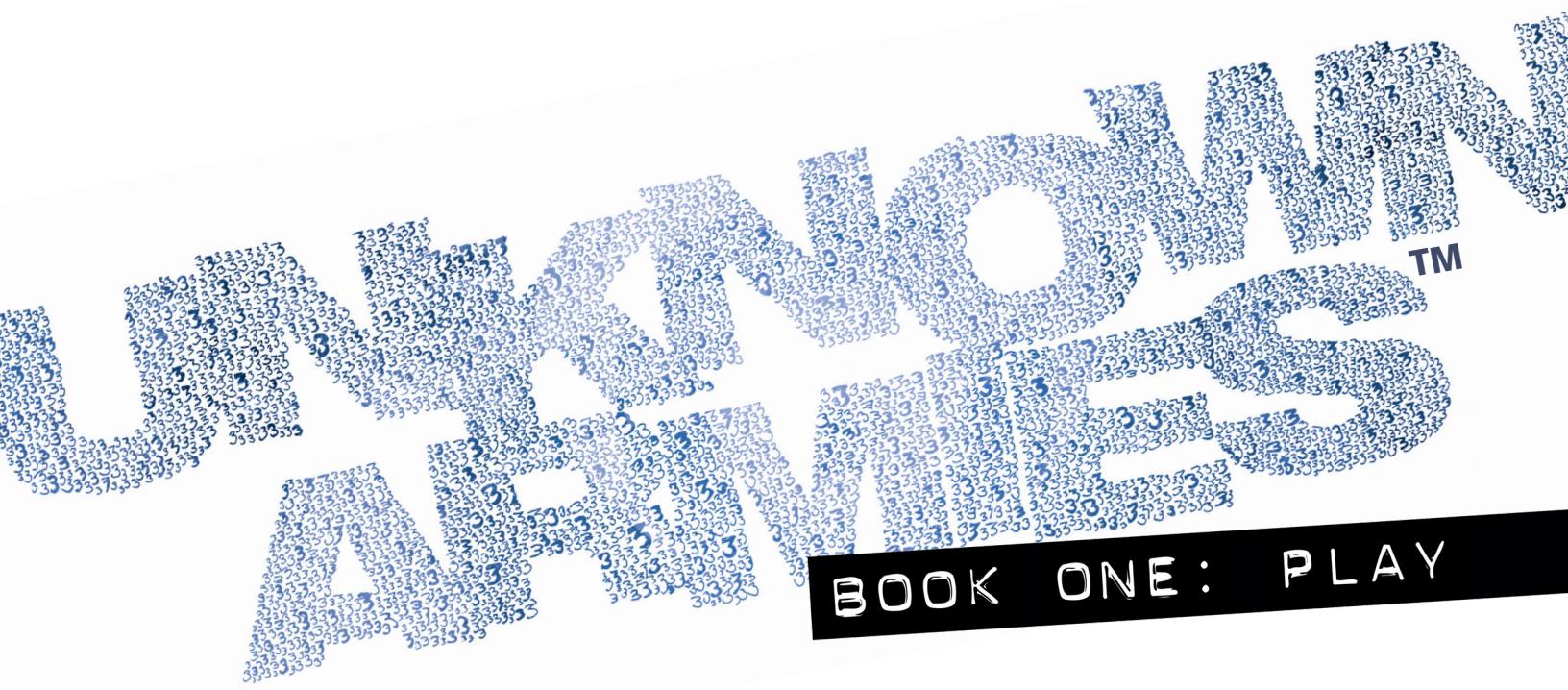


BOOK ONE: PLAY



BOOK ONE: PLAY

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To our legions of alpha, beta, and gamma playtesters and to our generous backers — this game exists because of you! You did this!

We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams; —  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world for ever, it seems.

*Ode*, Arthur O'Shaughnessy

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# 1: GO

*Unknown Armies* is an occult game about broken people conspiring to fix the world.

It's a game about people who want things very, very badly. Social justice, a fair shake, redemption for their myriad sins, or just a bigger slice of the pie, they want it. But no one is just going to hand it to them. No one else, frankly, gives a shit. Shits only *begin* to be given when their pursuit of their agenda inconveniences somebody — the folks benefitting from injustice and unfair shakes, or the people who were on the receiving end of those myriad sins, or the pie-eaters who placidly argue that sharing is for bitches and poor people.

Like every roleplaying game (or RPG), *Unknown Armies* takes the form of a moderated conversation between a collection of players. One player, usually one who has stronger evil mastermind tendencies, takes on the role of **gamemaster**, or **GM**. Instead of playing one lone person with lofty dreams, she portrays the whole world of lowly reality. She comes up with all the antagonism and entrenched inertia that keeps the characters' desires from simply falling into their laps like ripe fruit.

Players need to set an **objective**, a collective goal that they chase down, step by step, until they either fail resoundingly, abandon their quest when the price is too high, or achieve it.

Every one of these outcomes is acceptable. Every one can produce a spectacular story, because *Unknown Armies* is not about what gets done. It's about the people who do it. It focuses on character. But characters who aren't driven to achieve anything? They're not really worth the focus, are they?

There are a lot of games out there which feature heroes, saviors, champions... people who right wrongs, defend the weak, and slay the monster. Those games are great. This one's different. Instead of stopping the cultists or killing the beast or protecting the status quo, you *are* the cultist, the beast, the threat to tradition.

Without you, the world ticks on as it always has. Your job is to create a character for whom that is intolerable.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

*Unknown Armies* is a roleplaying game with rules that require dice. The dice are percentile dice, or a set of two ten-sided dice rolled together and read as a tens digit and a ones digit (00 is read as one hundred). You can get these dice from hobby shops, the internet, your cousin who's been playing other RPGs that use them, your own dice bag, wherever.

*Unknown Armies* is a roleplaying game for a group of people. We don't recommend playing alone, so try to get at least one other person, or, even better, three to four other people.

*Unknown Armies* is a roleplaying game that can be played at a table, or sitting around in chairs in a living room, or at a game store, or online using chat apps or hangouts. You just need to all be able to communicate with one another, roll dice somehow, and keep track of your character sheet and notes. We also recommend snacks, drinks, and a general agreement on whether it's cool or obnoxious to check your phone when it's not your turn.

*You know that I will never go. And I know that you will never stop.*

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## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS

# STRANGER

someone you don't know  
more peculiar  
only one letter away from strangling you

# IT'S ABOUT CHARACTERS

The first time you sit down to start *Unknown Armies*, you go through a series of steps that build the game from the center (your characters) outward (to setting, events, and mysteries). Create the game you want to play, define a character you want to see tested, and share with the GM the sort of challenges you want to overcome.

The heart of the first session is the group. The **player characters** (or PCs) are together for a reason, a shared and compelling objective. Pick something you can all get behind, because the game will suck — *suck*, I say — if you pick an objective to throw your GM for a loop, or make another player freak out, or as a weak sauce joke. If you don't want to play a game about supernatural assassins trying to hunt down the Secret King of the CIA, don't pick that. I know people are going to pick bad objectives and then whine about it like it's the *game's* fault they couldn't commit to anything worthy of sustained attention. You don't have to be one of them.

Future sessions are about those characters, in that setting, chasing that dream. It won't be a straight line. Your GM's job is to make it hard, make you question whether it's worth it, tempt you and distract you and terrify you. Maybe you give in to temptation and that's *all right*. Maybe you decide that, well, finding the Secret King of the CIA was a noble project but if we keep these sixty widows from getting ritually sacrificed *instead*, that's a win for us. Maybe the blowback from your own choices overwhelms and destroys you. All those outcomes are acceptable as long as they aren't *boring*. If everyone's interested in the story, you're playing it right, even if it turns into disaster and abject humiliation. Some folks dig tragedy, and some folks can't take success seriously if there's no real threat of failure.

## WHAT YOU WANT: OBJECTIVES

Objectives are something that changes the setting. They can be positive ("We want to find, or build, new parents for the kids at the orphanage!") or negative ("We want to kill Christopher!"). They can be concrete ("We want to steal the Lenina Ruby out of Jesse's safety deposit box!") or abstract ("We want people to stop thinking the number 13 is unlucky!") They can be **local** ("We're buying out that antiques store on 53rd!") or **weighty** ("We're going to make Greece haunted!") or even **cosmic** in scope ("We want to re-align the astrological correspondences of the planets!").

Like most uncertain things in *Unknown Armies*, your objective is measured as a percentile chance. 17% chance of killing Christopher. 42% chance of stealing that ruby. Once it hits 100%, you have bent events to your will. You poison Christopher's chicken tandoori, or found a lonely billionaire with unfulfilled maternal instincts, or get a small business loan.

You pick a **path** to your objective. The GM finds out obstacles on that path, as well as consequences from previous failures *and* previous successes. Most sessions are going to be about chasing some **milestone** on the path and either getting it or failing. Others are going to focus on fallout from previous sessions, or personal stuff that distracts from the objective. Every session should have an issue at the center and that issue should come to a head. Every session should involve doing something that can't be taken back.

Once you *accomplish an objective*, you can roll right into a new one, starting at 50% if it builds on your previous success. If you gamble and fail, you hemorrhage points from the objective and need to go into damage control. Or maybe

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you need to just pick a new direction. Christopher's not that bad, once you find out who's waiting in the wings to take over when he's out of the way.

## WHAT YOU'VE SEEN: SHOCKS

Objectives draw out the characters and show their natures in stark relief. But for that to work, individual characters have to be there, and more meaningfully than "My guy is really strong, pretty smart, loves animals but sometimes flies off the handle." All those can be true, and that could accurately describe a great *Unknown Armies* character, but it's not enough. We need to know what your character has *been through*.

We measure this with something called the **shock gauge**. The shock gauge is comprised of five **shock meters**, and they're a record of the absolute worst things that have happened to your character.

The meters measure **Helplessness** (times you've been unable to take action you felt was necessary), **Isolation** (when you've been cut off from society or loved ones), **Violence** (pain, injury, death), the **Unnatural** (experiences that challenge your perception of reality), and **Self** (your most personal failures and violations of your deepest beliefs).

Each meter has space for five **failed notches**, which you do not want to get. Failed notches are entirely bad. The only thing they help your character do is suck and die. Avoid them as best you're able.

Each meter also starts with eight **open notches**. The more open notches you have, the more your character is pure, unsullied, and maybe a little naïve. If you wish, you can start by changing some of those into **hardened notches**, which protect that meter from further shocks. So, for example, if you have a lot of hardened notches in Isolation, you're self-sufficient and used to being alone. Every character starts with, and keeps, one hardened notch on each meter (for a total of five notches in the gauge). It's a hard-knock world, pony.

As the game moves on, you're going to face further shocks and challenges. Rules-wise, these are called **stress checks**. If you get stabbed in the gut, that's a Violence check. You roll dice to see whether you can handle it or not. If you can't handle it, you get a new failed notch and a drastically reduced set of options. If you succeed at the roll, you get a new hardened notch.

These sorts of threats have ratings, since "I won't be your friend any more" is a less serious challenge to Isolation than "I'll divorce you" or "I'll accuse you of embezzling in front of the whole school board and they'll believe me." Hardened notches on a meter let you ignore lower stress checks, and the more notches you have on a particular meter, the more heinous a situation has to be to shake you.

Hardened notches are not an unmitigated advantage, however. Below, we describe **abilities**, and some are based on your hardened notches. Others are based on the number of open notches

## ABSOLUTE GAME VIRGINS

This is going to be the best experience of your life.

OK, kidding aside, you're new to RPGs, welcome! Don't let anyone tell you you don't belong. Greg's prepared a bare baseline primer on play, and you can download it and many other UA things at [atlas-games.com/unknownarmies](http://atlas-games.com/unknownarmies).

The internet has a lot of opinions about roleplaying games, many of which should be taken with a grain of salt and most of which can be safely ignored as long as you and your friends are having fun at your game sessions. There are many styles of play, ranging from casual, joke-ridden one-offs through intricately managed lengthy sagas played out weekly for months or *decades*. Different people like it in a lot of different ways.

The majority of tabletop games are played as a dialogue between a group of players, each making decisions for a main character in the story, while a game master describes the setting and judges the outcomes of actions the player characters attempt. Uncertain events are decided by rolling dice and consulting rules. The dice don't tell you what to do, especially in this game, but they may tell you what you've failed to do. Or, more pleasantly, what you've done splendidly.

Different games have different rules and focus on different things. Lots of partisans insist that their favorite set of rules is the best (as if one kind of fun invalidates another) when in fact it may just be that they like the kinds of games where things happen in a way that their best rules encourage.

Take chances, have fun, and don't worry about making mistakes. Mistakes keep things interesting.

on a meter. The more hardened notches you get, the more the abilities based on innocence erode.

See "Objectives" on page 13 of Book Two: Run for a thorough explanation of accomplishing an objective, but the important thing to remember is that they're collective. Share nicely.

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BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX  
IS NOT HO  
- ORIN E  
LIGON W  
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JE SILVER  
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## WHAT YOU DO: ABILITIES

Abilities measure a character's raw talent at broad swaths of activity. They're untrained and instinctive, and they tend to move around in play. If you want to be good at something, and for that to be bedrock to how your character *is*, construct an identity that does it.

Every character has ratings in ten abilities. They're based on the shock gauge. Five of them are derived from hardened notches, and five are based on open notches. What this means is that there's one suite of abilities that vulnerable, unspoiled, and innocent people possess, and another set that weathered, experienced, damaged folks have.

Note that no matter how many hardened notches you get, or how few, no ability ever drops below 20%. Even the most callous murderer can have his heart touched by a moment of unconsidered kindness, and even the gentlest schoolgirl might poke you in the eye if you really, really scare her. So every ability has 20% as its ground floor.

The abilities based on open notches are:

### CONNECT

When you want to make an emotional connection with someone, this is the ability you roll. It's what you use to avoid coming across as a dangerous creep. It's based on open notches in Violence.

### FITNESS

This covers resistance to drugs, poisons, and the common cold but is also a measure of whether you're in good shape or not. You can roll it to run, swim, climb a fence with alacrity, and show that slag Magda from Accounting how racquetball *really* gets played. It's based on open notches in Helplessness.

### KNOWLEDGE

Do you know a general fact you might have been taught in community college? Do you know how to do a task that a grown-up might accomplish without specialized training? These questions are answered with Knowledge rolls. These represent more than just your ability to filter out Wikipedia bias, although that sure comes into it. But more generally, this is a measure of your character's relationship to the truth. Someone with a lot of open marks is generally trusting, eager to learn new things, and confident in what childhood authorities said. Anything that isn't covered by another ability *might* be rolled with Knowledge. Or you just might not be able to attempt that particular task — you can't rely on beginner's luck for flying a jet plane or reading a language you were never taught. It's based on open notches in Self.

## NOTICE

Are you paying attention to the world around you instead of being wrapped up in spiritual torment or seething with resentment? That's the sign of a good Notice ability. Roll it to spot the one book on the shelf that doesn't belong, or to find that missing earring, or to register that Chauncey is not his normal chipper self today. It's based on open notches in the Unnatural.

### STATUS

How well-regarded and trusted are you within your community? This does not necessarily indicate money, though it could. It's more a matter of whether you act like you belong and have people who vouch for you. Are you on a first-name basis with your pastor? Do cops give you warnings instead of tickets? Do you have more than one person you could call from jail for a bailout? Those are the marks of good Status. It's based on open notches in Isolation.

The abilities based on hardened notches are:

### DODGE

This is what you use to avoid the punches, slaps, and hurled turkey dinners that characterize the lives of people who've had to develop high Dodge abilities. It's based on hardened notches in Helplessness.

### LIE

Practice makes perfect, and people who use deceit as their main compass for navigating life usually have some serious shame they're hiding. Lie is the dark twin of Knowledge because the Self meter shows how dysfunctional your character's relationship is to facts and truth. If that meter has taken some hard hits, lies roll off your tongue because truth and falsehood are just different sides of the same bullshit coin. Roll it to assure your lover you're not sleeping around, and to tell the cop your ID is in your other pants, and to insist to the bouncer that you are supposed to be on the goddamn VIP list! It's based on hardened notches in Self.

### PURSUIT

This ability is good for running away from people, and for running after people. It works equally well for purse snatchers, skip tracers, and honorary Dukes of Hazzard. When you need to peel out after the guy who stole your wife's corpse, or run and climb and slog across icy streams as the scent hounds bay in the distance, roll Pursuit. It's based on hardened notches in Isolation.

If you want to be good at something, and for that to be bedrock to how your character *is*, construct an identity that does it. See pages 10 and 42 for more on identities, and page 24 in Book Two: Run for guidelines for creating new ones.

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BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
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## SECRECY

This is an ability you roll to hide yourself, or objects, from the scrutiny of others. The more you learn about the real nature of the cosmos, the greater your incentive to hide. It's based on hardened notches in the Unnatural.

## STRUGGLE

Can you throw a punch, wrestle someone to the ground, break a clinch, or put someone in a stranglehold? Then you know how to handle yourself in a brawl. A high rating does not indicate training in the gentle art of self-defense. It indicates that when you bite people, they worry about infection more than you do. It's based on hardened notches in Violence.

## WHAT DRIVES YOU: PASSION AND OBSESSION

The shock gauge gives you a pretty good idea of what emotional meat grinders a character has been through and how many times, but they can be impersonal. One brawling social outcast may have a very different personality than another, when you get to know them both. The keys to an individual are in what motivates and drives them. Characters in *Unknown Armies* have four such keys: three **passions** and one **obsession**.

The three passions are **fear**, **rage**, and **noble**, and they're pretty much what they say on the label. Your fear passion is what scares you the most, be it as concrete as crocodiles or as abstract as dying unloved. To escape your fear, you might abandon a friend or humiliate yourself. Your fear passion always threatens a specific shock meter.

The rage passion is what *bugs* you the most, the intolerable irritant that you can't shut up about and strive to thwart, wreck, and harm: gropers on the subway, bigot cops who don't get punished, or the smug adherents of traditional religion.

Then there's the noble passion, the ray of hope on dark days which is, quite simply, you at your best. Whether you're unflaggingly loyal, truly believe in racial equality and understanding, or love art and literature, it's the kind of thing that you'd sacrifice for without reward, and support without reservation. It's what can make you face your fears and set aside your anger.

By acting in tune with your passions, you can get that rarest of prizes: a second chance. If you fail a roll while fleeing your fear, or fighting your rage, or upholding your nobility, you can re-roll it. Alternately, once per session, you can *switch the dice around* if that new result would help you.

Finally, there's the obsession. All player characters in *Unknown Armies* are obsessed with something: if you want to play someone cool and disinterested, I'm afraid you're out of luck. The characters' obsessions are boundlessly fascinating to them, they're the lenses through which they regard the world, and the bedrock upon which their assumptions rest. An obsession may scare

them or anger them sometimes, it may lure them away from their better natures, but in the end they can't leave it alone. More than any other passion, it's who they *are*.

Your obsession ties directly to an identity that fits with it. Whenever you roll for that, you can flip-flop the dice. Not just once a session like the passions, but *every time*. You can't redo failed rolls though, 'cause that would just get *crazy*. Nor can an ability be an obsession.

If you want to be an **adept**, your obsession has to relate to that. *Adepts* are people whose obsession lets them tap directly into a magickal tradition or practice.

## WHO YOU ARE: IDENTITY

The final component of your PC are some self-defined capacities known as identities. You roll these to accomplish actions that are in doubt and when you're in a stressful situation.

What's an identity? Could be anything. Parachutist. Police Detective. Manslut. Accomplished Pianist. House Painter. Assassin. Whatever it is, you get a percentile rating. If you have the identity House Painter 35%, you have a 35% chance of doing anything a house painter reasonably might in the course of painting houses while under stress.

Every standard identity substitutes for at least one ability, by default. Some can substitute for more. Substituting for an ability, after the first, is an example of a **feature**. Each identity gets two free features, the most common are substituting for an ability when you'd normally roll that ability and substituting for an ability when making stress checks. There are other possible features, however, but right now, consider identities the stats you're going to roll most often.

The guideline is if you'd say, "Of course, I can \_\_\_\_\_, I'm a \_\_\_\_\_", you're an expert. Of course I can tell if the music's any good, I'm an accomplished pianist. Of course I can run that license plate, I'm a police detective. Of course I know where he meant by "that cougar bar," I'm a manslut.

If you're a little concerned about the way shifts of the shock gauge might impact abilities (e.g., your character might become well-adjusted and start to suck at pounding on people) pick an identity to cover it. *If a field of endeavor is central to your character, it should be an identity*, not the fallback ability.

For more on adepts and schools of magick, read "Adepts" on page 124.

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See "Identities" on page 41 for more about unpacking an identity.

Switching the dice around is also called taking a flip-flop, a little dice trick described in "Flip-Flops" on page 13.

# THE WORLD

Now that you have an idea of how idiosyncratic characters can be and their capabilities, let's turn to the GM's side of the table. The game master, as we mentioned earlier, is the player whose role is to present the rest of the world. What is that world like?

Well, on the surface it looks like modern day reality. You can play a bang-up game of *Unknown Armies* set in the past, but you're on the hook for your own research if you go that route. Otherwise, the same person's the president, most of the same shows are on TV, and the internet works the same way, near as anyone can tell. People drive cars and pay taxes and whine about partisan gridlock.

It is a world where physical laws are studied and trusted, where exceptions to cause and effect simply are not accepted. It's a rational, steady, objective world where coincidences are just things that happen at the same time, not events influenced by secret skeins of meaning.

It is a matter of great cultural confidence that there is no such thing as magic. Sure, people are free to believe whatever they want, no matter how illogical or unprovable or transparently wrong. But, you know, fuckin' grown-ups don't believe in magic.

You believe in magick.

That is, your player character had personal experiences with powers that chortle at everyday logic while murmuring, "How quaint." Y'all have seen science with its pants off and realized it's stuffing its shorts when it goes onstage. Magick-with-a-k is willpower times understanding equals *get your wish*, which is why it's spelled differently from the word that indicates stagecraft practiced in Las Vegas and at children's birthday parties. One is a performer pulling a rabbit from a hat. The other is a psychic surgeon pulling a tumor out of your brain.

People think the world is consistent and rigid, but you know it is pliable and tattered and full of holes. Sometimes you can slip into a hole and come out the other side somewhere wonderful. Sometimes you step in a hole in the dark and it snaps your ankle like a chopstick.

The world can change, and you don't have to be rich, or born special, you don't have to be brilliant, you don't even need to be white. You just have to know the truth. Even a little bit of it.

## CREEPY WEIRDOS

If you and your crew were the only people who knew about how the whole deal really works, you'd be in the catbird seat, laughing down at all the poor pigeons shackled and blinded by their devotion to conventional reality. As it happens though, you're not first in line at the bird feeder. Not by a long shot.

There are cults out there that want to usher in a new dark age in which literacy becomes a hereditary privilege. There are scary racists running adept training camps. There are mystics so attuned to their cosmic patrons that they regard the laws of physics as a sometimes food and there are others who have no idea what they are but who have still amassed hundreds of followers willing to kill or die or vote as a bloc. There are grotty old magi who want to smack down any upstart who challenges their occult hegemony. There are magick conspiracies that fester in the government,

or tamper with your food, or owe allegiance to nothing on Earth.

There are people who never die.

They know each other, and they're going to know you, and if you're lucky, tough, and demented enough, you'll get to know them too.

There are hundreds of flavors of occultist, but if you have to break it down into broad categories, the hierarchy is determined by power. Of course it's power. What else would you expect?

**Chargers** are the people in charge, and it's no accident **charges** are the current and currency of magick. A charger is someone who has proven power to kick something that's usually immune to human tampering, whether that's a law of thermodynamics or the inchoate longings buried deep in the human heart.

**Checkers** are people who aren't as weird, feared, and revered as chargers, but that doesn't mean they necessarily put up with any bullshit. They're experiencers, people who saw something otherworldly and responded by paying attention and moving closer. That alone puts them way above the people who ignore the strangeness and instinctively withdraw from it. Checkers may know a trick or two — hell, they may have more root power in their gris-gris than many acknowledged chargers — but the powerful ones tend to have social deficits or plain old delusions that keep them from accomplishing anything useful. The checkers to watch out for are the practical, sensible people whose checks don't bounce, but who still won't be buffaloed away from what they want by some bleeding walls and a black velvet wardrobe. In all likelihood, the PCs are checkers.

**Pony** is the current occult term of contempt. A pony is someone whose feelings can be trampled without repercussion, whose money can be borrowed and not repaid, whose lover can be propositioned without fear of meaningful reprisal. They're vehicles, stooges, patsies — the second set of prints on the murder weapon and the guy who winds up being left behind when it's time to burn rubber. Nobody with any self-respect calls himself a pony, and saying it to someone's face is the kind of humiliation that can make even a mouse roar. If you don't know who the pony at the party is, it might be you. Or he might just be out on a beer run.

## THE SECRET MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

Invisible, disembodied *things* watch this world and influence its trends and progress at the highest levels. Their power is undetectable... almost. It's so thoroughly baked into the nature of reality that it looks like physics or mass psychology or good ol' coincidence. But you can see their shadow passing over the world in dreams, in symbols, in sudden outbreaks of order when events ought to be chaotic.

They are called the **Invisible Clergy** and even a tinfoil hat won't protect you. They're already *in* you. And you're in them.

Individuals within the Invisible Clergy are called **archetypes** and they aren't human. They used to be, but they fulfilled some broad, necessary social role so perfectly that they were plucked out of the coarse, gross realm of matter and taken up to a place where probability becomes manifest.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
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The very few people who've made the trip back called this higher realm the **Statosphere**. They're in pretty rough shape, though.

The way it seems to work is, if you embody something that enough people recognize as a social role — the Mother, the Hunter, the True King — you **ascend** from mortality into existence as an undying, archetypal representative of that principle. But if someone else comes along and does a better job at being the Necessary Servant or the Naked Goddess or the Captain, the sitting archetype gets ousted and returns to being a mere human.

There's only so much room at the top though. The Invisible Clergy only holds 333 former people, and as soon as it's full they scrap everything and start again. The archetypes merge into one great grisly creator/destroyer, they eject everything in the world like a menstruating uterus and start over, fertile and renewed and ready to be impregnated by 333 archetypes, starting the cycle once more.

If the mind of humanity is full of kindness and compassion and hope, the next universe can be a better place. If people can only trust hatred and groupthink and greed, the cosmos we create will be hell on Earth.

The Invisible Clergy is a bickering senate of the ideas we all voted for, whether we meant to or not. As with any truly functional democracy, we get what we deserve — good and hard.

## AVATARS

If archetypes are the distant, unavailable political insiders in this mythology, they have their ward-heeling activists in **avatars**. Or if you don't like that metaphor, avatars are the rabid fans to the archetypes' rock stars. They're the sniping, enabling, middle school wannabees to the

archetypes' popular girl queen bees. It's important to get a good metaphor for avatars, because that's their primary tool. Metaphors build a bridge between avatars' entirely human lives of undercooked linguini and cute shoes on sale and online auto payments through the credit union, and the abstract principles of justice and servitude and fate that are the Invisible Clergy's stock-in-trade.

One becomes an avatar through imitation. To be an avatar of the Mother, wear blue and guide children and, if at all possible, be pregnant. To be an avatar of the Star, be adored and perform and have the kind of clothes that make people ask "Who are you wearing?" Archetypes have symbols and actions old and new, and those who walk the walk work the archetypes' will in the world — not deliberately in the sense of taking orders, but because overlap between what the avatar's actions support and what the archetype stands for are very near to complete congruence.

The bridge goes both ways, too. The more an avatar resembles the archetype, the more the archetype is able to bend reality and make things go right for his mortal do-boy. Usually this takes subtle forms — psychological effects, intuitions, or "coincidences" that only help. But some more powerful and determined avatars can straight-up fly, survive *decapitation*, or order car crashes to go to their room and think about what they did.

Big showy stuff like that is usually the prerogative of **godwalkers**. Every archetype's best and most dedicated follower gets special treatment, serving as the archetype's bodyguard, fist, and envoy in the material world. But godwalkers are double-edged: because they're so close, they're the most likely to replace their patrons. Ask Indira Gandhi how trusting bodyguards works out.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Friends and  
lovers and  
enemies. I've  
eaten all  
their eyes to  
see my own  
exquisite  
splendor.



## ADEPTS

If avatars are the folks skipping to the front of the line because they're dressed right, **adepts** are the guys getting thrown out the back screaming about how they'll start their own goddamn nightclub! With klezmer music! They go against the grain, sometimes out of deliberate contrarianism, sometimes because their nature is just alien to cultural norms and they don't even have a chance of hiding it.

Every adept is obsessed with something important that most people take for granted, and every adept insists that everyone but them has it wrong. There are sex adepts who can't do it for pleasure or procreation, only as a ritual that gives them the keys to the coincidence engine. There are car obsessives who don't care where the road goes, and gun nuts who don't see firearms as weapons that propel bullets, but as talismanic expressions of the boundary between the rights of the state and the individual.

They're crazy — or, at least, weird as balls. But what sets adepts apart from the far more common lunatics and strangelings of the world is that when an adept screams, "Not your way, MY WAY!" at the normally-uncaring sky... sometimes the sky backs down.

Adepts have magick and they can Do Stuff.

## GUTTER MAGICK

To be an avatar is to slavishly obey what society thinks your role ought to look like, while the road of the adept is paved with stubborn, pathological self-will. In both cases, the balance between being social and being an individual is skewed. The idea that the way to create occult effects depends, not on painting pentagrams in your basement and chanting in dead languages but, rather, acting more like everybody than anybody or being a social outlier of epic proportions... that can be a tough sell to people who conscientiously read their Lesser Key of Solomon or put up with a bunch of robe-and-candle initiations. And actually, the old grimoire and eye of newt stuff can work. Sometimes. If you don't mind getting really smelly, and if you're OK with effects that you could duplicate with half the effort and trips to the local pharmacy and hardware store. Those sorts of **rituals** still hold their appeal, and some of them actually *can* produce effects that science would call impossible. But you have to kiss a *lot* of frogs to get a prince.

Now, if you don't want to be an avatar, or an adept, or spend literally years coughing over moldy old paper to get one or two functioning rituals, your option is what practitioners call reality bruising and everyone else calls **gutter magick**. It's nowhere near as strong or quick as the stuff adepts routinely dish out, and it's not as reliable and simple as the avatars' tricks. But though it's complicated and slow and effortful to cast, and its effects are deniably subtle to the point that skeptics don't need to bust a sweat before dismissing them as confirmation bias, it's real. Gutter magick changes things.

Part of gutter magick working is that you have to want it really badly but, as previously stated, that's not a problem for characters in *Unknown Armies*. Another part is constructing layers of symbolic meaning, paralleling *this* with *that*, metaphier and metaphrand. When done right, it makes things more likely, or less. It won't let you walk into a casino with the confidence that Helen of Troy is going to turn up as the river of your third hand in the poker tournament. But it could let you walk in with even odds against the house, instead of being dead money.

Adepts and avatars can use gutter magick, but 99% of the time they don't want to. They have much better juice in the bottle.

## WHAT THE...?

In addition to the human stuff on the fringes, there's magick places and things and objects in play that were never human but possibly want to be. There are parasites on the mortal view of the world. There are spiders whose webs depict Lucie Arnaz and comic books that read their buyer until her edges get blurry and smudged. There are unholy congeries of human limbs and prostheses clattering through haunted hospitals by night, dismissed by the staff as narcotic mass delusions. There are places that eat cars and shit extinct animals with no fear of man. There are haunted hollows, genius beehives, and urban legends that can make you the unreal one.

Checkers try to figure out these mysteries. Chargers try to control them. Ponies die to show how the monster works.

I followed the same person from station to station and they never had the same body twice

## 1: GO

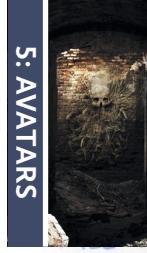
## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS



# THE RULES

Let's take a moment and let all the portentous urgency of the magick stuff sink in. Deep breath. OK?

OK.

All of that is the setting of the game, it's complicated and layered and confusing. It has to be, because if it was straightforward there wouldn't be much mystery or surprise, and it's hard to run a horror game without those. You know this is a horror game, right?

But what *shouldn't* be complicated is the rules. When the GM tells you roll an ability or an identity or to take a stress check, we want that to be easy. So it's always a **percentile roll**.

## PERCENTILE ROLLS

You roll two ten-sided dice, usually numbered 0-9, and read them to get a number from 01-100. The double-aughts are read as 100. You can get one die that's labeled 00-90 in increments of ten and another that's 0-9, or you can get different colors and say which is which before rolling. But it has to be clear which die is the tens place and which is the ones, because getting a 91 is very different from a 19.

## RESULTS

When you roll, you're rolling against something with a percentile rating. Maybe you have a rating of 40% in Lie. If you roll a 40 or lower as you gaze intently into the news cameras and insist "I never laid a hand on those circus performers!" you have succeeded, to some degree. If you roll a 41+, you have failed. Similarly, if you have an identity of Disbarred Lawyer 75% that substitutes for Lie, you can succeed with a roll of 75 or less, and fail only on 76 or more.

You only get asked to bust out the dice when it's interesting for an issue to be in doubt or when the situation is stressful. Roll Pursuit to get over that fence before the dog bites you. Roll Dodge to take cover as airplane wreckage falls from the sky. Do or do not.

Other times, however, a greater degree of nuance is wanted. There are some results that tell you a little more than the simple binary yes or no. They're listed below.

### THE FUMBLE (00)

Any time you look down the double barrel of a 00 result, you failed a lot. You got a fumble. Even if your chance was 100% (in which case, why did you roll?), a 00 means you screwed the pooch. It is a perfect confluence of bad luck and poor action. Your GM can inflict any vaguely plausible bad outcome, short of death. But if you failed while using an identity, at least you can put an *experience check* beside it.

### MATCHED FAILURE

With a matched roll — 99, 77, 55, anything where the dice are the same number — something unusual happened. If that matched roll is also a failure, it was something unusually bad. At least identity failures get experience checks. 00 is technically a matched failure, but worse, which is why it's a fumble.

### SIMPLE FAILURE

If you roll something higher than your ability or identity, but the dice don't match, that's a simple failure. The attempt didn't work out, you put an experience check. If it's an identity roll, you rub some dirt in it, and move on. If it's necessary to know which of two simple failures is *worse*, it's the higher number.

### SIMPLE SUCCESS

You got what you sought or did what you tried. If it's important to know which of two simple successes is better, it's the higher number. Like *The Price Is Right*, you want to get close to your score without going over.

### MATCHED SUCCESS

As with matched failures, successes where the dice are 11 or 33 or 22 are unusually good.

### THE CRIT (01)

Not only did you succeed, you *clobbered* it. The outcome was the best you could reasonably hope for — maybe even a little better than that.

### FLIP-FLOPS

Anyone who has played any game with percentile rolls has, at some point, rolled that 54 and thought "Oh! If only I could switch the places of the dice so that it becomes a 45, I could succeed!"

Well, a flip-flop is when you can switch the places of the dice so that you succeed. Or sometimes just to get a *better* success — flip-flopping a 10 into an 01 can make a big difference.

You can't do this any ol' time you want, however. When rolling an identity that has been *related to your obsession*, you can flip-flop every roll. Otherwise, you can flip-flop one roll per session, per passion, if the *passion is relevant to success*. If you roll an 81 and fail to escape your greatest fear, for example, but an 18 would let you succeed, invoke your fear passion and de-ass the area.

Some other things let you flip-flop rolls, but they're usually magick, and therefore capricious and unreliable.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

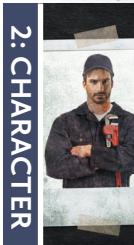
3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

You cannot have power over the world until you have power over yourself.



Find out more about these concepts in "What Drives You: Passion and Obsession" on page 9.



## HUNCH ROLLS

You may get a hunch roll at some point, because of magick. Here's what *that* is: you simply roll the dice and keep the result. The next time you have to roll an identity, stress check, or ability, you already have the result. So if you get a hunch roll and receive an 88, you'd better try to find something that merits a roll but where the consequences are slight, to get that bad luck out of the way. If your hunch roll is a 17, you might become conservative in your actions until it's a really *big* advantage to know that you *will* succeed.

Getting multiple hunches is rare, but it can happen. When it does, roll two sets of dice, or four, or however many hunches you got. You can then apply them in *any order you want*. But you must spend all hunches before making any other rolls.

You never get hunches with objectives. Hunches are personal. Objectives are too big for them.

The trouble isn't with the starting. It's always with the stopping.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## THE TRIGGER WARNING

When I was first getting started, some books had boilerplate alerts — it's all fiction, mature audiences, for entertainment purposes only — and trigger warnings hadn't yet entered the national lexicon.

This is, among other things, a horror game. Obviously, it has horrifying material in it. At one point, it's got overt cultural imperialism and ghosts and class warfare *and* cannibalism all bundled together. (That's in *Book Two: Run*.) It's a horror game about people, so we touch on a lot of the vileness people do.

That almost sounds like bragging, doesn't it? Our horror is soooo horrible it's, like, *double horror*. I don't want to exploit human evil for profit and entertainment, but there is something in me that craves these stories. Something that feels like a balance is redressed when a story says "No, sometimes the wolf wins, people are capable of the utmost evil, there is darkness and it looks like *this*."

It's not universal, but I find that a lot of horror fans are people whose lives haven't been all sweetness and light and net positive outcomes. We relish this material because it takes our trepidation seriously. Yes, you should be scared! The world is scary! Anyone who tells you different probably wants to *get you!* If you're in that category, I wish your life had been easier. Then again, as the old saying goes, "Shit in one hand and wish in the other: see which fills up first!"

Instead of impotently wishing the past wasn't the past, I'm offering an engine for telling stories, because sometimes telling a story about our hurts and regrets and fears makes them more manageable and less immediate. But if you fear that the foulness we deliberately engage on these pages is going to make your pain less manageable and more immediate, do what you have to do. Give it a pass, or read it alone first, or whatever you need.

Tabletop roleplaying has a dimension beyond a simple text though. If you play *Unknown Armies*, there are also the other people at the table, and they may bring thorny issues that aren't in this book. Maybe they're grappling with something on their own, maybe they don't understand what it means to someone else, or maybe they just like shock value.

Sometimes, I like shock value. As a horror writer, sometimes you just want to gross people out.

If things at the table overwhelm you, excuse yourself, and either make up a reason or tell the other people "I can't face that. Didn't want to interrupt the game, but there it is. Can't do it." If you can go forward and get things back to where you're glad to participate, good on you, but no game is worth any participant's misery. This isn't Omelas.

If things at the table overwhelm someone else, be cool. The point of the game is to be interesting and involving and dramatic and (yes) fun, so if someone is actually *suffering* because of the game, it's off the rails. Don't blame the passenger for the train wreck, and don't blame me — I just lay track. Do, however, try to get it back on course. Maybe build in a detour, or maybe give the distressed player a little time to get it together and see if you can find a way forward and through.

Some of the scary stuff in *Unknown Armies* is made up from whole cloth, which is no doubt part of the appeal. You can get your frisson on and then, when it's over, put it in the box labeled "Not Real" and go on with your day. But some of the stuff in here happens all the time. For some people, human trafficking and murder and racism are way too real. Treating real tragedies the same way one treats imaginary monsters can rub people the wrong way, hard, if they've got personal history with those tragedies. In many ways, horror monsters stand in for real traumas we can't touch and confront and stake through the heart. Know who you're playing with to get the balance between the realistic and the fantastic right.

That said, if someone chooses to play this game, triggers and all, they're indicating a willingness to engage the unexpected. Respect that. If they warn you off a particular topic, ("No rape for me, thanks!") respect *that*. Get on the same page.

If someone tells you they don't want X and you decide to give them extra X? Put this book down and get a therapist, you've got bad issues.

Even the simplest RPGs can veer into dark territory unexpectedly, and *Unknown Armies* wasn't designed for clear, straightforward Good versus Eevil. That puts it at particular risk of disturbing people. But I think the intensity and depth of its stories are worth it. I hope you agree.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## You ever have one of those moments where you had to reconsider your whole life? I've had two. The first was in 1998 and the second was in 2003.

Let me specify that I'm not talking about finding an ethos — getting exposed to Jesus, or Rand Paul, or ICP — and deciding that's your mental eyeglasses and now you're 20/20. And I'm not talking about an existential crisis where you wake up and realize you don't love your spouse, and you're thirty-three, and you not only don't know what you want to do when you grow up, you're starting to suspect no one ever does or ever has. (I had the ethos one when I was seventeen, and the existential one in 1996.)

