying the wearer's strength and speed.

The suits were assembled with a variety of weapons. Most were simply modified versions of existing firearms, altered so the weapons were more easily gripped through mail-gloved hands. Others were more bizarre, such as the armored man-portable cannon and the arm-mounted Gatling gun. On rare occasion, electrified swords were seen in conjunction with the Armorsuits.

A HydroGear Armorsuit gives the wearer the effective defense of plate steel and an effective Strength and Dexterity of 4.

HydroGear Armorsuits have since fallen out of favor with the Sons of Ether, who now espouse more progressive (or bizarre) forms of personal defense. While they're *not quite* Paradoxical in the modern world, they will raise quite a few eyebrows, most especially among engineers who recognize the inherent risky-ness of force-feedback suit systems like this one and who scratch their heads over the sensitivity of early century mechanics.

The Geostatic Rain Cannon

This peculiar device, according to what few records still exist, was an earlier prototype of a weather manipulation machine. It consists of a long, thin, metal barrel on a rotatable aiming hinge. Eight 50-foot lengths of solid steel cable are equidistantly tethered to the base. These cables are spread taut, tied to metal spikes driven 10 feet into the earth at each of the points of the compass rose.

Once set up, the cannon spends 20 hours gathering the static electricity present in a 50-foot radius of the platform. Once the energy is gathered, the accumulated charge is fired into the sky, attracting water vapors from miles around. Once sufficient vapors have gathered, clouds form — growing dark and eventually producing precipitation.

Naturally, such a Wonder tends to be highly Paradoxical in the modern age, but in the '50s it was the height of technology....

Silver Flyer

This bizarre craft consists of a large, silvered, convex steel plate with a series of metal tubes mounted to its surface. Each tube is tightly wrapped in several layers of copper wiring, as one would find in any garden-variety electric motor. A sturdy chair on a gyroscopically-controlled Lazy Susan sits in the center of the craft, just behind what looks like a control panel. Five large batteries are spread evenly about the craft, each terminal attached to the copper wires. The con-

trol panel consists of a circular gauge with five markers, a small hand-wheel and five battery level gauges.

A dusty manual sits in the seat. Most of the pages are rotten, leaving only mentions of the craft's name, assertions it should be capable of flight and a requisition form for mercury.

Funny What One Finds in the Stacks

During the establishment of a mundane university in 1860, the central library was funded and constructed by agents of a wealthy Hermetic philanthropist. The four-story marvel was a wondrous thing in its day. Unique for a library of its time, it had an Otis Safety Elevator — something the benefactor used to his advantage.

Careful to mask it on all public records, the library's constructors built nearly as much below ground as they did above. Using a carefully hidden door in the elevator subbasement, the Hermetic Cabal built themselves a safe hideaway below the well-traversed public facility. Twenty members of House Flambeau toiled for the next 60 years, caching away copies of materials thought only to exist in Horizon, copying and translating as needed. Extensive laboratories existed for experimentation in all manner of destructive and reconstructive forces. Efforts were made to keep pace with the destructive capabilities of the Sleeper world and the super sciences of the Technocracy.

The Cabal involved was certain that the Ascension War would only continue to escalate. Without the means and willingness to fight from an aggressive stance, the Cabal felt the Traditions would never stand a chance. With time, copies of nearly every Tradition tome on rotes of destruction, crafting artifacts of increased lethality, the use of spirits in warfare and all other manner of violent research existed in this one place. Research led them to develop a number of new rotes, advancing the House in the more esoteric uses of the Forces and Prime spheres, as well as designing a number of destructive talismans and Wonders.

Attempts to help the WWII war effort cost the Cabal all its members and, surprisingly, cost House Flambeau the Chantry. It lay completely untouched for the next 20 years, when the elevators were renovated to more a modern, pushbutton control panel. This made it virtually impossible to reach the Chantry entry, leaving the Flambeau secrets concealed.

The Cabal left a powerful ward, freezing time from the moment they left, waiting for the moment they returned. The ward was designed assuming the Cabal would not be gone more than a year. The advancing time deteriorated the ward, causing destabilizing effects on the remaining talismans within. Those entering the ward find themselves flooded with random images of the last few days of the Chantry's occupancy — ghosts of time gone by along with random time effects, such as rapid aging, regeneration and time distortions.

There are very few artifacts lying about in the laboratory; the Cabal members went off to war armed for bear, leaving very little behind for scavengers. Perhaps this is for the best; those pieces left are in terrible shape — only a small percentage functioning at all, many of the enchantments weakened by age, quite dangerous to the user in untrained hands.

House Flambeau still maintains records of the Chantry, but with the recent developments of the Avatar Storm and the destruction of several ranking mages, the records themselves languished in a box that holds notes from a now-deceased Hermetic Master. Ironically, the records themselves remain on Earth, in a back room of the same university that the library graces, but nobody has yet traced down the decedent and found this heritage.

"Don't Touch That Plotdevicium Ray Gun!"

A lost Chantry such as this is a tempting location for a dangling plot hook. It should be. But Storytellers must be careful not to simply hand the characters a warehouse of lost knowledge and let them loose like some toy store prize run. Give the players room to improvise as much as you feel comfortable with. It's not necessary to determine the exact contents of 60 years of Hermetic scrounging, research and tome copying before setting the players down. And remember, something *happened* to this Cabal. Why did they leave? Was it for their own safety? Did they *all* leave? Can the characters pick up their research where they left off? Should they? What side effects has the extended duration on the ward had on the environment there?

Wonders and Artifacts

The most potent magical treasures of history are long lost, but the Traditions at least retain a few items used by all. Each Tradition may have its own unique treasures, but a few Wonders transcend the boundaries of mages and represent the unity of the Traditions themselves.

Sadly, many useful Wonders have been lost or broken and formulae to create others discarded or turned ineffective. Even so, the presence of even a single Wonder of true power brings not only magical prowess to its wielder but, more importantly, inspiration. For a few treasures, their worth as a symbol exceeds any magical powers that they may have, or may have lost.

The Staff of Heralds (Unique Artifact)

Early in the formation of the Traditions, various Heralds and messengers traveled from place to place in order to foster inter-Chantry communication. The modern age of telephones has made such communications largely obsolete, except when a personal presence is necessary — to carry an item or to prove the authenticity of a piece of information. In order to verify the standing of these Heralds, the Euthanatos crafted a single staff designed to channel the power of Fate. The Staff of Heralds allowed the Tradition Council to mark its Heralds so that even a novice could determine their authenticity from the marks of Fate they bore.

Sadly, the Staff of Heralds passed from Tradition view during the invasion of Concordia. The death of most of the Tradition Council and the devastation of the center of Tradition Umbral power left the Staff as yet another mystery piece, gone to parts unknown and presumed destroyed.

Modern Heralds have had to function without benefit of the Staff. A few old Heralds still bear the staff's unique Fate-mark; the Resonance of the unique Staff, created with purpose by a group of Euthanatos Adepts and Masters, ensures that the sigil cannot be easily duplicated but is clearly visible to Entropic senses.

Recently, the Euthanatos have come to the conclusion that the Staff is, in fact, somewhere back on Earth. Apparently, Concordia's invasion didn't come as a complete surprise — which shouldn't be out of charac-

ter for a group that included some of the greatest Masters of Time known to the Traditions. It seems that some Disciples escaped with several artifacts, including the Staff. Unfortunately, the Technocracy was quite thorough in its destruction of said refugees. The Staff might very well be considered cursed, now: The Technocracy certainly considers it a symbol of the old Tradition Council and will pursue it until they can destroy it and its wielders. Conversely, a Cabal that finds the Staff essentially holds the authority of the Heralds of the Traditions.

The Tenth Seat (Unique Artifacts)

Among the treasures lost to the Tradition Council in the wake of the Reckoning was one of the seats of the Council at Concordia. While the Traditions have had a few opportunities to visit Concordia in the meantime, it seems that unrest still exists in the Horizon Realms — apparently, someone either destroyed or made off with a *chair*. In this case, it's the seat that was symbolically reserved, and the one that hosted an unknown sigil. No member of the Council has held this seat, and debates once raged over the nature of the sigil that mystically appeared on it overnight, with each Tradition having at least some members who claimed that the symbol stood for a unique "tenth Sphere" (which, of course, each Tradition claimed as an invention of its own — probably in an attempt to garner an additional seat, and thus more influence, on the Council).

Given that the symbol on the seat was never deciphered, the appeal is obvious: Someone who manages to unearth the significance of the tenth symbol may have a clue to a hole or misconception in the Sphere system. Conversely, nobody's really sure if it wasn't just an elaborate prank.

For now, the location and disposition of the seat remains a mystery. Doubtless it furnishes some Master's asylum in the Horizon Realms... unless it has moved of its own magical accord.

Tradition Blades (5-point Unique Artifacts)

Swords and knives hold power in their imagery. It's no wonder that sets of magic swords show up in fiction and legend; they hold an undeniable appeal. The mystic Traditions recognize the blade as a symbol of authority and balance. The Verbena have long used athames; the Order of Hermes, broadswords; and the Akashic Brotherhood, various martial arts weapons. Somewhere along the way, someone came up with the bright idea of forging blades representative of the various Traditions — probably for use in the Ascension War (before it ended), but also as symbolic representations of each Tradition in question. Each was made in the wake of World War II, although some are said to be re-forged or re-enchanted versions of pre-existing weapons that had some import to the Tradition in question. Each one reflects its Tradition's signature capabilities in some way.

Nobody has ever held two of the blades at the same time. Since use of a blade's powers requires that the individual actually hold it, no more than two could be used at once, barring some sort of bizarre Life magic. Presumably, the swords *could* function together like the Traditions that they represent, but with varying degrees of conflicting Resonance.

What happened to some of these blades is anyone's guess. Certainly the appearance of one of the blades would be a matter of great import, and would lead to a great deal of struggling between factions hoping to secure it as a symbol of status and power.