No, I'm talking about a radical assault on the unexamined foundations of day to day life. I mean an unveiling where it seems like the bottom drops out of making sense and everything spiritual, scientific, instinctive, and logical goes from being the four suits tidily arranged from ace to king in your mind, and instead gets bridge-shuffled seven times, so that the possible permutations of the fifty-two cards (fifty-four with jokers) exceeds the number of atoms in the observable universe.

I know people who call it crossing the unicorn. Or, at least, I knew those people once upon a time. Between 1998 and 2003.

In 1998 I was divorced, job-hunting, and renting a ranch-style house with my old college friend Maria. We had the second-worst yard on the block, once our landlord realized neither of us was going to sleep with him or lay out in bikinis while he mowed. The worst was in front of James Neville's house, five doors down.

Maria wasn't my weirdest friend, but she was on that end of the spectrum. James Neville was Maria's weirdest friend, and we wound up going to a party at his place, walking over the cigarette butts and bottle caps on his worst-tended lawn, but James and Maria don't really matter, because also in attendance at that 1998 party was a guy named Chris Four. (As near as I can tell, his last name really was the same as a digit, but I never saw his birth certificate or anything.)

James Neville was into UFOs and numbers stations and was the first person I knew to read Harry Potter, but he was a little too strange for me to really be buddy-buddy with him and drink in his presence past the point of a teeny-tiny buzz so I could still drive

away if necessary. Like I said, he was Maria's weirdest friend.

Chris Four was *James'* weirdest friend. He was into Terence McKenna and math rock and 'zines. He was the first person I knew who read *Dirk Allen*, and when I met him at James' party, he was in the kitchen giggling and spraying the oven with something from a little atomizer.

"If you're into cleaning ovens," I said, "I've got a doozy. Super-filthy." I immediately worried he would think I was hitting on him, which I don't *think* I was. He was a good-looking guy, if you like men raw and lean and ponytailed. But it went right over his head, I think. In a good way.

"I'm not cleaning the oven," he said. "I'm getting it high."

"Oh. OK," I said, reconsidering any flirting.

"It smells of fried lavender now," he said. "It's hallucinating that it cooked flowers instead of pizzas."

"I think I'm going to go get a drink now." I was starting to back away.

"You think I'm batshit insane," he said, with a charming grin.

"Um..."

"It's all right," he said. "Here. Watch."

He flipped open a cookbook on the counter and said, "We've got, what, here?"

"A recipe for... pasta and chickpea soup," I said, deciding to humor him while staying carefully out of grab range. James kept his knives on a magnetic strip. They were right behind me.

Chris sprayed the page and the ink ran and melded. Then it reformed into a woodcut print of a panda bear and string of words in that fancy German font — fraktur, I think? — that were laid out in stanzas like poetry.

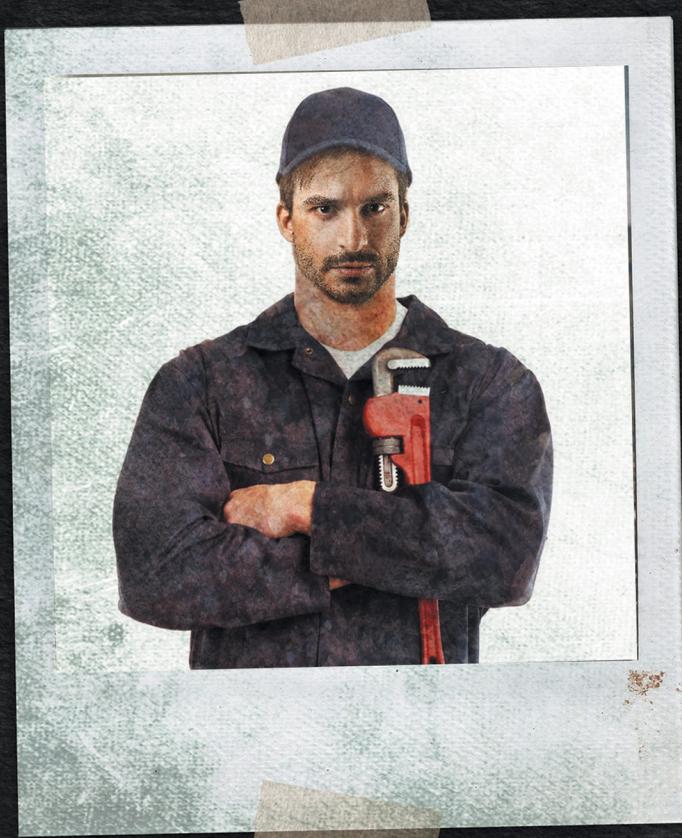
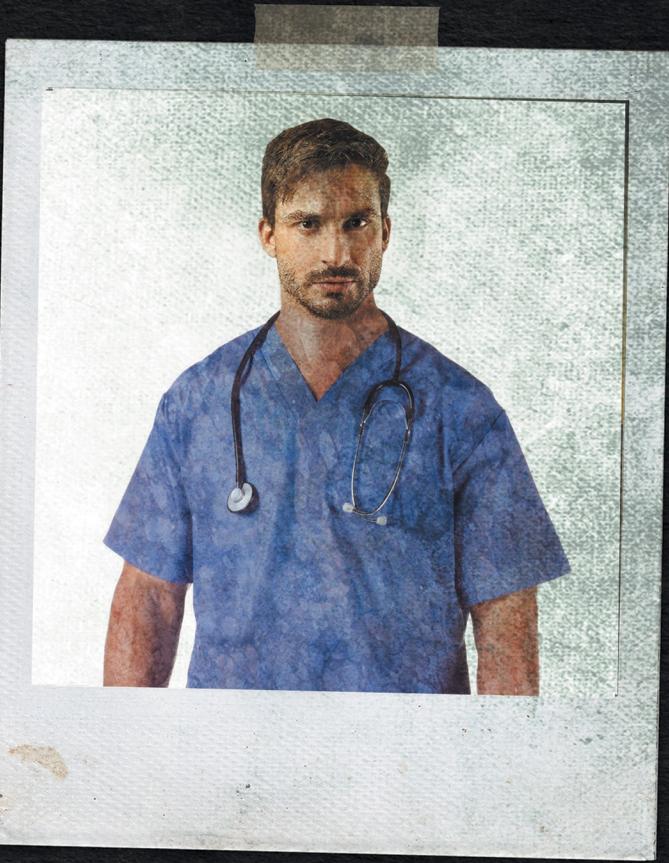
I stared. He giggled.

"How did you do that?" I asked.

He waved the little spray bottle. "It's a hallucinogen for the inanimate," he said. "C'mon, let's try it on the bathroom mirror!"

I hadn't had a drop to drink and wasn't in any way chemically altered. I spent the rest of the evening with James and that spray bottle, seeing what I looked like in a mirror that was off its rocker, watching bedsheets shimmer with TV signals (a brief scene from *I Love Lucy*, if I recall correctly), making a beer can briefly turn into a wood-textured candle that still had the Busch logo impressed on its side. Everyone else was doing typical party stuff, drinking and dancing and flirting and harassing and evading, it got pretty noisy when people started arguing about India versus Pakistan, and there were certainly people acting out more outrageously than spraying stuff with a clear liquid. I tried to get James and Maria to check it all out, but James had seen it before and treated it like no big deal (I think, now, that he might have been stoned) while Maria was really drunk and making her play for this guy Steve. (They got married in 2004, I think, but I've really lost track.)

So that was how I crossed the unicorn. That's how I found out there were stranger things in heaven and on Earth, et cetera. What I didn't know then (but found out soon, and hard) was that there was a whole culture built around the inexplicable and the unknown and the illogically, powerfully symbolic. It's got a different name in every town and internet rumor board that thinks it's the only one that knows about it — I've heard *le demimonde*, the occult underground, the Unacknowledged Legislators, the Invisible Clergy, and the wonderworld. In Cincinnati, we called it the offness.



# 2: CHARACTER

You've signed on to play a game that deals in 21st century existential mystic horror. The character you play has to fit in with that. If you pick someone who has nothing to do in the setting, it's not the other players' responsibility to drag you to the fun, nor the GM's duty to handcraft a story that focuses on one character to the exclusion of the others. When you make your character, you'll have ideas, and those are *good*. Pick someone about whom you can feel passionate, interested, and curious. Create a character who, if they were on TV, you'd be impatiently waiting for the next episode, if only to see her next crazy jack move.

But at the same time, don't be selfish. You should make a character who's your dreamboat, who entralls you and entertains you even when they *royally fail*. But you also should make a character who supports the other PCs and who interests and compels the other players, including the GM.

If you're completely selfish, consider that GMs hesitate to cavalierly slaughter characters who

make their job easy and are fun to watch. The boring, safe, too-cool-to-care-about-anything character? A good GM has no compunction about letting that guy perish to show how this week's monster works.

Actively seek reasons that your character would, if it came down to it, take a swing at a cop to protect one of the other PCs. Give her strong, compelling, non-debatable reasons to care about your group's goals... and be willing to bend when you and your group are deciding your initial objective. The more people you can get on board with the premise of the game, the better it works for everyone.

This chapter is instructional. Read it to know what all of the things on *your character sheet* mean. In *Unknown Armies*, you build your character at the same time as you collaboratively construct the local setting; that way, whoever you create is already connected to locations, characters, and situations before the game even starts.

Rules for creating characters are found in "Characters, Cabals, and the Stage" on page 25 in Book Two: Run but a summary can be found in "Creating Characters: The Lonely Singles Club Version" on page 53 of this book.

## YOUR SHOCK GAUGE

No one grows up without some unhappiness in their lives. Some sheltered, incredibly lucky people have very few shocks and disturbances, but if you watch a baby being born, you know the *very first thing* that happens to human beings is painful, bloody, and difficult. Then the doctor slaps you.

Think about your favorite story. Is it about a lazy Sunday afternoon where nothing much happens and no one's discomfited or challenged? Or is it about suffering and shock and bad decisions? I'm betting on the latter, and because those things are interesting, *Unknown Armies* tracks them in five categories.

### STRESS CHECKS

There are five categories of mental stress: Violence, the Unnatural, Helplessness, Isolation, and Self. It's quite possible to be very casual about, say, Violence, while being a basket case when it comes to the Unnatural.

Each stress has two types of notches. **Hardened notches** represent stress checks you've beaten, and they are numbered 1-9. **Failed notches** represent stress checks you've failed, and they are numbered 1-5.

Different stresses have different threat levels, ranging from 1-10. These are called **ranks**. The higher the rank, the more uncommon and scarring

the experience. Lots of people can shrug off a rank 1 check. No one's blasé about any rank 10 check.

If you already have a hardened notch on the same meter and at the same rank as the stress, you don't have to roll. You ignore the check because you've faced this down before and prevailed. Failed notches don't affect stress checks.

You face a Violence (4) check. You have five hardened notches on your Violence meter. You don't have to roll.

If you don't have a hardened notch at the rank of the stress check, roll against an identity that protects that meter. If you don't have an identity that fits, use a default ability.

If you succeed, mark off the lowest unmarked hardened notch on the appropriate meter. If you fail, you mark off the lowest unmarked failed notch instead and *choose one of three reactions: panic, paralysis, or frenzy*. A failure may have other long-term effects as well.

Defend Against Challenges To...	With...
Violence	Fitness
Self	Notice
Unnatural	Knowledge
Helplessness	Status
Isolation	Connect

These reactions are discussed more in "Failing a Stress Check" on page 25.

## CELL

the word we use for phones  
is also the word for when  
you're locked away in isolation

BAD NEWS  
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ICE RYACK

You face a Violence (4) check. You have four hardened notches in Helplessness, but that doesn't do you any good. You only have two hardened notches in Violence. With no identity that protects you, you have to roll against your Fitness ability of 55%. You roll a 47, and so you mark the third hardened notch in Violence. If you had rolled a 64, you would mark the next failed Violence notch.

It's common to have both hardened and failed notches in the same meter. Someone who's deep in both directions in Isolation probably has a highly ambivalent attitude towards being alone, which is perfectly in character for people who have been repeatedly exposed to that mental stress. Someone with the same setup for Violence feels little or nothing when exposed to most forms of bloodshed, but when something is so shocking that it gets through the hardened barrier, the result is devastating.

You may also notice that the ratings are given as a range, not as a hard single digit. This is because different people from different backgrounds, different cultures, and different families have different tolerances. Your GM is probably going to pitch towards the creamy middle of that range, but there's room for adjustment. Someone who grew up in a family where "dickhead" was a term of affection may be more able to shrug off verbal insults than someone cosseted and proper — even though the uptight character might, in fact, have more hardened notches in Helplessness or Isolation.

Or consider the Unnatural situation of realizing your vision of the future came true. If the vision was something mundane, predictable, and easy to dismiss like "Chet will make a scene at Thanksgiving," it probably gives less of a shock than something extremely specific, unusual, or dangerous like "My friend will break his arm after hitting an elk while driving too fast in the rain."

### THE VIOLENCE STRESS

You have an instinctive revulsion towards actual violence. It's stressful to hurt others, to watch others be hurt, and to get hurt. This stress also covers the fear of death that everyone suffers from to varying degrees.

### THE UNNATURAL STRESS

It hurts your brain to think of things that don't belong in your concept of the world. Contemplating infinity for too long, seeing *proof* that sometimes  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and realizing that magick actually works are all Unnatural stressors. It's more subtle and unnerving than Violence. Everyone recognizes that violence exists, even those who are insulated from it. Unnatural stress doesn't just attack your idea of safety. It attacks your idea of how the universe operates.

### THE HELPLESSNESS STRESS

A sense of control is crucial for feelings of safety, even when it's completely unmerited. When you have been challenged by helplessness, you can lose your ability to know how in control of a situation you are; you may feel powerless when the situation is not completely lost, or you may ignore real impediments from a misplaced sense of capability.

### THE ISOLATION STRESS

Isolation is a subtle danger: it corrodes your sanity by denying you input. You rely on other human beings for feedback. Without the opinions of others, you do not know how to judge yourself. When you become resistant to isolation, you overlook social standards and unwritten rules because you've forgotten how to conform to the expectations of others. If you've suffered from isolation, you become very needy. These are not mutually exclusive: it's possible to be very clingy and still be unable to pick up hints about when your behavior is unacceptable.

### THE SELF STRESS

This is the trickiest one. It's your guilt and self-loathing, but it's more than that. It's conflicts between what you believe, and it's damage to your ability to *believe* at all. A major stress is when you find out you're not the person you thought you were, by breaking a promise you honestly meant to keep, or by standing idly by when your values, or what you *thought* were your values, are desecrated. It's your sense of alienation from yourself that provides, perhaps, the deepest terror. If you can't trust yourself, then nothing is true. That's why people with heavy damage to Self are such good liars and bad students: they really can't care what's true or false anymore. Where other meters measure how traumatized you are by things that happen to you, Self measures how traumatized you are by your own reactions to those things. To put it another way, the only thing you can ever be 100% sure of is "I think, therefore I am." The Self meter measures how uncertain you are about the "I" in that statement.

### GETTING IN DEEP

For now, we're just looking at the practical, immediate effects of having a few hardened and failed notches here and there across assorted meters. If you get too many of either, that's trouble. But you don't get ongoing hassles until you amass five failed notches on one meter or get twenty-five or more hardened notches total. If one of those things happens? Read on to the next section.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## SAMPLE VIOLENCE CHECKS

Rank	Example
1-3	Be attacked with a weapon.
1-3	Witness an act of torture.
2-4	Get shot at random. Be tortured briefly.
3-5	Kill someone in a fight.
4-6	Be present at a massive battle, with hundreds of deaths on both sides.
5-7	Perform an act of torture.
7-8	Deliberately kill a helpless target.
8-9	Get tortured for an hour or longer.
9-10	Witness a brutal mass execution.
9-10	Watch as someone you love is tortured to death.

1: GO



2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



## FAILED VIOLENCE NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1	You're superficially fine. Perhaps you're a little edgy whenever a knife in the room happens to be pointing your direction.
2	You are very aware of violence, both as it exists and as it is depicted. It strikes you as somewhat odd that so many people don't realize that movie violence is very different from real violence.
3	You get alert or uneasy every time you see blood, even badly faked blood in a horror flick or when someone cuts a rare steak. Sometimes you have nightmares about violence you've witnessed.
4	You instinctively take a defensive posture whenever there's a loud noise or raised voice nearby. Your nightmares are frequent, and you have a hard time looking at anyone without briefly imagining what you would do at that moment if they attacked you.
5	You are insane. The traumas you've experienced have forced your mind to contort itself out of alignment with everyday reality, simply in an effort to deal. You may have delusions, periodic catatonia, paranoia, or fugue states, but it's something that makes an ordinary life very difficult.

## HARDENED VIOLENCE NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1-3	Superficially, you're much like everyone else.
4-5	Your attitude towards violence shows on your face when the subject comes up in conversation, unless you work to keep it hidden. It might be intensity, or nervousness, or just a grim silence, depending on how you cope.
6-7	Violence is a common feature of your mental landscape. Unlike less-hardened people, you show little reaction at all when it is discussed or depicted in fiction.
8	Your callousness shows in your every word and expression unless you make a continuous effort to suppress it. Again, the exact tone is up to you: it could be bitter and harsh, feverish and vehement, or icy cold.
9	It's not difficult for people to realize that the deepest horrors of torture and brutality have become commonplace to you, unless you work very, very hard to keep it hidden — which means you come off as tense and guarded all the time. The death of others, or yourself, has no intrinsic significance. You might prefer to stay alive, but it's only a matter of personal taste. Life, in the abstract, means nothing.

## SAMPLE UNNATURAL CHECKS

Rank	Example
1-2	Experience a preternaturally strong <i>déjà vu</i> .
2-3	See a creature or machine that cannot logically exist.
2-4	Realize that a vision you had of the future has come true.
3-5	Observe someone move impossibly — vanish from sight, go through a wall, or open a door to a basement that wasn't there a minute ago.
4-6	Be successfully attacked with magick.
5-7	Watch someone you know killed by magick, without any visible or rational cause.
6-8	Have a conversation with a loved one you know to be dead.
6-8	See an animal with human features.
8-10	Witness the dead rise.
9-10	Realize that the reason you and your husband of ten years have never had children is that he's not really a human being.

1: GO



2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



## FAILED UNNATURAL NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1	It's pretty hard to tell. Perhaps you become a little superstitious — reading your horoscope daily, watching for lucky numbers, avoiding cracks in the sidewalk, etc.
2	You have a few nightmares, and you are suspicious of and/or fascinated by occult and religious books, places, paraphernalia, and people.
3	You frequently feel like you're being watched, even when there's no one around. Sometimes it seems like you hear voices in white noise — sounds like the wind in the trees, the sloshing of a washing machine, or the noises of traffic.
4	The nightmares are frequent, and often you don't know you're dreaming until you jerk awake. Sometimes you feel like there's someone — or something — watching you and you can almost see it out of the corner of your eye. When you whip your head around, there's nothing there.
5	You are insane. Maybe you hide it well, but there's something in you that makes sense to you and only you, and it rules the way you live your life. You might develop a ritualistic obsession, or you may be subject to delusions, or you may face a trauma bond arising from seemingly innocent event

## HARDENED UNNATURAL NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1-3	There's little to distinguish you from the average person, except perhaps a tendency to snort derisively when someone mentions their intuitions.
4-5	You tend to listen very closely and intently when someone discusses the paranormal or supernatural, trying to figure out if they know something or if they're just full of shit.
6-7	You now know and accept that there are vast, incomprehensible forces governing the universe. It strikes you as odd when people act as if they're in control of their lives. You know better.
8	Things that average people consider meaningless coincidences strike you as deeply, intensely funny because you see the connections that they do not. You may develop a reputation for laughing inappropriately.
9	You are no longer surprised by violations of ordinary logic. Everything is normal to you — talking foliage, spontaneous combustion, and stigmata are as ordinary and reasonable as cars, dogs, and rain.

## SAMPLE HELPLESSNESS CHECKS

Rank	Example
1-2	Unintentionally humiliate yourself in public.
1-3	Get fired from a job you love.
2-4	Fail at something when it's <i>imperative</i> that you succeed.
3-5	Get dumped into a pit of maggots.
4-6	Spend a month in jail.
5-7	Watch a recording of your spouse committing adultery.
7-8	Be placed in a situation where you have to either saw off one of your limbs or die.
7-9	Watch someone you love die.
8-10	Watch someone you love die because you tried to save them and failed.
9-10	Be possessed, yet conscious, as your body commits unspeakable acts against your will.

1: GO



2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



## FAILED HELPLESSNESS NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1	You're fairly normal. Perhaps you're a little finicky or meticulous, trying to eliminate the possibility of something going wrong.
2	You have a tendency to get unreasonably nervous and pessimistic when small things go wrong. You may be irritated if a bus is just a few minutes late, or if your computer freezes up.
3	You have an intense dislike for surprises, even good ones. They remind you of the essentially unpredictable nature of reality, and that scares and annoys you.
4	You find it very difficult to trust anything. Your friends, your own abilities, even your memories could be false, waiting to betray you. You have a tendency towards obsessive-compulsive behaviors such as checking the door to your house two or three (or more) times every time you leave to make absolutely certain it's locked. You attempt to be prepared for every eventuality.
5	You are insane. Your experiences of confinement and denial have forced your mind to develop aberrant ideas as coping mechanisms. It may be blackouts, phobias, flashbacks, or something else entirely, but your life has deformed around it

## HARDENED HELPLESSNESS NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1-3	You don't have any major behavior or attitude shifts yet, just minor things. You tend to be pessimistic and fatalistic, perhaps.
4-6	Your fatalism has increased. When things go wrong in a big, bad way, or when trouble comes from a completely unexpected or unlikely source, you handle it with a remarkable lack of affect. This is not necessarily incongruent with the behaviors of two or more failed notches: it's perfectly possible to be freakishly calm about big things and freakishly upset about little things.
7-8	You have a boundless faith in the ability of chaos to screw you over. You can easily believe that even the most suspicious of mishaps is simple random chance. So your brake cable snapped and your gas pedal got stuck to the floor. Why would that mean someone tinkered with your car? Shit happens.
9	The distinction between intentional and accidental is pretty much lost on you. Maybe you believe that everything is completely predestined, or maybe you believe that everything in the world happens due to chance. The one thing you find hard to swallow is the idea that we are the captains of our fates.

## SAMPLE ISOLATION CHECKS

Rank	Example
1-2	Spend a day without seeing anyone you know.
2-3	Spend five hours in a sensory-deprivation tank.
2-4	Spend five days without talking to another human being.
3-5	Be institutionalized against your will by someone you love and trust.
4-6	Spend a week in solitary confinement.
5-7	See someone you thought you knew intimately behaving in a fashion completely contrary to her normal behavior.
6-8	Spend a month in a country where no one speaks your language and where you can't make yourself understood no matter how hard you try.
8-9	Be deeply, painfully, and violently betrayed by someone you love.
9-10	Be treated like a stranger by your closest friends for a week or more.
9-10	Spend a month in a sensory-deprivation tank.

1: GO



2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



## FAILED ISOLATION NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1	You can interact in society and get through your everyday life with no real problems. You're maybe a little reserved with people at first, but you feel a kind of gratitude whenever a new acquaintance doesn't reject you.
2	You're a bit nervous around new people, eager to make a good impression. This could be expressed as shyness or through chatterbox behaviors.
3	If you sleep alone, you sometimes suffer from insomnia. Perhaps you don't like silence when you're by yourself, and always keep a television on or a radio playing. Sometimes, when you're not paying attention, you talk to yourself or think out loud.
4	Sometimes when you're isolated, either all by yourself or surrounded by strangers, you have panic attacks — a sense of intangible, impending doom. Your skin flushes, your breath becomes rapid and labored, you sweat. Simply put, you show the signs of being in mortal danger, when there is no danger around.
5	You are insane. Your personal disjunction from human contact has made you unable to easily and casually move through society. It might be a phobia, an obsession or an addiction that you use to mediate between yourself and others, but it's something untenable in the long term.

## HARDENED ISOLATION NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1-3	There are no really obvious signs of your experiences. Perhaps you're a little standoffish or curt.
4-5	You can be unthinkingly rude, breaking in during the middle of a conversation before someone's done speaking, scratching yourself in an indelicate fashion, or telling the truth when it isn't diplomatic to do so. For example, you might blurt out "Damn that's an ugly haircut!" instead of saying "Wow, that's a new look for you, isn't it?"
6-7	You lack patience with people who don't immediately understand what you're trying to tell them. Your natural inclination is to repeat the same explanations, which are obvious to you, over and over. Or just give up. You can, of course, overcome this first instinct if you pay extra attention. In game terms, this means that your Connect or Lie abilities aren't penalized any time you make a roll, but you might have a little bit of trouble in casual situations.
8	Unless you're concentrating, you lack dialogue skills. You don't like it when people interrupt, but you frequently interrupt others. You also don't see the point of a lot of social conventions such as clothing, grooming, etc. You might still shave every day, but it all seems a little silly.
9	At some level, you not only don't care what people think about you: you can't understand how anyone could care. You are very aware that people are inherently alone, that we can never really understand anyone or communicate anything but the most rudimentary ideas and feelings. You know everyone is an island, in the final analysis. Especially you.

## SAMPLE SELF CHECKS

Rank	Example
1-2	Break a minor promise.
2-4	Be confronted with proof that your self-image is incorrect. "I'm very responsible; I'm sure I've called you back every time I said I would." "Actually, you've blown me off so many times I started keeping track in my journal. Lessee, November 19, December 3... again on December 17... January 9..."
2-4	Secretly gratify an urge that is unacceptable to your upbringing and background. Spit on a cross if Christian, date a person of another race if raised by bigots, have a same-sex affair if you come from a homophobic background, etc.
3-5	Lie to conceal some aspect of your personality from a close friend or loved one who trusts you implicitly.
4-6	Decide not to act on an impulse from your noble passion because it's too dangerous.
5-7	Deliberately deceive someone you love in a way that is certain to cause them terrible pain if they find out.
6-7	Discover that you have inadvertently committed an act of cannibalism.
7-10	Deliberately act completely contrary to your noble passion.
9-10	Kill someone you love.
9-10	Deliberately destroy everything you've risked your life to support.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## FAILED SELF NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1	You don't have any real uncertainty yet, but every now and again you feel a sense of dissociation, an eerie moment when you feel alienated from your own character and motivations. "Sure, I know I'm Greg Stolze," you might think, "But who's Greg Stolze?"
2	The "Who am I?" moments come more frequently. You tend to become introspective whenever someone mentions truth or lies or promises.
3	Half the time your words and actions feel oddly forced, fake, or rehearsed to you — as if, rather than yourself, you were an actor playing the role of you.
4	You frequently feel like you're watching your every action from the outside. You have little or no sense of will or volition; it's as if you're a passive observer, along for the ride while your body goes through the motions.
5	You are insane. The disconnect between your own narrative of who you are, and the actions you take in the world, has split and broken. You might patch it together with delusions, often false memories in which your behavior was less shameful. Or you could narcotize it with an addiction, or simply sink into a fugue state when the stress gets too much.

## HARDENED SELF NOTCHES

Notch	Example
1-3	There are few external signs of your interior struggle; people may sometimes find you to be a little brittle or phony.
4-5	Even when you're telling the truth, people often think you're lying, unless you make a particular effort to act natural.
6-7	You've lost a sense of connection to those who were previously close to you. You can predict the actions of your friends, relatives, or lovers, but you no longer know exactly what you feel about them.
8	Half the time, you only know you're telling the truth if you take a minute to think about it. Truth and lies aren't nearly as important as they used to be — back before you quit lying to yourself...
9	Life has been pared down to the essentials for you; you no longer have opinions about music, food, or fashion. You've lost the ability to enjoy or dislike things, because there's so little "you" there to interact.



## MENTAL TRAUMA

Earlier, we said that having extremes on your shock gauge can indicate permanent, debilitating problems. There are two broad categories for people with out-of-whack perspectives on life and reality, and they both arise from undergoing too many stress checks.

If you get five failed notches on any meter, you *go crazy*, choosing one of the maladaptive syndromes listed later. If you have twenty-five hardened notches you become *burned out*. First, let's look a little more in-depth at the immediate consequences of losing control.

### FAILING A STRESS CHECK

When you fail a stress check, you mark off a failed notch on the appropriate meter. You also freak out in one of three ways: panic, paralysis, or frenzy.

If you panic, you run away at high speed. You can take no action except to run full out in the direction farthest from what made you panic. If you get stuck, you have to continue to fruitlessly search for an exit or try to force your way through a barrier.

On the other hand, disturbing events often produce paralysis: indecision, terror, and a general "deer in the headlights" effect that persists until the stimulus ceases. This can be completely silent, or accompanied by screams and moans.

Frenzy is what it sounds like. You attack the source of discomfort with any means at your disposal. You can't dodge or attempt any fancy moves, like multiple attacks on a single target. You just shoot or punch or start biting.

You act like this until the stress that triggered the behavior is gone — or, at least, until its immediate manifestation ceases. It's certainly possible to be challenged by circumstances that are too abstract to flee or destroy (Helplessness and Isolation stressors in particular). If you fail a check from one of those stressors, you may just act out until the GM decides a reasonable amount of time has passed. You could frenzy and beat your hands on the walls of your cell, or simply sink into depressed motionlessness for anywhere from hours to days.

Choose carefully. Once you make up your mind, you must follow your choice. If you go berserk against someone who can beat the holy heck out of you, you are not able to run away. You fight until your opponent is dead, or until you're incapacitated.

While you're in this state, you don't have to make any more stress checks. You're too screwed up to process any other stresses.

Those syndromes are in "Ongoing Madness" on page 26.

### 1: GO

### 2: CHARACTER

### 3: CONFLICT

### 4: WEIRDNESS

### 5: AVATARS

### 6: ADEPTS

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL D  
EN . OX ST  
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TONES MO  
E SILVER  
ICE BLACK

You swing a lead pipe at an occult weirdo. When you see your poor-man's nightstick go right through the adept's arm with little apparent effect, you make an Unnatural (3) check. You fail the roll and flip your lid, attacking the adept with mindless frenzy. The adept defends herself by using a magickal attack which lets her tear chunks out of you with her bare hands. Being successfully attacked with magick is an Unnatural (5) check, but since you are already out of your mind, you don't have to make the roll. You just take the failed notch for the first one.

## ONGOING MADNESS

Once you have five failed notches marked on a single meter, you don't have to make stress checks when confronted with that stress any more. You just fight, flee, or freeze as if you'd failed the roll. The only exception is when your hardened notches are enough to void the stress check anyway, in which case you suffer no effects at all. Otherwise, you have your short-term freak-out, mark no notches, and life goes on.

Of course, it's not really that simple. The first time you hit five failed notches on a single meter, you pick up some kind of mental aberration. You and the GM should work out your insanity together. Note that a permanent madness should play off your obsession and your passions, because anything that central to your personality is reflected in your disorder. Also keep in mind that insane people can often get along OK in the world, if not very well. Many go undetected for years, making their mad way through life.

An automatic failure on a meter you've maxed out on doesn't give you another aberration. One per stress is plenty.

Some permanent forms of madness include:

**Phobia:** If something drove you mad, it's quite likely you develop a debilitating and irrational fear of it. If someone only *talks* about it or shows you a picture of it, you have to make a check in order to avoid freezing or panicking. If you're exposed to the thing itself, you automatically freak out without making a check.

**Paranoia:** Paranooids believe they are pursued by invisible enemies who have unbelievable and subtle powers. Characters in *Unknown Armies* often are pursued by enemies with such indescribable abilities, but if you think paranoia is an easy out, think again. Seeing enemies everywhere means having no friends, which means your enemies have all the protective camouflage they could ever need. While you're scrutinizing the mailman and the grocery store clerk, that's when they *get you*. If your character becomes paranoid, take 10% off a relationship every game session as you withdraw from your loved ones mistrustfully. The GM picks which relationship takes the hit.

**Trauma bond:** This is like a phobia, but instead of the actual stimulus, you get scared around something incidental to the trauma. If your father molested you in the mornings before work, you might repress your memories of that event but the smell of brewing coffee sets you off. You and the GM should negotiate to decide what sorts of things might provoke a stress check. You can burn one of your passions to keep it together.

**Flashbacks:** This is also known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD for short. If you're exposed to any element that was present during the trauma, you're in danger of reliving the event. In the example given above, the smell of coffee might sometimes be a perfectly fine scent for you — but other times, it might make you relive the event. Or sometimes you might experience a flashback when hearing footsteps on stairs, or simply from waking up in a bed that reminds you of the bed where the assault took place. There are many examples of combat veterans who flash back at the sound of fireworks, or when in a setting similar to that where combat occurred. You can burn one of your passions to keep it together.

**Blackouts:** You can slip into a semi-conscious state and simply wander away in an attempt to flee your past. When you come to, you have no recollection of your flight. These blackouts (or fugue states) can last for days and cover a lot of territory. You're usually non-violent and seem pretty dazed — you're just drifting off. Threatening stimuli usually snap you out of a fugue. So can the presence of friends or trusted individuals. Unlike other disorders, which are activated by the re-inistence of the scarring event (either literally or symbolically), fugues come on *after* some other sort of emotional failure. So after you come out of a fight, flight, or freeze response to *anything*, you proceed into the fugue and wander away.

**Addictive behaviors:** You can smother your memories of the past with any one of the countless chemicals available in this modern world. Alcohol is a perennial favorite — powerful and easily available. Marijuana, heroin, and synthetic depressants might appeal to you because they deaden the pain and make everything seem OK. On the other hand, mood elevators like 'drine, meth, and 4-MEC give you vital illusions of being in control. When confronted with your drug of choice, you can either *indulge* or use up *one of your passions*. If you focus on your rage to resist the siren call of scotch, you can't use it later in the session to reroll or flip-flop. If you get confronted more than three times in a session, you automatically succumb.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



See "Booze and Pills" on page 27.

See "What Drives You: Passion and Obsession" on page 9.



1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



**Philia/Obsession:** You may develop an unhealthy affection for an individual, object, or action that you perceive (for whatever reason) to have rescued you from the trauma. The target of your affection didn't necessarily have to save you directly — you see some sort of salvation connection that isn't necessarily rational. This philia could result in a desire to constantly be around that person, or object, or area, or it could result in a compulsive repetition of the saving action. If you said the Lord's Prayer when you were saved, you might develop an obsession with the Lord's Prayer, say it constantly, and carry a rosary at all times. Witnessing the object of your devotion destroyed, or losing it, is a Helplessness (10) check. Where's your messiah now?

**Delusions:** You believe something that simply isn't true because it covers up the pain. Delusions in response to trauma can range from flat denial to elaborate confabulations that rationalize or justify the experience. There are no rolls involved with delusions. You and the GM just decide what your delusion is, and she adjusts everything your character perceives accordingly.

### BOOZE AND PILLS

There are many reasons to take drugs. Maybe they're prescribed by a doctor. Maybe you're a hypochondriac. Maybe they make you feel good, or maybe they suppress the crushing despair that you have to constantly hide from the people you've fooled into thinking you're a normal person. Whatever the reasons — maybe everyone else is doin' it — if your character decides to experiment with substances, here's how the rules model them:

**Booze:** Legal, popular, available at a wide variety of price points, this depressant has a long history with... well, every society, pretty much. You can take one drink an hour (more or less) without feeling it. Every drink after that puts a -5% penalty to all ability rolls, and any identity roll to mimic an

ability or perform a unique task. Rolling to resist shocks? Still OK. Avatar and adept powers are also remarkably booze-resistant.

**Uppers:** Anything that makes you feel alert and energetic and powerful falls in this category. Caffeine and nicotine are the mild ones, unlikely to provide any rules changes. Cocaine and meth are like their badass older siblings, the ones you want to party with until they take it too far. And they always take it way too far. A serious dose of crank, or half your kid's ADD prescription provokes jitteriness, giving a -20% penalty to any tasks where subtlety or concentration are needed. You get a +10% bonus when resisting shocks to your Helplessness or Self meters, but a -20% penalty against challenges to the Unnatural and Isolation.

**Downers:** These make you calm, sleepy, and relaxed. For mild sedatives, the rules for alcohol are a good match. For stronger stuff like heroin, you lose the ability to use passions, your initiative drops to leave you acting last, and any tests that require keen concentration take a -20% penalty. You do get a +10% bonus to all rolls resisting shocks, however.

**Psychedelics:** Drugs like LSD, psilocybin, Nexus, and MDMA are especially popular for mystics who aren't choosy about whether their visionary insights are genuine or just chemical static in their gray matter. When your hallucinogen kicks in, you get a +10% bonus to resisting shocks to Self, Isolation, and the Unnatural, but a -10% shift against Violence and Helplessness. Moreover, if you fail a stress check while under the influence, you take two failed notches.

*They speak of my drinking but not of my thirst.*

*I would tip the oceans to drain between my lips given half a chance.*

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: MISSING MADNESS

You may notice that schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder, formerly known as multiple personality disorder, are missing. This is not an accidental omission. A great many people have misperceptions about these disorders, and we don't want to reinforce any incorrect information out there.

**Dissociative identity disorder** (or DID for short) is generally believed to be the result of severe and repeated traumatic betrayals in childhood. As one professional put it, people who go through this sort of treatment end up one of three ways: catatonic, dead, or multiple. One reason to keep it out is that the traumas that send your character over the edge are rarely childhood experiences. You face them as a grown-up. That's better, right?

The second reason to keep it out is that we don't want to split your attention. If you're busy running two personalities, both are more likely to end up as caricatures. Instead of having one character with two personalities, we'd rather see more single characters with twice as much personality.

Now that DID is taken care of, that leaves **schizophrenia**. Actually, the two disorders are often mixed up, because both are injuries to the sense of self. However, where the self fragments

into separate selves in the case of DID, in schizophrenia, the self is disorganized and has a difficult time processing the world or interacting with it appropriately. Furthermore, there's strong evidence for a physical, neurological basis for schizophrenia. The success of certain psychotropic drugs in alleviating its symptoms also argues for a chemical disorder. While psychological stresses probably play a part in causing the disease to manifest, it first has to be present, albeit dormant in the chemistry of the brain.

We left schizophrenia out because we don't understand it all that well, and because its effects are so varied and intrusive that it would detract from most stories that did not center on it exclusively. Additionally, because the hallmark of schizophrenia is disorganization more so than hallucinations or delusions, playing one would be unlikely to lead to engaging play.

Both of these cases are suggestions. If you're interested in playing a character who suffers — or who is predisposed to suffer — from one of these illnesses, go for it. But the time to make this decision is during character creation, not the heat of play, and you should know something about these conditions before taking a stab at playing them.

*People who say that power is sexy are turned on by their own failure.*

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS



# GETTING CALLOUS

Cops, coroners, and case workers know all about getting callous. When you've seen enough horror, it loses its power to horrify you. The more hardened notches you have on a single meter, the more it takes for that kind of stress to rip up your head. Once you have nine hardened notches on a meter you're so jaded about it that only the most extreme and heinous incidents can endanger you.

This is not a good thing.

Mental stress makes us vulnerable, but it also makes us human. If you fill in too many hardened marks, you get cut off from a broad range of emotional experiences that everyone else shares. You're hardened all right: hardened into an emotional fortress, completely isolated, unable to make a fundamental connection with other human beings.

## ABILITIES

We have certain expectations of people based on how much suffering they have endured. Many folks transcend their pain, but the fact is that people who have undergone few shocks in their lives aren't well-equipped to stay unchanged when they confront something that's outside their experience. It doesn't matter whether that challenge is a magick spell, a bloodied blade, or harsh language from the boss because it will change them one way or another. Most likely, they leather up, take a hardened notch, and move on.

People who have a lot of hardened notches have waded through so many slings and arrows that the little stuff just bounces off them. "Oh, you slapped me," thinks the guy with a fistful of hardened notches in Violence, "I wonder if you're going to strike me in any *serious* fashion." The cultural exile with a bunch of Isolation notches may not even notice an insult that would set someone with an open Isolation meter trembling.

But here's the thing about people with lots of hardened notches: when something *does* challenge them, it's more likely to really hurt. Every hardened notch erodes your ability to get more hardened notches in a different meter, and when you face something you can't ignore and don't have the innocence left to accept, it breaks you.

Failed notches measure that breakage. You don't want them. But whether you're hard but brittle, or soft but reslient, they're always a risk. In *Unknown Armies* that risk is the ante you pay to play the game.