Akashic Brotherhood: The Akashic blade is perhaps the most mutable of all. In its natural form, it's a jian — a two-foot-long, straight-bladed Chinese thrusting sword. The blade is worked out of an etched piece of steel with swirling dragons and a cross-guard shaped to resemble a pair of feng huang (phoenix) in flight. A wielder with knowledge of the weapon's power can concentrate on the sword and cause it to re-pattern into any single-blade weapon desired between two and four feet in length, from a Chinese dao to a Japanese katana to a German war sword. Generally, this allows the wielder to claim a specialization bonus by shifting the sword into an appropriate form, assuming that the wielder has a Melee specialization in some type of sword. A trained Akashic can even change the sword in mid-fight (as a reflexive action) to take advantage of shifting weight and length (and thereby remove one success from any parry or dodge attempt on the part of a foe).

Celestial Chorus: A cruciform hand-and-a-half war sword, about four feet in length, with an extended hilt and a simple shape, makes the Chorus' weapon — probably from a design inherited from the Templars. The blade is forged of Primium, so the sword can be used to block magical attacks. The wielder can make a melee parry (Dexterity + Melee, difficulty 6) against a directed magical attack like a fire bolt or plasma gun (but not against an instant pattern attack, like Rip the Man Body). Success causes the attack to spatter harmlessly off the blade.

Cult of Ecstasy: The Cult uses a lotus sword, a two-and-a-half-foot long Indian blade made of a blued steel metal with a simple one-handed pommel and an abbreviated upswept cross-guard with gold foil. Generally, the Cult sword manages to show up at important crux events — its appearance is almost symbolic with a turning point. Typically, if the sword has an owner, events conspire to bring the owner into important conflicts and meetings. If not, the sword generally disappears from view only to resurface in some place where it'll be found by a Cultist of appropriate Destiny. In game terms, the holder of the sword gains two dots of Destiny so long as the sword remains with him, but this also means that the individual often finds himself thrust into very dangerous situations.

Dreamspeakers: The Dreamspeakers' weapon is an uninspiring obsidian knife, just under a foot in length. The blade has many chips in it; over the years, it's been reshaped and rebuilt several times to retain its strength. Although this fetish weapon may not seem terribly impressive, it holds multiple spirits, some bound directly inside of it and others that respect it for the chiminage its former creators and owners gave. The blade has full effect upon spirits. In any place with a Gauntlet of 3 or less, the wielder may cut a hole directly into or out of the Umbra — such a passage lasts for two turns, but does not necessarily bypass the Avatar Storm unless it's at a place naturally shielded from said Storm.

Euthanatos: A curved knife functions as the Euthanatoic symbolic blade. Although apparently a simple weapon, this image is deceptive; no armor has any effect against this knife. It automatically seeks out weak points and slashes through armor like paper. If the weapon strikes an opponent who has broken a magical oath (see the Entropy Sphere in **Mage** p. 164), it kills the subject instantly on a successful hit. No magic or defense can stop this effect.

Order of Hermes: The Order inherited a medieval broadsword, a thin double-edged chisel-bladed piece suited for ritual work. As a symbol of authority, the sword lowers its wielder's difficulty on all magical effects by two so long as it is in hand. In certamen, the blade grants an automatic success on one action every turn, but by Hermetic tradition its use cannot be denied from any certamen challenge.

Sons of Ether: The Etherite blade resembles a short Gallic or Roman sword, wide-bladed and squat. It's made with the strongest technomagical materials science the Sons could devise, complete with mystic enhancement, Pattern reinforcement and nuclear bonding. This short sword cannot be broken or bent by any known force. (Presumably, an archmage or Exemplar could come up with something, but it wouldn't be easy.)

Verbena: The Verbena athame — essentially, a ceremonial knife — provokes a bit of a split in Verbena policy. On the one hand, some Pagan groups hold that blood should not be spilled because it is sacred; others believe that the same hallowed power makes blood an ideal magical tool. Both groups agree, though, that sacrifice is also a potent practice. The athame enables its user to sacrifice personal health and blood (health levels) to empower magical effects: Each health level not only counts as a point of Quintessence toward the effect, but garners an automatic success on the resulting effect. On at least two occasions a Verbena has killed herself in the course of casting an effect with this blade.

Virtual Adepts: The Adept blade doesn't really exist. Not as a physical object, anyway. The Adepts' "knife" is a computer program, used to cut through computer security and encryption. The holder of the datablade never botches a Computer-related roll, so long as the datablade's used somehow (for breaking a code or hacking into a site, for instance, but not for making new programs or recoding reality). In the Digital Web, the datablade can manifest as a foot-long xiphold weapon with the appearance of the underlying green grid structure that permeates much of unformatted webspace. In this form, the blade can strike any traveler in the Web, resulting in a dump (if it "kills" a projected traveler) or even killing someone immersed holistically. The blade cannot be copied, but it can make duplicates of itself that the holder can give out — such duplicates lack the powers of the original but still make effective weapons in the Web, although they automatically disperse after a scene.

Paradox Stone (5 pt. Charm)

Dreamspeaker Masters once made charms such as these in fair numbers, and the technique rapidly spread to other Tradition mages because of their utility. Making a Paradox stone isn't a simple task, but some mages still hoard these tiny charms.

Generally, Paradox stones are found by themselves or in small groups — much less than the usual bundles of ten in which one finds a charm (the cost listed is for ten; one by itself costs a half point). Most often, they're small crystals, but some mages even use otherwise normal rocks with small, elaborate designs painted on to them.

Just as a Master of Prime can nullify Paradox, a Paradox stone holds a small amount of Quintessence charged for just that same capability. While most Masters simply enchant a small stone at need, a few Masters were known to produce them in a form that could be saved for later. Typically, the stone has a single point of Quintessence in storage, tied up into its Pattern with the spell. When the mage suffers from Paradox, he simply makes sure that he's holding the stone and the stone itself crumbles into dust while the Quintessence counters the Paradox.

Naturally, some mages like to deck themselves out with as many of these stones as they can carry. This suffers from two major problems: First, the stones are rare enough as-is; second, few mages want to draw the sort of attentions that are brought on by carrying a dozen easily-accessible rocks of different pedigrees — generally the size of a quarter in diameter — all with their own Resonance.

Parking Karma (2 pt. Talisman)

Charms and hexes may not be as prevalent as they used to be, but plenty of people still use small symbols or items for good luck in various endeavors. One sample of such is the tongue-in-cheek "parking karma," which is really just one aspect of the otherwise ubiquitous minor Wonders that many mages own.

Parking Karma tends to take the form of a small slip of paper, a set of fuzzy dice or other affectation hung from the rear-view mirror or placed upon the dashboard of a car. The item makes sure that the mage always coincidentally happens across a convenient parking space. While perhaps a rather mundane use of magic, it certainly helps a mage get through an otherwise frustrating day. Other forms of such charms might be the small token that helps a mage to always get short lines at a store, or the gaudy necklace that ensures the mage has a good number when waiting for service somewhere. Such "day-to-day living" tokens have become a staple of many mages' existence and also a rather ubiquitous task in creation — a sort of proof that the mage can in fact create a mystic item, no matter how small. Some Sleepers even rely on similar (but unenchanted) tokens.

A Parking Karma token or similar Talisman typically has one Arete and a couple levels of Time or Correspondence magic — just enough for the user to spot a likely location or arrive at just the right time to take advantage of an opening.

Infinite Change Purse (3 pt. Artifact)

Old legends credit traveling heroes with purses or bags that never ran out of coin, or even with boots that always had a spare penny or allowed the owner to find a little bit of spare change when necessary. Modern Tradition mages, leery of drawing too much Syndicate attention with large transactions (like phone cards or fake credit cards), sometimes rely on smaller bits of wealth to see themselves through the day. The infinite change purse typically takes the shape of a small, battered, black fake-leather coin pouch with a zipper, but a few variants have been spotted, from small drawstring bags to thin wallets.

The mage can reach into the change purse and coincidentally draw forth a small amount of petty change. Some severe limits restrict this feat: The change cannot exceed the value of Resources 1 (it's *petty* change), and the mage can only draw out coins of a type that have previously been placed in the purse. Thus, if the mage wants to draw forth quarters, at least one quarter must have been placed in the bag previously. Two other strictures help in the maintenance of the magic: The mage must always place at least one coin into the bag from any spare change acquired, and if the bag is ever emptied or turned inside-out, its magic dissipates.

The purse itself uses a simple Matter/Prime effect to replicate coins of the types placed inside. Due to the heavy limitations on its use, making such a bag is generally easier than making a device with unlimited replicative capabilities (hence the low cost). A few types are built as Talismans with Arete, so that they're easier to use or usable by anyone, but these are rare.

Traveling Coat (4 pt. Artifact)

In the 1500s, these artifacts were cloaks. By the 19th century, a few had come up in the form of overcoats, and in the late 20th and 21st, they're usually trench coats. Regardless, they're all built with similar benefits in mind — namely, they help to ease traveling. Of course, modern travel offers many technological conveniences that probably far outweigh the benefits of such a coat, but during the Renaissance any traveler would've been delighted to own one of these.

The traveling coat generally has a spate of minor enchantments. The typical coat makes the wearer immune to the ill effects of low temperatures, down to

freezing; the wearer still feels the cold but suffers no hindrance from it. The coat has a slew of pockets that tend to be overlooked; although they can't hold anything too large for a usual pocket, they grant a 2-point bonus on attempts to conceal anything that fits within them. The coat is typically rugged and padded, offering the equivalent of one die of armor. The coat is fire resistant, but not fireproof (and, indeed, can be burned and destroyed).

A few rare and unique coats are made with more specific capabilities (and a commensurate increased cost), such as Correspondence pockets that hold much larger capacities than one would expect, improved resistance to fire and heat or a "blending" effect that helps the wearer to blend into crowds (treat as one dot of Arcane).