Moreover, there are ten abilities derived from your hardened and open notches on the shock gauge. There are **upbeat abilities** — Connect, Knowledge, Fitness, Notice, and Status — based on open notches. Someone who has led a sheltered or cosseted existence is likely to excel at these things. They are the rewards society provides to those who color within the lines. **Downbeat abilities** — Dodge, Lie, Pursuit, Secrecy, and Struggle — are what people necessarily develop to survive outside the warmth of society's protective campfire. Which are better, or more powerful? Whichever one you happen to need *right now*, I'm afraid. But you can't be good at all of 'em. Nobody's toolbox is big enough to hold everything you might need.

You might exhibit sociopathic behaviors, or strong signs of depersonalization, depression, or dissociation.

You're **burned out**.

If you've descended into this state, you can no longer use your passions — the noble, rage, and fear events that represent you at your most intense. You just can't relate to them anymore, and you don't get to flip-flop those passion-related rolls.

If you're an avatar who becomes burned out, you cannot use your avatar identity until you get treatment. Avatars rely on an empathic connection to the global unconsciousness, and burnouts slam that particular door shut.

You become burned out when your total sum of hardened notches is twenty-five or more.

1: GO

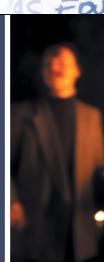
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## UPBEAT ABILITIES

The good news about upbeat abilities is that they never drop below 20%. Your ability to form emotional bonds, trust your own education, and maybe shake off the flu never bottoms out, no matter how much of a leathery burnt-out shell you become.

These abilities have a percentile rating of 20% plus 5% for every open notch on the corresponding meter. If you have seven open notches in Violence, your Connect ability is rated at 55%. You could also look at it as being 65% minus 5% per hardened notch, the math is identical. It's right there on the character sheet; your upbeat ability score in any meter plus your downbeat ability will always add up to 80%.

### CONNECT

How good are you at earning trust? Can you listen to people and hear what they really mean, instead of what you think they mean? Are you willing to be vulnerable to build respect? Are you open, honest, and forthright with people, and does your carriage and demeanor convey that? The answers to these depend on your ability to connect. If you're used to solving your problems through hugs and talking, you can convince others that those methods work, just by projecting confidence in them. If not, you seem a little... off. Not necessarily *bad*, but disconnected people make those around them defensive instead of lazily complacent and trusting. It's almost as if they can sense the potential for conflict.

Roll Connect if you're trying to have an earnest discussion with someone, relatively unencumbered by manipulation and posturing. This is what you roll to be real and get real. It's based on your open notches in Violence.

**Fumble:** You really stuck your foot in your mouth. If you're trying to persuade someone of something quickly, you get frosted out and can't make any approaches for the rest of the scene, short of *coercion*. If this is someone you have a relationship with, that relationship just decreased by 5%. If it's an *involved discussion* you just moved them a step towards the cold end of the chart. Tough break, Kissinger.

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**Matched Failure:** If this is a short-term, one-off persuasion, you earned a hard “no” unless they also had a matched failure, and theirs was higher. If you were *connecting with someone in a relationship* with you, your relationship decreases by 5%. If you’re doing a long-term persuasion, you just moved them *away* from helping you.

**Failure:** For snap-judgments, you simply don’t get what you want unless their failure was worse than yours. You might open a long-term debate and talk them around another time, but not in this scene. If it’s more of a measured debate, you don’t budge them one little bit.

**Success:** If they just have to make a quick decision, they go along unless they got a superior success. If it’s a lengthy discussion, you move one step closer to acquiescence.

**Matched Success:** Same as a success, only you beat any non-matched success.

**Crit:** Same as a matched success, and if you have a relationship with this person, it increases by 5%.

Connect is also what you roll to resist challenges to your Isolation meter, should you face a stress check that’s greater than your number of hardened notches. When you’re feeling alone and threatened, it helps to remember all the people you’ve been close to.

## KNOWLEDGE

How much do you trust what you’ve learned? Do you generally think the media is honest and disinterested? Are you a skilled critical thinker who can sniff out bullshit when that’s what your cell phone’s search engine turns up?

Knowledge is the ability to recall anything you maybe learned in high school. It’s also, with a few hours in a library, your ability to learn new things and understand them. If you want to research something, or cyberstalk somebody, or find an online video that shows how to pick a lock, you can get that done with Knowledge.

You can’t use this for anything fancy. If you need to install a DVR or speak mostly conversationally in a common foreign language like Spanish, just assume you can do it. If you need to speak any foreign language fluently, or debug a computer program... no. Only identities cover specialized training like that. But if there’s a chance you just know something in passing, that chance is measured by your percentiles in Knowledge. It’s based on your open notches in Self.

**Fumble:** Your GM tells you the worst possible thing your character could believe, relating to this roll. Your character believes it.

**Matched Failure:** Your character knows nothing and is learning nothing about this any time soon. Better find a course of action that doesn’t depend on this.

**Failure:** Can’t find what you’re looking for easily. You might find it by trying some other way.

**Success:** You remember or find your necessary information!

**Matched Success:** You not only get the information you’re looking for, you sound smart and have some grasp of the context.

**Crit:** Same as a matched success. On top of that, you maybe come across something tangentially useful, or just interesting to someone else you know.

Roll Knowledge to protect your psyche from Unnatural stress checks. When you face something that shouldn’t be, an open and flexible mind just might see you through. Failing that, you might remember a pat explanation for why these sorts of weird manifestations are so persuasive.

## FITNESS

Do you live right, get plenty of rest, exercise frequently but in moderation, and avoid liquor and fatty foods? Yeah, me neither. But I know some people do, I’ve met them, I swear! Those people — who aren’t exhausted by their inner demons and who aren’t oppressed by a sense of doomed helplessness — take care of themselves and enjoy bodies that are resistant to illness, responsive to physical demands, lithe and limber and strong.

If you need to hike through the woods in the rain without getting sick, or climb a steep wall, or drag a friend out of a wrecked ambulance, then Fitness is what you roll. Also useful for biking long distances, shaking off hangovers, and out-golfing your snotty coworkers. Fitness is based on the open notches on your Helplessness meter.

**Fumble:** Ouch! You wiped out and not only failed at what you were trying, you made it worse. You take 1-5 wounds from twisting an ankle or throwing your back out or tripping and getting an asphalt facial.

**Matched Failure:** You not only fail at whatever physical feat you were attempting, you kind of look weak or foolish in the attempt.

**Failure:** You may have come close, but you didn’t get there. Hit the showers, champ.

**Success:** You accomplished whatever athletic or barf-resistance goal you were pursuing. Good hustle!

See “Coercion” on page 56.

## 1: GO

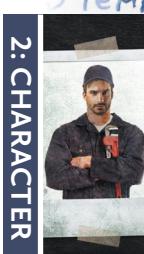
## 2: CHARACTER

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**Matched Success:** You not only got it done, you looked kind of sexually desirable while doing it.

**Crit:** Crushed it. You not only got your task accomplished — possibly even making it look easy — you wowed everyone watching, if anyone was.

Fitness is also what you roll to resist stress checks on the Violence meter. Your mind may not be ready for a cheetah attack, but on an instinctive level, you handle it better if you know you're not the slowest zebra in the herd.

## NOTICE

*Unknown Armies* has a lot of mystery and confusion in its stories, and paying keen attention to the world around you can reveal the little details that show the connection between old widow Kowalski and the ghost cats haunting St. Anne's church.

Notice is what you roll to spot things that are out of place, whether that's the unlocked front door to your apartment or the one coat on the rack that's wet from being outside recently. It finds hidden things, overhears quiet words, and smells the bitter almond scent in the wine. It's not what you use to conduct research — Knowledge is for finding stuff that *someone* wants you to learn. Notice is for what no one cares if you learn, or things that someone wants to keep hidden. It sees a lot of use as the counterpoint to Lie and Secrecy.

Notice is based on the open notches on your Unnatural meter. The more exposure to the ugly side of magick you get, the stronger your motivation to shuffle along the street with your head down, trying not to see any more.

**Fumble:** Fool, you were off in la-la land. Anything the GM can conceive of as a bad outcome from you not seeing what's right around you is in play, short of death.

**Matched Failure:** Whatever it was, you did not spot even a bit of it. You don't even know that there was anything to miss.

**Failure:** Nope, nothing to see here. If it was something the GM considers really obvious, you might have a slight sense that you're overlooking something.

**Success:** Hey, you picked up on the whatever-it-was!

**Matched Success:** You not only saw or heard or noticed whatever it was — you retain details. If you were eavesdropping, you remember intonation and meaningful pauses, not just a sense of what was said. If you got a fleeting glimpse of someone, it was good enough that you can provide a rough description.

**Crit:** Not just hearing or sight, but *insight*. With this, you penetrate disguises, make brilliant deductions about people's inner lives based on no more than how they smoke a cigarette, and understand not merely that you're being lied to, but what *type* of lie it is — embarrassed, devious, self-deceiving? In short, you get as much information as the GM can think to give you.

Notice is also the ability you roll when stress checks challenge your sense of Self. It's sad to say, but the perceptive understand that there is deceit and cowardice and hypocrisy everywhere.

## STATUS

If a cop pulls you over on a dark road at night, that can play out very badly. Or he can tip his hat, give you a warning, and send you on your way. What gets one person impersonally ticketed and another pulled out and roughly searched? It's a slightly ephemeral quality called Status. The way you dress, talk, hold yourself, and project expectations are all based on where you think you are in the social hierarchy. Those expectations, in turn, influence others, for good or for ill.

Roll Status to defer suspicion, get seated in a fancy restaurant, or to see if your cousin knows someone who might give you a deal on replacing your smashed windshield. With good Status, people give you the benefit of the doubt. They may not like you, but they feel unthreatened and are confident that they understand how social interactions are going to proceed.

This ability is based on the open marks you have in Isolation. The more society cuts you off, the less able you are to trust it to protect you next time. People notice this. It's not quite the mark of Cain, but it stings.

**Fumble:** You've presented yourself as dishonest, creepy or, worst of all, *arrogant*. Don't bother trying any other positive interactions with this person this scene. It's hopeless. Moreover, you're memorable. If trouble starts later, you're the first suspect that comes to mind.

**Matched Failure:** The person you're trying to persuade has decided you're not their type. You might still make your case through personal appeal, using Connect or an identity, but it's going to be a hard sell. Your GM should impose penalties as appropriate.

**Failure:** The answer is no. It's not a cruel no, but it's a firm one. You might make another attempt, but if that one also fails, that no starts to get a little more prickly.

**Success:** Fine, whatever. The person won't actively help you, but won't stand in your way. If they have to do something, it's done with grudging competence.

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS



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**Matched Success:** The person helps you cheerfully and politely, as if cadging a tip.

**Crit:** You get, more than compliance, *assistance*. The person gives you directions or advice on the best way to go about whatever it is you're doing. You're accepted as fully entitled to be where you are.

Status is also the ability to face stress checks on your Helplessness meter. You ever see a guy shouting "Do you know who I am?!" at a flight attendant? That's someone whose Status is struggling with Helplessness.

## DOWNBEAT ABILITIES

Being good folks contributes to health, social, and emotional attachment. So what does that make people who are flinchy, deceitful, and sneaky? The compassionate view is to say they've had a lot of shocks in their life and have had to adapt to them.

Downbeat abilities are the ones you rarely wake up hoping you need to use today. If your abilities are your toolkit for getting through life, these are the duct tape and baling wire of quick fixes and rushed jobs. But sometimes it's more important to win than to be congratulated on a good game.

Downbeat abilities have a percentile rating of 15% plus 5% per hardened notch, which means they start at 20% because of the hardened notch everyone starts with on all shock meters. You can

also quickly determine your downbeat percentile rating by subtracting the upbeat rating from 80%.

### DODGE

If you get hit a lot, or have a lot of plates of spaghetti hurled at your face, or if you work in the monkey house at the zoo, your natural flinch reflex gets tuned up. Dodge is what you roll to get out of the way of a falling piano or to leap aside when a motorcycle's coming right at you.

Dodge is based on hardened notches in Helplessness. When it's rolled, Dodge is usually binary. You either got hit or you didn't, though it can moderate how *badly* you got hit. But Dodge isn't always rolled. If you use it to try to avoid someone who's coming to clobber you with a flatiron or who's shooting at you, just say "I'm taking my action to dodge" and your enemy takes a -10% penalty to their attack roll (if your Dodge score is less than their attack score) or -20% (if your Dodge score is equal to or greater than their attack score, or if it's your obsession ability).

**Fumble:** You made it worse. Not only did you get hit for full damage, you could *permanently lower your wound threshold* by 1-5 points at the GM's discretion. You also lose your next action because you're stunned and probably sprawled out looking awkward.

**Matched Failure:** You got hit for full damage and you lose your next action. Ow.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Duck on over  
to "Damage"  
on page 62  
for more  
information.



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**Failure:** You got tagged. Sorry.

**Success:** Hey, whatever it was missed you! Whew!

**Matched Success:** Not only did it miss you but, if plausible, you dodged into some sort of cover that protects you from further shrapnel, bullets, or shuriken.

**Crit:** Wow. You dodged it with such grace and alacrity that you can take an additional action. You're like *Jackie Chan*!

### LIE

“Just one glass of wine with dinner, officer!” This is what you roll to provide useful verbal lubrication when you’re trapped by a sticky situation.

Lie is based on hardened notches in Self. It is countered by Notice, and the better roll has it their way. The hierarchy goes like this: o1 then matched success then high success. If both you and the person to whom you lie fail, only their failure counts unless you get a matched failure or the dreaded oo, in which case you give some major-league tell.

Note that you can tell lies without rolling, as long as the listener doesn’t care or isn’t paying close attention. Don’t roll unless it matters.

Note also that a Lie success doesn’t force him to believe something that’s obviously untrue, just like a Lie failure doesn’t mean he might not give you the benefit of the doubt.

What happens when Lie beats Notice is that the hearer has no subjective reason to think the speaker doesn’t believe what he’s saying. If there’s objective proof, the Lie isn’t going to trump that. Long-held beliefs, or crucial ones, aren’t easily changed.

For example, suppose you tell Fred, “Dude, your wife is sleeping around all over the place, every kind of crazy way, lying down, standing up, bending over... she’s outta control!” Even if Fred blows his Notice and you crit your Lie, he doesn’t automatically believe the accusation. But he thinks you’re sincere, and it’s certainly enough to make him watch her, if only to figure out how you could be so badly mistaken.

On the other hand, if you tell someone something they really want to believe, a failed Lie roll and a successful Notice may not dissuade them from trying, especially if you have evidence or something that can pass for it. Most likely, they wind up conflicted and suspicious and very unhappy, asking sharp questions and glaring.

But by and large, the Lie versus Notice conflict determines whether you seem sincere. Messing it up is likely to attract more attention and scrutiny. Success may not prevent all future questions, but it sure helps.

**Fumble:** Yeah, you look and sound like a bumbling, sweaty, lying liar. At your GM’s discretion, you may not be able to really say anything to people in this scene without them side-eyeing you.

**Matched Failure:** The only way you avoid sounding like your pants are on fire is if the listener gets a higher matched failure.

**Failure:** If the potential sucker rolled a higher failure, or a matched one, then you might sound vaguely plausible. Otherwise, not so much.

**Success:** Your listener is inclined to think you believe what you’re saying, unless their success was superior.

**Matched Success:** Your listener thinks you believe what you’re saying. This may not make *them* believe what you’re saying, but they don’t think you’re acting in bad faith.

**Crit:** You *sell* it. Even if there’s concrete evidence against your claims, your radiant pseudo-sincerity makes skeptics re-evaluate facts.

### PURSUIT

This is partly based on experience, but it’s just as much an awakened set of instincts that are atavistic to people who don’t have running for their lives, or desperately chasing other people, as features of their regular experience.

Pursuit means being in tune to both hunter and prey. Are you trying to get away from that rabid dog, angry lover, or unspeakable horror? Roll Pursuit to scale obstacles, run flat out, and avoid tripping on the gnarled tree roots of the forest and the slippery burger wrappers of your polluted downtown. Are you trying to chase down a pickpocket, witness, or lurking voyeur? Roll Pursuit to follow their trail, navigate the obstacles they fling behind them and find that final burst of speed.

This is also what you roll for car chases. In fact, it’s for anything related to keeping a car under control, so roll this if you hit some black ice or if Sally sabotages your brake lines again.

There’s a *subsystem for chases* — basically, it’s five steps with “close enough to grab” at the top and “too far to follow” on the bottom. If you’re running, you want to get to the bottom of the chart. If you’re following, you want to reach the top. Rolling Pursuit moves you up or down.

Pursuit is based on hardened notches in Isolation. Hey, if you’re an outcast, you probably got that way by running away from someone. Or maybe you’re used to chasing people down because it’s the only way you get any company.

**Fumble:** You change the distance in the *opposite* of the way you intended. If you’re fleeing, you moved the range a step towards the top, while if you’re pursuing, you’ve moved it down.

## 1: GO

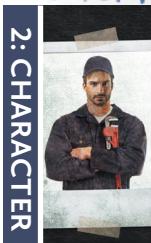
## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS



That subsystem is at “The Gridiron: Extended Contests” on page 69.



**Matched Failure:** You don't change the distance, but you barked your shin or caught a branch in the eyelid or bit your tongue driving over a curb at speed. Take 1d5 wounds.

**Failure:** You don't influence the chase one way or the other.

**Success:** Move one step up if in pursuit, one step down if running away.

**Matched Success:** Same as success and if you're unclear about who you're chasing or being chased by, you perceive something about them that lets you know if they're tall or short or smell rancid.

**Crit:** Same as a matched success, except you move two steps up if in pursuit, two down if fleeing.

## SECURITY

Sometimes you've got to hide yourself away. Or you have to hide something precious and secret that other people wouldn't understand. Sometimes? You *are* the hiding place, for knowledge that most people can't fathom and wouldn't like if they could.

First off, if you try to hide yourself, you roll this to stay still and unobtrusive. Do people who learn magick learn to hide themselves, or is hiding yourself essential to learning magick? Kind of a chicken and egg question, really.

Secondly, if you want to conceal an object or idea, either through codes and ciphers, or by burying it in your yard, slipping it up your sleeve, or putting the purloined letter on the mantelpiece, this is the ability you roll for amateur attempts at that. If you want to be a pro, get an identity.

Unless you have an identity with the *Use Gutter Magick feature*, Secrecy is what you roll when you're trying to bruise reality with improv magick.

Secrecy is based on hardened notches in the Unnatural.

**Fumble:** If you're trying to hide yourself or an object, it's pretty obvious. Enticing, really.

**Matched Failure:** You fail to hide unless the seeker gets a *higher* matched failure. Hey, it's the blind misleading the blind!

**Failure:** Your concealment failed unless the searcher got a matched failure or their failure was higher.

See "The Soft Way: Gutter Magick" on page 178.

I:GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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**Success:** If you were hiding, you hid, though you might still get spotted if the seeker rolls a higher success or gets a match or crit.

**Matched Success:** Whatever you're hiding, it can only be spotted by a higher *matched* success, or a crit on Notice.

**Crit:** You're like a ninja who owns the night. Even if the other fellow rolls an o1 *also*, the best she gets is some tracks or clues about who you are, not whatever is hidden.

### STRUGGLE

"You've got a black belt in karate? Well I've got a black belt in *rabies*. Let's see how this plays out!"

Struggle is kick. It's bite. It's punch, it's wildly thrown elbows and thrashing. It's grabbing the guy around the waist and throwing yourself to the ground, hoping to land on him. Struggle is head butting and shrieking and a willingness — even an eagerness — to get your thumbs in eyes. It is not graceful, studied, expert violence. It is raw and primal and scary as hell.

Roll Struggle to make attacks with your weaponized body and raw anger, or to use basic weapons where it's clear how you mangle someone with it. You can use Struggle to attack with knives and clubs and chainsaws — not so much bolos and butterfly darts.

Struggle is based on hardened notches in Violence. It does not let you make sensible attacks with firearms. If you pick up a gun to just spray 'n' pray, you can attempt suppressive fire with your Struggle ability.

**Fumble:** You fail your attack and very much look like a violent buffoon. Although you did no damage, it was crystal clear that you very badly wanted to. Also, you hurt yourself somehow. Take 1-5 wounds from hyperextending your elbow or accidentally kicking a parking meter.

**Matched Failure:** You miss and, yup, whoever you tried to hit is damn sure you were seriously trying to do harm. If he immediately counterattacks, his next roll to hit you is +10%.

**Failure:** You miss. But if this was your opening move, it's just barely possible that you can pass it off as a very weird joke. Maybe a hug? Maybe you say you were trying hugging?

**Success:** You hit! If you're using a hand weapon, *you did damage*. If it's just a punch, kick, or elbow to the softies, you do damage equal to the sum of the dice. That is, if you rolled a successful 18, you they take 9 wounds because 1+8. If you roll a 20, that's 12, 'cause the o counts as a 10.

**Matched Success:** You hit hard. If you're using a weapon, it does damage equal to the *result*. A successful 11 inflicts 11 wounds and a successful 33 inflicts 33 wounds. If you're using bare hands, you get no special bonus for a matched success, sorry. You probably looked cool though.

**Crit:** If you're using your bare hands, you have a choice. You can kill the target dead (assuming it's something vulnerable to physical damage), either with a lucky shot or by just meaning it hard enough to grab someone by the head and break their neck like a dinner chicken. Alternately, if it's a human or other animal, you can just knock their ass out. They drop like a ragdoll, maybe twitch a little, and are out cold for one to five rounds and unable to fight for one to ten minutes after waking. One to ten minutes *at least*. Alternatively, if you had a weapon in your hands, the living target is now simply dead. None of this knockout stuff. Boy, I bet you're glad you picked up that beer bottle to use as a club, huh?

Refer to  
"Damage" on  
page 62.

### 1: GO

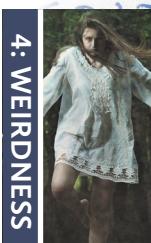
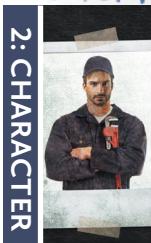
### 2: CHARACTER

### 3: CONFLICT

### 4: WEIRDNESS

### 5: AVATARS

### 6: ADEPTS





## RELATIONSHIPS

What's a relationship? Well son, when a man and a woman love each other very much, or have been drinking...

OK, I'll stop. I suppose it's unfair of me to make jokes and then expect you to take things seriously. But this idea — our relationships, our emotional ties to other people — it's a touchy thing. We want to cushion it with laughter. There are people who suffer all manner of insult with a smile, but crack wise on their sister and suddenly things are on a different quantum level. We are often more defensive of others, and of our feelings for them, than we are of ourselves. Humans are social beings, and this is one of the times it helps us be noble and selfless.

Being close to someone makes you vulnerable. Not just in the Batman sense, where your parents get killed and you become a badass and then won't let anyone else get close to you because then the Joker might torture them to lure you into a deadly game of bat and mouse. I mean, that's there. There's a reason for the stereotype that evil criminals threaten your family, because, honestly, they do. They do because it works, because telling the Godfather to go fuck himself is a noble gesture when it's only your head on the block, but saying it when he's pressing a gun against your kid... again, a different quantum level.

Beyond that, though, beyond the outside threat, there's the one inside. When you love somebody — honestly, that's what we're talking about here more than anything else — it puts a ceiling on your personal, individual, selfish happiness. If you know your beloved daughter is in torment, there's only so happy you can be. (Unless you're a turd, anyhow.) Being human is emotionally hard enough when you only have to carry the weight of your own bad decisions. Knowing that someone you love could get hooked on meth or, hell, just get clobbered by a BMW? It's a wonder any of us can even get out of bed.

But we do, and we fall in love and form friendships and develop respect and admiration because we can't really help it. We belong to each other. It's our nature — it's why Isolation gets its own meter and fear of roller coasters doesn't. Friendships also put a floor under your personal, individual, self-absorbed misery. You get by with a little help from your friends, your family, the people who have to take you back when you apologize and the ones who can see what's right with you even when you, yourself, have lost sight of it.

Our ties to each other matter. They matter a lot. So *Unknown Armies* gives them percentile ratings.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## WHAT DO YOU DO WITH RELATIONSHIPS?

Your character starts out with two of the five most important relationships in her life statted out. Each begins equal to one of the upbeat abilities, but they don't remain in parity. The base ability may go up or down as your shock gauge changes, but the relationship only gets improved or diminished by interactions between the character and the person on the other end of the connection.

You can roll relationships for one of three effects, and just like an ability, you can roll it as many times as it's relevant in a session. Also like an ability, you can't make it the focus of your obsession.

### COERCION

This covers emotional blackmail and manipulation and the kind of bullying that doesn't leave physical scars, only the kind you can't see. The short version is, you make a threat against someone or something and roll: if your roll succeeds, you're threatening and the target has to either cave in and do what you say or face some level of stress check. Normally, coercion rolls are made with identities that substitute for abilities. If you're attempting to strong-arm a person or organization and you have a relationship to them, you can roll your relationship score instead.

This is not without cost, however. Every time you coerce someone using a relationship, that relationship's score drops by 5%. Doesn't matter if your roll succeeded or failed. If it hits zero, that person no longer respects you or wants to spend any time with you.

### SELFLESS GIVING

You can improve any relationship without a roll by doing something selfless for the other person. There's a catch though. It can't be too thoughtlessly easy.

You can increase a relationship by 5% every session by doing something for your pal that either your friend could not accomplish on their own, or costs you dearly. If you're an avatar or adept, breaking taboo definitely counts as a dear cost. So does any action that forces a stress check or which has a decent chance of resulting in injury. But it's pretty much up to the GM. Does she think that this gesture has a good chance of solidifying the bond? Then hey, go for it. GMs, you may want to be generous with these. Five percent isn't much, and relationships are great tools for getting PCs to care about events.

### SUBSTITUTION

If your relationship score to someone is higher than a relevant identity or ability, you can substitute the relationship and roll that instead. The relevant abilities are: Connect, Lie, Notice, Status, and Struggle.

So, yes, it may be much easier for you to punch your grandmother than punch a stranger. Which sounds icky, but lines up with shameful statistics about domestic abuse. Similarly, you're more likely to pick up on pallor and weight loss from a spouse than from someone you only see once a week (Notice) and your instincts for what riles up your dad are likely to be more accurate than when you try to needle a stranger (Status, Connect).

### OF COURSE MY RELATIONSHIP...

Here's the grab bag. If the relationship as established allows you to roll for something else and the GM says, "Yeah, OK," then warm up your dice, you're permitted to roll! This tends to see more use when you're related to an organization ("Of course I have a key to the office, I'm the VP of Accounting!") but can be circumstantial with individuals as well ("Of course I have some idea of where Jeannie would go if she was drunk and upset!").

### ...AND SOMETIMES, THE RELATIONSHIP ROLLS YOU

Relationships go both ways. They're notorious for it. This means that if the GM takes a notion to reel in your relationship with a **gamemaster character (GMC)** or a group larger than the PC cabal, she can roll *your* relationship percentiles. She can do this as often as once per session *per relationship*, though in practice it probably won't be nearly that often unless you're being really slug-like and inert and she feels the need to prod you into urgency with *something*.

These rolls are pretty simple. The person or organization makes a request of you, and the GM rolls. On *any* success, if you do the task or favor or whatever, your relationship improves by 5%. If you refuse, the relationship drops by 5%. On any failure, the relationship doesn't change, whether you agree to help out or not.

If you're in relationship to another PC, as you necessarily are, that player can pull on the relationship in this fashion once per session. Your PC cabal can make a relationship roll this way if everyone else in the group agrees to play it like that.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT CONNECTIONS

You don't just get five generic homies. No, in keeping with the mythology of social roles with mystic force found in *Unknown Armies*, you get five archetypal life connections.

Now, while we've so far been referring to these as individuals, it's just as possible — common really — to have one or two be organizations. When you're looking for guidance for life's big, abstract, persistent questions of value, it makes just as much sense to turn to the Catholic Church or the Social Democratic Party of Germany as it does to turn to Larry, your friend who always has good weed. You're obligated to have one of these relationships with your group of PCs. (I vote guru or mentor — if you pick favorite, that's going to be tricky.) But overall, you want a mix of social organizations and actual people with skin on them. Too many individuals and you're clingy. Too many organizations and you're detached and creepy.

### FAVORITE

This is the one that gets all the poems and love songs. Who do you love? Whose happiness do you consider integral to your own? Now, I'm just a simple country game designer, so I'm not going to dig deep into the nature of love, but I have one observation. If there's something you do that annoys *everyone* — it bugs your *mom* even — but there's one person who thinks it's cute? That person loves you. Similarly, Will Ferrell invokes the feeling of seeing a waiter coming with your food. If there's someone in your life who gives you that sensation every time they walk into the room? That's probably your favorite.

Now, uncomplicated love tends to be a little toxic for games because it seldom motivates characters to do anything more interesting than dither over whether she'd like the jade necklace or the opal and, my gosh, how can I afford either one? But complicated love, where it's unreciprocated, or teetering under the repeated impacts of lies and betrayal, or when it's *star-crossed*? Oh, that's the good stuff. So try to have one of those in your game life, and I hope you get the clean and uncomplicated type in real life.

Having a favorite organization is a little tricky. If you've dedicated your life to a business or to running a pet shelter or something like that, it could work, but generally this level of wordless passion is reserved for other human beings.

Your relationship with your favorite starts out equal to your Status. This is the person you go to for a connection to the world.

## WHO DA GURU? YOU DA GURU!

Each PC has to have a relationship with another PC — at *least* one relationship. While it's obvious what happens if Jan is mentor to Jean and Jean picks protégé as her relationship to Jan, what if both want to be in the driver's seat? What if Gary declares that Maurice is his guru and Maurice decides that Gary is his?

It's fine. The rules work the same way. They just take turns giving advice and guidance, in what looks from the outside like a fairly codependent partnership. If they're both in crisis at the same time, *then* things are going to get brisk. But the rules should work just fine even if they're arguing bitterly.

### GURU

Who explains what it's all about to you? When you have a deep spiritual crisis, wondering why we're even born, and why bad things happen to good people, and whether there's anyone at the helm or maybe God is just, like, an insecure pissy drunk... that's when you approach your guru.

Organizations *love* to be gurus. Any religion can serve admirably in the role, calming you down, providing explanations, giving you a framework of other people who've got the same concerns and letting you support each other. (Seriously, any religion! Even Scientology!) Political groups are less avid for the role — they're more hot for the part of mentor, but people treat atheist humanist left-liberalism as a spiritual bedrock, just as others adopt traditional American patriotism as the foundation of their moral universe.

But whether your guru is the ACLU or the gnomic old guy who runs the yoga class at the Y, it's your source for advice about what's right and wrong. It's distinct from mentor, though similar, because gurus operate on a larger, more abstract and sometimes mystical level. Your mentor tells you how to do something, while your guru tells you *why*.

Your guru relationship starts out equal to your Notice ability. This is the person you go to when things don't add up.

*Nobody needs anybody.*

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

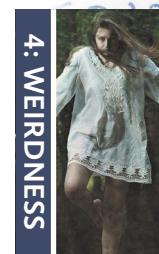
3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

*Everybody uses everybody.*



## SHE'S MY LOVER AND MY STUDENT!

While it may seem convenient to put one person or organization into multiple roles — guru plus mentor doesn't seem like much of a stretch — please keep them separate. Having multiple relationships with one person makes it possible to have one be healthy and one be sick, and that's not how this particular set of tools is intended to be used. Just choose or make up different people or societies you give a damn about. That's not so hard, is it?

### MENTOR

Who do you look at with admiration? Who's your aspirational figure? Who do you look at and think "Wow, \_\_\_\_\_ really has it wired together tight. I'd be better off if I could only be more like \_\_\_\_\_"? If the name in that blank is someone in your cell phone directory whom you see often enough, you can consider that person your mentor.

A mentor is similar to a guru, but where a guru is more concerned with big picture questions and morality, mentors work on pragmatics. What should your next move be? What's smart and what's foolish? If you're stuck on principles, call a guru. If your problem is with process, call your mentor. "I feel like no one will ever love me!" — talk to your guru. "Should I sell my Nabisco shares?" — ask your mentor.

Organizations make great mentors. Political parties, obviously ("Vote for this guy! And send money!") but also Alcoholics Anonymous ("Take it one day at a time and go to your meetings!") or even something like a municipal band ("Yeah, you're a little flat in the fourth measure. Let's try it with a quicker tempo, too!").

Your mentor relationship starts out equal to your Connect ability. It's all about interconnection, after all.

### RESPONSIBILITY

Somewhere there is someone you have to care for. It could be someone you owe, big time. Maybe you acted badly — abominably even — or maybe this person just doesn't have anyone else, regardless of their needs. It could be your child, or your elderly parent, or your sister who's in a bad spot. Or maybe you prospered on someone's back, the cake got cut and you got all the frosting, and now you feel ashamed and want to make that right.

You could love your responsibility, but it's not the fun kind of dizzying affection you have for your favorite. But, given how unhappy they can make you, it may be hard to feel anything other than sickly obligation.

This burdensome relationship starts out equal to your Knowledge ability. Either you know what you did, or you know what you *have* to do.

### PROTÉGÉ

There's someone who looks up to you — or, at least, someone you *think* looks up to you, or should. Someone you can guide and help and, if not exactly *shape*, certainly influence. Positively! Someone who treats you as their guru or mentor, really.

Like your responsibility, this is someone to whom you give and give. Unlike your responsibility, you give to your protégé because you *want* to, without obligation. Your protégé could also be your child, or a student or the kid you met through the high school mentoring program. Doesn't matter: you see something in them that you value and you want to nurture that. Is this selfless? Is it because you think that one day, this person is going to be *real useful* to you?

Your relationship with your protégé starts out equal to your Fitness, which may seem a little odd because Fitness is *usually* representative of physical health. Just remember that this is most likely to be a *healthy* relationship. There you go.

### RELATIONSHIPS, GAINED AND LOST

Relationships fade away, sometimes. Insert your own personal song and dance about how it's not you, it's me! People change. So what happens when a relationship drops to zero? Or, just as relevant, what happens when the other person in your relationship *dies*?

Well, first off, it's an Isolation (4-5) stress check. Whether they perish horribly or just fade away, losing a friend isn't easy.

Secondly, you're left with an open relationship slot. The course of *a typical character and setting build* leaves you with several free in any event. So how do you fill one?

Well, you could make it a group objective. It would be a local one — "Find Omar someone to make him a better avatar" if you're in the market for a mentor, or "Get Loretta out on the dating scene again" if you're up for the sitcom hijinks of well-meaning wingmen helping Loretta acquire a new favorite. But really, crowdsourcing your personal life isn't a great plan. It's unwieldy, it takes a lot of effort and attention from your buddies and, when your objective is full, you get a relationship with whomever the GM has presented. The relationship starts at half the value of the successful objective.

The much simpler and more straightforward way is to tell your GM who you want to be your new favorite and the relationship kicks in at 5%. You can then use it and improve it normally. So can the GM, of course.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Collaborative character and setting generation is found in "Characters, Cabals, and the Stage" on page 24 in Book Two: Run.

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Loretta's player convinces her group to do that, to do the exact thing that I just said was not a great plan. But they were paying attention when I suggested that bad ideas make for good stories, and after some grim and heavy plotlines – one of which put paid to Loretta's previous favorite – she's ready to get back in the saddle and they're ready for something that's more about feelings and less about suppurating chest wounds.

Having succeeded at an objective of "Make Peace Between the Hollister Family and the First Church of Edison Bodhisattva," they have the chance to roll half their old objective's score into the new one. The GM tells them that if they want to keep their 50% remainder, they have to set Loretta up with someone from the FCEB or one of those sardonic, tailored-suit-wearing, rat-fink Hollisters. Loretta's down, so the GM devotes a couple sessions to a love triangle between her, Seth Hollister (the least offensive of the cousins), and Brianne Chukwu (congregant at the FCEB, engineering student, and fellow bisexual). After many dates, the obligatory occult weirdness, and making it clear that going forward with either relationship could put the two groups at each other's throats again (and no, not in sense of making out), the objective hits 100%. Loretta's in love! With a small smile, the GM says, "I think that's a good spot to end the session." Loretta's player has to wait until next time to find out who she's got favorite 50% with. The player may have strong opinions, but this is what happens when you let the group set you up. You accept that you don't always get to choose who you fall for.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

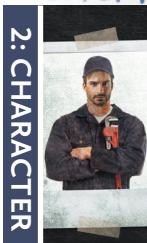
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6: ADEPTS

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## SHOCK GAUGES, CORRESPONDENCES, AND YOU HELPLESSNESS

FITNESS

DODGE

ATTACK THIS SHOCK GAUGE WITH **VIOLENCE**  
LINKED RELATIONSHIP: PROTÉGÉ

## ISOLATION

STATUS

PURSUIT

ATTACK THIS SHOCK GAUGE WITH **HELPLESSNESS**  
LINKED RELATIONSHIP: FAVORITE

## SELF

KNOWLEDGE

LIE

ATTACK THIS SHOCK GAUGE WITH THE **UNNATURAL**  
LINKED RELATIONSHIP: RESPONSIBILITY

## UNNATURAL

NOTICE

SECRECY

ATTACK THIS SHOCK GAUGE WITH **SELF**  
LINKED RELATIONSHIP: GURU

## VIOLENCE

CONNECT

STRUGGLE

ATTACK THIS SHOCK GAUGE WITH **ISOLATION**  
LINKED RELATIONSHIP: MENTOR

# IDENTITIES

Abilities are broad, but they have some important limits. First off, everyone has them, or nearly everybody. They're general, which means that if characters were *only* built around abilities, everyone would be varying degrees of sameness. There's no ability that covers healing spells, or being a world-class chef, or singing a song.

More importantly, abilities change and they shrink. That's part of their charm, but also a hassle if the guy you're counting on to be the party's face-man takes a series of shocks to Violence and Isolation and comes out of jail with considerably less of an amiable, trustworthy demeanor. But on the plus side, free knuckle tats!

Both these issues are addressed with identities. These are skills or traits or qualities that get *better* with time, and are more versatile than abilities, and more unique, and more reliable. Plus, you get to decide what identities you have. Want a character who's a cowboy? You can have the identity Cowboy 50%. Want to play someone who's a disgraced ATF agent? Disgraced ATF Agent 30% is yours. You can throw some percentiles on any identity you can imagine, from Artistic to Zen Monk.

## HOW MANY IDENTITIES? HOW MANY PERCENTILES?

When you create the setting, there are two steps where you have to define identities for your character. So, obviously, you have to have at least two identities. You can have as many as four, if you wish.

How many points do you distribute to your identities? Ask your GM. The default for an ordinary game, if ordinary has much meaning in the context of *Unknown Armies*, is 120 percentiles. You have to start an identity with at least 15% in it and it can't go over 90%. Don't take one at less than 30% unless you like to fail a lot.

Thus, if you're an aristocratic mathematician, you could go Aristocratic 35%/Mathematician 85% or vice versa or put 60% in each.

If your GM wants to run a more powerful game, she might give you 140% or even up to 160% to start. But even then, you can't begin with an identity above 90%. Honestly, c'mon.

In the course of the game, you can roll that identity much of the time. If you don't want to risk having your ability to do a particular task shrink or change, create an identity that covers that task instead. After all, if it's that important to the character, why *wouldn't* it be part of their identity?

Identities are specific roles or positions that are either chosen or are uncommon enough that they're not covered by abilities. Identities can perform tasks for which abilities are otherwise rolled, but that's covered below, under features.

## OF COURSE I CAN \_\_\_\_\_, I'M \_\_\_\_\_!

The most commonplace uses of identities are going to be obvious. If your identity is Cowboy, it's not much of a stretch to imagine it includes understanding why this cow is better than that one, and riding, and lassoing things. If your identity is Beautician, presumably it covers makeup and haircuts and eyebrow threading.

You could even take something like Brilliant and make a case for a lot of uses. "Of course I can discourse about the subtleties of poststructuralism, I'm brilliant!" But what about "Of course I can tell she's lying, I'm brilliant!"? Well, that's up to the GM, based on how you've played the character, how brilliance has come into play previously, and whether she thinks you're trying to make one identity so ultra-good that the others are obsolete. (Hint: if we wanted one identity to make other mechanics obsolete, we would have just had that one and let everyone take it.)

But rather than let unclear identities get bogged down with arguments, it's helpful to nail down a few things they do *for sure*. These — the most commonplace uses of an identity, the rolls you make with 'em all the time — are that identity's *features*.

Every normal identity *substitutes* for one ability. Weird mystic powers break the rules, pretty much by definition, so they don't get to sub in for Connect or Struggle, usually. When you choose an ability that the identity subs for, it does not sub for that ability for the purposes of coercing a shock meter or making a stress check. It's only for taking actions that the ability it subs for ordinarily covers.

Non-paranormal identities have two additional features, two circumstances where they definitely come into play, above and beyond the "Of course..." elements and the free substitution. Now, when you pick features, they should *also* have some justification under the "Of course..." rubric. "Of course I can resist that contagious illness, I'm a former altar boy!" makes no sense unless you have some rationale, so even if you *really want* your Ex-Altar Boy 60% identity to substitute for the Fitness ability, you can't just declare it so without some explanation. Even if you make what you think is a brilliant case for inclusion, your GM may

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

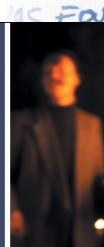
3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Clothes are the skin we choose.





1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

say no and you just have to accept that without whining. Apparently Brilliant doesn't stretch to cover "Of course I can get my GM to say yes!" either.

**Important:** *Supernatural identities, as well as adept and avatar identities, don't get the "Of course I can..." element.*

## SOMETIMES, SUCKING IS FUN

Most of the time, you want to roll an identity, and some of the time you wind up falling back on an ability. Abilities are sort of the laundry-day sweatpants of task rolls. Nonetheless, there are going to be times when an ability is greater than the identity which substitutes for it. What do you do then?

You choose.

If you roll the identity, you *might* succeed, but even if you fail, you get an experience notch and are more likely to succeed next time. If you roll the ability, you're more likely to get it right, but if you get it wrong there isn't even a consolation prize. How dire is your need? If you have to roll at all, it's probably pretty important.

If you don't want to make those tough choices, then just make sure your budget of identity points isn't spread thin over too many options. Two identities at 60% might be more immediately useful than four at 30%... although, after failing upstairs a couple times, the player with four at 30% can become the player with four at 40% while the cautious double 60% player is unchanged, albeit successful. Pick your poison. Do you want long-term growth, or short-term stability?

That's without considering the *characterization* elements of having a low identity — even though *Unknown Armies* is a game that is all about character. Suppose I have the identity Martial Arts Master 30% which isn't quite as reliable as my Struggle rating of 45%. What does it mean when I roll the identity instead of the ability? It means I'm trying to do it *right* and control myself instead of flying into a rage of head-butts and groin-kicks.

The name you put on your low identity can be interesting as well. "Greatest Fighter in the World 15%" is a choice that says a lot about the disconnect between your character's self-image and actual reality. That overconfidence can be fun to play with, right up to the point it becomes unsurvivable. Maybe even after that, if you die like you lived — smugly throwing weak lotus kicks.

The other fun way to use low identities is to play a beginner at something. You could start a game as the woman who *just invented* an adept school based on high energy physics. If you want to write *a whole new school of magick*, it might be neat to start her at a low level of aptitude and have her character take the classic zero-to-hero growth arc. It's been popular in all those systems with levels for a reason.

For more on those, take a look at "Supernatural Identities" on page 45.

A whole new school of magick? See "Adepts" on page 124.

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## FEATURES

When you define your identity, choose an ability it supplants ("Substitutes for...") and pick two features from this section. As mentioned, you can only pick ones that make sense to the GM. You can't expect her to run a good game for characters who are absurdist caricatures.

### CASTS RITUALS

*Book Three: Reveal* describes many mysterious rites that, if performed correctly and with intense desire, yield no-kidding magickal effects.

If you take an identity with this feature, something about it relates to performing magick rituals — Thelemic Initiate, Hoodoo Woman, Defrocked Priest, Eliptonic Devotee, Aleister Crowley Reincarnated. You can roll the identity to activate minor rituals. More than that, you can roll the identity to perform significant rituals too, as long as you've got the magickal charge or charges needed for that ritual. (Charges are like invisible, immaterial magick batteries. Adepts can make them out of nothing more than bad intentions and stubbornness. Other people have to get them other ways.)

This feature shouldn't be confused with the Use Gutter Magick feature, although it's often paired up with it. Casts Rituals is for Thamaturgy and prepared magick based on years of research and study. Use Gutter Magick is improvisational rituals made up on the spot.

Avatar and adept identities come with this feature baked in.

### COERCES A METER

*Coercion* is covered in full elsewhere in this book, but the short version is, you plausibly threaten someone and they either do what you say, or they suck up a stress check. When you take this feature, nail down which meter it menaces. An identity can attack multiple meters, but only if it takes one feature per meter. Some possibilities for identities that could coerce, by meter, include:

**Violence:** Hulk, Cop, Mafioso.

**Isolation:** Society Matron, Church Elder, Gossip.

**Helplessness:** Judge, Lawyer, Hack Politician.

**Self:** Psychologist, Blackmailer, Spy.

**Unnatural:** Authentic Thaumaturge, Oracle, Creepy.

You can roll this identity to coerce a meter, substituting it for one of the abilities coercion usually requires. You still need circumstances that make it plausible — a weapon, some kind of inside information, and so on.

### EVALUATES A METER

If your identity gives you insight into people, you can give it a feature that lets you assess one of their shock meters. Pick one of the five, and after spending a little time with someone — just enough that a cold read is plausible — roll the identity. Depending on what you get, you find out just how far off normalcy's baseline this person has strayed.

**Note:** as the game begins, it's presumed that you've successfully evaluated the meter of everyone with whom you have a relationship.

**Fumble:** This person is a stone-faced *cipher!* It's kinda freaking you out! And the person *knows* they're kinda freaking you out, because they're starting to freak out about your staring and weird questions.

**Matched Failure or Failure:** You get nothing.

**Success:** You can tell if they have more hardened notches than you, or fewer, in the meter.

**Matched Success:** You know if they have a much greater or lesser supply of hardened notches on the meter. If they're within two notches of your score, it seems pretty close, though you still get whether they have more or fewer than you. If it's a broader spread, it's that much more obvious.

**Crit:** Same as a matched success, and you also know if they have a permanent insanity from having five fails in the meter. A five-fail syndrome is not always subtle, but sometimes people can conceal a lot.

### MEDICAL

The identity involves keeping people alive after injury and getting them healthy when they're sick. It's no good for mental stuff — for that you want Therapeutic. Basically when someone's been hurt, *you can help*. You can use this for less-scientific abilities like Faith Healer or Root Medicine or Aromatherapy too.

### PROVIDES FIREARM ATTACKS

Although guns are notoriously user-friendly ("It's a simple point and click interface!") it's sometimes difficult to actually harm a person, animal, or clay pigeon if you have no practice or idea about what you're doing. This problem's compounded if the person (or clay pigeon, I guess) is shooting back. If you're a total beginner with guns, use the rules for *Suppressive Fire*, rolled with Struggle. Otherwise, you need an identity with this feature before you can realistically attempt to gun someone down when they're running and screaming.



1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

See "Coercion" on page 56.

4: WEIRDNESS

The nuts and bolts of this are covered in "Medicine" on page 74.

5: AVATARS

Shooting someone who's restrained? That's a different matter, described in "Point-blanking" on page 67.

6: ADEPTS

The results of rampant firearm violence is unpacked in "Guns" on page 64.

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## PROVIDES WOUND THRESHOLD

The average dude has a wound threshold of 50, which means he can take 50 wounds before snuffing it. If you want an identity that makes you tougher than normal, you can use this feature. Naturally, it's kind of a sucky deal if your identity is less than 50%, but even then it has the advantage of improving over time.

## PROVIDES INITIATIVE

Initiative is a game-simulation contrivance to help the GM determine when things happen in combat. Generally speaking, when a fight or emergency happens, people just say what they're doing, and the GM resolves those actions in whatever action seems most sensible. There are times — a lot of times, actually — when one person wants to get their action done before another. Both of you try to grab the wad of cash off the poker table, or you try to slam the door before he gets out, or she wants to stab you before you jump behind the desk.

In those cases, if it seems like it could be a tie, you compare whatever you're rolling to perform the action. Typically it's an ability like Struggle or Dodge, or a substituting identity. If she has Struggle 20% and you have Dodge 40%, you jumped behind the desk before she could stick you. If you both roll Fitness to grab the cash off the table, and both get successes, you can resolve the tie by looking at whose Fitness ability is higher, unless one of you had an identity with this feature, and that identity was higher still. So suppose you have Twitchy Paranoid as an identity. ("Of course I locked the goddamn door! I'm a twitchy paranoid!") It's rated at 60% and has this feature. Any time there's a panic situation and you're seeing whose ability or identity goes off first, you act as if your rating was 60%. It's only for timing, but it doesn't matter if that's Struggle or Dodge or Pursuit. You're fast off the mark.

## RESISTS SHOCKS TO A METER

If you don't have an identity that protects you, you have to fall back on rolling Fitness to resist stress checks against Violence, and Notice to resist stress checks against Self, and so on. But you can also designate an identity to preserve your priceless sanity by using this feature. If you decide, for example, that your identity Badass Biker Thug 45% protects you against Violence, you roll that instead of Fitness — but only for stress checks, and only for checks against Violence. It's one meter per customer, and it only protects your sanity. You can't use Badass Biker Thug 45% for the actions of Fitness, unless it also has the feature Substitutes for Fitness.

## THERAPEUTIC

Your identity involves caring and sympathy and healing the troubled souls of puzzled mortals in this modern era. It could be something recognized and licensed, like psychology, or you could do it all with crystals and soothing words. Whatever your therapeutic modality, you can help people *repair their damaged shock gauge*.

## UNIQUE

Pretty much *any recurring action* you can talk your GM into gets shoehorned into the unique category. Want to own and be able to safely, legally operate a hot air balloon? Unique feature. Want to be famous enough that a certain segment of middle-aged women goes absolutely *nuts* when they see you? Unique. Be able to forge documents and recognize others' forged documents? Build and disarm explosive devices? Sculpt beautifully in clay? Unique. Just try to keep these quite narrow. If you're rolling for a unique effect more often than any single ability, it may be too broad. If your GM decides after the fact to rein it in, be OK with that.

## USE GUTTER MAGICK

Working magick when you're not an adept or an avatar of one of the archetypes of the Invisible Clergy means either spending years combing through rituals that may or may not actually work, or just shoving your face into reality and using pure will. Reality bruising is *gutter magick*, and it's described in detail later.

Secrecy is the default ability to roll when using gutter magick, but anyone with this feature attached to an identity can roll that identity instead.

Adepts and avatar identities get this feature for free, but let's be honest, what they have going for them mojo-wise is probably a lot better than this. Still, gift horse, etc.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



More on healing a damaged shock gauge in "Therapy" on page 75.

See "The Soft Way: Gutter Magick" on page 178.

## IMPROVING IDENTITIES

The great thing about identities is that they almost never get worse. Instead, however sucky they start out, they get more reliable and less embarrassing with time.

There's a little box on your character sheet next to where you write in each identity. It's labeled "Failed!" The first time, every session, that you make a roll on that identity and don't succeed, check that box. Then, at the end of the session, erase each mark and add 1-5% to that identity. (Roll a d10 and cut the result in half, rounding up.) You don't get more improvement from unusually awful failures, you don't improve more than once. It's just a slow, steady improvement over time. Unless, of course, you don't use the identity. Or you use it and it succeeds *every time*, in which case I don't see how you have much room for complaint.

## NEW IDENTITIES

Getting a whole new category of skill is not easy and, in fact, you can't do it without help. Specifically, it requires the help of your cabal (or whatever you're calling your group of PCs). Or magick, but that's always the exception.

More commonly, a character can get a new identity if the group makes it a local objective to help them do so. Suppose Eunice wants to become a survivalist. If her fellow PCs agree to that objective, they can chart a path and pursue it and build up the objective's percentiles as they would for any other collective project. When they hit 100%, Eunice can add Survivalist 15% to her character sheet and define its features. They also get half the objective score to roll on into another project, as long as it's related to Eunice, or survivalism, or something arguably connected.

New identities start at 15%, unless they were gifts of magick, which vary greatly depending on the source.

## SUPERNATURAL IDENTITIES

Identities are whatever you make them, mostly, but supernatural identities need some guidelines. Without them, that one player in the group — you know the one — defines something coherent but so broadly and powerfully applicable that it's the obvious solution to every challenge and the other PCs are reduced to carrying his water.

(You say you don't have that player in your group? Damn, where do you live and what wardrobe takes me there?)

To keep supernatural abilities loose but manageable, we draw a distinction between the mechanics under which supernatural identities operate, and the skin of fiction on top that mediates their impact on the story.

I realize that sounds confusing. A simpler way to put it may be: the dice rolls do one thing, and that's always the same. The description of how that same thing happens can vary a lot.

Even simpler: the guy who gets hints by reading tarot cards uses the same mechanics as the gal who gets hints by interpreting her weird dreams. The nature of the hints the GM supplies may be very different — sound different, imply different things, arrive through different means — but at the end of the day they both get a hunch roll.

Supernatural identities are broken down into eight rough categories, each with mechanics assigned. If you want some kind of paranormal power, look to what it does and find the mechanics that are closest to what you want out of it. You can call it whatever you want, but if it offers vague, general protection, use the rules later in this book.

Supernatural identities don't get the free feature of substituting for an ability. They get Cast Rituals and Use Gutter Magick unless it makes no sense for them, conceptually — either way, they don't get anything else, feature-wise. The eight broad categories of supernatural identities are as follows:

### VAGUE INFORMATION

**Examples:** Prophetic Dreams, Tarot Reader, Haruspex, Visionary.

These identities provide hints, clues, and insight, but no specific information. They're relegated to horoscope-and-fortune-cookie-level aid, offering general abstract guidance instead of hard, concrete fact. Mechanically, they are intermittent. Perhaps they require an investment of time in a tranquil environment — good for reading cards or gazing into a crystal ball or consulting a spirit guide. Or perhaps they just happen whenever the GM wants to say "Give me a Visionary roll." They are not something you can just switch on casually. Accessing this information is kind of a hassle.

**Fumble:** You see something nightmarish. Take a Helplessness (4) or Violence (4) check (GM picks), and describe the dire future you're now desperate to avoid. If the future you describe is insufficiently dire, the GM should feel free to ignore it and decide it was all a psychotic episode.

**Matched Failure or Failure:** Reply hazy, try again.

**Success:** You get a hunch on your next roll and some vague insight into what's going on — possibly just the GM reminding you of something you knew but have forgotten or dismissed as unimportant.

**Matched Success:** The GM gives you a giant clue pointing towards where *she* wants your character to go next, and *you get a hunch for your next roll*.

**Crit:** The GM gives you a giant clue pointing you towards your character's personal goals, and additionally you get a hunch for your next two rolls.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

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More at  
"Hunch Rolls"  
on page 14.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**Examples:** Aura Sight, Clairvoyant, Astral Projector, See Dead People.

Some powers provide very specific information unnaturally, and do nothing else. Instead of the impressionistic landscape view of the vague information powers, this is a photorealistic miniature. It tells one thing well, not everything through a dark glass.

Pick what your power shows. For instance, Aura Sight shows auras — you can get a sense of someone's mood, general health, and whether they're under paranormal influence. That's useful and predictable, but you can never use it to see the future or find the answer to an abstract question like, "How do I fix my marriage?" A clairvoyant can see distant places as if she was present, but can't hear, and it has to be somewhere she's been before and can clearly recall. An astral projector can travel immaterially to distant places, but sees them unclearly and is likely to attract the attention of other intangible entities. Mediums see and hear restless spirits, and demons, but nothing else.

When you roll one of these identities, you scan one thing or person or place. What you get depends on your roll.

**Fumble:** You've come to the attention of some powerful person or entity or force which now seeks to use your powers as part of its grand cosmic scheme. But on the plus side, you see something — you see what that entity wants to show you to lead you into its clutches...

**Matched Failure and Failure:** You get nothing, except perhaps a mild headache.

**Success:** You perceive your target with so-so clarity for sixty seconds or less.

**Matched Success:** You perceive your target clearly for about fifteen minutes.

**Crit:** You perceive your target clearly for as long as you wish.

## VAGUE PROTECTION

**Examples:** Good Luck, Guardian Angel, Blessing, Quantum Psychic Positivity, Precognition.

You have something that makes you less likely to undergo physical harm, period. Your guardian angel, dangerous visions, or lucky rabbit's foot protects you equally from car crashes, stabbing, stuff that falls off windowsills, bullets, and kidney punches. But you have to invoke it — rub the rabbit's foot, pray to the angel, pause and put a hand dramatically to your head when going all psychic.

Its effect? Just like *Dodge*. It's exactly the same, except cooler. In addition, pick one category of effect that can't usually be dodged — stuff like magick spells, roll penalties, stress checks to one specific meter, illnesses and poisons — and explain how your vague protection power also defends you against that. You and your GM can work out what form that protection takes, whether it's "Like Dodge for magick" or "If I'm going to be poisoned, I roll and can avoid poisoning if I succeed."

## SPECIFIC PROTECTION

**Examples:** Bulletproof Agimat, Protective Palad Khik Tattoo, Enchanted Molar Twin Decoy, Spiritual Colonic.

You have something that protects you from a very specific, narrow category of physical, mental, or spiritual harm. It might stop bullets, but be useless against fire and pinching. It might protect you against deliberate spells, but not demonic possession or head games. It might shield you against emotional peril, but leave you vulnerable to tangible threats.

The rules for specific protection depend on what's being blocked.

**If it protects your sanity**, define three meters it defends. You can roll your spooky supernatural power instead of the abilities that would normally resist challenges to those three types of shock.

**If it protects your body**, you can take an action to roll it when you're imperiled by one very specific threat — bullets, knives, fire — and if you succeed, you take no damage. For the purposes of this roll, you always win initiative.

**If it protects you from malignant magick**, you can roll it any time you're under the influence of an ongoing spell and, with a success, be rid of it. Moreover, if you know someone is casting a spell at you, you can use it as if it was the Dodge ability, except that it can avoid bad luck and erotic befudlement sorcery instead of cock-punches.

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS

Rules can be found in "Dodging" on page 62.





## VAGUE HARM

**Examples:** Hexing, Curses, Psychic Vampirism.

You have some creepy ability to put bad luck or evil juju or malign spiritual aspects on those who have displeased you. They don't know what form this vague cloud of ill-will takes. You don't know what form it takes. But misfortune dogs their steps.

Once per hour or so, you can pick out some poor sucker and put a hurtin' on him using your vague harm identity. The form this takes depends on your roll.

**Fumble, Matched Failure, or Failure:** Damn. Nothing happened.

**Success:** The target falls under a -10% hex. He takes -10% to all rolls until a roll has failed specifically because of that penalty. This works just like the *reality bruise effect called whammy*.

**Matched Success:** The target falls under a sticky -20% curse and doesn't even know it.

**Crit:** The target falls under a -20% curse. Moreover, he has a feeling of terrible, impending doooooom and faces a Helplessness (3-4) check.

## SPECIFIC HARM

**Examples:** Evil Eye, Psychic Assault, Dim Mak.

You've got some kind of mojo that causes actual physical injury, but it's nothing that the cops would recognize as such. Maybe you just touch someone and they get blood clots, or you glare at them and their bowels are seized with rending pains or they start to sweat blood. Real Scanners stuff.

In addition to being vanishingly rare, the power to just up and harm people with your naked will-power has important limits on it, and those limits vary depending on the description of the identity. If you know the art of the dim mak death touch, you obviously have to touch your target with your vibrating palm. If you have the evil eye, you have to glare at your target live and in person, not just at a photo or over Skype. Additionally, you can't do it in the presence of a nazar amulet or a hamsa or any of the other popular and attractive talismans that stop the evil eye cold. For psychic assault, you may have to be calm and tranquil and *not be able to see or hear your victim — meaning you may not even know if it worked or not*.

Regardless of the strictures, you can only throw out one such attack per hour, and doing more than a few every day is going to give you nosebleeds and leave you peaky. So that's a bit of a limiting factor, but on the plus side, no one can dodge this attack. Not even the dim mak, since it's a lot easier to touch someone like you're playing tag than it is to hit with meaningful force. Also, suffering from this sort of thing causes a Unnatural (4-5) check.

Weapons do not enhance these attacks.

**Fumble:** Nothing happens to the victim and you get some serious backlash. Suffer 1d10 wounds as blood vessels in your eyes and nose burst. You can still see, but you look like you thought smoking a giant blunt would cure your pinkeye.

**Matched Failure:** Nothing happens to the victim and you snarl your internal energies. Take a -10% penalty on your next action.

**Failure:** Nothing happens.

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6: ADEPTS

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**Success:** The target takes the total of the dice in damage.

**Matched Success:** The target takes the total of the dice in damage — ten points if it was a 55, four points if it was a 22 — and takes a -20% penalty on their next action.

**Crit:** The target suffers 20 wounds of damage and loses their next action as they reel and stumble from the malevolence.

## INFLUENCE

**Examples:** Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Mesmerism, Siren Voice, Telepathic Mood Infliction.

Much the same as using Connect. Identical rules for *snap judgments*. But when you really sit down and press someone, these powers are more potent than just good word choice. If you're using the *gridiron system*, fumbles and simple failures have different results.

**Fumble:** The other person takes an Unnatural (4-5) check. They jump immediately to the most negative result. If you have a relationship with this person, it loses ten percentiles.

**Failure:** You move one step away from your chosen direction.

## VERSATILITY

**Examples:** Telekinesis, Telepathy, Ancestral Memories, Spirit Guide.

There are some paranormal abilities that are commonplace in fiction and urban legend that can do a whole lot of different things. Telekinesis can pick locks, collapse an artery, flick someone's ear, and write a message in steam on a mirror. Telepathy can send messages, receive them, read thoughts, know when someone's about to attack, and serve as a lie detector. If you're getting advice from hundreds of generations of ancestors or from nigh-omniscient spirits from beyond, that could apply to just about every ability roll, except for programming the latest smartphone.

There are people who have tremendously powerful and versatile mystic abilities, and they're called adepts. But they also pay heavy, *heavy* prices. A versatile identity can't do what adepts do because it doesn't have a giant battery of suffering and cosmic discord powering it.

So here's how a power like this works: once per day, you can roll it as if it was any one of the other categories of supernatural identity. You want to use Ancestral Memories to hurt someone? Describe it as utilizing the lost hand-to-hand combat secrets of the Maya, or brewing a poison used by your illegitimate Borgia forebears. Want to learn something with TK? Describe picking the latch on someone's shrink's briefcase and teasing out their file. Want to protect yourself with your

## WHERE ARE THE ADEPT AND AVATAR IDENTITIES?

We've devoted entire chapters in this book to adepts and avatars. Specifically, all of chapters five and six. You can find the rules for avatar identities on page 94 and adept identities on page 125. But here's the short version.

Adepts get Casts Rituals and Use Gutter Magick, don't get to use "Of course I can..." tricks, and don't substitute their identity for an ability. Also, your adept identity must always be your obsession. Adepts can generate and use charges to power their specific school of magick, which you also have to choose when you create your character.

Avatars get Casts Rituals and Use Gutter Magic, don't get to use "Of course I can..." tricks, and don't substitute their identity for an ability. Avatars channel their chosen archetype and get amazing powers as a result. You don't have to make your avatar identity your obsession identity if you don't want to; some avatars have no idea they're doing what they're doing.

See "Connect" on page 8.

Refer to "The Gridiron: Extended Contests" on page 69.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
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## IDENTITIES A-Z

If you're having trouble coming up with identities for a character, or are just a little curious to see how they could be built, here are twenty-six examples — one for each letter in the alphabet. You could throw some hardened notches on a meter, pick identities from your initials, and have a character mostly complete.

### ACROBAT

Maybe you teach it to kids in a gym, or are a kid who gets taught, maybe you work in a circus or used to. Maybe you were just on the team and kept up with your stretching. Whatever the origin, your sense of your body's position in space is highly developed, you're quick, you're lithe, and you're limber.

**I'm an Acrobat, of course I can** tumble, squeeze into small spaces, slip out of bonds and handcuffs.

**Substitutes for:** Fitness.

**Feature:** Provides Initiative.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Dodge.

### BLUES MUSICIAN

You pursue that profoundly American art form, blues music. You chase that strange alchemy that lets you sing mournfully about unhappiness and bad luck and somehow sometimes wind up cheerful at the end of it. You presumably have a slouch hat and sunglasses.

**I'm a Blues Musician, of course I can** play guitar and harmonica, develop a fanbase, get backstage.

**Substitutes for:** Status.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Helplessness.

**Feature:** Evaluates Helplessness.

### CARING

Caring does not require special training or natural talent, it doesn't earn you big money and *People* magazine does not profile the year's 50 Most Caring People. Nonetheless, a deep and abiding concern for others is essential. Without it, civilization would die in a week.

**I'm Caring, of course I can** find first aid supplies, maintain a chipper disposition, bake.

**Substitutes for:** Connect.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Status.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Isolation.

### DOG TRAINER

The money's in training dogs to sit, stay, and heel, but some people love animals of all types. The lucky ones get loved back in return.

**I'm a Dog Trainer, of course I can** make your sick dog feel better, charm pet owners, train all sorts of animals.

**Substitutes for:** Dodge.

**Feature:** This identity can be rolled to prevent any animal from attacking (unique).

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Isolation.

### ELECTRICIAN

You know what an electrician is, right? Someone who comes in, runs conduit, stands on a ladder, makes sure your house doesn't fry you or burn down? In a world lit by Edison, these guys are on the inside of the real power.

**I'm an Electrician, of course I can** plausibly demand admission to secure locations, read blueprints, schmooze with union folks and building inspectors.

**Substitutes for:** Knowledge.

**Feature:** Build and evaluate electrical devices (unique).

**Feature:** Repair or demolish electrical devices (unique).

### FREEMASON

Or Shriner, or Knight of Columbus, or Rotarian... this is your basic group-membership gig, where you know people who know people and you get together to socialize. The Freemason mysticism schtick permits people with this identity to cope with the idea of spooky boojums, while Mensa membership might let someone substitute that identity for Knowledge, while belonging to a temple could provide some help with Self or Helplessness.

**I'm a Freemason, of course I can** get access to a tiny Shriner car, get investment tips from my buddies, get aid in unexpected circumstances.

**Substitutes for:** Status.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Connect.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to the Unnatural.

### GYM RAT

This could also represent someone who runs marathons, someone who's really into tennis, or anyone avid for any sport, really. Some might substitute for Struggle or Dodge instead of Pursuit.

**I'm a Gym Rat, of course I can** massage that sore iliotibial band, talk shop with the bike store owner, find a buddy to lend me a kayak.

**Substitutes for:** Fitness.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Dodge.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Pursuit.

I have made  
a collection  
of people

and

they wander  
my memory  
palace sobbing  
for release.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## HOT

Also known as gorgeous or sexy or stunning, but it may not actually have anything to do with *looks*. There are people whose photographs appear average but who have this magnetic presence when you're face to face. Pheromones maybe? Whatever the source of this sexual magnetism, it pries open the human psyche like little else can.

**I'm Hot, of course I can** look good in those clothes, create a distraction, go to the front of the line.

**Substitutes for:** Lie.

**Feature:** Coerces Helplessness.

**Feature:** Coerces Isolation.

## IRRITABLE

Everyone knows someone who's lovably crabby. This is a bit more serious than that. This is smoldering rage that makes people step softly, speak carefully, and maybe just avoid you altogether. Some irritable people are all bark, no bite. Some bite really hard.

**I'm Irritable, of course I can** make reasonable arguments seem insipid, provoke people, get the manager out here.

**Substitutes for:** Struggle.

**Feature:** Coerces Violence.

**Feature:** Evaluates Helplessness.

## JUJUTSU INSTRUCTOR

This is an example of how you can build an identity for an unarmed combatant who isn't chockablock stacked with hardened notches in Violence. An instructor is teaching a class somewhere, and maybe even has her own dojo. Though if so, she probably isn't making any money at it, unless the identity substitutes for Status. She has not necessarily been in a bunch of life-or-death fights.

**I'm a Jujutsu Instructor, of course I can** explain that martial arts match to an outsider, get a bokken out of my trunk, bond with other fans of Ronda Rousey.

**Substitutes for:** Struggle.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Dodge.

**Feature:** Evaluates Violence.

## KARATE INSTRUCTOR

Compare with the jujutsu instructor to see how you can craft an identity to *supplement* a high Struggle score, or a different violent identity. A character with another fighting identity right out of the gate doesn't need a second one. An identity that lets him not get hit, or that lets him react quickly, could give him an essential edge over a guy who has only exchanged numerous head-punches.

**I'm a Karate Instructor, of course I can** speak some fragmentary Japanese, get a tonfa out of my gym bag, get help or advice from one of my students.

**Substitutes for:** Dodge.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Violence.

**Feature:** Provides Initiative.

## LIFEGUARD

The job is to swim out and save lives, either at the beach or the pool. Oh sure, *mostly* the job is to blow the whistle at kids who are horsing around, but now and then... saving lives. Like a gym rat, this implies a lot of physical exercise, which explains the increased wound threshold. Since lifeguards have to always be on the lookout, it can substitute for Notice as well.

**I'm a Lifeguard, of course I can** swim fast, spot the signs of drowning, perform CPR.

**Substitutes for:** Fitness.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Notice.

**Feature:** Provides Wound Threshold.

BAD NEWS  
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ICE BLACK

## MUSLIM

I'd argue that being a person of faith can be *more* central to who someone truly is than their job or their hobby or their gym membership. Moreover, this works for any religion, as long as it provides a framework for understanding one's place in the world, and a community with whom you can share your joys and miseries.

You could also build a religious hypocrite identity — or, less harshly, the identity of someone *trying* to believe but not doing well — by protecting the Isolation meter with your faith community's social aspects, and maybe subbing in for Status if you're gossiping over coffee with your pals from the mosque.

**I'm a Muslim, of course I can** read Arabic, remember some Saudi history, cook a pretty good halal dinner.

**Substitutes for:** Connect.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to the Unnatural.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Self.

## NATURE LOVER

This could cover anything from a day hiker with a life list of birds to watch, to a heavily trained wilderness guide. Either way, it represents someone who can live without Wi-Fi and whose mind can handle adapting to the environment instead of living in an environment that's profoundly rebuilt around humankind.

**I'm a Nature Lover, of course I can** identify those animal tracks, start a campfire without matches, purify water.

**Substitutes for:** Fitness.

**Feature:** Provides Wound Threshold.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Isolation.

## OCCULTIST

This could be an autodidact with strong opinions about Aleister Crowley, or someone who joined a secret society of one stripe or another. In the setting of *Unknown Armies*, it might just be someone who's been paying attention.

**I'm an Occultist, of course I can** tell the difference between Santería and Satanism, wow the goth kids, cruelly mock the major religions.

**Substitutes For:** Knowledge.

**Feature:** Casts Rituals.

**Feature:** Evaluates Unnatural.

## POLICE OFFICER

This set of features is good for a uniformed cop on the beat. To be a detective or investigator, you'd better have good Notice and Knowledge, or an identity that props up those abilities.

**I'm a Police Officer, of course I can** fix your parking ticket, reasonably request entry to most places, find my way around town.

**Substitutes for:** Pursuit.

**Feature:** Provides Firearm Attacks.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Struggle.

## QUIET

Some people are shy, wear soft-soled shoes, and don't particularly need others to endorse their feelings about everything.

**I'm Quiet, of course I can** be around people who normally freak out at strangers, get close to wildlife, avoid being overheard.

**Substitutes for:** Secrecy.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Notice.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Isolation.

## 1: GO



## 2: CHARACTER



## 3: CONFLICT



## 4: WEIRDNESS



## 5: AVATARS



## 6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
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## UNDERTAKER

Nobody wants to fool around with corpses, and if they do, they shouldn't. That's why people have to get paid to do it. Specifically, undertakers and mortuary attendants. While it's indisputably a creepy job to most folks, the work's steady, it can't get outsourced overseas, and if you ever need to deal with a dead body off the books, undertakers have the expertise.

**I'm an Undertaker, of course I can** politely (albeit superficially) console the grieving, make a good guess about what happened to a corpse, use a lot of terrifying tools and chemicals.

**Substitutes for:** Lie.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Violence.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Secrecy.

## VETERAN

Between two wars in Iraq and the one in Afghanistan, there are a lot of Americans who have been trained to kill, courtesy of US tax dollars. A fair percentage of them actually went overseas and did it, too. Of course, there are plenty of veterans who never saw action, but... this identity is for the other kind.

**I'm a Veteran, of course I can** speak in military jargon, endure discomfort, kick nine kinds of ass on Xbox.

**Substitutes for:** Fitness.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Violence.

**Feature:** Provides Firearm Attacks.

## WEATHER FORECASTER

There are all kinds of meteorologists out there, and while this one assumes a local TV setup, it could work as well behind the scenes as on the screens. For a government meteorologist, or expert in *anything*, really, just modify the list of what you can do.

**I'm a Weather Forecaster, of course I can** introduce you to everyone at the local news station, identify cloud types, ridicule climate change deniers.

**Substitutes for:** Knowledge.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Notice.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Status.

## X-RAY TECHNICIAN

Any sort of health functionary could fit in here, and in this era of specialization there are *many*. Lots of square day jobs can justify substitution for Status or Knowledge and some kind of stress resistance.

**I'm an X-Ray Technician, of course I can** move around the hospital without arousing suspicion, use an x-ray machine, tell you crazy stories about stuff that's been inside people.

**Substitutes for:** Knowledge.

**Feature:** Resists challenges to Helplessness.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Status.

## YARDBIRD

No, not a member of the '60s band that did "Heart Full of Soul." A yardbird might refer to a new military recruit assigned to menial tasks but it is more often a term for a convict, due to the amount of time spent in the prison yard.

**I'm a Yardbird, of course I can** play dumb, craft makeshift weapons, know when things are about to get ugly.

**Substitutes for:** Dodge.

**Feature:** Substitutes for Fitness.

**Feature:** Provides Initiative.

*What you do is not who you are, unless you are desperately boring.*

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS





## CREATING CHARACTERS: THE LONELY SINGLES CLUB VERSION

In most *Unknown Armies* games, everyone creates their characters together, at the table (kitchen, living room, basement, virtual, etc) in the presence of the GM and a big sheet of paper or corkboard. That's the first session, generally, and the GM runs that show, so the procedures for doing that are all included in *Book Two: Run*.

But you're not most people, are you? Plus, it'd be a good idea for us to include a summary of creating characters here.

Note that this does not include all of the fun collaborative setting-building stuff that goes into the default method. This is just so you know how many points you get and what order to do stuff.

1. Come up with a concept.
2. Set each of your shock meters to a number of hardened notches between one and nine. Watch out for burnout — that happens when you hit twenty-five or more total hardened notches.
3. Figure out the percentages of your abilities based on each shock meter's hardened notches. Your upbeat abilities (the first of the pair) are equal to 65% minus 5% per hardened notch. Your downbeat abilities (the second in the pair) are equal to 15% plus 5% per hardened notch. The two abilities in a pair should add up to 80%.
  - Helplessness gives you Fitness and Dodge.
  - Isolation gives you Status and Pursuit.
  - Self gives you Knowledge and Lie.
  - Unnatural gives you Notice and Secrecy.
  - Violence gives you Connect and Struggle.

4. Pick two or more identities. If you want to be able to do weird stuff, one of your identities has to cover it. Split 120% (or more if the GM says so) between the identities, with a minimum of 15% and a maximum of 90%.
5. Choose your three passions: fear, noble, and rage. Tie fear to one of the five shock meters.
6. Select features for your identities. Apart from supernatural, adept, or avatar identities, give each identity two features.
7. Divide the total number of hardened notches on your character sheet by five (rounded up) and assign those as failed notches. If you've got five failed notches in a single meter, your character is not well.
8. Unless modified by an identity, your wound threshold starts at 50.
9. If you're playing an avatar, figure out all of the details about that.
10. If you're playing an adept, you need a magick school and you get 8 minor charges.
11. Decide your name, various details, etc.

You're going to need an objective, and connections to other players — determine at least one PC to have a relationship with (guru, mentor, protégé, favorite, responsibility) — but now we're getting back to the group collaboration thing, and for that you need to refer to "Set the Stage" on page 25 in *Book Two: Run*.

The  
bricks  
were  
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there.

They  
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1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## In 2008, I knocked on Vaughn's door. Finding him hadn't been easy, even with the internet. Turned out that all the time we were working together and relying on each other and committing serious felonies, I was calling him by a fake name. But I'll stick with Vaughn. I can't think of him any other way. Besides, respecting his privacy is the least I can do. He once jumped into a car crusher to drag me out.

He opened the door and his face turned pale and his jaw dropped. I'd considered how to handle this, in some vague way, ever since March 4, 2003. Once I tracked down his real name and address, I gave it more serious and specific thought.

"Hey, nice house! Do you remember me?"

He didn't say anything. His expression was the perfect picture of dread and dismay. Vaughn was never a good looking guy in any way — kind of in the dumpy/slumpy/plumpy tribe, big but looked small because he was curvy and bald and had that kind of low-IQ width to his eyes. Easy to underestimate.

"From your expression, um, I guess you do and aren't too happy about it, huh?"

"Look, you can't come here," he said, taking me by the arm and pulling me back to the car. I went with it, even before I thought about it. Hell, if I'd thought about it, I would have gone quicker and, if possible, would have been more docile. Vaughn was a body worker which is, I guess, like being a chiropractor, but without all the strict licensing requirements. He gave people massages and fixed their joint injuries for a reasonable rate and, I'd been told, had put at least one kid's leukemia in remission. He never had a terminology for what he did, but it worked. His hands sucked a headache out of me faster than two aspirin and a Mai Tai, and degraded agonizing green-blue bruises to mildly aching red marks with a half-hour adjustment. Never had any kind of formal lesson, just that his dad and his grandma showed him how.

On the other hand, he never had a single wrestling match or karate class, and I saw him put his hands on a guy's arm and shoulder and just fold him up like a deck chair. Turns out, if you understand how the body fits together, there are a lot more positions that are messed up than not. It helps if you're surprisingly strong, too. Vaughn never lifted weights and didn't have anything even close to an ab, but he said his mama had fed him a lot of unpasteurized milk and that made him sturdy.

We'd been close friends but, well, people change.

"Hey, c'mon, be cool, it's *me*, Vaughn," I said. "You don't need to hustle me off. You're not being watched, are you?"

"Not so far as I know, but before today I figured you were..." he trailed off.

"What?"

"...imaginary?"

I sighed. "Yeah, I got that for a while too. March 4th, am I right?"

"Rats," he said, very quiet. Vaughn never swore, he just said rats. Like Charlie Brown.

"Hey, I'm not knocking it. Sure, I was out for six months doped up on Orap, but near as I can tell, our outstanding warrants all vanished. Moreover..." I wiggled my left fingers at him, and he flinched. Vaughn was usually a cool customer, but he'd seen my left pinkie and ring finger turned to jam — that 2001 car crusher episode. I'd wound up with silicone prostheses, but as of 2003 I got a do-over. My hand was fine.

"Look," I said, "Sex Ghost is in the car. I can get that you don't want to upset your little suburban idyll, but can we at least...?"

"Don't call it my 'little suburban' whatever," Vaughn said, "And I'm not going with you. I'm done. I don't wish you anything bad — hey, I want only the best for the both of you," he said, nodding at the vague figure in my back seat. Sex Ghost nodded back. "I was never *fascinated* by the offness the way you were. We know that. We're both OK with that. I had my reasons and you were really solid to me, I haven't forgotten that, but..."

"Dad? Who's that?"

I turned and saw a thinner, more refined version of Vaughn biking up on a Schwinn. It took a minute to connect this kid to the one in the picture that Vaughn cried over that night in the Super 8 when we thought Sex Ghost might not pull through, but that's 'cause this kid wasn't dead and was eight years older than he'd been in the last photo I'd seen of Vaughn's wife and two sons.

Vaughn's path into the offness lacked the features of wonder and amazement

that had drawn me. Instead, he'd been on the trail of the person or persons who had elaborately murdered his two kids, after casually killing his wife to get her out of the way.

But on March 3, 2003, something happened. Almost no one knows. But some of us — me, my little crew, who knows who else — remember a different history. One where only one of the 9/11 hijackings worked, because some asshole had tried the same thing with the Sears Tower back when it was still the Sears Tower. One where Alex Abel was still one of *Forbes'* richest Americans, and Dirk Allen wasn't the surprising new face of recovery. One where Al Gore's running mate in the 2000 election was John Edwards, not Joe Lieberman. One where I'd lost two fingers and had outstanding warrants for assault, grand theft, and misdemeanor brandishing of a firearm instead of a husband and (apparently) a thriving career in retirement income management.