EMP Grenade (5 pt. Charm)

This is one of the inventions by the Sons of Ether that the Technocracy vigorously seeks to discredit. Unfortunately, the Technocrats have largely failed, and the technology behind EMP grenades is rapidly becoming a part of the accepted paradigm. Electromagnetic pulses are powerful bursts of electromagnetic radiation that destroy every piece of unshielded electronics within range. A decade ago, a team of Sons of Ether researchers led by electronics genius Dr. Laura Hanson "proved" that EMPs were not solely created by nuclear explosions. Instead, a small explosive charge, a large capacitor and a coil of wire were sufficient to generate small EMPs. They used this research to create the first EMP bombs.

EMP grenades are small explosive devices that resemble ordinary grenades. They can be set with a timer to go off anywhere from 5 seconds to 24 hours after they are activated, and they have a user-definable pulse radius between 30 and 200 yards. When the device explodes, anyone within 3 meters takes 2 dice of lethal damage (electromagnetic pulses aren't kind to the human nervous system). Also, every electronic device within the pulse radius is instantly destroyed. Crucial circuits within every radio, electronic toy, computer, fuel injection system, digital watch or piece of cyberware are instantly fried. Only devices that are specially shielded, or that are made using vacuum tubes and hardwiring, continue to work. Although all of the best Technocracy and Tradition-made electronics are adequately shielded, little else is. Even cars made after 1970 cease running and coast to a stop, often without steering.

EMP grenades are one of the more popular tools used by the Traditions, and a number of Tradition mages sell or give these devices to sympathetic groups of eco-terrorists or similar allies. However, they can be somewhat unreliable. If the damage roll for the EMP grenade results in a botch, the grenade fails and the EMP does not occur; otherwise, it functions as desired.

While the Sons of Ether pioneered Tradition EMP grenades, the Virtual Adepts quickly devised copies, and other Traditions sometimes make variants that work on mystic principles (a bound electricity spirit, for instance). Versions of this Charm are now fairly common among Tradition mages who expect Technocratic opposition.

For 5 points, the character has 10 grenades, as usual for a Charm. One grenade costs 1/2 of a Background point.

Organic Knife (2 pt. Artifact)

For the truly paranoid, or merely the exceptionally careful, this device can provide the user with easy access to a weapon in almost any circumstance. Originally made using a formula for memory plastic that a Virtual Adept stole from the Progenitors, the material of this knife has several unique properties. If heated to the boiling point of water (which can be either by accomplished by immersing the knife in boiling water for a few minutes, or placing it in a microwave oven for 30 seconds) the plastic becomes extremely soft and pliable. It can then be molded into a wide variety of shapes. Molds for bangle bracelets, large novelty key chains or plastic toys are usually provided with this weapon. Once it is allowed to cool, it will act as the item it resembles in all ways, except that the plastic is unusually hard and scratch resistant.

Since plastic knives are normally made in a variety of bright primary colors few ever suspect that it is anything other than what is seems to be. However, when hit against a hard surface with moderate force (merely dropping it on a hard floor is unlikely to exert enough force) the item's molecular structure alters and it instantly becomes a moderate-sized knife. Since the memory plastic is quite tough, this knife is just as hard and sharp as an ordinary steel blade. Botches rolled when using this knife normally cause it to either revert to its previous form or to shatter.

Mystically-inclined Traditions don't use the same memory plastics as technomancers, but instead rely on other organic compounds with similar properties. A Verbena might grow a wooden knife with these characteristics, or a Hermetic might have a bone knife scribed with a rune of changing. The effects are similar.

An organic knife functions in all ways like a normal knife when it's in knife form, including combat statistics. Larger blade or cudgel weapons are possible but not recommended, since they retain their mass and it can be hard to find a reasonable plastic accoutrement that would have mass enough for a full-on club or sword. The plastic can't be broken up between multiple objects.

Submersible Car (5 pt. Artifact)

Now that the Umbra is effectively cut off from easy visiting, many Tradition mages interested in exploration are turning to other regions. Since the depths of the oceans still contain a number of untapped and unmonitored Nodes, there has been considerable interest among Tradition mages in submersible craft. Based around a late model mini-van, this vehicle was developed by a faction among the Sons of Ether who were interested in discrete underwater exploration. This vehicle superficially resembles an ordinary mini-van. However, it is electrically powered, and advanced batteries, life-support equipment and underwater propulsion systems have replaced both the rear-most seats and the back door. When the vehicle enters the water the driver can convert it to underwater use at the push of a button.

The wheels retract, intake and exit ports for the inboard motors open, and the oxygen tanks and rebreather units supply fresh air. Underwater the craft can travel at speeds up to 20 kph, while on the surface of the water it can reach 40 kph. However, battery charge and life-support limits only allow this vehicle to remain submerged for up to 12 hours. Also, this vehicle is incapable of safely diving more than 2 kilometers below the surface. Diving deeper will destroy the vehicle and kill everyone within it.