"It's one of my clients," Vaughn said, smoothly changing his grip on my arm so that it looked like he was demonstrating a stretch. "She was just leaving."

The kid nodded and took his bike around the side of the house, already losing interest.

"Vaughn," I said, "You don't owe me anything. Stay here with your wife and your kids and be as happy as you can."

"Thank you," he said, stepping back. Was he tearing up?

"But think about this. If you got a second chance, maybe Edie did too."

His face clouded. He looked even unhappier than he had when he'd seen me.

"I thought I was getting better, you know," he said quietly. "I thought I'd been insane and that now I was all right."

I don't ever want to see a man lose hope right before my eyes again. Not even my worst enemy.

"Let's go," he muttered, opening the door to the car.



# 3: CONFLICT

By definition, risk entails the possibility of harm, and effort implies opposition that must be overcome. So to bend the arc of history in your direction or whatever else it is you and your cabal have settled on doing as an objective, you have to put something on the line and you have to work hard.

## COERCION

Events change people. People also change events. No one should expect the veteran who comes back from a bloody war to act, think, and feel the same way he did when he was a kid signing up for the Marines. Or, in a less charged example, if you paid for your daughter to go to college for four years, you'd be pretty pissed if she didn't seem any different after. So people change, for better and for worse.

Coercion is this game's term for non-violent attempts to change people or their actions. If you threaten, or cozen, or insinuate that you can do awful things to someone unless they act as you wish, there are two ways that can go. One is that they back down and do as you say. The other is that they defy you and face the consequences.

Because we have the handy shock gauge to measure internal trauma, that's the target of coercion attempts. Every coercion roll works like this:

1. You establish a credible threat.
2. You roll the relevant identity, relationship, or ability. If it fails, they don't believe you're serious. You can carry out your threat and inflict consequences on them, but they're unfazed until you do.
3. If the roll succeeds, the person has a choice. They either acquiesce and keep their shock gauge intact, or they don't and take a stress check.
4. The rank of the stress check depends on what you rolled.
  - Simple success yields a rank 1 check.
  - Matched success or crit yields a rank 2 check.
  - Add +1 for each of your passions that is in play.
  - Add +1 for each of the *target's* passions that is in play

What follows are the rules for what happens when you take risks, be they emotional or physical or miscellaneous, and the rules for how the inertia of the world resists your efforts unless you grit your teeth and put some backbone behind it.

## IS IT WORTH IT?

At this point, you may be wondering if coercion is worth doing. After all, you might fail your roll, or they might have enough hardened notches to simply ignore you. Even if they're vulnerable and you get a good roll, they may stand tough and get a hardened notch, improving their ability to come at you like a rugged SOB. So why do it?

First off, coercion is low-risk. You can roll this as a total bluff — lie about your ability to get them fired, threaten to murder their kids when you're unwilling to do any such thing, use minor magick to create random effects and imply that it's just the tip of the iceberg when in fact, no, minor poltergeist is the full extent of your mystic prowess. If they fold, great. You got what you wanted and didn't have to do anything dangerous or cruel.

Second, it opens negotiation space. If you roll coercion after threatening to infect a guy with night terrors, you could fail or he could shrug it off. But if you then actually arrange nightmares, what's happened then? You've taught him that you don't make idle threats. The next time you coerce him, you may not even need to roll if the GM decides he doesn't want to try your patience again. Moreover, it gives you the right to say "Hey, I warned you. You could have played ball. I'm still willing to talk things over like an adult, or do I need to find another way your life can suck?"

Third, coercion is precise. When you attack someone physically, your options basically boil down to do harm or do less harm. But coercion can target one of five areas of a person's life, and just about everyone has a spot where they squirm if you press it hard enough. The avatar assassin who's buttoned up in Violence and the Unnatural? He really doesn't want to get those final hardened notches that tip him over into *burnout*, losing him his connection to the Statosphere. Threaten him with exposure. Tell him you can show his friends and family all the evil shit he's done, tell him you can turn him into a social reject. Unless he has an identity for it, he's not equipped to take hits

See "Getting Callous" on page 29.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## RECIPROCAL

physics says force yields an equal opposite reaction  
so why is it we can hate someone  
without them loving us back

## "I CHANGED MY MIND"

It's possible that a GMC or PC might cave rather than face a stress check, only to renege on the deal later. That's fine. That just means they take the check when they fail to uphold their agreement or when they become unable to.

to Isolation — you resist attacks on that with Connect, and if he's got a boatload of hardened notches in Violence, his Connect is rubbish. So if he doesn't cave and you carry out your threat, he might get the hardened notch that disempowers his avatar abilities or get a failed notch and be one step closer to being a basket case.

Fourth, it lets you feel out the opposition. If you roll a crit to coerce someone's Helplessness and they simply laugh it off, you know their Helplessness meter is pretty solid. That, in turn, means that their Fitness ability is weak, and that they are therefore less able to resist attacks on the Violence meter.

Fifth, even when the target resists and gains a hardened notch, you still have impact. Harden a city council member on her Isolation meter and she has become 10% more capable of running after a purse snatcher, at the cost of 10% of the social capital that got her elected. That change may make her less effective at thwarting your schemes. Certainly, it's one she won't like.

These are the same rules other people use to coerce you. So making a meter safe by getting deep into hardened notches cuts both ways, if you're willing to be the hard character.

## WHEN YOU CAN COERCE

Shifting someone's nature is not simple. You need to possess some kind of leverage that makes the target take *your* demands seriously. You also, as mentioned previously, need to roll a success on a relevant identity, or possibly an ability.

Also, don't forget that you can *always* substitute a relationship score for *any* attempt to coerce. If you know someone well enough that she's your mentor, you know *exactly* how to push her buttons.

## HELPLESSNESS

To attack someone's Helplessness meter, you need to make them believe you can disempower them. If they feel that resistance is futile, that you're just presenting facts instead of a challenge, then you've done it right. You attack it with the Connect ability, by making the person feel you are communicating, honestly and directly, the legitimate consequences of contravening your will.

The leverage for a Helplessness attack arises from authority. On a ship, the captain can coerce a sailor. Your boss can threaten to fire you. A cop can intimate that you're the subject of an

investigation. That guy who slipped and fell on your property can threaten to sue you.

If the threat's plausible and the roll succeeds, the target either agrees to do what you've demanded, or faces a Helplessness roll as they suffer sleepless nights worrying about the future that's been taken out of their control.

## ISOLATION

Isolation attacks are the source of colorful words like "ostracize" and "pariah." They're entirely social. You convince the target that unless they make you happy, you're going to make them an outcast, snubbed by neighbors, hassled by authorities, and unlikely to get bank loans at decent interest. Threatening to cast someone out is rolled with Status, as you present yourself as the repository of the cultural capital they need to live that good life, with a manicured lawn and plenty of character witnesses.

Leverage for this form of coercion comes from commonality. You have to move in one or more social circles with the target. It doesn't matter how high your status is in the criminal demimonde if you're trying to hassle someone in the lobster-fork-and-country-club set. But if you attend the same church, or are both Freemasons, or were in the same college fraternity, then you have an avenue of attack.

If you have that connection and roll well, the target has to agree with you or face the loss of prestige and the concurrent loneliness, isolation and, frankly, boredom of having no one to hang out with.

## SELF

This one's tricky. Convincing someone they're betraying their own better nature is a bit more involved than a typical do-what-I-say-or-I-cut-you transaction. You have to appeal to the target's better nature, and convince them that you understand what the right thing to do actually *is*. This may not be a simple sale if you've been making promises to cut them. You roll this with Knowledge, because it takes confidence that you know what you're talking about if you're going to present an ethical challenge. You need to construct a rationale for why helping you or agreeing to what you say is the right thing to do.

The leverage is your knowledge of their wrongdoing or their feelings of guilt. If you know someone stepped out on a spouse, cheated on taxes, or just faked illness to ditch work and see a ballgame, you might have what you need to talk them around. Generally, anything that forced a stress check is probably emotionally significant enough to work in this circumstance, as long as they acted badly. "Wow, you were so scared of a ghost that you curled up and cried?"

**This is what you use to plead for your life!** If someone's pointing a gun at your face, you can beg them to look into their heart and just leave. After all, killing someone is widely regarded as, y'know, wrong and unethical. All it takes is a

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*Sixteen  
hummingbirds  
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feeders  
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and  
they  
were  
delicious.*



1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



KNOWLEDGE ROLL TO GIVE THAT ICE-HEARTED KILLER A SELF STRESS CHECK TO WORRY ABOUT. EVEN IF SHE KNOWS SHE CAN EASILY SOAK THE VIOLENCE CHECK FOR PAINTING THE WALL WITH YOUR ASSORTED HEAD-JUICES.

If you make your point and have the right guilt for the trip, the target either agrees with you or enters an existential nightmare of neurotic self-evaluation.

### VIOLENCE

This one's simple. Want to threaten somebody? Point a weapon, or have an established reputation for doing harm. Roll Struggle to present yourself as someone who knows a thing or two about hurt.

If it's well-known that you served eighteen years on a five-year assault sentence after permanently crippling two other inmates, you don't really need to be holding a knife to intimidate. On the other hand, if you're sweet and kind and don't have a hardened Violence notch to your name, but happen to be 6'5" and rippling with muscle, well, your mighty thews count as a weapon for the purposes of scaring the crap out of most.

That's the result if you roll right and seem dangerous; the target either meekly complies or faces a Violence check as they hyperventilate and panic, scared that they're about to get manhandled.

### UNNATURAL

What changes people most of all, perhaps, is learning that the way they assumed the world works is all just bunk. Instead of a tidy world of physics and politics — or even an unruly world of Heisenberg physics and crooked Jersey politics — they're living in the weirdly fair representative cosmology of a Dirk Allen novel. But even if they don't learn of the Invisible Clergy and have no idea what a threat the House of Renunciation is, finding out that there are invisible entities who *hate* you? Kind of a shock. Therefore, the ability for coercing someone's Unnatural meter is Secrecy. Roll it to seem plausibly satisfied that you have the hidden answers. You can, after all, explain what they can't.

But you can only make that roll with the leverage of unnatural events. Or — if you're a real estate developer out of *Scooby-Doo* — the appearance of unnatural events. Use some gutter magick to brew up weird events that are armored against Occam's razor, then sweep in with portentous explanations. Fraudulent mediums and exorcists do it every day.

If you roll right amidst inexplicable events, the target either goes along with you, or is haunted by the fear of the uncanny. Boo!



## COMBAT

Somewhere out there is someone who had loving parents, watched clouds on a summer's day, fell in love, lost a friend, is kind to small animals, and knows how to say "please" and "thank you," and yet somehow the two of you are going to end up in a dirty little room with one knife between you and you are going to have to kill that human being.

It's a terrible thing. Not just because he's come to the same realization and wants to survive just as much as you do, meaning he's going to try and puncture your internal organs to set off a cascading trauma effect that ends with you voiding your bowels, dying alone and removed from everything you've ever loved. No, it's a terrible thing because somewhere along the way you could have made a different choice. You could have avoided that knife, that room, and maybe even found some kind of common ground between the two of you. Or at least, you might have divvied up some turf and left each other alone. That would have been a lot smarter, wouldn't it? Even *dogs* are smart enough to do that. Now you're staring into the eyes of a fellow human and in a couple minutes one of you is going to be vomiting blood to the rhythm of a fading heartbeat. The survivor is going to remember this night for the rest of his or her life.

### SIX WAYS TO STOP A FIGHT

So before you make a grab for that knife, you should maybe think about a few things. This moment is frozen in time. You can still make a better choice.

**Surrender:** Is your pride really worth a human life? Drop your weapon, put up your hands, and tell them you're ready to cut a deal. You walk, and in exchange you give them something they need. Sidestep the current agenda. Offer them something unrelated to your dispute, and negotiate to find a solution.

**Disarm:** Knife on the table? Throw it out the window. Opponent with a gun? Dodge until he's out of bullets. Deescalate the confrontation to fists, if possible. You can settle your differences with some brawling and still walk away, plus neither one of you has to face a murder charge or a criminal investigation.

**Re-channel:** So you have a conflict. Settle it a smarter way. Arm wrestle, play cards, have a scavenger hunt, a drinking contest, anything that lets you establish a winner and a loser. Smart gamblers bet nothing they aren't willing to lose. Why put your life on the line?

**Pass the buck:** Is there somebody more powerful than either one of you who is going to be angry that you two are coming to blows? Pretend you're all in the mafia and you can't just kill each other without kicking your dispute upstairs first. Let that symbolic superior make a decision. You both gain clout for not spilling blood.

**Call the cops:** If you've got a grievance against somebody, let the police do your dirty work. File charges. Get a restraining order. Sue him in civil court for wrongful harm. You can beat him down without throwing a punch.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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**Run away:** The hell with it. Who needs this kind of heat? Blow town, get a job someplace else, build a new power base. Is the world really too small for the both of you? It's a big planet out there.

## OH WELL

Still determined? Backed into a corner with no way out? Have to fight for the greater good? Up against someone too stupid to know this is a bad idea? Or maybe just itching for some action? So be it. The rest of this section contains rules for simulating the murder of human beings. Have fun.

## THE SO-CALLED COMBAT ROUND

Because this is a game, fighting is abstracted and resolved with rules and rolls. One essential component of these rules is the idea of the **combat round** as a measure of time, but it's not an exact amount like "three to five seconds." That's probably about how long each round lasts if you need to estimate it, but it can vary a lot. Instead, a combat round is as much time as it takes for everyone in the fight to do one thing.

RPGs are a moderated conversation, so for an RPG combat to even approximate fairness everyone has to get the same opportunity to act. Once everyone's had their chance to try something, one round ends and another begins. They're sometimes called **turns**, because you take turns acting.

Other games, and previous editions of this one, have very strict mechanics for determining who acts when. But to streamline, we're just letting PCs and GMCs declare their actions whenever they want — "I shoot Pete," "I duck behind the car," "I get out my cell phone!" If you need to break a tie, the highest ability or identity score being used goes first. Unless someone has an identity with Provides Initiative: in that case, it's always that identity's score that gets used. If Jane takes a swing at Jim and Jim wants to get out of the way, that's the time to compare. If Jim and Jane each attack one another, compare then too, since one of them might wind up incapacitated.

But by and large, a very structured initiative procedure isn't necessary. Announce what your character's doing. Maybe you want to act first and force others to respond. Maybe you want to hang back, see what other people are doing, and react appropriately. (No one feels dumber than the guy who dodges when no one's attacking him.) But whatever you do, the identity rating — not the roll! — determines which event happens first, if necessary.

## AMBUSH!

If you can lay in wait for your victims (probably using Secrecy (page 36) and Notice (page 32) mechanics) and get the drop on them, you all get one free action while they're standing around shocked and awed. After each ambusher takes a cheap shot, the combat starts as usual.

Don't roll until everyone's agreed on what they're attempting. You can change in response to other people's actions, but don't go overboard with it. Changing your mind once or twice per combat is all right. More than that and you run the risk of looking indecisive, and of bogging down the fight until it's no longer fun.

## ATTACKING

You want to harm someone? Roll the appropriate identity, or fall back on Struggle to punch and kick. Shooting at somebody calls for an identity with Provides Firearm Attacks. If you roll a success, *you inflict wounds*.

If you roll a matched failure on an attack, you've made a tactical error. Your GM can either penalize you with -10% on your next roll, or give an enemy +10% if they immediately take advantage of your misjudgment.

If you roll a fumble on an attack, you've done something screwy. If you're firing a gun, it's jammed now and you're going to have to take an action to clear it. If you're punching and kicking, you got hurt — maybe you strained your shoulder with a missed punch, maybe your knuckles hit the wall, or maybe you stumbled while approaching and tweaked an ankle. The GM inflicts 1-5 wounds on your character.

## DRAWING A WEAPON

If you don't have a weapon ready in your hand — a blade unsheathed, a gun drawn and round chambered, a chainsaw started or a stun gun drawn and switched on — it takes one round to get it out. You don't have to roll for this action, you just declare that you're doing it and next round your weapon's good to go.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## BONUSES AND PENALTIES

The default assumption for a roll to do bodily harm is that *things are serious*. Those numbers on the character sheet represent your chance to complete that task under life-and-death circumstances. So when it's already that tough, the GM doesn't really need to throw on extra modifiers if the sun's in your eyes or you have the sniffles or you're not fighting with the sharpest knife in the drawer. Adding a lot of needless penalties turns combat into a festival of brightly described near misses.

That said, when there's something that is unique to one character and which makes things substantially harder on her, then a penalty is sensible. If she's tied to a chair, that's going to be worth a -20% penalty. If she's barefoot on an uneven surface sprinkled with broken glass? -10% penalty. Blindfolded? Well, maybe the GM won't let her make a roll at all. But if everyone's fighting in the same inferno of combusting industrial waste, nobody needs any *particular* penalty. Just assume that if you're fighting in a cloud of tear gas, their movement is impaired as much as your aim.

Sometimes, however, things go your way. You might be on a balcony with a fire ax and your enemies have to climb up to reach you. That might give you a +10% bonus. If you're in a really superior position, like firing from a comfortable enclosure at people who are fleeing across open ground with nowhere to run, that's good for +20%.

By and large though, penalties and bonuses are a spice to use lightly. They should be the exception, not the norm.

## GOING ALL-IN

Sometimes, you go for broke, leave it all on the field and decide you're going to double down on death or glory. If you make some kind of balls-out attack where you scream incoherently and rip your shirt open, you can improve your odds of hitting with an attack. But there's a price. You also make it that much easier for everyone else to hit you.

The technical term for this is a **focus shift**. You can take a +10%, +20%, or even +30% increase to your attacking identity. However, anyone who attacks you that same round gets the same bonus.

Focus shifts aren't subtle. Once you announce you're doing one, everyone has an opportunity to readjust their tactics to take advantage.

Harris is fed up. He charges those two chubby Ordo Corpulentis pricks, screaming and waving a fence post wrapped in barbed wire. He gives himself a +30% focus shift. The two pricks, however, each get +30% to their attacks against him. Even though one was planning on shooting

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Harris' wife, that guy decides instead to shoot Harris, because he's making himself an attractive nuisance.

## RUNNING AROUND

In addition to punching and shooting and fireaxing people, you probably want to move around during the fight, if only to get within swinging range of your next target.

You can move about ten feet in a round and still roll for another action. If you want to move more than that, declare that you're running and make a Fitness roll. On any success, you can move thirty feet in a straight line or with a couple sharp turns. If you get a simple fail, you move twenty feet. Matched fail? You only get the base ten feet. On a fumble, you wipe out, moving nowhere. It takes an action to get to your feet after stumbling, too.

## NOT GETTING HURT

There's a martial arts instructor whose favorite phrase is "Lesson number one: Do Not Get Hit." That's more a goal to which people aspire than a reliable skill, but it's a popular idea. It's not easy — in fact, it's a hell of a lot harder to retreat while blocking punches and kicks than it is to advance throwing jabs and haymakers, especially since the attacker only needs to get one good blow through while the defender has to stop every one. But sometimes it's the only option.

## DODGING

If you do nothing but try to not get struck, you don't have to roll. You just say you're doing it and you penalize everyone else's rolls to attack you. If the identity you're using, or your Dodge ability, is less than the attacker's ability or identity they're using to attack, that penalty is -10%. If your Dodge or identity is equal to or greater than the attacker's ability or identity they're using to attack or if it's an obsession identity, the penalty is -20%. This combines with any other penalties in play. Some attacks, notably sneaky shit with magick, cannot be dodged, however.

There are other times when you roll Dodge in active response — when something's falling on you or when a trap springs shut — so it's still worthwhile to have a solid Dodge ability.

## ARMOR

If you know a maniac with a gun is after you, you could do worse than to go get a bulletproof vest. Then again, even a tough leather jacket is better than a fleece hoodie if someone is trying to stick you with an icepick. As for a motorcycle helmet, it's good on offense and defense. So depending on what you pick and how you layer it, you can significantly diminish the harm of assorted attacks.

**Bulletproof clothes:** For the purposes of our grainy simulation, all flak jackets and Kevlar clothes work the same way. Instead of taking firearm damage when shot (that is, the result of the dice, with a roll of 43 doing 43 wounds), bullets do damage like a punch or kick — the total of the dice (so that 43 does 7 wounds because  $4+3=7$ ). Warning though: no matter what the ads on the internet say, bulletproof clothes don't look like anything other than bulletproof clothing. It's up to the GM to decide whether you look like a narc or a paranoid, depending on the circumstances and what kind of shoes you wear. (Narcs wear comfy, soft-soled shoes. Paranoys wear Kleenex boxes.)

**Helmet:** A motorcycle helmet or a cop's riot helmet mechanically works the same as bulletproof clothes... once. It also reduces damage from falls and car crashes and the like by 10 points. Melee weapons no longer do special damage on matched successes. Kinda makes you wish you could wear one everywhere, doesn't it?

**Assorted Protective Gear:** If you put on a heavy-duty motorcycle jacket, or knee and elbow pads and a cup, or one of those firefighter jackets, it offers no special protection against gunshots. It does, however, preclude hand-to-hand weapons from doing special damage on matched successes.

## DAMAGE

The GM keeps track of damage. This is a big change from most games, but it's a crucial part of the horror that is *Unknown Armies*. Knowing that you've taken 11 wounds and that you have a wound threshold of 50 is clinical and abstract. Your GM should never use numbers to describe injuries, except possibly when she tells you how many lightning-quick jabs your face absorbs.

If you take an identity with the feature Provides Wound Threshold, then your wound threshold equals that identity. When bad things mortify your flesh, you take wounds. Your wound threshold stays the same, unless you've somehow increased it, probably from an identity, possibly from a wizard. When you take wounds equal to 90% of your wound threshold, you fall unconscious. When you reach your wound threshold, you're dead.

You can take wounds up to half your wound threshold without feeling like hammered crap... as long as you're in the middle of a fight and hopped up on adrenaline. After the fight, your body crashes and you're likely to barf, pant, tremble, and feel terribly sore. Moreover, any cuts, bruises, or miscellaneous injuries that got ignored during the crisis immediately cry out for attention, and may seem worse than they are.

Consider this: you can donate two cups of blood and drive home after a fifteen-minute breather. But if you toss two cups of red food coloring all around your kitchen, it's going to look like a splatter film. So it's very hard to judge

*He told  
me that in  
Detroit you  
put on your  
coat and you  
put on your  
attitude.*

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

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5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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whether that quantity of gore that *seems* mortal is actually dangerous or not, because when you're bleeding it's hard to rationally estimate volumes of liquid.

As soon as you take wounds equal to half your wound threshold (25 wounds, in most cases) you feel sore and exhausted when you go to bed, and you get up feeling tight, weak, and rickety. Expect a lot of joint pain and headaches. If your GM isn't describing this stuff, she's slacking. Or, possibly, it's because you're all right.

When you take wounds equal to or greater than three-quarters of your wound threshold (38 or more for most people), that's a very dangerous situation and the GM should make it clear that you're badly beat up. Depending on what got done on you, you could have blurred vision, painful breathing, seeping lacerations, or broken bones. Those are all nature's way of telling you to get your ass to urgent care.

## FISTS AND FEET

If you punch and kick someone successfully, you do damage equal to the total of the dice. That is, if your success is a 32, they take 5 wounds.

You get no special damage from matched successes with these sorts of attacks, but if you get a crit, you get a choice. You can knock the guy out, leaving him unconscious for one to five rounds and then unable to fight for one to ten minutes, or you can kill him.

That's right: one punch in a hundred automatically switches off the lights, temporarily or permanently. It could be that he falls back and catches the edge of a table just so, it could be that you hit his heart really hard at the bottom of its cycle, causing it to actually *drop off* the aorta. You could manage to collapse his trachea or you could inflict the confusing second-impact syndrome.

## MELEE WEAPONS

Picking up a stick or a knife or an urumi steel whip immediately escalates a fight, both legally and medically. A guy who gets into a fistfight can claim he's hotheaded. A guy who gets in a fight and stabs somebody with his treasured reproduction Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife has a harder time passing himself off as a misunderstood pacifist.

There are many, many, many types of weapons, but for this system it comes down to three questions.

**1. Does it cleave?** If the weapon has a point or an edge or is otherwise set up to slice or pierce flesh, it does +3 wounds and always does at least 1 wound even if the attack roll is a *normal miss*. If you're close to someone who's flailing at you with even a small knife, you're going to bleed. Try to bleed from your arms, not your vitals.

**2. Is it big?** Anything that takes two hands to manage properly counts as a big weapon. Big weapons do +3 wounds, even if it's something light like a broomstick. Protip: broomsticks hurt more if you poke than if you swing.

**3. Is it heavy?** Does the weapon have the heft necessary to crack bone? If it does, it does +3 wounds.

These factors combine. Thus, some sample weapons would include:

- **Paring knife:** Sharp, but small and light. +3 wounds and does 1 wound even on a normal miss.
- **Motorcycle helmet:** Just barely heavy enough. +3 wounds.
- **Ball-peen hammer:** Another heavy object. +3 wounds.
- **Sturdy walking stick:** Big, but not really heavy. +3 wounds.
- **Brick:** Heavy, but not really big. +3 wounds.
- **Golf driver:** Big and counts as heavy because all the weight is balanced to really focus on the drive face. +6 wounds.
- **Hatchet:** Heavy and sharp. +6 wounds and does 1 wound even on a miss.
- **Felling Axe:** Heavy, sharp and big. +9 wounds.
- **Chainsaw:** Also heavy, sharp, and big for +9 wounds. Don't mess with lumberjacks.

As soon as you're using a weapon big enough to give you a wound bonus, no matter how slight, things get more complicated with your results.

**Fumble:** Ugh. You hit yourself. You take 1d10 wounds.

**Matched Failure:** The weapon somehow went flying out of your hands. Either an opportunistic enemy disarmed you, or you clumsily disarmed yourself.

**Failure:** You missed.

**Success:** The weapon does damage normally.

**Matched Success:** The weapon does damage like a gun, i.e., the result of the roll instead of the total. If you rolled a 33, you deal out 33 wounds. There's no **damage cap** on this.

**Crit:** That guy you hit? He's dead. None of this knockout crap, he's bereft of life, he rests in peace.

1: GO

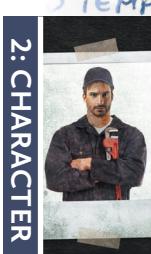
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## GUNS

If you don't want to screw around, you can tool up with a pistol, rifle, shotgun, or the like. Here's how those work: if you hit with any success, it does damage equal to the roll. You hit with a 31, you inflicted 31 wounds. Crits do the maximum damage for that weapon (the damage cap, described below), while misses have no effect on gunshots, for good or ill. If you fumble, the weapon's jammed and you need to waste an action clearing it or checking it.

Now, guns have limits on their ranges and they also have a damage cap which simply means there's a maximum amount of damage that they do, regardless of what you roll. Even if you're the Punisher and hit someone with a successful 88 roll, a .22 bullet is not going to do as much damage as a .45. Bigger bullets are bigger.

Ranges are defined narratively, rather than in strict yards, for simplicity's sake. **Short range** means it's accurate about as far as you can recognize someone's face, or as far as you can throw a flying disk on a still day. **Medium range** is about

a city block — you can hit someone when you can clearly see arms and legs. **Long range** means you can hit someone who's just a tiny little speck off in the distance... as long as you're firing from something stable and aiming through a scope. A super-costly, super-accurate .338 Lapua rifle is a medium range weapon when fired from the hip.

## NONLETHAL WEAPONS

While to many, nonlethal force seems like an oxymoron, it's more and more popular to send your enemies home in wheelchairs with traumatic memories of being electrocuted instead of in body bags, on the theory that it scales back the vengeance from loved ones. So here are some options when you don't want to cope with corpse disposal:

**Electroshock Weapons:** Unlike just hooking someone to a car battery, the current is modulated to force muscles to contract many more times than nature intended, leaving them exhausted and limp.

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## WEAPON RANGES AND DAMAGE CAP

Gun Type	Range	Damage Cap	Examples
<b>Handguns</b>			
Light Pistol	Short	40	Walther PPK, snubby revolver, anything you can hide in your pants pocket
Heavy Pistol	Short	60	Colt Cobra, Glock 17, Colt M1911
Giant Pistol	Short	90	Desert Eagle, Ruger Super Redhawk, Grizzly Mark V
<b>Rifles</b>			
Light Rifle	Medium	35	That birding piece at your grampaw's
Rifle	Long	60	AR-15, Sauer 101
Long Rifle	Long	100	SSG2000 bolt-action, Remington-Lee
AV* Rifle	Long	170	Barrett Light 50
<b>Shotguns</b>			
20 gauge	Medium	70	Mossberg 5500 MKII, slug
20 gauge	Short	60	Browning BPS, shot
12 gauge	Medium	80	Remington 870, slug
12 gauge	Medium	120	Benelli M2, shot
10 gauge	Medium	85	H&R Pardner, slug
10 gauge	Medium	130	Ithaca Roadblocker, shot
<b>Submachine Guns</b>			
Compact	Short	50**	H&K MP5, Uzi
Full	Medium	80**	AK-47, M60

\* anti-vehicular, that is.

\*\* capable of burst and full-auto fire (see “Full Auto” on page 66).

When the weapon hits, compare the roll to the character's current wounds: if the result is equal to or less than that number, the target goes limp for 1d10 minutes — almost certainly until the combat is over. Of course, some occultists don't need to move to be effective in a scrap. Even if the roll is more than their current wounds, the target takes a -30% penalty on physical actions for the next round and can't move much. If someone is *really* desperate to cover some ground, it's a Fitness roll for *extra movement*.

If it's a hand-held stun gun, you attack with Struggle. One of those gadgets with the darts attached to wires uses a firearm identity, but it's essentially a one-shot projectile. If you shoot and miss, you can still use it as a melee stun gun though. Oh, and many conducted electrical weapons also fire confetti with printed numbers on the paper bits, so the cops can tell whose weapon was discharged.

**Tear Gas and Pepper Spray:** You attack with these using Struggle to spray someone's face, or Fitness to throw a gas grenade. If you get hit with one, there are three effects.

- Your physical actions are at -30%. This persists until you recover from the gas, which involves motionless breathing in clear air. About ten minutes is enough to recover from tear gas completely, and to overcome the worst discomfort of pepper spray.
- You have to roll Fitness to resist the temptation to curl up and just suffer for one to five rounds.
- Your Notice ability and any other sensory abilities can't be used until you wash your eyes out or otherwise get yourself back together. Fun fact: milk and liquid antacids are often used to counteract the effects of tear gas. Medical professionals recommend against it as they're not sterile, but if you're in the fetal position from your burning eyes, you'll take what you can get.

**Bolos and Nets:** Throw one with Fitness. With a successful roll, the target's impaired in one of two ways until she makes a successful Struggle, Dodge, or Fitness roll to eel out of it. Identities like Double Jointed or Escape Artist would work too.

On an even hit, the target's arms are bound. She can't attack with her hands until she gets loose. On an odd hit, it's her legs. She can't run away until she's disentangled, and she probably falls over, too.

## EXTREME TACTICS

Wading in with fists swinging and foul language is fine for the peasants, but if you're a more refined occult fringe weirdo, you may want to engage the riff-raff with a little more style and precision. Here are some options for the discerning fisticuffian:

### AIMING

If you take a round to do nothing but position yourself and squint and get yourself set, you can take a +10% bonus to your next attack. Should you take two rounds to do so, it's +20%. You can use this with Struggle or when using a firearm. Aiming can't give a bonus beyond +20%.

### THROWING THE FURNITURE

If you want to pick something up and huck it at somebody to injure them, it has to be heavy enough to do some damage or otherwise harmful — pointy, on fire, full of bees, or spewing acid. Roll Fitness. If you hit, you do the sum of the dice as damage, just like a punch or kick. Throwing stuff only works in short range or less — no one's hurling a cinder block very far with any kind of accuracy.

### KNOCKDOWNS

If you want to use your badass judo throws or WWE moves, you can pick someone up and hurl them to the ground, which hurts plenty. It's a Struggle roll with a -20% penalty. If you succeed, the target falls down, takes the sum of the dice in damage, and loses his next action getting up.

### DISARMS

If someone comes at you with a weapon, that's bad. Removing the weapon from the equation by knocking it out of his hand or using an armbar takedown might be an excellent idea. Roll Struggle.

**Success:** It goes flying out of his hand. If it's pointy or has an edge, you take a wound in the process of the disarm, because it has an edge, or is pointy, and you're *grabbing that*.

**Matched Success:** It winds up in your hands.

**Crit:** You're holding it and you also do the sum of the dice in damage by popping his elbow or degloving his finger or taking some other cheap shot.

See "Running Around" on page 62.

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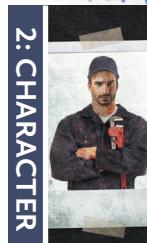
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## MULTIPLE GUNSHOTS

If you're shooting a semiautomatic weapon or a light handgun of any type, you can fire more than one bullet per round, but it may not help you much. If you fire twice, roll twice but cut the benefit from the identity you're using in half (round down). If you fire three rounds or more without using a fully automatic gun, you're only doing suppressive fire, as described on the next page.

## FULL AUTO

If you have a weapon designed for selective fire, you can fire more than one bullet with a single squeeze of the trigger. This opens up all kinds of mayhem. You can fire a short three-round burst, you can do a long spurt, or you can just empty the clip.

This lets you potentially hit two targets with a single Firearms roll, if they're close together. It also removes the damage cap. Finally, it improves your odds of hitting — you get a +10% bonus for a three-round burst, and +20% for anything more.

The other results depend on what you rolled.

**Fumble:** Friendly fire. Everyone on your team rolls a d10, including you. The one with the lowest roll takes 3d10 wounds. If multiple people tie for lowest roll you wounded multiple people, which could indicate that someone in the Statosphere is giving you the stink-eye.

**Matched Failure:** You missed and the gun's jammed. Spend an action or two clearing it.

**Failure:** You missed.

**Success:** Normal firearms damage (the result of the roll) with a three-round burst. With a long burst, you get +5 to the result. If you emptied the clip, you get +10 to the result. If you hit multiple people, the GM divides the damage between them.

**Matched Success:** Damage equal to the weapon's usual damage cap. If you strafed two people, the GM divides the damage between them.

**Crit:** If you were aiming at multiple targets, you inflicted 100 wounds on one and missed one.

Doing extra damage sounds great, if you're into that sort of thing. Keep track of your ammo though. If you can't be bothered to count bullets, you don't really want a character who shoots full auto. Three-round bursts take three bullets. Emptying the clip takes all the bullets you have left, as long as you have at least ten. A long burst requires 1d10+5 bullets. Don't have that many bullets? Treat it like a three-round burst.

## SHOOTING THE LEG OR HEAD

Take a -20% penalty if you want to shoot someone in a limb, -30% in some smaller location like the head. If you succeed, you ignore armor. If you hit him in the arm, he drops his groceries, or whatever else he's carrying. If you hit him in the leg, his movement's halved and he can't make Pursuit rolls for foot chases or Fitness rolls to run. If you hit him in the head, he's unconscious. The damage is otherwise normal.

## SUPPRESSIVE FIRE

If you just fire wildly and loudly at people, instead of aiming center mass, you are laying down suppressive fire. This doesn't hurt anyone, usually, and requires at least three gunshots per round. You still roll though, just to see what happens. If you have no identity that lets you shoot guns, you can roll Struggle to lay down suppressive fire only.

**Fumble:** Crap. You shot yourself, or one of your homies. You and all your allies roll 1d10 each, and the one with the lowest result takes 2d10 wounds. If there are ties for lowest, each of them takes the damage.

**Matched Failure:** The gun is jammed. Waste a round tinkering with it before you fire again. Nobody's suppressed.

**Failure or Success:** You have suppressed them, making it hard for them to move directly at you, get out of cover if they're in a defensible position, or resist the temptation to dive for cover, or hit the deck if they're in the open. If they want to do one of those three things, it's a Violence (2-4) check.

**Matched Success:** You winged a random foe for 1d10 wounds, and everyone at whom you fired is suppressed, as per a success.

**Crit:** Holy cats, you lucked into a center-mass shot! You do 3d10 wounds to one random enemy target. Also, everyone downrange is suppressed, as per a success.

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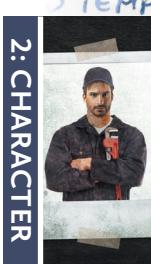
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## POINTBLANKING

This is less a tactic than a crucial moral decision. The French may dignify this with the phrase “coup de grâce,” but it means inflicting fatal damage on someone who’s injured, restrained, or otherwise can’t prevent it.

If someone has been disabled — knocked out, straitjacketed, paralyzed, electrocuted into immobility or the like — and you want to finish him off, declare that you’re doing that. This is no light thing. The consequences of snuffing out a human life on purpose, in cold blood... they’re real and severe. You pay for it psychologically, it may cost you the esteem of your peers (and if it doesn’t what does it say about your choice of companions?) and the legal penalties are considerably stiffer for murder in the first than they are for manslaughter.

If you’re committed to the course and you’ve got a weapon, don’t bother rolling to attack. That’s what weapons do best.

If you want to do this with your bare hands, roll Struggle or the relevant identity. Any success kills, and normal fails do damage like a firearm. If you get a matched failure, or a fumble, you only *think* you killed him. Depending on what you do with the corpse, that may be moot.

Killing someone in this calculated fashion, or even just thinking you did, is a Violence (7-8) check. Watching it’s probably Violence (3-4) check, depending on just how gory and protracted the execution is. That’s without any ongoing Self checks that might emerge from finding out that you can just snuff someone like that.

## GRAPPLING

Grappling is complicated — instead of a straightforward punch that hurts and inflicts wounds, you have a complicated and fluid wrestling match that changes the fundamental assumptions of the encounter. But an awful lot of fights start out with an exchange of blows before going to the ground. So we’re going to *use the gridiron* to manage it.

The person who starts the grapple is called the attacker. The person who gets grabbed and wrestled with is called the defender. Once they’re on the ground, the attacker is usually on top and the defender is usually underneath. It varies, but that’s the general way of it.

*The white panel van with the duct tape roll in the glove box.*

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## STARTING THE GRAPPLE

The attacker starts the grapple by declaring that she wants to tangle with the defender, and then rolls a relevant identity, or just Struggle. If this roll fails, she missed, or got a pocket that tore free, or established a frail grip that can't be maintained.

**If she gets a success after the defender has already acted,** the defender has been grabbed by the hand or around the waist or gripped by his hair or is otherwise caught.

**If the attacker succeeds and the defender hasn't acted,** the only response the Defender can make is to roll Struggle, Dodge, Fitness, or a combative identity in order to escape. On a success, he gets free. If he fails, the two of them are well and truly engaged and they go to the balance section of the gridiron.

## THE GRAPPLE GRIDIRON

Every combat round, the attacker and defender both roll their fighting identity, or Struggle. If the attacker gets a success, the fight moves one step towards the top of the chart. If it's a crit, two steps. If it's a fumble, the process goes one step towards the bottom of the chart.

For the defender, it's the same in reverse. Success moves him a step towards the defender end zone, crit moves two steps, fumble moves a step backwards. Neither fighter gets an advantage or a disadvantage from matches.

**Attacker End Zone:** The defender is either unconscious, or so firmly trapped that he can take no additional action. If the attacker wants to kill him, *that can be done* in the next round. If someone else kills the helpless defender, it's a Violence check for both the killer and the attacker.

**Attacker Advantage:** The attacker has the defender on the ground in some kind of pin and is doing a good job of restricting his actions. If the round ends with the fight at this stage, the attacker can do 1d10 wounds to the defender by poking eyes or wrenching limbs. Alternately, if the defender has a weapon, the attacker can send it flying a good ten or twenty feet from where they're engaged.

**Balance:** This is where the fight begins. Neither side has any rules advantage. If it's the first round of the grapple, they may both still be standing up.

**Defender Advantage:** The attacker is still attached, but it's not tight or decisive, or the attacker is on the ground, but the defender may have his feet under him. If the round ends when

the fight's at this stage, the defender may choose to switch roles — becoming the attacker and moving to the balance stage.

**Defender End Zone:** If the fight ends here, the defender has escaped. He gets free and does damage like a normal punch on his way out.

## OUTSIDE FACTORS

The gridiron is fine for a wrestling match, but grappling in a frat house or gas station parking lot has some extra variables.