On land, this vehicle can easily reach speeds of up to 120 kph. It seats up to five people and can carry several hundred kilos of gear. The right rear door on this vehicle can also convert to a small expandable airlock that will allow a single person to depart the vehicle at a time while keeping the van water-tight. Also, at least one group of mages has designed an undersea habitat with an airlock that can fit perfectly with this door. Unfortunately any botch to a driving roll usually results in a serious malfunction, which can require several hours to repair. Malfunctions while underwater can be fatal.

Only three submersible cars currently exist, all unique prototypes of the Sons of Ether. The Hermetic House of Thig has considered construction of a magical variant, but find resources for such a project hard to come by.

Tradition Rotes

Due to the fractiousness of Tradition paradigms, the Traditions have fewer common rotes than the Technocracy. While each Tradition has its own stock in trade for training and everyday use, the rotes that *all* Traditions use tend to fall into two categories: Ones so ubiquitous that there can't help but be a version for every Tradition, and ones so critical that every Tradition has learned to adapt them.

At Ease (Mind ••)

Resonance and mystical quirkiness tend to set mundane humans on edge around mages. While some unscrupulous mages might directly take control of other peoples' emotions to circumvent this problem, most subtle Traditionalists prefer to give off "harmless" vibes. With this rote, the Traditionalist seems more like an eccentric but otherwise harmless individual, instead of a strange and potentially threatening outsider.

System: The mage applies this rote to himself. Successes allow the mage to send off a weave of harmlessness and calm along with his normal Resonance. This negates interpersonal relationship penalties for Resonance on a one-success-for-one-die basis. Note that the mage must also generate a duration from the successes scored. Also, this effect does not require constant concentration, but does count as a running effect.

Smoker's Timing (Time ••)

A fair number of Tradition mages are smokers — probably a by-product of the stress of the lifestyle. Smokers have their own library of small tricks and amusements relating to their particular vice. As such, this rote relies more on the superstitions surrounding smoking than upon any sort of Tradition paradigm.

The smoker's timing relies upon the well-established urban legend that any time a smoker waits for something, he need only start a new cigarette and it'll arrive. The smoker can be waiting for traffic to move, for a meal to arrive, for a bus to show up — all he has to do is pull out a smoke, light it and take a drag. The phenomenon almost always takes place nigh-immediately thereafter.

System: This rote is very simple; the smoker doesn't so much force an event to happen, as garner a precognitive timing and happen to light up a cigarette at just the right (or wrong) time. A more powerful version of the rote might actually cause the smoker to alter time and circumstance in accord with lighting up a cigarette, though! Use the usual Arete roll successes to determine how close the smoker cuts his prediction. With only one success, the smoker probably makes it through one drag before having to crush out his cigarette and deal with the attendant problem (dammit!). With four or five successes, the event probably happens *just* as the smoker finishes a cigarette.

Node Raider (Prime •••)

Sometimes, there's just not enough time to wait for a Node to refresh a mage's Avatar, or to generate Tass, or to refuel a chantry... sometimes, a mage needs Quintessence *right now*, and there's no choice but to rip that energy straight from the Node at hand. Node Raiding is a long-established practice, once used commonly to steal enemy Quintessence while simultaneously denying the foe the Node's resources. In this modern age of dying magic, it's regarded as a much more criminal act, but occasionally mages don't have much choice....

The mage need only arrive at the site of a Node, as usual, and fire off the rote to steal its Quintessence. Ripping Quintessence in this fashion is quite deleterious to the Node, but it's a nigh-addictive rush of power to the mage — the mage can *feel* the pulsing, raw energy of creation course through his Pattern in a surge of magical might. Of course, any guardians that the Node may have — be they Technocrats, spirits or shapeshifters — are likely to be quite incensed by this sort of behavior.

System: The mage reseats his Pattern with respect to the Node's Quintessence stream, then calls upon this rote to tear its power out in a tremendous stream. Each success causes the mage to immediately absorb one Quintessence from the Node. The mage can also redirect this Quintessence into a Periapt or other storage medium without further casting. An extended ritual of the spell causes the mage to gain Quintessence as successes are scored, instead of waiting until the end of the ritual.

On the downside, the Node is suppressed for a number of days equal to the successes scored — it won't generate any Quintessence or Tass in this time. Worse still, every ten successes causes the Node to *permanently* lose one level of power. If the Node drops to a rating of zero, it's destroyed and no more power can be drained.

Fate Mark (Entropy ••••)

While some Traditions rely on a **Binding Oath** (**Mage** p. 164), especially before acknowledging the responsibilities of a Master, many rely on simple **Fate Marks** for recognition. The caster places a simple mark on the patterns of destiny around the mage, a sort of metaphysical bend that's recognizable to anyone with Entropy senses. The mage can customize this bend, so a true Tradition Herald may have a mark, a messenger may have a special mark or a traitor might have a mark. It's customary to place a **Fate Mark** on a newly-founded chantry, and some cabals also **Fate Mark** all of their membership. Of course, with a dearth of Masters of Entropy, **Fate Marks** aren't as easy to come by — but that also makes them more difficult to counterfeit.

System: A **Fate Mark** is essentially a metaphysical "tag." It carries the Resonance of the individual who cast it (so an onlooker can tell who made the mark, if he recognizes the Resonance), and can take on a unique sigil so that it's distinguishable from other marks. Such a fate mark is rarely permanent — usually it's renewed if the subject takes on a job and continues to carry it out over time. Removing a fate mark is also possible with this level of Entropy. A **Fate Mark** may additionally mark an area or chantry — so, a specific mark might indicate "This chantry is property of the Northern Wind cabal" or "This Node is a place of danger."

Node Spike (Prime •••, Mind ••)

The **Node Spike** rote is one of the more fearsome modern magics — it serves as a response to the Technocracy's recent trend of "tagging" Nodes with Resonance and then tracking down people who've used the Node and thus become carriers of that Resonance. The Traditionalist performs a symbolically painful or poisonous act — self-mutilation, drinking something mildly acidic (painfully so) or otherwise generating a strong aura of anguish. Then, the mage casts that concentrated hate and pain into the Node itself. The next time the Node's accessed with Prime magic, this psychic spike lashes out at the hapless Node user.

System: Successes scored on a **Node Spike** translate into duration, telling how long the Node remains tainted, and into effect dice like a mental impulse used as an empathic attack. The **Node Spike** generally causes pain, nausea and disorientation, although its effect level is resisted by the victim's Willpower roll. If the **Node Spike** manages to best the victim's Willpower, the hapless mage is overcome with wracking agony and stunned for a number of turns equal to the net successes of the effect. A more powerful variant uses Mind ••• to actually make the Resonance so strong that it's telepathically damaging; treat as a Mind attack. Once fired off, the **Node Spike** is discharged. Since this relies on tainting the Node's Resonance, it doesn't require Time to hang an effect; the Node itself is altered, just as if the mage had turned a dull chunk of metal into an effective blade. More esoteric versions of this rote might use Time •••• to hang an effect (usually Forces) so that when the Node's accessed, it fires off an actual physical attack.

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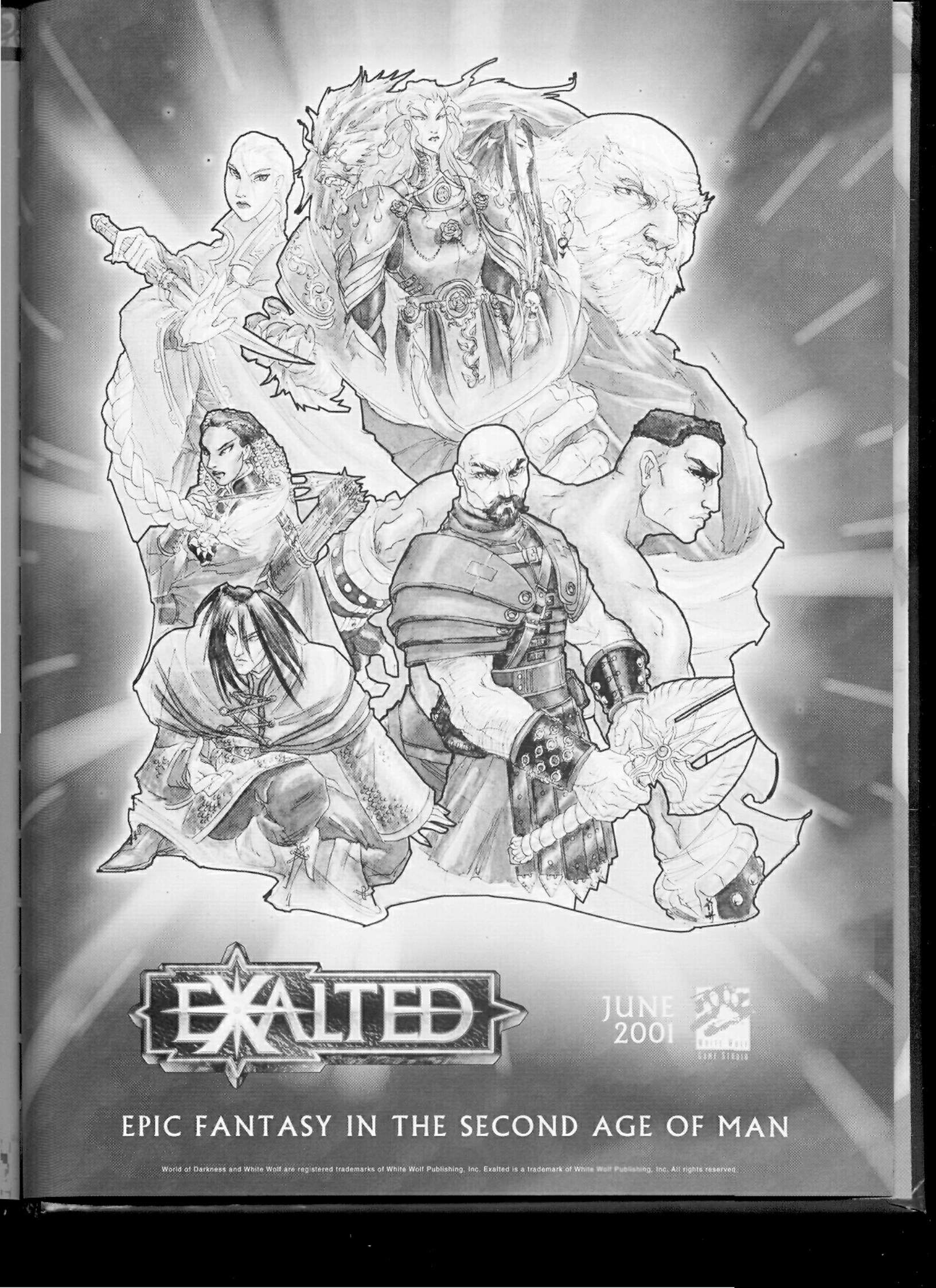