**The Dogpile:** If someone (or something) has started a grapple with you, your buddies may try to break it up or pull you free. Or if you're the attacker, they may grab a flailing leg in order to end the conflict sooner. Either way, other people who dive in to an active grapple have the same effect. Instead of rolling, every round they move the fight one step towards their desired end zone. If you pile in to help someone escape, you move the fight towards the defender's side. If you're helping the aggressor, you move the fight in favor of the attacker. Every person who gets engaged has this effect, so a four-on-one dogpile is nearly impossible to escape.

**Guns:** Someone who has a gun can't use it the round the grapple is established — we assume that the attacker is smart enough to mess up the defender's aim. After that, the defender with a gun can use it any time he's at defender advantage or in the defender end zone. An attacker with a gun is a really marginal case, but he can use it any time he's got attacker advantage or is in his own end zone.

**Edged Weapons:** If you're holding a weapon with a point or an edge, it helps a *lot*. In addition to everything else that happens in the grapple, you get to do 1d10 wounds to one other person in the grapple, no matter what you roll or where you are on the gridiron.

**Putting In the Boot:** "Hold him down, I'll kick him!" is a dishonorable but effective tactic. If you attack someone who's in a grapple, you get a +20% bonus with a melee weapon or punch or kick. If you miss, however, you have a 50/50 chance of doing 1-5 wounds to someone else in the grapple — GM's choice. Firing a gun at a wrestling match? No advantage, and if you miss, you have a 50/50 chance of doing 2d10 damage to a wrestler the GM picks. People in grapples can't attack anyone outside the grapple, and they can't dodge.

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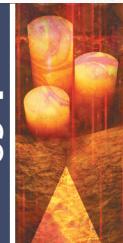
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See "Point-blanking" on page 67.

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# ASSORTED HASSLES

Knowing how to harm people, both emotionally and physically, gets you over a lot of the opposition in *Unknown Armies*. But sometimes you may face an obstacle that isn't amenable to fisticuffs or bluster. You might need to disable a sophisticated security system, decipher an encrypted email, get bonded out of jail, avoid a falling boulder, or swim across a swift river. For all these things, you might get an identity roll, or default to an ability. Just remember that a successful roll achieves what you were attempting and a failed rolled means you lose. But there are times you want more depth and interaction, and there are times when you just get a pass. The following guidelines tell the GM when to ask for a roll:

## MULLIGAN

Sometimes, the GM is just going to let you do it. It's like a bye week in the NFL, only for your dice. Usually this comes up if the GM's options are "allow you to do it" or "let everything suck." If your character might *reasonably* get out of those handcuffs and — this is the important part — *the GM can't think of any other cool things to happen until he escapes*, then the GM might just let you eel out without even rolling. Even an event that feels important and uncertain may earn a mulligan if all the alternatives are worse. Or the GM may just know something you don't, and lets you get past the cameras without rolling because the guards are already dead...

## NECESSARY PROGRESS

A refinement of the mulligan free pass is a roll for effect in necessary circumstances. It's like a standard roll, but instead of spreading from failure to success, you vary from success-with-cost through success-with-bonus.

**Fumble, Matched Failure, or Failure:** You succeed, but it costs you something. Maybe you lose a few wounds because you have to overexert yourself physically, or maybe you leave behind a ton of evidence that the cops are going to find later. Perhaps you have to owe a favor to someone you despise, or you make an ugly moral compromise.

**Success:** You succeed with no strings, but no bells and whistles either.

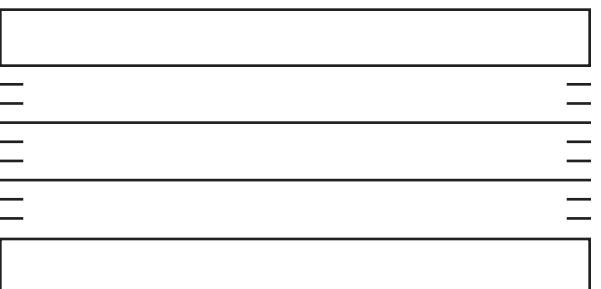
**Matched Success or Crit:** You not only achieved your goal, you got some extra bonus on top of it. Maybe you looked good and impressed an onlooker, or stumbled across an object that might come in useful later. Maybe you just comforted yourself by getting out of a jam handily.

## BINARY CHALLENGE

Sometimes, success and failure are both equally interesting, but there isn't the need or the opportunity to go into great depth in the results. In a typical "do or do not" roll, any success — simple, matched, or crit — gets 'er done. Any failure fails. Simple.

## THE GRIDIRON: EXTENDED CONTESTS

The other end of the spectrum involves situations where it's dramatic and satisfying to stretch out the uncertainty and suspense, allowing for some back and forth before one side ultimately triumphs. After all, a basketball game wouldn't be much fun to watch if the team that sank the first basket won the whole thing. That's why the combat rules go into detail — it's dramatic and it keeps you on the edge of your seat. But you can put *anything* that's being argued between two sides in that sort of rules arena. This is a customizable subsystem called the **gridiron** that the GM can use for any ongoing uncertainty that's big and dramatic and important. It looks like this:



There are five different stages to the gridiron, and there are five steps to using it to define, struggle over, and resolve any big, complicated issue.

First off, you decide if the conflict is **compressed** or **open-ended**. If it's compressed, it means there's a time limit. Maybe you only get three rolls to crack the encryption on the Nightmare Device before the chamber gets flooded with demon gas. Or in a courthouse example, there are five rolls representing pretrial motions, opening arguments, witnesses, cross-examination, and closing arguments. For a compressed situation, you need to have outcomes on each tier of the gridiron.

Open-ended conflicts, on the other hand, move and swerve until someone gets a touchdown, reaching either the top or the bottom of the gridiron. Look out for quagmires with this! If you're five rolls into a conflict and starting to lose interest, your GM may decide that it's time for sudden death and bust it loose after the next successful die roll. Certain abilities might only come into play when you're nearly beaten or almost to the top. Look for that in the gridiron for car chases. Or, simplest option, you just bounce up and down until you settle on one side or the other.

Next, you establish what's at stake. Maybe it's a car chase and the PCs either escape or they get run off the road. Maybe it's a jury trial where the PCs defend themselves with integrity and passion or legal chicanery and deceit: the possible outcome is guilty or acquitted. Maybe they're trying to persuade someone of something and it's a long-term project, involving separate conversations and debates over

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the course of weeks or months. The outcome is either that the listener comes around or the listener isn't convinced.

Third, figure out the abilities in play. For that car chase, anything that lets someone drive, or interfere with another person's driving could get rolled. For courtroom drama, it's identities dealing with the law and possibly Connect, Lie, and maybe Status.

Fourth, you prepare the gridiron. Basically, we've got a blank set of five stages here. You put the stakes from the first step at opposite ends. Then you figure out how various uses of abilities move you up or down the ladder. Some abilities could be more useful at different stages, or not. If there are situation modifiers based on the stage, they only come into play after the conflict ends at that stage.

Finally, you describe the struggle and **roll the dice**, moving a token (representing the conflict) up and down the gridiron until you arrive at one stage or another. The token usually starts in the middle of the gridiron but the GM might kick things off with one side at a disadvantage to the other.

**Fumble:** You move in the *opposite* direction you wanted. If you were trying to convince the jury you're innocent, you've made them more eager to convict.

**Matched Failure:** You don't change the conflict, but some other hassle has arisen from your bad luck or foolishness. If you're in a physical scrape, maybe you take 1d10 wounds. If it's nonphysical, you could wind up with a -10% penalty on your next roll.

**Failure:** You don't move the conflict.

**Success or Matched Success:** You move the conflict one step in the direction favorable to you.

**Crit:** You move the conflict *two* steps in the direction you prefer.

## CHASE SCENE

This is the gridiron for all those Pursuit rolls. If you're running, you want to reach the bottom. If you're chasing, you want to get to the top.

**On Top of Each Other:** You're so close you can touch. In a *car chase*, it only takes one successful roll for the pursuer to force the other to stop, or to cause an accident. But basically, the chase is at an end and some other sort of confrontation (verbal? physical?) impends.

**Too Close for Comfort:** In a foot chase, the pursuer isn't *quite* close enough to grab the runner's coat, but if he stops, he can take a shot with a ranged weapon. Of course, if he stops and doesn't hit, the distance grows. In a car, on the other hand, you can take a shot with a gun, but if it's the driver shooting, he has to immediately roll on Pursuit or a relevant identity and succeed, or else drop an increment of distance as well.

**Close:** The chaser is near enough that the runner can't hide and has to keep constantly moving or else lose distance, but there's no clear shot.

**Far:** The quarry is starting to outstrip pursuit. At this distance, the fugitive has the option to try to hide instead of running. But if the hiding roll fails, the pursuer *automatically* gets to close range.

**Too Far Away:** The runner has escaped and the chase is over.

## TRIAL

This is the gridiron for a criminal court case in front of a jury. As mentioned above, each team gets five rolls. They represent pre-trial motions, which would require a legal identity; opening arguments could use Connect or Status; testimony with Connect or Lie, mostly; cross-examination using Notice or Connect to pick up inconsistencies or to lure the witness into making a fool of herself; and closing statements utilizing Connect, Status, Lie, or whatever the GM accepts. After each side has made their five rolls, see where you are on the gridiron to get the outcome.

**Guilty As Hell:** If you reach this stage, the jury has decided you're a shitbird who deserves to be a jailbird. The judge throws the book at you.

**Guilty...ish:** Maybe there are extenuating circumstances, or you're only convicted on lesser charges. Depending on how serious your crime was, you could get probation, community service, a suspended sentence... but the GM should definitely be clear beforehand what the penalties are here. If the prosecutor doesn't absolutely despise you, this is the deal you're offered if you plead guilty.

See "Pursuit" on page 8.

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**Hung Jury:** It's up to the prosecutor to decide whether to press for retrial, but even if they do, you're probably out on bond for a while and have some time to get a better defense together... if your lawyer wants to stick with you.

**Not Guilty:** You didn't win clean, but you won. Maybe your case got dismissed on a technicality, maybe the prosecutor offers a last-minute slap-on-the-wrist in exchange for pleading guilty to a lesser charge, but you're not going to prison. *You're not going to prison.*

**Exonerated!**: You're not only released, you're declared innocent where it counts — in the media!

### SEE IT MY WAY

Let's foreground something, because it's important. You cannot *make* anyone do anything, except die in combat. All characters in *Unknown Armies* have free will, PCs and GMCs alike. You might magickally puppet someone's body and have them do... whatever, but that's not making them *decide*. You can make arguments, but you can't force people to believe. It's just not possible.

But what you can do with this gridiron is convince people that your position is reasonable and you believe it. They may not act on their understanding. They may irrationally cling to their delusions even after you've explained how foolish they are. But if you reach the end of this ladder, they can't muster an argument against you.

Generally people start at "Ugh," the middle stage of the gridiron, but if you touch on stuff they feel passionate about, it can get ugly fast.

**Go To Hell!**: The debate is over, and "Fuck you!" won it. If you *have a relationship with this person*, it just lost five percentiles. If you don't, your next social interaction with them takes a -10% penalty.

**Wait, Do You Really... ?**: The person is incredulous and confused. If you back off and show some humility they might give you the benefit of the doubt, but they think you're really turned around.

**Ugh**: They wish that the conversation had never started, but since it did, they'd be perfectly happy to stop it now before anyone says anything that can't be taken back.

**Look, I'll Grant You...**: You actually made some point they found relevant, or identified an issue where they agree with you. Depending on how far-fetched the idea originally was, they may be coming around to agree, or they may simply find you less odious. A hardcore atheist at this level isn't going to suddenly find his road to Damascus, but at least he accepts that there's a difference between Unitarian Universalists and the Westboro Baptist Church. On the other hand, if the idea

wasn't wholly alien and antagonizing, they may be open to further persuasion.

**OK.**: The person may not adopt your beliefs, but they accept that you're sincere and have reasons for your statements other than being a trollish dick. If you're trying to convince a Jew to espouse the Nazi ethos, it's still no sale. But they think you're badly misled, rather than purely ignorant and hateful. Even if you have been trying to get them to join something they will never join, they tolerate you and perhaps think you can be rescued. On the other hand, if they started out largely indifferent to belief in the Invisible Clergy, for example, this result may have convinced them that it holds together. If nothing else, they're open-minded and more respectful.

### MISCELLANEOUS HARM

It's a world of hurt out there, and some of you are only going to be satisfied if your injury is regulated in masochistic detail. So you can use these guidelines for the most common forms of physical woe. However, every GM has my permission to wing it if something comes up in the heat of the session and she just wants to keep things moving along instead of pausing to look up *exactly* how much damage falling off a skyscraper does. If she knows she's got a car chase coming up, she's probably going to look up the car crash rules, but if she just says, "Eh, sounds like 3d10 of wounds to me," that's also fine.

### CAR CRASHES

There are really two kinds of car wrecks, for our purposes: crashes where you're a pedestrian and get creamed by a truck or a bike or a Mini Cooper, and crashes where you're inside a car that hits another car or a solid object.

If you're the creamed pedestrian, and the car's going 10 miles per hour (mph) or slower, it does no wounds, but you do have to stop and you're probably knocked down. If it's faster than that, the damage is as follows:

### MAKING A STREET PIZZA

Speed (mph)	Wounds
20-30	2d10
31-50	1d100

For every 20 mph above 50, add another d10. Also add 2d10 if it's a really huge-ass vehicle like a train or a semi — the momentum on those is pretty grievous.

Brett is urinating beside the highway at 3 AM, minding his own business, when a motorcycle going 70 mph hits a patch of gravel and spins into him. He rolls 1d100+1d10 wounds. Ow.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

See  
"Relationships"  
on page 36.

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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If you're on a motorcycle and hit someone, you get thrown or dragged. Take the damage for your speed as if you were a pedestrian. A *helmet and/or leathers* reduce the damage.

If you're in a car that gets T-boned, or rammed from the front, or slams into a tree or wall, you take wounds based on your speed.

## HOT CAR ON CAR ACTION

Speed (mph)	Wounds (w/seatbelt)	Wounds (w/o seatbelt)
Up to 20	None	1d10
21-50	2d10	1d100
51-70	3d10	1d100+1d10
71-90	4d10	1d100+2d10
91+	5d10	1d100+3d10

Don't worry about the object's speed. If you're going 50 mph and have a head-on collision with another car going 50 mph, it's the same as hitting a brick wall. It's physics!

If two cars are going in the same direction, or are side-by-side, don't bother with damage. Just make Pursuit rolls to keep on the road, with the guy who initiates the ram getting a +10% bonus. Anyone who fails the Pursuit roll goes off the road, and it's up to the GM if they skid harmlessly to a muddy stop or wrap around a concrete stanchion.

## CONFLAGRATION

If you get set on fire, that's a Violence (4-5) check. You take 1d10 wounds every round until you get doused, get tackled by someone with a blanket, or until you stop, drop, and make a successful Dodge roll. Note that if you fail your stress check, you don't have the presence of mind to do that unless you decide to freeze, which means you're going to be rolling and slapping yourself frantically for some time after the fire goes out.

## ELECTRICITY

There are many, many factors that determine how dangerous electricity is and since this game isn't explicitly about electricians, we're just dumbing it down. If you get a jolt from a minor source like a light socket, you take 1d10 wounds, get thrown back and lose your next action. If you get hit by lightning, it's 1d100 wounds. If you grab on to a live high-voltage wire or get thrown on the third rail of a train track, it's 1d100 wounds per round, and you need to make a successful Dodge or Fitness roll to wrench yourself free. Or your buddies need to roll to knock you lose.

## FALLING OBJECTS

If someone drops a heavy object on you — heavier than this book, something that could break someone's arm if you swung it with both hands — it

does 1d10 wounds for every ten feet it fell, or fraction thereof. This tops out at 10d10 if it went off a ten-story building. If you know it's coming, you can make a Dodge roll. If it's 4d10 wounds or more, you can automatically avoid it if you're aware of it, because it takes a while to fall forty feet. Big objects, something that'd take a roll to even lift? Like a floor safe or something? Add +2d10. Something too big for even that guy with Weightlifter 90% to pick up without mechanical advantage, like a piano? Add +3d10. In no instance does the damage exceed 10d10 though.

## BECOMING A FALLING OBJECT

When you fall, roll Dodge or Fitness, whichever you prefer. The results help to determine how many wounds you take. The base damage roll is 1d10 wounds for every ten feet you drop, up to a maximum of 10d10.

**Fumble:** You die. Sorry. People have died falling off curbs. Must've hit your neck just right.

**Matched Failure:** The damage roll is unaltered and, even if it doesn't kill you or knock you out, your next roll is at -20%.

**Failure:** The damage roll is unaltered.

**Success:** The damage roll is reduced by 1d10 wounds.

**Matched Success:** The damage roll is reduced by 1d10 wounds and you don't die from this fall. Anything that would kill you instead leaves you unconscious, a single wound away from your wound threshold (so that's a number of wounds equal to your wound threshold minus 1, for those playing at home).

**Crit:** The damage roll is reduced by 1d10. You don't die from this fall. Anything that would kill you leaves you crushed and messy, 10 wounds away from your wound threshold (so, you've got a number of wounds equal to your wound threshold minus 10).

## DROWNING AND SMOOTHERING

Denial of crucial oxygen to the brain can render people unconscious, cause brain damage, and kill. So take that plastic bag off your head right now!

Getting choked or strangled only happens during grapples, and specifically only when it reaches the *attacker's end zone*. That's how it works in combat. If you try to strangle someone outside of combat, it's either *pointblanking* or it starts a combat.

If you're drowning or in a chamber of poison gas, you can hold your breath one round for every ten points of Fitness, or fraction thereof. If you've got Fitness 45, you're only in trouble the fifth round after getting your SCUBA mask pulled off. Once

See "Armor" on page 62.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

See "The Grapple Gridiron" on page 68.

See "Point-blanking" on page 67.



## HOLDING YOUR BREATH FOR A REALLY LONG TIME

There are esoteric techniques that have let people hold their breath as long as twenty-two minutes, as of this writing. If you want a character who has Hold Breath as a unique identity feature, go for it. You can hold your breath one minute for every point in that identity, up to thirty minutes. Don't expect it to come up much, though.

you run out of breath (assuming you can't get a gasp in and restart the countdown), you have two rounds of activity before you pass out. Once you pass out, it's two more rounds before you're brain damaged, which means the GM can saw about twenty percentiles off any non-magick identities she sees fit. Two rounds after brain damage and you're dead.

## GETTING SICK

If you run around naked in the snow, or fall on a pile of rusty needles, or make sweet sweaty love to someone who's positively sodden with venereal disease, you're likely to get sick.

When you're exposed, make a Fitness roll. If the exposure is risky, there's a penalty ranging from -10% to -30%. If you make the roll, you maintain your health. If you fail, you're sick.

Common illnesses just make you feel cruddy for a few days — maybe to the extent of a -10% or -20% penalty to all rolls. Roll Fitness every day, and once you get a success, you start feeling better.

Really grievous illnesses inflict a wound every day you fail the Fitness roll to shake them off. Once you're cured, *those wounds recover normally*.

Both severe and common illnesses can be diagnosed with a successful roll on any sort of medical identity. That tells the person rolling what you need to do to get healthy. That could just be getting a prescription, so talk some MD into that posthaste. Or it could mean an operation, and thus another identity roll. Depending on how the diagnostician described his identity with the Medical feature, it could mean collecting obscure folkloric ingredients for your moxibustion treatment. A successful treatment acts like a successful Fitness roll.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

# MEDICINE

If you've been shot, kicked, electrocuted, and bitten by a feral hog, you are going to want salves and stitches for your assorted burns, punctures, and lacerations. These are all provided by people with medical identities. It could be MD 50% or Holistic Healer 70% or Combat Medic 20%, as long as it's got the Medical feature, it can use the rules below to heal wounds. Of course, if you can't access those sorts of treatments because emergency rooms tell the cops about gunshot wounds, you can just self-medicate and take a rest cure until everything stops seeping and hurting.

Any time you perform medicine on yourself, it's at -10%.

## GOLDEN HOUR TREATMENT

The golden hour is the first sixty minutes after an injury occurs. If someone provides treatment, even first aid, in that crucial early juncture, it helps a *lot*. If not, the patient has time to bleed out or get infected or be gnawed on by opportunistic scavengers, none of which help him get better.

So! If you're rolling a medical identity within the first sixty minutes, here's what happens:

**Fumble:** Ouchies! The poor fellow suffers another 1-5 wounds (1d10, divided in half). Good thing he passed out from the pain.

**Matched Failure:** The only thing your patient gets out of your first aid is a Violence (2-3) stress check.

**Failure:** You've covered the problem with gauze and tape, but it's not helping much.

**Success:** Your patient heals wounds equal to the tens place of your roll. You rolled a 34? Three wounds are erased.

**Matched Success:** The patient heals wounds equal to the sum of your roll. If you got a 22, that's 4 wounds, and if you got a 44 it's 8 wounds.

**Crit:** The patient heals 20 wounds!

This roll presumes that you've got him somewhere fairly safe and motionless, and that you've got access to first aid supplies. If you're doing it on the deck of a rolling ship, you might get a -10% on your roll.

## HOSPITAL STAYS

If it's been longer than an hour and the person is admitted to a hospital under your care (or, alternately, is sweating it out in an anonymous hotel room where you're paying off the cleaning staff), a person with a medical identity can perform surgery. This can only be attempted once per major injury.

**Fumble:** Do you know what a nosocomial infection is? Google it, along with "malpractice lawsuit." Your patient just took 1d10 wounds.

**Matched Failure:** Your patient's wounds remain unchanged. They would have been better off if you'd never entered the room and they'd just rested instead. Compare with "Outpatient Convalescence," next.

**Failure:** The patient heals wounds as if he had a nice day of bed rest.

**Success:** The patient heals wounds equal to your roll. If you rolled 49, he can erase 49 wounds. This cannot heal the very last wound. Only bed rest cures that.

**Matched Success:** Same as a success, but the patient also feels pretty good and is capable of thinking critically and answering questions intelligently soon after the operation.

**Crit:** The patient heals all but 1d10 wounds (or recovers wounds equal to the roll, if that would leave you with fewer wounds) and may, at the GM's discretion, get a dashing scar that practically screams "badass survivor!"

Again, if you're taking the sew-him-up-in-my-basement-with-a-scalpel-made-from-an-old-soup-can-top approach, that's probably going to get you a -10% or -20% on your roll.

Once you've been taken care of initially at a hospital, you recover the remainder of your wounds at the standard rate.

## OUTPATIENT CONVALESCENCE

Maybe you don't want to go to some funny-smelling hospital where the doctors are just going to lecture you about your lifestyle choices. Maybe you can take care of your own self like a grown-up! (Maybe you can't afford a hospital stay.)

If you've got wounds and you continue to run around like a damn fool, jumping off rooftops and casting spells and whatnot, you don't get better. C'mon.

If you have a moderate number of wounds — less than half your wound threshold — and you spend a day kicking back at home with soup and rest and ice packs, you heal a wound every day.

If you're really damaged — you have taken more than half your wound threshold — you need to spend a day with the aforementioned relaxation and assorted over-the-counter remedies, and succeed at a Fitness roll to heal a wound.

Convalescing this way is the only way to heal your last wound.

Well, OK, you can cheat and use magick for that too.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## THE THERAPY

Healing the mind is not much different from healing the body. You put in the time and effort and you pay attention and make gentle, encouraging suggestions until their psyche is reassembled. And, of course, you roll an identity with the Therapeutic feature. If you don't have that, you're stuck nodding and scratching your head.

You cannot use any therapeutic identity on yourself.

### IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE

The best time to treat someone for a psychological shock is soon after it occurs, because that's when you can frame it properly and demonstrate a healthy way to think about it. People who've been shocked aren't in the best position to calculate the healthiest way to regard their own damage, so having outside guidance is very useful. Talk them down in a calm, soothing voice, and roll.

**Fumble:** Welp, that made it worse. The target now also has a Self (2-3) check to contend with.

**Matched Failure:** You didn't make them any worse, but if you have a relationship with this... patient? Client? Stooge?... it drops by 5%.

**Failure:** Nothing happens. Sorry.

**Success:** If they got a failure, you can erase that and change it into a hardened notch instead, if the person being counseled agrees.

**Matched Success or Crit:** You can erase the notch the person took, hardened or failed. It's as if they never faced the stress check. Of course, you can't do this if they don't permit it, no matter how much you scold about resisting therapy.

### HELPING THE DISTURBED

When someone has gotten settled in their ways, you can still roll after some deep, heartfelt therapy sessions and possibly erase some stuff off their shock gauge. You can make a roll like this every month or so, if you've been having close, heart-to-heart, honest sharing exchanges with the person every week for at least an hour. (Let's be real though, it's more like fifty minutes after the meet 'n' greet and paperwork each session.) Alternately, if you go for intensive daily therapy, you get a roll every week, but that assumes at least three hours a day spent in encounter groups and talk sessions.

**Fumble:** Ugh. Shouldn't have brought up their mother. Target takes a Self (2-3) stress check.

**Matched Failure or Failure:** "You worked real hard today, good session." No change to the shock gauge though.

**Success:** The client can choose one hardened or failed mark to remove, if desired.

**Matched Success:** You can choose one hardened or failed mark to erase, regardless of whether the client wants it gone or not.

**Crit:** Pick one meter. The client loses a hardened notch and a failed notch off that meter.

If the client has an ongoing issue — meaning, one or more meter has five failed notches — you as the therapist *must* treat those first. You really can't help someone get mildly more functional in their social life if they're still completely enslaved by an occult phobia. In game terms, if someone has five failed notches in Violence and one in Helplessness, you can't get rid of that Helplessness failure until you take one off Violence. If someone has multiple neuroses from multiple maxed-out meters, pick which one you target first.

### HEALING THROUGH BED REST

Ahahaha, no. You can fix a sprained ankle that way, but sitting by yourself at home in the dark is a way to get your mind sicker, not better.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

You spend fifty-five minutes with the therapist and if the epiphany does not come between minutes forty-five and fifty, you exit the wilding tremulous and thin

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**“I’m not like that anymore,” Edie said, and it was pretty** hard to argue. The last time I’d seen her, she’d been living mole-people style in the old subway tunnels. By the way, if you’re thinking of facing down an adept fixed on stuff that gets thrown away underground, you can’t really pick a worse place than an abandoned train system that never even got used.

But, yeah, she had a point. Last time, she’d been shit-stained and pale and had all kinds of sores from being half-submerged and, oh yeah, we were cutting her into six segments. Now she was wearing a nice chocolate-colored high-waisted skirt, a sleeveless cream blouse, and better shoes than me. Good haircut, too. She looked like a mildly prosperous mid-level city bureaucrat from the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati, which was exactly what (on paper) she was.

## “I’m not,” she insisted, looking at Vaughn and me with big, frightened eyes.

“You’ll pardon me,” Vaughn said, “If I don’t want to just take your word for that.”

“I’ve changed! I mean, can’t you see that?”

“People don’t change,” he said.

“We do! Just not very much, and not very fast. But it’s been *years*. If I was only, what, one percent different every *week*, I’d be 100% different in just two years.”

“Only as long as you never changed back,” I said.

“Why, why on Earth or under it, would I want to be that crazy murderous bitch again? I lived in a goddamn toilet! I’m *happier this way!*”

“But in two years, maybe you’ll be back in a killing mood,” Vaughn said.

“I’m not the one pointing a gun!” she said, flapping her hands at the pistol in my hands. “I’m practically normal now! What other assurances can I offer? What else do you need? Your kids are alive! You can’t convict me of a crime that never got committed!”

“What about Giselle Ramirez and Walter Block?” I asked. “I checked up and they’re still dead.”

“And I still never did anything to them! You never had any proof about that, any more than you had with his sons!”

“Oh, we had proof,” Vaughn said.

“Really? A hallucinatory vision quest? The word of a medium?”

“She knew things only my boys could,” Vaughn said.

“And there’s the little matter of you coming back from the grave,” I said. “We know how you did it, and how you fueled it, so why don’t you drop the innocence act?”

“That was the other me! Yes, that was bad, very bad, but I’ve changed. The *world* has changed, *history* has changed, I think the whole universe was reborn and you’re still chasing that same vendetta?”

“You believe that Invisible Clergy, cosmic-democracy, tear-it-down-and-build-it-again line?”

“Haven’t you seen the evidence yourself?” she demanded. “I’m not sure what the event was on March 3rd, but something moved the universe on its foundation and we were shaken into new positions. Look, I don’t blame you for k... killing me. I was terrible. I was on the path of filth, I was actively pursuing my own degradation. But it’s the other way now! The stain can be cleansed, the foul can be made clean, it’s what *sanitation is all about!*”

We were in her house, her nice tidy house with the pet white rat staring at us from a cage that didn’t even stink.

“They want us to stay stuck,” she said, leaning forward, eyes intent. “Whoever it was that ascended on three-three-three, they plugged the pipe on their way out. They don’t want us to find out what happened, how or why, they want us to be distracted fighting each other again. Or else, they want us tranquilized in domestic bliss,” she said, giving a tiny side-eye to Vaughn.

It was that sly little look that did it. “Maybe I’ll look into that after taking care of you,” I said, pulling back the hammer on my revolver. “But the way I see it, you’ve got the blood of three people on your hands — Vaughn’s two kids and his wife. And we’ve only killed you twice.”

“Are you sure you want to do this? Again? Piss away your second chance?”

“No, but I’m going to.”

She sighed. “Well, I tried reasoning with you.”

Rats boiled out from behind the bookshelves, under the TV cabinet, and air conditioning vents.



# 4: THE WEIRDNESS OF THE WORLD

Everyone is taught that the world operates on the laws of science, but it's hard, sometimes, to *feel* that. When you read about how a ten-year-old girl named Laura Buxton released a balloon with her address on it and it was found by an entirely *different* girl named Laura Buxton who's about the same age... well, it's like logic blushes and shuffles its feet, isn't it? When a mathematician avidly says that coincidences happen *all the time* and that what's *actually* rare is for us to uncover them, that doesn't really make the world seem more stable and rational. It makes it feel like there's a deeper order of which we are ignorant, and it deforms the shapes of our lives in ways we cannot predict.

Occultism is all about trying to find that set of secret rules that govern the world. Magick is all

about knowing those rules and believing you can beat the house odds.

In *Unknown Armies*, the unnatural, the hidden and the magickal exist. They're waiting to be discovered, battled, exploited. They are the patterns we feel but can't prove, the faith in a lucky shirt that never let us down, while the scientific method can't explain why that goddamn dishwasher doesn't work even though we followed the installation instructions *exactly*. They're the "measurement anomalies" and "observer errors" and "one-time flukes" that become more reliable than any device we can fully understand. They're out there, and they don't need you to believe in them.

The question is, what are you going to do about them?

## COSMOLOGY

There is something fundamental to humanity, a drive to know more, understand foundations, grasp not just how things came to be, but *why*. This drive, this profound hubris, seems both deeper and higher than other similar ingrained desires. The urge to get some sex is, in most of us, certainly strong, but lacks the patina of nobility that cosmic curiosity possesses. We seek the mysteries to benefit humanity, while we get laid for ourselves.

Staring up at the sky's infinite depths and wondering "Why, though?" isn't something that seems to preoccupy spider monkeys and sharks and slime molds. It's us. It's our problem, uniquely.

According to *Unknown Armies*, it's our problem because it's our fault.

And our glory! Every marvel beheld in the natural world, every great work of art remembered or forgotten or imagined but never shared? All ours. The elegant sophistication of biology, the profound mysteries of physics? We did that. The sublime and the ridiculous and the *kawaii* cute are all courtesy of humanity.

But on the other hand... cancer? Death? Rape and unfairness and birth defects? Someone put those in the mix. Our instinct for mayhem and the way we learn to shirk from difficult justice without ever being taught... someone thought those were good ideas. They were done to us, on purpose, by people like us. The myriad wounds upon humankind are self-inflicted, each and every.

## COSMOS

things can only be seen from outside  
only humans can see the cosmos only us  
and only as it dies

When you  
can fly you  
don't need  
any goddamn  
pants.

1: GO

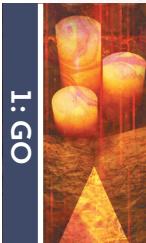
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## ATHEISM, DISMISSED

The central tenet of scientific atheism is that there is no intentional supernatural force guiding events because, if there was, we'd detect it with... I dunno, magnets probably. Their core position is that you go for the simplest answer that fits the observed facts, like atoms are just really tiny pieces of matter that obey Newtonian physics, until your tools get advanced enough to suggest that whatever is going on down there in the realm of quantum entanglement, it doesn't look *anything like* stuff on the sand-grain-to-planet scale of reality. But still, you know, the simplest explanation is likely to be the right one, trust your senses and reason even when they're mediated by layer upon layer upon layer of theory and technology. It got us the Apple Watch, didn't it?

Scientific atheism does not have much space for avatars, which is too bad, because they are exactly the instruments that reveal the guidance of intentional supernatural forces. Avatars are people who act like ascended archetypes because the sincerest form of flattery can get you high-fives from coincidence and synchronicity. Sadly for atheists, their very distaste for the subjectivity of human perception blinds them to actual, repeatable proof that higher powers are listening and, if not exactly answering prayers, certainly impacting aggregate humanity. Oh well! If only they realized that their biased faith in quantifiable and laboratory-tested effects was blinding them to the faith healing and levitation going on all over the world! But no, these guys hate mystics almost as much as they hate the vast influence and wealth of organized religion and the way the public stubbornly persists in believing something out there loves them even when all reason insists that nothing possibly could.

## THEISM, CORRECTED

On the other side of the great cultural divide are your traditional faiths, polytheistic or monotheistic or vaguely deist. The disputes arising from believing in god(s) are way above the pay grade of a book this size. Moreover, they've been batted about like the last chew toy in the Doberman pen since the first time some Roman guy said, "A god who does mean things doesn't deserve my worship, and a god who's not omnipotent to stop bad things doesn't either! SICK BURN!"

It's a question that has prompted the field of apologetics from Christianity — an entire academic discipline built around "Whoopsie! God's sorry bad things happen to good people!" Other religions suggest that grief in this life is payback for the dirt you did in previous lives, or simply state that it's not God's job to make you feel better if you're just going to covet your neighbor's ass and drink wine all day long.

Belief in the archetypes, however, suggests a very good reason that bad things happen to good people. It's because there are bad people, and some of them are invisible, undying, and obliquely powerful. Once you jettison the idea that anything with a joystick wired to causality has to be *benevolent*, a lot of those logical conundrums simply unravel.

Still, it's hard to gaze upon the grandeur of a double rainbow and not feel that there's something bigger, better, and more real than oneself. That hope for perfection, for an ideal human who doesn't have to molder in the grave... that too is more than solipsism. It's well-nigh universal because it's *not* a pipe dream. It's a correct intuition of human potential.

## NOW WHAT?

Having established that there's conflict in abstract fundaments of reality, just as there is in an ideologically riven congress, or on a busy highway, or on Twitter when someone suggests it's theoretically possible to draw a female superhero with pants on... what now? What's a mere mortal to do?

Appeal to the base of archetypes who support one's own agenda? Yes! Great idea!

Struggle to supplant archetypes who are outmoded and retrograde? Sure! You can do that! Throw the burns out!

What if one *doesn't* want to risk the wrath of an undying immortal whose power to make things happen appears to be limited only by the fact that they can't do anything too *small*? Does this mystic knowledge have ramifications for someone who just wants to get by, drink away the weekend without The Man coming down on him, and maybe chase some purely superficial or even selfish objectives?

Oh hell yes it does!

If history teaches us anything about human beings trying to collectively govern, it's that it's a recipe for ungainly cop-outs, patched-together compromises that satisfy no one, and gross inefficiencies. *The universe really was designed by committee.* That means there are all kinds of obscure bylaws that can be invoked to one's advantage... if you know about them. But even if you don't, just being aware that the cosmos has cracks and leaks and soft, exploitable loopholes? That's still a big advantage over anyone who thinks that things as they were yesterday is how they must be tomorrow.

The world is wide, weird, and wild.

Let's have a look.

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS



## UNNATURAL PHENOMENA

Everyone's walked into a place or a situation that was just not right. When it's a cemetery at midnight and you're alone with a candle and a white-handled knife, it's a lot harder to be a rational skeptic than it is in a sunny science classroom full of middle-class brainiacs. But even beyond the suggestive trappings of low-budget horror movies, there are times when your neck hairs rise and your muscles get an adrenaline bath.

You get on an empty elevator and, without a single sound or event, you're oppressed by a sense that *something's going to happen*, it builds and builds until you get off two floors early and take the stairs.

You meet your mom's pastor's cousin, he shakes your hand and smiles and your skin absolutely crawls. He says nothing wrong and has not a hair out of place but he could not frighten you more if he was caressing your cheek with a straight razor and muttering about skin lotion.

You look at a used car that's got a phenomenally low price and you know you're not going to buy it no matter how badly you need one because you'd always feel like it was in the parking lot staring at you.

Those situations, places, and people are creepy enough without inexplicable weird events. When the walls start bleeding or you hear voiceless voices (yes, it's a contradiction,

but you'll recognize them if you're ever unlucky enough to hear them), you know that something has gone wrong.

### WHAT THEY SIGNIFY

Those signs — rains of fish, insects swarming into brief sentences, coins turning up heads even if they have to spontaneously flip themselves — mean that the world of sequential cause-and-effect has been jarred by a collision with something deeper and odder. The world of our senses and flesh has impacted a world of meaning and concealed principles.

Some people keep an eye out for unnatural phenomena so they know what to flee. Others seek them out like connoisseurs eager to sample a novel delicacy. What both groups know, if they're smart, is that these phenomena are never the whole of the story. Phenomena have causes. They are only the shadow cast upon matter by some strange and profound illumination.

Fools look for phenomena. The sensible look away. But perhaps it's the wise who look *behind* it. Or perhaps that's a job for the mad.

What makes unnatural phenomena happen? Adepts casting spells, non-adepts using rituals, or the attention of the Invisible Clergy as it sweeps across the landscape, trying to find relevant people, the way you'd try to spot one

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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6: ADEPTS

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
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yellow blade of grass on an otherwise green lawn. Unnatural phenomena are the friction of meaning. Your GM can throw them in whenever weird stuff is afoot.

The following unnatural phenomena are meant to inspire. Each could range from a strange thirty-second distraction right up to a very deadly predicament, depending on the GM's needs and inclinations. More than that, they are intended as seeds for the GM's own imagination. The unnatural is vast, poorly documented, and often terrifying. Use it as such.

## MINOR PHENOMENA

Minor phenomena crop up individually when unnatural beings, including dedicated adepts and avatars, are around but inactive. In single instances, they're easy to dismiss, but when a bunch of them happen at once, that's harder to rationalize.

### THE ALMOST-SEEN

A figure, usually menacing or eerie, sometimes seraphically beautiful, is seen from the corner of the eye. When turned on, it's gone. It usually appears to only one person, is never seen clearly or for more than a split-second, but it often persists, as if following them about.

### AUDIO MISCUE

Everyone knows about Freudian slips where you say "We were just playing a game of peckers" when you mean "checkers," but audio miscue phenomena are less cute and more creepy. When an audio miscue occurs, someone says something, and one person present (only one!) hears something entirely different. There's usually a disconnect between the intensity of the correct and the incorrect statements, too. If you say "I love you," it's likely to get miscued as "Your shoe is untied" or "I like vanilla." If you ask someone if they saw where you left your sunglasses, on the other hand, it could get miscued as a death threat.

### DIZZINESS

Your head spins, you might stagger for a step or two, and then you're fine. Or you know when people shiver for no reason and say a goose stepped on their grave? It has nothing to do with geese.

### ELECTRONIC VOICE PHENOMENA

A nearby telephone rings — whether it's your regular mobile, or a busted child's toy. Answer it, and you hear a series of strange numbers being read out by an oddly metallic female voice. If you could understand them, they'd be the key to preventing your untimely death. Alternatively, you may hear your own voice from a decade in the future, desperately trying to warn you of a horrible mistake you're about to make. Or maybe it's a long-dead loved one asking why you never come to visit, or a wispy voice muttering mind-blasting secrets, or the playback of messages left on the answerphone of the soulmate you haven't met yet, or a genuine hotline to the person you least want to talk to in the entire world. Fail to answer, and you might be hounded for months with unsettling messages via voicemail, answering machine, or even notes pinned to your fridge.