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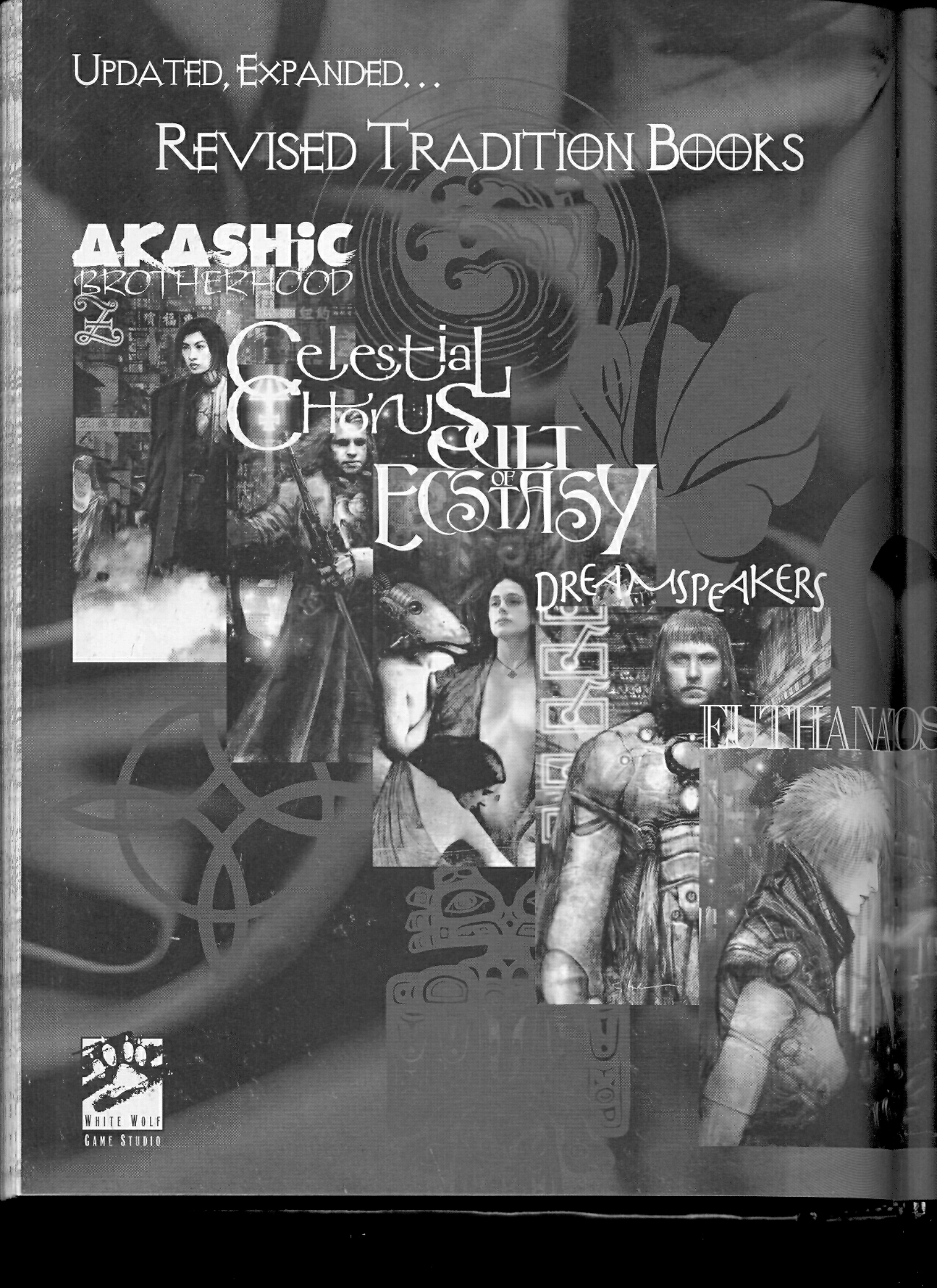
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