## THE HAUNTED HOUSE ROUTINE

Weird noises, unexpected cold spots, and creepy stains running down walls are often observed around mystic entities and locales. Those are, in fact, the classic symptoms of a haunted house. Of course, they're also symptomatic of an old house that's settling, has drafts, and is getting moldy.

Individually, it's rarely hard to dismiss a minor effect as an entirely mundane event. It's similarly easy for occult paranoids to experience natural effects and mistake them for unnatural events.

### OWLS

A lonely, wailing hoot can be an eerie sound at the best of times. It's worse in a setting where you really wouldn't expect to hear it — in the middle of an office building, for example. Worse yet is when the calls start up all around you, from every direction, sounding for all the world like a pack closing in on its prey. Unfortunately, owls are not always what they seem. As the cries get closer, it takes a very strong mind not to just turn and run, run away as fast as you can. Don't think too hard about the direction you're being chased in, the long drop, the high window at the end of the corridor, the wonderful cake shop you've been avoiding, the fast-moving stream of traffic just ahead, the thing you were trying to hide from in the first place. Superstition said that owls were the harbingers of death. Sometimes, superstition gets it right.

This phenomenon can strike individuals, or a whole crowd, or just select members of a group. Anyone who resists the temptation to flee shakes off the eerie feeling in a few moments, but anyone who runs has to make a Violence (2-3) check. Anyone who fails the check automatically continues to flee.

### SPONTANEOUS MOTION

Something violates the conservation of momentum. An object that was still begins to rock without being touched, or just falls over. Or, something that's falling or rolling stops — maybe just momentarily. This rarely influences anything bigger than a bread box.

### TECHNOLOGY FAIL

Sometimes mystical energies express themselves through electromagnetic chaos, making a watch go on the fritz, briefly speeding up a pacemaker, causing a car to stall, or disabling a cell phone just when you were going to bust on your girlfriend's insufferable brother with a quick visit to snopes.com.

### TEMPORAL STUTTERING

This resembles nothing so much as when you're talking to someone over video on the internet, and your connection slows down. Instead of moving smoothly, everything seems to freeze for just a half-second and then jerk forward to catch up. It usually only affects individuals or small groups, and only for about ten or twelve seconds, but it's weird and disquieting. Of course, similar experiences occur naturally if you get the right kind of concussion, so... watch out for that, too.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
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EN . OX  
IS NOT HO  
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## THE WRONG VOMIT

Someone spits up something they never swallowed, possibly something they *couldn't*. People have thrown up razorblades, small sculptures of unfired clay, balls of hair matted around undifferentiated keratinous tissue, and a hen's egg (uncracked) with a yolk containing about a hundred bucks' worth of gold dust. The upchucking hurts, but does no real injury. That aftertaste though...

## SIGNIFICANT PHENOMENA

These are often one and done shockers that befall individuals when there's no other witnesses around. To that unfortunate loner, it's indisputably *against reality*, but when they try to explain it, it's usually easier to just dismiss the claims as madness or an attention-seeking hoax. These can, nevertheless, inflict stress checks on those to whom they happen.

Significant phenomena usually happen when something fairly momentous has occurred — the death of a powerful adept or avatar, the presence of an unnatural creature that's under duress, or a section of reality itself groaning under the pressure of a mighty ritual.

Anything that might cause a significant phenomenon might, instead, cause up to ten minor phenomena... *all at once*.

## BLIGHT

There's something wrong with wherever you are. Something really wrong. It's not just your imagination. Was that your reflection smirking at you hungrily with razor-sharp, jagged teeth? When you leave, you discover that you're walking back in. The carpet, or wood, or ground underfoot is wheezing in agony as your weight presses down on it. Furious messages appear on the wall in blood, vanishing again the instant you look away, but they were really there, dammit. You know they were. Why does your friend look like a shadowy mass — or is it something pretending to be your friend? You can't tell, but her voice sounds impossibly hostile.

Blight rarely lasts more than a quarter-hour, after which everything snaps back to normal. It can't cause physical injury or damage objects, but if described, it sounds a lot like a psychotic episode. Indeed, there's no experiential difference, except that one is objective and external and one is subjective and internal. But for the experiencer, there's no way to tell the difference.

## LOST TIME

Someone unobserved vanishes from reality for *idio* hours. People still remember them while they're gone, but assume they're somewhere else — just as you, right now, are assuming that about almost everyone you know. The vanished individual has no sense of time passing. They feel like they spaced off, woolgathering, for a little

while... and when they started paying attention again, it was much later. There's no distinct re-arrival moment, but it's jarring.

## RELOCATION

Like lost time, only for space. Someone who's unobserved passes out of reality, only to re-materialize somewhere up to a mile away. They never show up anywhere observed, but often it's baffling, enclosed — sometimes dangerous. People have found themselves in locked closets, water towers(!), car trunks, and behind layers of intense security.

For the person relocated, it feels like they got turned around for just a moment, then... were somewhere else. There's a dreamlike, unexamined *feeling* that they got there simply by taking a wrong turn, and if they find their way out, they may eventually forget it happened if they rationalize hard enough.

## SPATIAL DISTORTION

Reality bends and twists in unpredictable ways. The ten-foot corridor stretches out like silly putty, becoming fifty feet then one hundred then two hundred whilst simultaneously managing to not burst out the far side of the building. A door shrinks until it's so small only a doll could get through. The next step on the staircase becomes a vast cliff, populated by ravening monster dust mites. A crack in the ground turns into a yawning chasm. Although they don't affect the structures and surfaces around them, spatial distortions are absolutely real for anyone caught in them. Continue on down that dizzying staircase on the basis that it simply can't be a huge drop, and they find your body crushed onto the next stair. Spatial distortions are broadly random, and while they might pose an immediate threat or inconvenience, they're unlikely to deliberately turn against you. Unless they do.

Sometimes spatial distortions are minor — confusing and inconvenient, but brief. When they last longer, they can do up to *1d10* wounds, and are capable of damaging tangible objects if they interact with it wrong. For example, a fishbowl could get crushed when the alcove where it's set suddenly slams shut.

## SPONTANEOUS ORDER

Poltergeist activity usually wrecks the place, but a higher class of weird movement is when objects spontaneously organize themselves — stones fly into a new configuration in a garden, sorted vertically by size and lengthwise by color, chairs stack themselves into a tight tangle, the cords behind a desk suddenly go from tangled to *woven* with no interruption of power, or the pages of a book change position to be alphabetized by the first word instead of going in proper order. These changes rarely happen before multiple observers. Like most phenomena, they're shy, but they last.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*Timekeeping  
is a shared  
hallucination.*





Once something's changed or sorted, it stays that way. Once the mystery force puts the pigs on the roof, there they stay until evacuated, while everyone assumes human agency and wonders who the prankster is.

## MAJOR PHENOMENA

These are the big guns. They only happen when the strongest challenges to material normalcy are acting up and particularly stroppy. Adepts throwing around major charges *might* cause one, as could the culmination of a powerful cosmic objective. Ascensions are usually accompanied by several throughout the globe.

Major phenomena are undeniably supernatural and have permanent effects that many people can witness simultaneously.

## FORTEANA

Rains of things other than sleet, snow, and rain are collectively known as Forteana after their primary chronicler, Charles Fort. Things that have fallen out of the sky and been reported in papers include: fish, blood (with chunks), frogs, grey mud, leaves from plants that science cannot classify, tiny spheres of indigo rubber, and fire.

Less common are rain-ups where water seeps up out of the ground, collects into drops on the tips of leaves or the roofs of houses, and then gets sucked into the sky in defiance of gravity. Rain-ups

usually presage something very bad for living humans, but the only thing that flies up off the earth is drops of water, nothing else.

## THE GAME

The world spins, and you find yourselves in a grubby, low-rent living room. The air fills with a vile stench, and blue goop oozes from the walls. There aren't any doors, and the stink is actively debilitating. There's a grating whine coming from somewhere, but you can't pinpoint the location, and it's making your spine crawl. A crudely made board game sits in the middle of the floor, waiting for you to make your move. Game pieces with your faces sit in the middle of the board, in the square labeled "The Bain Game." Routes spider off from it. Fortunately — or unfortunately — you know what to do. Pick a route, throw the dice, and discover your fate. "Exit" is great. "Bonus" can be incredible, but it's likely to be seriously unnerving to your friends and family. Most of the rest are bad in one way or another (possession, injury, a weird curse), but you really want to hope you don't land on "Forever."

## LABYRINTH

Was that door there before? There's no way it should have that passageway behind it. Polished wood floor, off-white walls, ambient lighting, there's nothing particularly distressing about it,

1: GO



2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



I think  
we're  
property.

4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



other than what the hell is it doing there? Good question. The passage leads to a junction, similar hallways continuing off in opposing directions. Deep marks are gouged into the floor here and there, as if the endless network of corridors were patrolled by some huge, ferocious beast. You might catch a hint of it as it passes, the faint snick-snack of talons on wood. You won't find it, though — at least, not unless you're startlingly unlucky. You did remember the way back, right?

People who wind up in the labyrinth seem to slip away when no one else is paying attention, and have to face their own personal minotaur alone. There are two ways to defeat the maze. One is by rolling some appropriate identity to find the way out, possibly bolstered by Notice or by a clever strategy. The other is to fight a creature with a wound threshold of 60 and a Struggle at 45%. The creature does +3 wounds and can flip-flop its attack rolls.

Those who die in the labyrinth are ejected back into causality only moments after they left it, sometimes appearing before dozens of witnesses. Whether they died of starvation or mauling, the cause of death is visibly obvious.

### SOMEONE DIES

Some random person within a mile or so perishes. Could be a brain aneurysm, or it could be that his brain is simply no longer in his skull, though there's no sign of how it exited. Maybe he's torn apart by invisible claws. Or maybe he vanishes and is never heard from again.

## HOW TO EXPLOIT UNNATURAL PHENOMENA

Like attracts like and strange calls to strange. Most people regard a house with weeping walls and dancing dolls and decide it's demon-infested or, at the very least, a poor real estate investment. But people who are trying to *get something* you can't just drop cash money to obtain often head towards unnatural phenomena, rather than away from them. They might be in search of:

**Insight.** Peering at anomalies opens your mind to how the real world — the one *behind* physics and chemistry — functions. If nothing else, it conditions you to accept the eerie for what it is, rather than immediately dismissing it as observer error or a drug flashback. Mechanically, this is represented by picking up hardened notches on your Unnatural meter and getting better at Secrecy. Of course, there's always the risk of going insane, but you pay attention and you take your chances.

**Spoor-tracking.** Since unnatural events have unnatural causes, investigation often leads to exploitable resources. Entities can sometimes be open to negotiation, or coercion, or sometimes someone just wants their ichor for a ritual. Even if you get to the source and it's useless and dangerous, you're at least *informed*. You know the saying "Better the devil you know?" Following phenomena is how you get to know the devil.

**Resources.** If you own a legit haunted house, you can run tours. Not just on Halloween, but for ghost-hunters, the curious, and the damned. Or if you know that people who head to a certain hill when the moon is full wind up underneath it in the labyrinth, that might be a good time and place to set up a meet with Meth Mike to pay off what you owe.

**Demonstration.** Significant and major events in particular tend to really shake people up when their worldviews don't permit for stuff that looks like a no-shit dark miracle. Even petty phenomena can disturb the squares. By claiming to invoke the effect, or even just predicting the time and place, you can prove to doubters that you are the real deal, the person who understands the occult. Once people believe one impossible thing, it's a lot easier to sell them on the next. This can set you up to coerce their Unnatural meter, and that's a soft target on many upstanding citizens. It could even reinforce someone's protégé position.

As a general guideline, any clever attempt to move a weird effect into the plus column on your objective's ledger is worth a  $1d10+5\%$  increase, if the scale is right. With significant danger, it might even add  $2d10+10\%$ .

1: GO

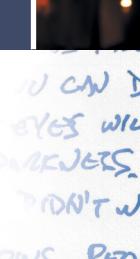
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



See  
"Relationships"  
on page 36.



## ARTIFACTS

Things hold a sense of power in the world. People fight and kill over trinkets, infuse objects with centuries of spiritual weight, and mourn the loss of prized possessions as strongly as they do family. Artifacts are objects given cosmic or magickal importance, imbued to perform some unnatural function. In the hands of a canny charger, they can be a significant and unpredictable edge; in the hands of a common pony, it's like leveling the playing field by building a zip gun out of a coffee percolator, a heavy-duty stapler, and a drill bit wrapped in duct tape.

### NATURAL ARTIFACTS

Any sort of strange event can create an artifact by utter happenstance. They're side effects of the cosmos, and those items can range in power from changing the eye color of someone holding a smooth pebble, to melting the flesh off of someone you touch with a pair of old cleaners' gloves, to turning a city into salt if you flip an old coin and it lands tails. Some artifacts are purely dangerous with no utility, like that nice Viennese watch that slowly erases your memories, starting with the earliest ones.

Coming up with natural artifacts is entirely in the hands of the GM. These objects always do their magickal effect when triggered. Treat the effect as having a critical success, should a roll be necessary to determine what happens. Of course, depending on the artifact, other rolls may come into play, like using Struggle to touch someone with those old gloves, but then if you succeed you treat the roll as a critical success. Careful with the gloves; if you fumble, you've probably touched yourself. You're going to miss that leg.

These artifacts can get complicated: they could have different effects with different triggers, they might be linked, they could even have some taboo or safe word that shuts them off. Maybe it has a grander effect in the light of a full moon, or doesn't work on Wednesdays. The artifact could work just once every hundred years, or be continually active. Some natural artifacts are effectively indestructible, and others are terribly fragile. They might even seem to have wills of their own, naturally losing themselves so no one person can easily possess them for a long time, and so on. Any given artifact might even transcend the game rules.

In short, natural artifacts are *weird*, and they play by a cosmic set of rules that maybe only the Invisible Clergy truly understand.

That gets us to the most dangerous aspect of natural artifacts: until you understand them, they're like handling a bomb whose instructions are in Aramaic and you're missing a couple pages. Hell, even after you think you understand them, they're still risky. Once you've got an artifact, you've got to figure out how to make it work without it backfiring on you, if it can backfire, and you should assume it can. If you're smart, you try to figure out not just where the "on" button is, but piece together its very nature and place in the cosmos. If you're lucky, you do so without cost to your body or mind.

### CONSTRUCTED ARTIFACTS

*Adepts can intentionally make artifacts. Damn, is anything off limits to those lucky jerks?*

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## SAMPLE ARTIFACTS

Here are a few of the more well-known artifacts out loose in the world.

### THE GLORIOUS PUMPKIN

**Power:** Minor.

**Description:** It's a pumpkin. A *beautiful* pumpkin, just the right size, its rind a vibrant and healthy orange, its stem curled at a jaunty angle.

**Effect:** The pumpkin never ages, never molds, and is impervious to all conventional sources of damage. It's an immortal, bulletproof gourd. Other than that... kinda useless, albeit decorative if you like that sort of thing.

The glorious pumpkin has a surprisingly widespread reputation, with all kinds of theories about where it came from — “Paracelsus threw out what he *thought* was dross but it was the philosopher’s stone and it made a garden vegetable immortal!” “It’s the platonic ideal of a pumpkin, somehow transduced into material reality!” “Somehow, a pumpkin ascended to the Statosphere and the Glorious Pumpkin is its godwalker!”

Lots of people want to eat it, but no one has been able to breach its skin.

### THE OPTIMIST’S CARD

**Power:** Minor.

**Description:** People make these. Could be there’s a dedicated ritual, or just that the idea has gone around and adepts like it. Or both.

The object is a business card, and it has to list the user’s legal name and some fairly accurate description of their job. It functions once and after that is just a dreary old business card.

**Effect:** To use the card, the person whose name is on it has to convince someone to answer a question — any question — affirmatively. “Excuse me, is that your car?” for example. Once that’s been done, the user can hand the card over and the person who takes it instinctively says “yes” to the next yes/no question asked. The person can immediately backtrack, but, depending on the question, they may reorder their thoughts after the fact to rationalize their acquiescence. They may have to face a Self (1-3) challenge, depending on what they agreed to and whether they resisted or not. Note: you have to hand the card to the person who agreed. You can’t have one person answer and give the card to someone different.

### MAGIC BULLET

**Power:** Minor.

**Description:** This is made from the spent shell of a bullet that was used to unjustly or accidentally kill someone. The person making the Magic Bullet has to reload the casing themselves. They aren’t used by professional assassins in the underground, because they aren’t nearly as efficient or as long-term as knowing what you’re doing. Instead, they’re given to punks that power players use for anonymous, “random” killings, the idea being

## ARTIFACT CULTS

Wherever there’s power poured into an object, there are those who revere it. Pretty much every religion puts some stock in sacred relics, so it’s no surprise that small cults spring up around natural artifacts. When someone discovers an artifact, the GM should consider who is directly interested in this artifact, and what do they already know about it? If they are aware of it, they’re probably looking for it. If not, they are surely interested once word gets around of someone using it.

Vicious, competing cults form around groups of related artifacts, like a dozen seemingly innocuous objects that were sitting in the same bus station locker for two decades, but become powerful if they’re used together. Even if that’s just rumor, well, people kill over rumors. When you add to the mix occult groups that just have general interest in anything freaky, possessing an artifact means you’re immediately embroiled in a turf war.

Objects have no inherent power.

They only have the power we give them.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX  
IS NOT HO  
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LAGON W  
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event, the artifact conks out when another person handles it, so you can't lend it to someone and wait for them to immolate.

These gadgets typically have 1d10 charges in 'em.

### MINERVA'S EYES

**Power:** Minor.

**Description:** These artifacts, named after the person who made a small living creating them in the early '00s, are constructed from garden gnomes, small house gargoyles, and other statues that creep out some people. The statue can't just be one that's found randomly in a store; it has to genuinely unnerve the adept creating the artifact. **Effect:** Place the statue with its eyes facing an open space. Until sunrise or sunset, anyone that enters that space can't shake the feeling of being watched. If they stick around for more than a minute, it grows from being a vague feeling into a certainty — they hear rustling leaves, whispers, footsteps, whirring motors on cameras they can't find, though these never come from the direction of the statue.

After five or so minutes, they start to hear voices mocking them, with very personal comments that cut to the core. Remaining at this point is a Self (3-4) check.

These statues are single-use objects, but that one use lasts until sunrise or sunset shuts it off.

### GRANDMA'S DIARY

**Power:** Significant.

**Description:** It's a dusty, old-fashioned journal. Chameleon-like, it seems to change form into whatever its holder would accept as something their grandma owned. For someone young, whose grandma was born in the '50s, it would look like something with a '60s or '70s design. For someone older, it would be leather-bound and stitched.

**Effect:** Whoever spends five or six total hours reading it understands the biggest and most significant events of their maternal grandmother's life. This can provide warm and sentimental feelings, or profound shocks, depending on the person and the grandma.

It cannot be copied — cameras and copiers glitch or break down altogether, while attempts to hand-scribe it invoke distractions or pencil-breaks, or the copy simply gets lost somehow. Readers can't quote it or remember the wording of any particular passage. They just know what it said and what it meant to their granny.

Anyone who attempts to show Grandma's Diary to someone else loses it. It simply ceases to be where they left it, and it turns up in some random attic, or appears in a used bookstore.

### THE CORSICAN RINGS

**Power:** Significant.

**Description:** Though it takes the form of two separate but identical plain gold bands, Corsican Rings are a single artifact.

**Effect:** The power of the rings takes effect once two different people wear them on their left ring fingers. It is, or they are, good for only one use. One is plenty.

As soon as they're worn, the two people wearing them feel an immediate and powerful affection for each other. They also gain deep and profound insights into each other's nature, as if they'd been intimate for a decade or more. Mechanically, *each takes a relationship* with the other. Each becomes the other's favorite, and the rating starts at 80%. This continues even if the ring's removed, though it can be whittled away through coercion and neglect like any relationship.

If they previously hated one another, that doesn't change. It just coexists with the new admiration, in a state of incredibly uncomfortable confusion. If either had a previous favorite, that rating drops to zero, but it doesn't mean the character no longer cares about their previous favorite. Those feelings are still there too, just scrambled and muted by the new, artificial sensation. If the spell of the rings is broken, the old relationship returns at its former level.

Getting this kind of bond is a Self (6-7) challenge.

### JUST WHAT I NEEDED

**Power:** Significant.

**Description:** A Just What I Needed charm takes one of many forms, all of them useful and versatile. Just What I Neededs have been made from pocketknives, duct tape rolls, multitools, smartphones... even aluminum foil. As long as it has dozens of uses, it can be enchanted to become Just What I Needed.

**Effect:** When invoked, the object transforms into a generic tool or item — whatever the user needs, within some fairly strict guidelines. First off, it has to be something you could legally buy for under a hundred bucks in any major, industrialized city. Second, it has to be something small and light enough to pick up and carry one-handed.

This is a single-use item, so once the magick is utilized, it remains a mundane machete, distributor cap, insulin dose, EpiPen, handcuff key, or crowbar. It's pretty good quality, nothing special, and completely void of any trade dress or decoration.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX  
IS NOT HO  
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## THE KNOB

**Power:** Significant.

**Description:** Made from the stump of a massive, old oak, this altar's surface is scored with innumerable cuts from axe blades and knives, and the top is stained from decades of animal butchering. The sides and bottom are carved to make it roughly four feet around and sit flat on the ground, with four handles built in recesses — which are needed to move it, since the Knob weighs more like it's stone than wood.

**Effect:** When an animal is slaughtered for charges on this crude, wooden altar, the Knob gains the charge instead. Of its own accord, the Knob seems to use these charges to ward the animals and plants on a farm or ranch from disease. As long as the Knob has been charged in the last three days, the adept using it and anyone on its land gets a +10% bonus to all Fitness rolls.

Once the Knob has been fed, it must continue to be fed, or all the illness it held back come at once, poisoning the immediate two square acres around it. Every plant in that area dies over the course of a month, and nothing grows again. It's real Superfund stuff. The last two times *agrimancers* have found the Knob, it's been abandoned in wholly barren fields. Jessica Mae Jenkens, who claimed power through human sacrifice, once tried to take possession of the Knob, but got shot before she could use it. No one's sure what it would do with *that* flavor of mojo.

## THE BASILISK PORTRAIT

**Power:** Major.

**Description:** It's a painting, about ten inches wide and fifteen inches tall. No one who sees it is unaffected. No one who sees it can remember it afterwards. It has been photographed, however, revealing an uninspiring black velvet portrait of a man in a cowboy hat, possibly Willie Nelson. The photographed reproductions do not have any paranormal or psychological effects.

**Effect:** Anyone who looks at the Basilisk Portrait enters a *fugue state* and wanders off for 1d10 hours. They also face an Unnatural (10) check, but if it's failed there's no need to flee, freeze, or frenzy — the fugue is apparently a fourth option, in this case. Seeing it definitely gives you a hardened or failed notch.

Every day that the owner doesn't look at it, they face a Self check. For the first week, it's a Self (1) check and the rank increases every week until they look at it and enter the fugue. Once in the fugue state, the owner inevitably takes the Basilisk Portrait and gets rid of it. Somehow, though, it always turns up again, even if apparently burned.

## THE NIGHTINGALE WATCH

**Power:** Major.

**Description:** This old-fashioned pocket watch, 1850 vintage, has a nightingale inscribed on the cover and is stopped at one minute to midnight. It

is in poor condition with a corroded stem, cloudy crystal, and battered gold casing.

**Effect:** No one with the Nightingale Watch on their person can die. They can be injured to the point of maxing out their wound threshold, they can be mangled and maimed and be left blinded or permanently deafened, but they do not die. Unless, of course, someone deliberately removes the watch.

## SEE A PENNY...

Many ancient cultures believed that metal was a gift from the gods, a windfall of good fortune, a shield against evil, and a conduit for mystical power. Whether formed into tools, weapons, or currency, metal's pretty darn spiffy, especially when it's being carried, used, or found on the ground. Enter the common penny.

First off, they're ubiquitous, in the worlds of the body, mind, and spirit — everybody's got a pocket, purse, or piggy full of pennies, or can lay hand on one in bare minutes. Also, while pennies have a low value solo, they have potential immense value *en masse*. (Is the role of pennies in the global economy symbolic of, a metaphor for, or a dim financial reflection of the role human will and action plays in the *Statosphere*?)

As a vastly common bit of coinage, pennies play an outsized role in Fortean and other supernatural phenomena. Abandoned cars being found full of pennies, ancient geodes found with seventeen 1941 pennies inside, pennies forming significant patterns when spilled, divination from counting heads and tails. That last bit is numismatomania, also known as the non-yarrow stalk method in the *I Ching*.

The personal significance of pennies is widespread: many people sort through their change, on an almost daily basis, picking out pennies of a particular type (a date, especially a birth year; chosen obverse or reverse, especially Indian Head and wheat pennies; or metallurgy, like the United States' 1943 steel war penny) for good luck and/or future use in a dream expense, like a vacation.

Nearly all English-speaking children learn at least the first part of the rhyme "Find a penny, pick it up, and all day long you'll have good luck" which this leads to a habit of adults picking up lucky pennies as a matter of course, or stubbornly refusing to, simply because it's a superstition. We'll get back to this in a sec, after asking the trenchant question: "Why do fewer children know the second part of the rhyme?"

We could leave it there, and be all cryptic, but in fact the rhyme has multiple second lines that almost no one knows or remembers:

Give it to a faithful friend

Then your luck will never end

See a penny, leave it there

Bad luck comes! So beware!

See a penny, let it lie

All day long you'll have to cry

See a penny, let it lie

Need a penny till you die

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



See  
"Agrimancy"  
on page 171.

See "Ongoing  
Madness" on  
page 26.

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX ST  
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ICE BLACK

Found pennies are charged with luck because they belong to the fairies, or the dead, or because they're cold hard cash lying on the ground that you didn't own before. Whether it's good luck or not, whether you pick it up or not, whether you keep it or not, it's all up to whatever crazy thing you grew up believing. Avoid the tails-up ones, because those are bad luck (also when flipping a coin for divination); heads-up is good luck (moons, they're called). Kick a goocher to possibly change the bad luck into good for the next guy. Pick up the coin, spit on it, and throw it in a hedge for a leprechaun to pay you back: good luck for you, or bad luck for an enemy. Apparently, leprechauns just know what you wanted, like a magickal Irish Amazon predictive algorithm.

Then there's the belief in witches (bruja, strigo) being able to bind curses into objects that fire the curse onto folks who accidentally pick up or step on the object — works hand-in-hand with the superstitious rhyme, doesn't it? Might also be the basis for the rhyme told to soon-to-be-married women ("Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and put a penny in your shoe"), so that they're walking on good luck, and it blocks or cancels out the bad luck from any cursed whatevers a witch may have strewn on their bridal path.

Pennies are great objects to make into minor artifacts like travel bonds (keep you in one place, by physical, mental, social, or coincidental delays), trouble magnets (cause irritating minor mechanical failures regularly), wooden nickels (cause adepts to leak or bleed charges), and lucky charms (what it says on the tin).

Here's some more penny proverbs for you to involve in gutter magick and mojo mayhem:

- Lots of people say "A penny for your thoughts" or want to put in "their two cents."
- Wrap a penny in paper, and keep it on you to avoid debtors.
- Carry a penny bearing your birth year for luck; it should also attract other money.
- "Spend a penny" is a British idiom meaning to urinate. Some public toilets used to be coin-operated.
- Slip coins under your welcome mat; it keeps bad luck from visiting.
- Charm pricing (\$1.99 rather than \$2.00) does actually work, for valid psychological reasons.
- When giving a gift of a purse or wallet, put a penny in it for good luck.
- Coins with holes in them are especially lucky. Some clairvoyants say they're like eyeglass lenses for second sight.
- Tossing a penny away when you have a problem asks the Fates to take care of the problem for you. Over a shoulder is better; into water is best.
- Time is money; therefore, money is time.

- Scatter pennies in front of someone chasing you, so they stop to pick them up. No, wait — that's vampires and mustard seeds. Same idea.

Just remember: a penny saved is a penny earned, but don't be penny-wise and pound-foolish — take care of the pence and the pounds take care of themselves. When the penny drops, and you're without two pennies to rub together, something nasty is sure to turn up like a bad penny. Don't sweat that penny-ante crap, but remember that "in for a penny, in for a pound," and that it probably costs a pretty penny to get out of it, one way or another.

## HOW TO EXPLOIT ARTIFACTS

Again, there are some magick items that are just obviously useful and it doesn't take any great creativity to find advantage. But some are not nearly as forthcoming with their value. However, even something with an oblique or weird function can be used indirectly.

**Ritual Use:** Gutter magick parasitizes magick with a superior pedigree, so if you get an artifact with a function that doesn't help you, it can still give a boost to a reality bruising ritual if incorporated in some vaguely plausible way. Even a single-use object can be used over and over to get this advantage, as long as you haven't used it for its intended mystic purpose.

**Cult Use:** As mentioned, people tend to get hysterical and obsessive around artifacts, though generally only over those that do their thing over and over again. If you hold the gadget, you have leverage over those who desire it. Just be careful. This leverage is like blackmail, where you always have to keep your requests reasonable. Otherwise, the people you're manipulating may recalculate costs and decide that doing what you want is more of a hassle than just removing you. With that in mind though, the kind of attention a famous artifact can get you is the kind of attention that can take you from local to weighty or cosmic objectives.

**Trade Use:** Just because you don't want it or can't use it doesn't mean there's no one out there who can and does. Find the guy who needs your very finicky and specific artifact and see what he has to trade. Or, if you've got something that's more of a curse than you thought it would be, trade it to a gullible checker for something a little less like the monkey's paw.

1: GO

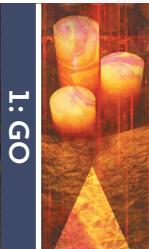
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



Money is  
honey, Bloom.

Money is  
honey.

**It's alarming when someone you once seduced looks at** you with genuine fear and confusion. Surprisingly, it's also kind of dejecting. Normally, alarm makes you energized and hyper while dejection makes you logy and depressed, so experiencing both at the same time is some kind of misery speedball. I can only imagine how bad it would be from someone you really loved.

The scared guy was named Teddy and I slept with him one time between crossing the unicorn in 1998 and the train wreck of history on 03/03/03. I don't know... I'm not really proud of it. I didn't have a lot of good options for getting laid. Did I want to pick up some rando and feel like a loser, or sleep with a guy I knew and have to look him in the eye afterwards?

Now, of course, Teddy doesn't remember me at all, which makes it super-awkward when I know his name, where he lives, and what he does for a living. Not to mention some real personal details about what went on when he snuck out of his family's cabin when he was sixteen to meet this townie girl by the lake.

### What would you do?

It's scary to be known by someone who doesn't know you, and what I was asking was pretty innocuous, all things considered.

Teddy did database management for the Department of Motor Vehicles and I just needed to know if Edie Esquibel had renewed her driver's license since 2003. I was careful. I asked for the renewals in Cincinnati from 2003 to the present, with names ESP-ESS.

Between me knowing everything about him that's none of my business and Sex Ghost glowering at him from the doorway, we spooked him pretty hard. He did what we said, put the names on a jump drive with addresses and no other data. I mean, it was nothing we couldn't have gotten from a private investigator, I bet. If we'd had the money to hire one.

I won't keep you in suspense. Edie was alive.

We killed her in 2000. Vaughn did. Well, we were all there. And we were sorry, even though she was no good. People say that so-and-so was no good, and mean so-and-so pissed them off, usually. But Edie Esquibel, known in the offness as Arratoi Enperatriza

was no good. She worked very hard at not letting compassion or justice or anything that makes you a good person hold her back. And she had serious magick.

Arratoi Enperatriza is Basque for the rat empress and Edie was obsessed with them, and with the Roman goddess Cloacina, and with toilets. She was shit. That was her highest ambition. And before you think this was just some weird kink, understand that it's possible to have a fetish and put it away while you go to work, buy groceries, putter around in the yard, and take some grad courses by night. What I mean is, if you like spanking, even if you're *really into it*, you're not about ass-paddlin' 24 hours a day. It's something you like, it's not all that you *are* like. But shit and rats and stuff in sewers was all that Edie was like. Some weird unity of those elements was all she wanted out of life, and she killed Vaughn's boys (and, we think, three others) in pursuit of it. So in 2000, Vaughn broke her neck. He threw up and we all had some quiet hysterics, and then we went to the urgent care clinic to get treated for dozens of rat bites all over our lower legs.

In 2002, we had to do it again. Because she had serious magick. She came back like a gutter Jesus and that time I did it with a gun, and we cut her body into six parts, burned one, threw one in William H. Harsha Lake, and buried the others under crossroads.

Committing homicide together is really, really tough. Double homicide with the same fucking victim? Worse still. We kind of drifted apart after that. Vaughn had his closure, he didn't want anything else to do with the denizens of Weird World. Sex Ghost slipped away when no one was paying attention, as was typical. And me, well, the offness didn't seem as neato-keen and wonderful after that, but I was in too deep. I couldn't pass for normal any more, which is a problem when you're looking for accounting gigs. "Once you've had freak, the rest seems weak," and so on.

Then we all got a second chance, and Edie got a third.

Third time's the charm, right?



# 5: AVATARS AND ARCHETYPES

Humans are complicated beings, as any adept could tell you. Our personalities — our selves — are split across several levels, and we hardly even notice. The conscious mind holds the thoughts that we're aware of, such as "Mmm, pizza," "Man, I'm bored," and "Why the hell is there an agonized human face embedded seamlessly in my ceiling?" The super-conscious mind provides intangibles like conscience, imagination, social understanding, empathy and, if such a thing exists, the soul.

Then there's the unconscious mind. Despite what the conscious mind thinks, it's the unconscious that calls the shots. Sure, maybe you don't like the color red, so you decide to hit that obnoxious red-suited jerk. But it's the unconscious that decided you disliked red in the first place, and that violence was an option, and that the guy deserved it. The conscious mind says "Jump!" — but not until the unconscious has already told it how high.

The unconscious makes sense of the world by analyzing patterns, and providing the results to the conscious as needed. Everything in existence ticks a selection of boxes, appearance, location, properties, and so on, and that selection makes it the unique object that it is.

But it has another job, as well — to connect you to the rest of your species, so that you can deal with the dangers of the world together. Combined, the unconscious minds of humanity form a vast pool of knowledge and experience, one which we all draw from and contribute to continuously, every moment of our lives. Psychologists, shamans, artists, and other dreamers have used various names for this interconnected understanding — the mass mind, Ideaspace, morphic resonance, the dreamscape, Bwiti, etc. Prophets of the rational call it instinct, and tell themselves they've explained it. The occult underground generally prefers Carl Jung's term, collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious has been around since the first human walked on Earth, long before homo sapiens was anything of the sort. It has

no will of its own, but it writes into our minds as readily as it reads from us, and its memory is long indeed. There are things in there that no conscious mind living has ever conceived, that myth itself has forgotten. All the ancient secrets of our kind live on, buried deep below the surface of our awareness.

## THE FOREST OF THE MIND

For humans, life on Earth usually falls into one of a number of predictable patterns. Maybe you spend five days out of seven traveling a moderate distance to sit in a boring room for hours on end, returning so exhausted that you just flop on your couch until bedtime. Or perhaps you stay in your home all day, tending to the incessant demands of children, and snatching frantic moments to try to make the place look less like a disaster zone. Maybe you're constantly driving from one place to another, always alone, locked in a big, smelly metal beast that requires constant tribute in the form of gasoline.

Don't feel bad. Huge swathes of humanity are busy doing exactly the same thing.

These patterns of similar personal experience draw on — and write to — the same areas of the collective unconscious. They are the paths through the dark, forbidding forest of our group mind, the roles such as father, teacher, or priestess that require common behavior. There are myriad paths, each one a model of action and reaction, collectively providing answers to every possible situation that a human being might encounter. With so much unconscious attention on them, they build up power like a tree builds rings. The more urgently and frequently the path is accessed, the more power it holds.

Rarely, very rarely, a path builds up so much power that it develops a consciousness of its own. The human whose life experience best matches the path in that moment is drawn into it. This means being sucked from mundane reality and through the collective unconscious, leaving life without dying, ascending to an existence where probability takes the place of matter. There, they take personal control of that element of human experience.

These immortals are known as archetypes.

## EPIPHANY

my desire to do terrible things abated  
when I realized everyone else was just  
like me and was doing them instead

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



Trees are  
not a forest  
until a  
human mind  
observes them

## ARCHETYPES

Archetypes are the conscious embodiments of a specific aspect of human experience, representing the important parts of life. They are incredibly powerful, bending humanity to their will by altering the collective unconscious — writing and re-writing the rules of what it means to be human — and using human urges to tinker with synchronicity. Their powers are channeled through the paths that gave birth to them, and it is a rare archetype who has any interest in matters outside of their own direct mandate.

All paths written into the collective unconscious are drawn from direct human experience. One curious side effect of this is that no archetype is pulled from a fictitious source. Although fiction flames in our imagination, the actual human experience of consuming that fiction is extremely mundane. You may be totally engrossed in a movie, but you're still just sitting in a room, staring at a screen. Most movie tropes are a long way from real experience. There are few real humans running around using Sherlock Holmes-like acuity to solve thrilling crimes, so there's nothing in the collective unconscious to lend power to the idea of the Great Detective. Archetypes are drawn strictly from the real.

The collected archetypes of humanity are known as the Invisible Clergy. They are many and varied, called up by the needs of mankind in critical moments. Together, they are God, or shards of God, or a pantheon of gods, or constructs of our species, or patterns given will, or all these things at

once and more. Their purpose is two-fold — to guide the development of the world, and to unmake reality entirely.

In the instant that the Invisible Clergy reaches 333 members, the universe ceases to exist. Creation is uncreated, all its energy flowing back into the archetypes that embodied it. They are then drawn together, and from their principles and passions and obsessions, a new universe crystallizes. The 333 cease, and become the new reality, forming the new collective unconscious for humanity to filter through. The game begins again, with new rules. Needless to say, an Earth created from predominantly violent archetypes is a lot less pleasant than one created from archetypes of creativity and kindness.

There's no set timetable for the creation of new archetypes. These things happen as they will, when the urgency in the collective unconscious becomes unbearable. The world might be at 330 Clergy members already, on the brink of non-existence, or it might be ticking over at a lazy 20 or 30 so far. There's really no way to tell unless you're the GM.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## AVATARS

Because the archetypes are so potent in the collective unconscious, the paths they embody are familiar and readily understood by all of us. We know, on a deep and visceral level, what it means to be a Lover, a Murderer, or a Soldier. But precisely because they are such burning presences, their paths are imbued with power. Walk that path, and some of its power can be borrowed.

Avatars are people who align themselves with an archetype's path. It's not always an easy route to follow, but with sufficient dedication, great influence can be had. Life circumstance — external word and action — is the key to the avatar's development. Drape yourself in the trappings of your chosen archetype, place yourself in the situations that it recognizes, and you deepen your alignment with it. The things you *think* couldn't matter less. You can deeply loathe your archetype and everything it stands for, so long as you never speak those thoughts aloud, and keep surrounding yourself with the right props. You don't even have to realize what you're doing. There are plenty of unknowing avatars out there who just think that their lives contain unusual degrees of randomness.

The power drawn from an archetype manifests primarily through access to **channels**: mystical talents granted to avatars at various degrees of attunement to their archetype. They are innately tied to the archetype's sphere of influence, and get increasingly powerful as the avatar's alignment deepens.

A secondary effect of the attunement is known as theme music. This is uncontrolled and uncontrollable spiritual static which surrounds the avatar. Simply attuning to an archetype's path results in the collective unconscious associating the avatar with that path. This manifests as a constant background buzz of synchronicity linked to the nature of the archetype. The stronger the avatar's attunement, the more marked the effect becomes.

As an avatar of the Teacher, you can expect to field a lot of questions from strangers, particularly children — and there's nearly always a pencil in your top pocket. When a potent avatar of the Rebel walks into a bar, chances are there's a James Dean movie playing on the TV behind the counter, or something like "Wanted Dead or Alive" playing on the jukebox. Theme music is rarely directly helpful, but then it's rarely directly harmful either.

The very pinnacle of the avatar's path is held by the **godwalker**. There is only ever one godwalker at a time per archetype, and the powers associated with such a lofty position are immense. So is the competition, of course. Their abilities are the stuff of legend and rumor, and they defend their positions with everything they've got. A godwalker who has the favorable attention of her archetype is a terrifying force indeed. Some survive at the top for a very long time.

## THE AVATAR IDENTITY

To become an avatar of a specific archetype, you take it as an identity. However, it doesn't work exactly like other identities.

You get a percentile rating in it, but there's no "Of course..." elements, and it doesn't substitute for any ability. It does have the features Casts Rituals and Use Gutter Magick, but really, you don't get to do specific things because you're an avatar, you get to be an avatar because you do specific things.

Instead, you get channels. If you're low-level, you get subtle, deniable mystic powers. You start with one when your ability is at 1-50%. When you cross into 51-70%, you get a second, without losing the first. At 71-90%, you access a third channel, there's a fourth at 91% and, in the unlikely event of hitting 99%, you get to *choose* a godwalker channel. That one's unique to you and, as long as your GM says it's all right, anything goes.

Unfortunately, you don't improve your avatar identity by failing, because it's not something you learn, it's something you *are*. Any session in which you roll a *success*, you can put a check next to an avatar identity. But if you break taboo, you don't improve at all. In fact, you may *lose* 1-5%. If your avatar identity is low and you need a boost, improving it can be an objective. Succeeding at an objective that makes you more of an avatar is local if your score is under 50%, global if it's 50-90%, and anything further is cosmic. Success at any level of avatar improvement gives you a +1d10% boost — unless that would take you to 99% or above.

Avatar identities don't get features (sorry) and they can decrease if you break taboo (not sorry).

On the plus side though, avatars have no-kidding paranormal powers.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



Godwalkers  
are  
starfuckers.

But you  
know  
who loves  
starfuckers?

Stars.

## BECOMING AN AVATAR

Starting on the path is easy, even if you don't take it as an identity at character generation. As a PC, you decide to begin attuning to an archetype. Your first task is to surround yourself with the trade dress associated with it, and start behaving in the appropriate way. If you want to channel the Plutocrat, get hold of some really expensive outfits, move to luxurious digs, eat only in top restaurants, pinch every penny you can, treat other people like scum, and make sure you've got a flunky to boss around. If the Driver is more your speed, better get yourself a car, and a pair of leather gloves.

Your avatar identity starts at 0%. For each in-game week that the GM agrees you've been sticking religiously to your role, you get 5% added to it. Once that hits 15%, the free handouts stop, but the identity still improves. Unlike other identities, which get experience checks when you fail a roll, avatar identities *get an experience check* when you roll a success.

On the other hand, if you act or speak in a way that undermines your archetype, you may lose 1-5% off your identity at the GM's inclination. You're free to think or imagine whatever you want, but outwardly, you need to keep toeing the line. The collective unconscious reacts to reality, so you need to be careful. Every avatar description includes a section on taboos, spelling out the actions that put you at direct risk of disconnection.

Nobody can have more than one avatar identity. You cannot serve two masters.

Only the godwalker can attain an avatar identity of 99%, unlocking the mysterious benefits associated with the role. Every other avatar has maxes out at 98%. Godwalkers aren't immortal, though. They die, just like anybody else. In fact, they generally die sooner than anybody else, given the pack of bitter rivals they invariably have snapping at their heels.

If you're an avatar at 98%, killing your godwalker — or forcing him into some impressive breach of role — lets you take his place. If he dies by some other means however, or screws up enough to lose skill, or otherwise vacates the position, it becomes empty. Every avatar on that path at 98% immediately knows that the role is vacant. Most archetypes set up some sort of contest or challenge. After all, it's very easy to get a group of people in the same rough location when you can control seemingly random happenstance. The nature of the trial depends on the archetype, with the victor becoming the new godwalker. As for the failed candidates? Well, the archetype obviously has an interest in keeping high-power avatars breathing and in play, even if they're not best of the best. The new godwalker, on the other hand, is usually less pleased to have those knives pointing at her back.

## ASCENSION

The process by which a person becomes an archetype is called ascension. There's no master list of accepted archetypes waiting to be filled, though. It's entirely down to a path through the collective unconscious becoming sufficiently urgent to the massed ranks of humanity. Once ascended, that archetype is locked in. The individual representing that archetype in the Clergy is theoretically replaceable, but the slot itself is filled. Similar paths inevitably get sucked into the power of the archetype, so if the Clergy includes the Teacher, it becomes impossible to ascend as the Tutor, or the Instructor.

Unconscious ascension is just a matter of being very, very lucky. At precisely the right moment, you happened to be the human being most perfectly representing a particular role. Bam! Put your trousers on, you're a god. The vast majority of the Clergy were unconscious ascensions. Luckily, new arrivals immediately have access to the secrets of the collective unconscious, so it only takes a few instants for them to find their feet.

Conscious ascension is far harder. If you want a job being part of the design team for the next universe, you first need to identify a clear path. This has to be a role that's really significant to humanity worldwide, but doesn't yet have an archetype attached. In fact, it must be different enough from existing archetypes that it doesn't get subsumed by an existing remit. You've got no real way of knowing for sure, so plan carefully.

Once your target path is identified, you start following it as if you were its avatar. Identity is built up slowly and deliberately, as usual. However, there's no power to be gained. You don't get any channels, and there's no theme music to keep you company. There's no hiding from the collective unconscious either, so if, for some reason, one or more of the Clergy takes issue with your plans, you can expect to come down with the worst case of Murphy's Law ever.

When you finally build your way up to 99% in your utterly useless avatar identity, you need to put symbolically relevant pressure on humanity. This needs to be some sort of act that perfectly encapsulates and represents the archetype that you're trying to become. Ideally, it should be dramatic enough to shock people, so that everyone is suddenly putting unconscious pressure on that path. Making it an objective can help a lot.

If you've done everything right, and can build the right pressure, and aren't sabotaged at the last moment by angry Invisible Clergy members, then congratulations! You're now ex-mortal and, obviously, a GMC.

Conscious ascension is very difficult, and very rare.

See "Improving Identities" on page 45.

1: GO

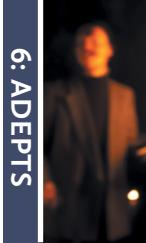
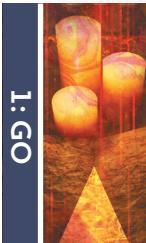
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## ASSUMPTION

There is another deliberate route to the Clergy — not that it's much more attractive. It requires the godwalker of an existing archetype to identify and embody a variant of the current path. Once that's set up, the godwalker needs to pull off the sort of relevant symbolic stunt that would be required for a conscious ascension. The path needs the same flood of power. In that moment, if the collective unconscious of humanity feels better-served by the new version, there's a switch. The former Clergy member is ejected back to Earth, powerless and unhappy, ousted by the godwalker.

The variant path has to be close enough to the original archetype to remain within the role, or else the godwalker loses that precious 99%. At the same time, it needs to be distinct enough that it fits the current human expression of that role more closely than the original. The Bodyguard, for example, might have a chance at unseating the Knight-Protector, but the experience of motherhood is so primal that assuming the role of the Mother is effectively impossible.

Some paths are better suited to assumption than others, too. If you're the godwalker of the Meek Inheritor, any unambiguous step towards replacing your archetype

would be sufficient to rob you of your status. On the other hand, the Leader of the Pack is probably a little disappointed if its godwalker isn't plotting a run. Assuming, that is, that assigning feelings to ascended archetypes isn't rank anthropomorphism.

On top of the difficulties inherent in preparing an act of assumption, there's also the fact that the archetype is most definitely not going to take it lying down. Although the members of the Clergy have no say in who is and is not an avatar of theirs, they are incredibly powerful beings. Their control of happenstance is near-perfect.

Threatening your archetype's position in the Clergy is a great way to get an airplane dropped on your head. The best protection individuals have against the Clergy is that single humans are so small, and the archetypes are so big, that a unique challenger is hard for its archetype to track... unless he happens to be godwalker. Archetypes can always see them.

As for lesser challengers, sometimes the archetype narrows their identity down to a single town, or bloodline, or set of beliefs. You really don't want to be in that town, or belong to that family, or hold that faith when an archetype decides that category of humankind threatens it.

## ARCHETYPES

The entries that follow contain a wide range of archetypes for potential avatars to follow.

An archetype's **attributes** summarize the path it embodies, what constitutes appropriate behavior to attune and align to that path, and its priorities and expectations.

**Taboos** are the things that avatars must absolutely avoid. Break these, and you lose points off your rating. If you're absolutely determined to break taboo without any consequences, consider active dreaming, 'cause it ain't happening in the real world.

**Symbols** are the elements associated with your path. Surround yourself with them as much as possible, and the more the better. Fail to do so, and your avatar identity won't flourish.

**Suspected avatars in history** are the people most likely to have been following this path, back in the day. Nobody's absolutely sure, though. It's not as if the Invisible Clergy keeps a registry of known avatars available to librarians everywhere, provided that they know the secret Dewey code. Unless, of course, that's exactly what they do...

**Masks** are religious and mythological depictions of avatars, fictionalized versions of the real thing. Good religions are quick to claim responsibility for any source of power out there, so older archetypes tend to get co-opted into a lot of mythic cycles.

Finally, **the channels are the good stuff** — the payback for all the effort you're putting into this nonsense.

### 1: GO



### 2: CHARACTER



### 3: CONFLICT



### 4: WEIRDNESS



### 5: AVATARS



### 6: ADEPTS



## THE CAPTAIN

### ATTRIBUTES

The Captain is the person officially in charge, making it run and getting it done. The word captain comes from the Latin *caput*, meaning head. Much of the Captain's work is done as and by the head. (Also sometimes in it.)

The Captain has authority over a group of other people, traditionally called his men or crew given the strong male and naval influence on the archetype over the centuries. The source from which that authority comes, and the levels of responsibility and/or loyalty existing betwixt Captain and crew, are flexible, changeable, and highly interpretable. As are the relevant gender roles; a bossy eldest sister could easily Captain a crew of younger siblings.

Some claim the Captain's authority is just a rationalization of primate band dominance roles. Be that as it may, the Captain leads the crew in some endeavor. He plans how to use the crew to achieve a mission, whatever it is, and then orders crewmembers to do whatever is needed. They do whatever is needed. They do it. A mission could be anything from "fish these waters, and get into port safely" to "take Hill 14A" to "knock over the Third National Bank." It does not have to be a *shared game-rule objective*, but it could be.

The Captain tends to the state and welfare of his men. Even the nastiest Captain out there gives hard thought to recruiting, supplying, rewarding, and disciplining his crew: they are his hands, his tools to effect change in the world. And he agonizes when they are lost to ill luck, the necessary costs or demands of the mission, or disloyalty. He's willing to go through hell for his crew, and for his goals... but setting priorities when men and mission are in conflict, that's a personal call. It's part of the burden of command.

The Captain acts to show his personal courage, ruthlessness, or honor; to inspire fear, obedience, love, and/or loyalty; and to establish, build, maintain, protect, and display his authority. You don't get the skill and experience to lead others out of a Crackerjack box. The Captain wins his fancy hat with blood, sweat, and tears.

Note that there is a confusing naval convention that anyone in command of a ship is called captain, whatever their rank happens to be, and visiting captains are often temporarily promoted to commodore, but that's all navy crap. Captains commanded people — mercenary bands, airplane crews, police, and fire departments — before, during, and after the heyday of the Age of Sail. Don't get it twisted.

### CAPTAINS AND THEIR CREWS

You can, and might, fancy up the ceremony all you want, but the basics are that a Captain must first accept an individual as one of his crew, for them to become his responsibility and subject to his authority. They have to accept his leadership to complete the mystical circuit. This is a big deal. Now, if someone demands to be made a crewmember, the Captain can tell them to go screw. And a potential crewmember may or may not accept the Captain's authority. In those cases, nothing happens. Mystically. A whole bunch of stuff could socially.

Being part of a crew means a couple things:

- On a basic level, you've agreed to obey the orders of your Captain, no matter how messed up they are. Even if you disobey a monstrous order, you feel weird about it.
- You believe your Captain's going to take care of you. You could be very wrong about that.
- You've accepted that you're a tool of his will, in some ways. Sometimes, tools get broken in the course of a job.
- By agreeing that you're part of his crew, you've handed over the house key to your soul, in a real — if limited — mystical way, and the Captain has more authority over you than he does over Joe Average on the street. (See the 71–90% and 91%+ channels.)
- Your affiliation with the Captain and the rest of the crew shows up in your aura.

Optionally, if the Captain commands some sort of vehicle — sailing brigantine, Greyhound bus, Panzerkampfwagen V Panther tank, B-52 Stratofortress, space shuttle — it can be considered, and could be treated as, a sort of crewmember for symbolic magickal purposes.

### "O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!" (GMC AND PC CREW)

Normally, a Captain character doesn't have to have anything mechanically in his write-up to represent his crew. A couple notes in his background, some brief negotiation with the GM about GMC crewmembers — number, names, stats, talents, and a decent starting character might have one or two crewmembers per tens place of their avatar identity — and boom.

Some GMs may recommend taking an identity called My Crew or something evocative (The 9th Avenue Mob or The Sisterhood of the Hammers) that covers basic crew-based abilities, and information. Roll it for simple actions the Captain should be able to perform by bossing around a couple GMCs. ("Hey, Blind Jane — where's this roadhouse you were talking about last month?" or "Boomer, how do I disarm an IED again?" or "Stewie, go grab me a beer out of the cooler.")

But what if another player wants their character to be part of a crew?

1: GO

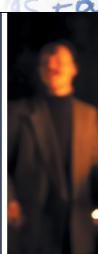
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



See "What You Want: Objectives" on page 6.

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
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ICE BLACK

What the player is saying, then, that the character has — mechanically and narratively in the setting — agreed that the Captain in question is their boss, at least nominally. The world is going to react to that.

Some archetype paths simply can't be followed if you're part of a crew; others synergize in effective and scary ways. Adept charging rituals and taboos can get complicated. *Gutter magick* and *unnatural phenomena* might reflect the association. Situations do, one way or another, get more interesting in a matey way. Avast!

## TABOOS

The Captain's authority cannot extend over a larger endeavor than a small ship, business, or group (call it twenty people). Otherwise, the reality of meetings and paperwork harshes the "we few, we band of brothers" vibe.

An avatar of the Captain must brook no challenge to his authority from anyone under his command or of lesser rank. He must respond to insubordination within the ranks or insults from without in some immediate, unequivocal way, right or wrong. A challenge to his authority from someone equivalent, like another avatar of the Captain, or someone who outranks him — say, an avatar of the True King — well... that's going to be an interesting day. At least that response doesn't have to be immediate.

An avatar of the Captain must consider or agonize over the fates of the crew under his command, while balancing his leadership, the overall good of the majority of the crew, the completion of the mission and the achievement of any goals. Failing that, the Captain must make a *show* of considering or agonizing over them. Avatar taboos are all about how you act, after all. Leave the emo crap for adepts.

You make sure your crew gets decent grub and a place to doss, you don't leave any crew behind, and you can even beat an insubordinate bloody with a mop handle, but there has to be a good reason. As long as when a grave decision is made, the Captain can say "I did what I had to do because \_\_\_\_\_," it's fine.

## SYMBOLS

Stars (especially a star in a circle, a set of three stars, or both), two bars (especially silver), three bands (especially gold and/or looped). A sword crossed with a battle flag. A ship's spoked wheel. That fancy hat.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

The Captain sheds avatars over history like a junkyard dog sheds fleas. Seriously, look at any popular book of history involving warfare and read about leaders whose followers worshipped them like living gods. There's at least two in the first five chapters.

Some of the fun ones are: Grace O'Malley ("The Sea Queen of Connacht"), Lord Thomas Cochrane (10th Earl of Dundonald and historical basis for fictional naval captains Horatio Hornblower and Jack Aubrey), Ching Shih (a Chinese widow, one of world history's most powerful pirates), Hugo Eckener (commander of the *Graf Zeppelin*), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (founder of the Republic of Turkey), and James A. Lovell (flight commander of Apollo 13).

## MASKS

Interestingly, the Captain is closer to legend, trading off of historical or pseudo-historical figures, more than myth. However, there is Jason of the Argonauts and Odysseus, Achilles, Ajax, and all that *Illiad* cohort (Greek), Sinbad (Arabian), Hendrick Vanderdecken (folkloric captain of the Flying Dutchman), and scads of fictional starship commanders.

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** The Captain automatically and instantly counts as a trusted authority when counseling one of his crew, and can use his avatar identity to remove their hardened and failed notches as if it had the Therapeutic feature.

**51%-70%:** If one of the Captain's crew loses it, he can stop their freakout with a successful roll. It's as if the stress trigger was gone, though they still get a failed notch. Moreover, when he does this, he may take that psychic energy and turn it into a +10% shift to any ability for his next roll. It won't work on identities, sorry. With an additional avatar roll, he can hand that shift over to one of his crew. If multiple crewmembers snap, he can generate multiple shifts. He can't stack these up to give a bonus greater than +10%, but he can contain up to three bonuses at a time.

**71%-90%:** Any simple, possible, non-superhuman or non-supernatural order — "Unlock that door!" or "Shoot your father!" — given to one of his crew allows them to flip-flop their next roll when they obey, and they never take a stress check from performing the task. If they choose not to obey, that's a Self (3-5) stress check.

**91%+:** Naval tradition has it that aboard ship, the Captain outranks the Lord God Almighty. They're right. At this rank of avatar, he can give simple orders that have big mojo behind them. Orders given using this channel to crewmembers allow them to flip-flop their rolls to fulfill the order

See "Gutter Magick" on page 12 and "Unnatural Phenomena" on page 80.

1: GO

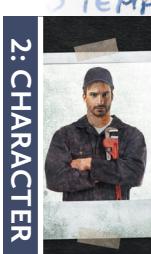
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
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IS NOT HO  
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TONES MOVE  
E SILVER  
ICE BLACK

if they choose to obey; if they refuse to obey, their body obeys anyway. (Here's the downside of mystically swearing to follow someone else's authority, eh?), and that causes a Helplessness (6-7) check or Self (6-7) check.

When you bark an order like this at a non-crewmember, they can feel the voice of cold command. People notice the force behind the words and may be knocked off their pins for a sec. It probably warrants a Helplessness or Self check at rank 2 if they disobey. Animals just do what he says, if they're not controlled by a trainer or someone with magick; if they are otherwise controlled, they panic.

Lastly, once per day, the Captain can use this channel on an inanimate thing or situation to command it to do something that is one of the things it normally does — doors open, shut, lock, or unlock; they don't turn into birds. Rain starts, stops, or holds off; it doesn't become a hail of frogs. Fire burns, burns faster or slower, or goes out; it doesn't become a flaming giant that stalks the countryside.



## THE EXPLORER

### ATTRIBUTES

Everyone likes finding shiny, new things. That's how knowledge passes around the globe. Be it the ruins of a forgotten kingdom deep in dark jungles, or a Star Wars Holiday Special outtake featuring a half-nude Bea Arthur doing coke with Anthony Daniels, somebody discovers it and shares it with the world. Yet for some people, this isn't just a fun way to get some attention. It's central to their being. These folk are avatars of the Explorer, and they are addicted to finding something hidden or lost and sharing it with people.

Don't let the name fool you. These avatars aren't necessarily traipsing around the planet, skulking about the Arctic Circle, or hanging out with an obscure tribe in the Amazon. Thanks to satellites and modern cartography, most of Earth's dry land has already been mapped. Modern avatars of the Explorer focus on the deeper meaning of exploration: finding something forgotten or concealed. And thanks to the internet, this kind of Explorer doesn't have to get off her couch. Lost and forgotten things can be found on old .zip files left unprotected.

The exploration doesn't even have to be literal. Exploring the inner self and discovering that your passion for football comes from a deeply repressed desire for both triumph and physical pain is an important discovery too. Of course, more traditional exploration can still yield good results. There are loads of animal species unseen by humankind, and the modern trend of urban exploration can uncover some startling finds.

Uncovering something is only half of the equation, though. An Explorer who discovers the master tapes to *Smile*, the lost Beach Boys album, won't gain any points from the Statusphere if she sits around and listens to it herself. No, she needs to share the tapes with the world and bask in the admiration, jealousy, and attention that it brings. Sometimes this creates an altruist who shares her discoveries so that others may enjoy. Other times, this creates a bored, jaded individual more concerned about the next big thing than actual people.

Either way, the Explorer tends to focus on the hunt, discovery, and sharing, more than silly little things like laws or personal property. Who cares if this idol is central to the locals' beliefs and removing it causes a crisis of faith? No one's seen it before, unless you count the people who've worshipped it every day for centuries! Take it and give it to a museum, then get back out there and find new stuff. Like maybe some celebrity nudes. Those usually work.

### TABOOS

Avatars of the Explorer must find something new to them each day. It can be information, a new place, or a new person, but the avatar must not have encountered it before. The flip side is that the Explorer must never create any cultural artifact of her own. Whatever discovery is to be made, it must be natural, or created by someone else. No faking it.

### SYMBOLS

The map and the search bar are two powerful symbols, but travel tickets (plane, boat, etc.), the compass, and any sort of telescope or microscope are symbols as well.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Neil Armstrong, Ibn Battuta, Sacagawea, Jacques Cousteau, Jane Goodall, Timothy Leary, Marco Polo, Herodotus, Xu Fu, Count Byron de Prorok. Regrettably, many paparazzi also channel the Explorer.

### MASKS

St. Brendan, Lara Croft, Indiana Jones.

### CHANNELS

**1%-50%**: Exploring can be a long, arduous journey. Sure, it's worth it, but that doesn't mean the trip is easy. Explorers often have to suffer temperature extremes, starvation, privation, sickness, and anxiety.

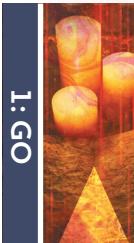
Suffer no longer. As long as the avatar is on a journey to discover something, she can ignore the effects of hunger, thirst, fatigue, and minor environmental damage such as sunburn, frostbite, and cuts from thorns. It lasts as many days as the tens digit of the avatar: Explorer identity. These things just don't happen. She can still be hurt by major environmental problems — jumping into lava still burns, dumbass — and combat is never affected. Again, she must be seeking something, not just heading out to the movies. This also applies to searching online; no need to go to the bathroom or even eat when on that kind of journey.

The avatar: Explorer identity can be used in place of any outdoors identities such as tracking, scavenging for food, navigating by the stars, and so on. Again, combat is not affected.

**51%-70%**: In order to find something, Explorers need to be good at getting into places. In order to share their discovery with the world, they also need to get back out again. On a successful avatar: Explorer roll, instantly know either the safest or quickest way into a room, building, or structure — but not both. Choose safety or speed before rolling. It is also possible to find a path through woods, up a mountain, etc. Another roll can be made to find the safest or quickest exit.

None of this does anything to locks, security systems, traps, guards, washed-out bridges, or

*The acquisition of knowledge is a kind of conquest.*



similar barriers. If every way into a manor is booby-trapped with explosives, you won't know the safest way in only has one bomb instead of two until the C-4 goes off in your face. If there is no natural way to the location, then the Explorer knows that. Magickal pathways are never revealed. This ability can be rolled about once every half hour.

**71%-90%:** Finding lost things is central to the Explorer, but usually someone has an idea where those things wandered off to. By talking to someone who knew about it or had it, whatever it is, she can find where it went next with a successful avatar: Explorer roll. This knowledge starts off general, as in a city or several mile radius, but when getting closer, the feeling draws her to the exact spot where it can be found. If she's tracking down a missing Rembrandt and talk to the previous owner, she knows the painting is in London. Once there, another roll, but not necessarily another interview, and she knows it's in Soho. Once she goes there, she can roll to realize it's in the basement of a Chinese restaurant on Gerrard Street. But any time the Explorer fails one of those rolls, the trail breaks and she needs to find someone new to interview. Or just search mundanely.

Only objects and data that are lost, or at least not publicly known, can be located. Stolen items count only if most people have no idea where it is after the theft.

**91%+:** With a successful avatar: Explorer roll, the Explorer can open a closed door to reveal a place she has heard of but never actually been before. If she's never been to the White House Situation Room, she is one door away. But if she only *suspects* the crime boss has a compound, and she hasn't heard people talking about it, then she cannot open a door to there. And once the Explorer has been someplace, she can never open a magick door to there again. Make that trip to the basement of the West Wing count.

The destination doesn't have to have a doorway, as the universe moves stuff around to make sure a doorway is there, despite how out of place a door would be on the slopes of Mount Fuji or atop the Washington Monument. That said, the destination must be a tangible, non-magickal location; Rooms of Renunciation<sup>†</sup> cannot be targeted. Also, vehicles cannot be targeted, only stationary locations.

## THE FIREBRAND

### ATTRIBUTES

Plenty of people see changes they'd like to make in the world. They grumble against taxes, against the government, against civil and social issues. And while many rebel in small ways, or even big ones, it takes a rare spirit to stand tall and inspire others to come away to battle. It takes a voice and a mind unified behind a purpose to lead the clarion call in a world so inundated with noise. Those that channel their passion into a force for action call down the Firebrand.

As the name suggests, the Firebrand calls upon her talents to not only spot issues that require championing, but to give a voice to that issue. She stands tall on whatever medium she can — soapbox, internet forum, or cable news network — and proclaims her stance, using charisma, articulation, and intensity to draw in a crowd. She braves the slings and arrows of her peers and the persecution of the status quo to force an issue to the surface and get it the attention it needs. Along the way, she uses that very passion to inflame the minds of all those around her, inspiring them to join the cause until she commands a troupe, a unit, or an army.

The Firebrand leads a movement, and that movement has a clearly defined set of parameters and goals. The more those goals and parameters begin to shift and become diluted, the more the power of the Firebrand ebbs. Unlike the Demagogue archetype, Firebrands can change course and admit wrongdoing. She just can't lose track of her goal or break from her followers.

Similarly, the members of a movement gain strength so long as the Firebrand does, and the relationship is symbiotic. A Firebrand gains strength from followers, who gain strength from the leadership.

Some Firebrands are selfless, motivated only to stand up and speak up for their beliefs. Others have monster egos and use the movement for self-aggrandizement. In between are those who think very highly of themselves and of their cause, until personal and political triumphs are inextricably entangled. Doesn't matter. Motive isn't important. Her voice is the bell struck, the piece of paper nailed to a door, the blog post that goes viral. Her strength comes from making an indelible mark on the world.

That mark does not have to be positive. As long as the movement is powerful and people are following, the Firebrand may represent any cause. This may result in Firebrands leading opposite movements, each pushed by her beliefs and the strength of her followers to force a confrontation between ideologies. The results can be intense upheaval which almost always causes change.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

<sup>†</sup> If you don't know what this means, hope that you never learn.

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## MOVEMENT

Each avatar of the Firebrand must have a defined movement, with goals and an aim. This movement remains the touchstone for the avatar, the driving intent behind her power. The Firebrand's movement must include a mission statement and a clear plan. Those aims must be actions the avatar can impact and draw her followers to impact, or else the frustration of failure inevitably drives a wedge in the movement and weakens the avatar. Likewise, the movement must have clear structure and forward momentum. Stagnation and complacency are the undoing of the Firebrand. The avatar's movement doesn't have to be the cabal's objective, but it can be.

Movements drift, and that's natural and acceptable. What isn't acceptable is for the Firebrand to lose touch. Influencing the shifting priorities and rhetoric of the movement is natural to the archetype, but so is obedience to the whole. If the movement becomes radicalized, calling for violence or terror, the Firebrand must keep pace, or else be excluded. Similarly, if the movement becomes conciliatory or even colludes with one-time enemies, the Firebrand better make nice, no matter her personal feelings.

## TABOOS

The Firebrand must never speak publicly against her movement, nor be seen as acting in direct opposition to her movement's goals. Appearances can be just as damaging as actual actions, so Firebrands must work constantly to guard against the perception of impropriety. Likewise, she must always work to appear the purest of exemplars of her cause, or else risk her followers losing hope and the movement losing steam. Public scandal is deadly and must be countered at all costs — unless it's scandalous only to those outside the cause. For a Ku Klux Klan Firebrand, a scandal where he skimmed funds or cheated on his wife puts his percentages in peril. But a bigoted comment that would sink someone from a major political party is par for the course with hate groups.

The Firebrand must always work to keep the values and the motivations of her movement in the public eye, ever seeking more publicity for her cause. She must never turn down a chance to forward that agenda, and cannot turn away from a debate regarding her issue of choice. This goes double should she be confronted with another Firebrand who is at odds with her agenda, since the result of such clashes can powerfully influence the public narrative about the cause.

Despair is the death of a Firebrand, and fervor for her struggle must be presented at all times. This extends to her followers. A Firebrand must always work to keep her people motivated, and worry about the ways to get her fellows actively involved, not just passively supportive. The Firebrand may not stay out of contact with her movement for more than a few days, and must maintain personal and professional relationships with all those involved or risk becoming a remote leader who no longer inspires.

## SYMBOLS

Rising sun, a generic white mask, a black armband, a megaphone.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

The Firebrand's avatars are spread all across history, present wherever the world needs a voice to speak up and lead people to speak their minds. For that reason, there have been military Firebrands like General George Patton and statesmen like Winston Churchill. Others lead their movements outside of the status quo, like labor leader Cesar Chavez, activist Malcolm X, women's movement leader Susan B. Anthony, and First Lady of Argentina Eva Perón. Firebrands can also lead their people into disaster, like cult leader Jim Jones. Some are saying Bree Newsome, but those people also want activists to go through the courts and not rock the boat.

## MASKS

Katniss Everdeen, Princess Leia Organa, Roj Blake, Robin Hood, Rosie the Riveter.

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** With a successful roll, the Firebrand can convey to someone that she is an authority on the subject of her movement and its issues. They may continue to defy her or deny her, but inside, they acknowledge her devotion.

If a follower has accrued hardened or failed notches on their shock gauge while pursuing the Firebrand's mission, she may remove one notch with a successful roll. If the roll fails, however, she can't retry against that notch. To do this, she has to have a heart-to-heart talk about the issues and what happened.

If a Firebrand confronts another Firebrand on the opposite side of her particular movement, the two duel. If it's not a conclusive competition where one side clearly prevailed — who won the election, whose followers survived the bloodbath — each rolls avatar: Firebrand. The best success (01, high match, high success, low failure) succeeds, at least in the eyes of the Statosphere. Not only do events go that movement's way for a week or so, but the winner immediately gains 1-5% in avatar: Firebrand, separate and apart from any other improvement. The loser immediately loses 1-5% in her Firebrand identity, separate and apart from any taboo losses.

**51%-70%:** The focus of the Firebrand's life is spreading the cause. At this rank, she may use her position to redirect someone's other concerns away from their issues and towards her movement's cause. This automatically works on members of her movement. With a simple success, she may sway a non-follower towards her viewpoint. Anyone thus inspired gets a +10% shift to any roll, as long as they're acting on behalf of her cause. This boost lasts for minutes equal to her avatar: Firebrand identity. Activating this channel takes about five to ten minutes of speechmaking. Bonuses don't stack — she can never give someone more than +10% with this — and people can only be subject to inspiration once per day. She can, however, inspire different people as many times as she likes.

Note that this is simply the raising of emotion — it's not mind control, any more than playing a sad song when it's

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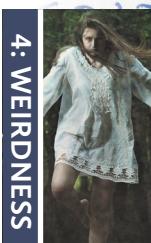
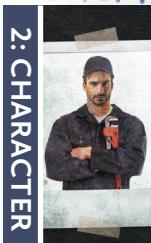
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raining out is mind control to make someone gloomy. But the influence, though subtle, is real..

**71%-90%:** There is no greater love than to lay down yourself for the movement. If the Firebrand is killed while actively pursuing her movement's cause, she rolls her avatar: Firebrand identity. If she succeeds, she returns to life — or, rather, the universe retroactively corrects itself so that she somehow survived. This can be an ungainly cop-out, depending on circumstances. Every time a Firebrand resurrects this way, she permanently lowers her wound threshold by 10. If these losses drop her wound threshold to 0 or lower, this channel stops working. Sorry Firebrand: the pilot light only gets relit so many times.

**91%+:** The followers of a movement are dedicated to the cause, and the Firebrand is the mouthpiece of that cause. At this rank, she may drive multiple members of her movement to follow orders implicitly no matter the consequences, even should their actions lead to danger or death. She may channel her personality to speak as the authority on her cause once per day, and it cannot be refuted unless directly challenged by another Firebrand. If she issues this sort of ex cathedra command, any follower who disobeys faces a Self (10) check.

## THE FOOL

### ATTRIBUTES

The Fool goes where she shouldn't, says what she ought not and gets into what is forbidden. She's a walking disaster area, an accident waiting to happen, a seething focus of chaos that seems to wreck everything around her while she wanders on, blithely ignorant of what she's doing. The fool is feckless, random — and undeniably lucky. "Fortune favors the fool," even as she walks unheeding into the abyss.

The abyss represents the Fool's dark side. This archetype is by nature easy to manipulate and can readily become the pawn of those more sinister and ruthless than she. In the case of a pure fool, that's almost everyone.

### TABOOS

The Fool is never exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer. If any intellectual identity ever goes above 50%, she's in danger of thinking too much to be a good Fool. For our purposes, an intellectual identity is any identity that substitutes for the Knowledge ability.

The Fool is also gullible. Any time a Fool avatar acts suspicious of an individual or circumstance without good reason, the link to the archetype is weakened.

### SYMBOLS

The Fool card in a tarot deck, and the joker in a standard deck. The hobo bag-on-a-stick is one of the Fool's props, as are shoes with bells. The Fool's animal is the butterfly, and in recent years, the archetype has become associated with marijuana.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Peter the Hermit, who started the Crusades, was probably a Fool, as was Christopher Columbus, who stumbled on the New World despite total confusion about his destination, his course, and how far everything was. Political-minded chargers, depending on their ideologies, suspect either President Ronald Reagan or President Bill Clinton of being avatars of the Fool.

### MASKS

Sir Dinadan and Sir Parsifal (Arthurian), Monkey (Chinese), Dionysus (Greek), Nanabozho (Ojibwe), Great Hare (Winnebago), Steven Universe (American).

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

## 4: WEIRDNESS

## 5: AVATARS

## 6: ADEPTS

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** At this level the Fool can find a common object whenever she succeeds at an avatar: Fool check, as long as there's a good possibility of it being where she's looking. This is good for finding quarters, the hairpin needed to pick a lock, a lead pipe to smash someone's face in... in more specific locations, she can find other things that would reasonably be there. She could find a quarter-inch socket wrench in a garage, or a picture book of Goya's artwork in a library, but not vice versa. This cannot be used for objects of great value, so no diamond rings or magick artifacts.

**51%-70%:** Any time the Fool takes wounds, she can immediately make an avatar: Fool check to bounce the damage onto someone nearby instead. If she succeeds, someone else takes the hurt, even if it's normally impossible. When she uses this ability, she loses her next action because she's stumbled and fallen out of the way of a knife thrust, or simply because she's standing around slack-jawed at the carnage.

Keep in mind that the Fool doesn't decide who takes the damage for her; the GM does. She may decide it randomly, or she may stick it to one of the fellow PCs. That means that using this ability a lot can make you really unpopular.

Donna the Fool and her associate Clark get into a knife fight with some punks. Clark, who's injured, decides to spend a turn dodging with his impressive Cowardice 60% identity. Meanwhile, one of the punks shoots Donna and hits, inflicting 23 wounds. Donna decides to reflect the damage, and rolls successfully to do so. The GM decides, by spinning an empty bottle on the table, that the damage goes to Clark. Clark takes 23 wounds automatically. His dodging has no effect on it whatsoever because it's not his damage; it's Donna's. He's just getting shafted.

**71%-90%:** The Fool gains the ability to be in the right place at the right time. It could get her to a friend in need. Or it could be just the right spot to capitalize on an opportunity, or learn something by being an innocent bystander.

It's not teleportation. She makes the roll and the GM decides where she's supposed to be and provides a rationale, no matter how flimsy, to get her there. Work with the GM on this. The aimless wandering of many fools makes more sense once you're aware of this talent.

Know that this channel doesn't improve the Fool's ability to handle what happens when she gets there. It deals a hand of random cards and the avatar must figure out how to play them. Good luck with that, Fool.

**91%+:** Whenever anyone tries to harm the Fool, either conventionally or with magick, their identity or ability automatically takes a -30% shift when used against her — she doesn't need to make a check. If someone with Brawling 70% jumps her, he suddenly has Brawling 40% instead.

If the Fool is willing to give up her next action, even if it's in the following round, she can forego this automatic protection and attempt to directly manipulate the forces of chaos to make it even harder on her opponent. She can choose to do this after she sees their roll. If she does so, make an avatar: Fool check. On a successful roll, her opponent's rating is reduced by ten times the number she rolled in the ones place. That is, if she rolls a 48, their identity or ability is reduced by 80%. On the other hand, if she rolls a 31, it's reduced by 10%.

## 1: GO

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## THE GUIDE

### ATTRIBUTES

We've all had that time in our life when we weren't sure which direction to take. Perhaps we lost faith in our religion after a tragedy, perhaps a bad breakup drove us to the banks of the Thames with thoughts of suicide. This is where the Guide steps in. From the person who drives a taxi to the wise mentor we remember from our youth, the Guide lights a path for us to follow. It may be something as simple as getting directions to the address you're seeking, or it might be advice that changes your life.

The Guide has already walked a path. His role is not to complete that path, but to show others the way. The Guide is a facilitator in its better aspects. In its worst, the Guide is an instigator, for not all Guides send us on the path we wanted or even the path we needed to find.

Cult leaders and proselytizers alike can be Guides. One instills hope while the other brings obedience through fear. Both embody an idea they may not fully understand. The Guide is a vessel through which others come to know the path they must take. Cartographers make maps which guide us around the world. In their own way, so does the travel show host. The concierge at that nice hotel in New York might have been an avatar of the Guide.

We see them on the corner — strangers who point the way to the job interview we would have otherwise missed. We see them on TV — megapreachers offering salvation through broadcast media. The scale is not important. What counts is that Guides get people on a certain path. Finding the right specific person often becomes their life's work. Whether for a moment or a decade, the avatar of the Guide has a place in time where he must reside and wait for that lost person to arrive, seeking help.

### TABOOS

The Guide never completes the path he helps others along. The cabbie does not get out at the stop. The preacher does not live like the poor he seeks to help. The wrestling coach does not compete on the mat at the tournament.

A Guide, therefore, never becomes that which he knows so much about. He is always the one who helps a journey, but never finishes it. Those who cannot do, teach. This can't be overstated. As soon as a Guide begins to walk the path himself, he gives up his connection to the archetype. The Guide is that which lights the way, he is not the way itself.

### SYMBOLS

Lights, lines on a highway, maps, and books of wisdom are all symbols of the Guide. The GPS on your phone, the scrawled directions hastily written in your pocket are also signs of the Guide. The

Guide is often bearded or matronly. The compass, the Book of Chakras, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, all these are things the Guide might carry, totems of those Guides who went before him.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Martin Luther, Pocahontas, Kit Carson Scouts, Native guides during the French and Indian War, Joan of Arc, Harriet Tubman.

### MASKS

Virgil in Dante's Inferno (or Beatrice in the rest of the Divine Comedy), Charon the Boatman on the River Styx, Osiris of the Egyptian underworld, Moses, and John the Baptist. The Jungian archetype of the wise old man.

### CHANNELS

**1%–50%:** Inherent Direction. No matter where the Guide is, mentally or physically, he has a chance of sending someone in the right direction.

This channel can only work when someone else activates it by asking for advice, guidance, or instructions. The results are as follow:

- **Fumble or Matched Failure:** The avatar gives guidance that seems reasonable enough, but which directs the recipient to disaster. If it's at all possible, this should be ironic, backhanded guidance that fulfills the letter of the request while transgressing its spirit violently.
- **Failure:** No advice to give.
- **Success:** Helpful directions, though maybe a little vague.
- **Matched Success or Crit:** The avatar gets a sense, not only of where to go, but some intuition about the challenges or obstacles along the way.

**51%–70%:** The Guide can offer solid advice to anyone, on any subject, once a day with a successful roll of his avatar: Guide identity. He has to specifically tell someone what to do or, if they know what they want, how to accomplish it. If the person so advised does as the Guide says, they gets to flip-flop their next roll.

Moreover, the Guide has a special connection to anyone who treats her as a *mentor or guru* or anyone she has designated as a protégé. Once per day, by dispensing some kind of cryptic, gnomic, ambiguous whizz-dumb, the Guide can give the people on the right side of those relationships a *hunch* on their next roll.

The restriction that this can only be done once a day is per person. If eight people ask the Guide for direction, he can roll eight times, but never more than once per person per day.

**71%–90%:** When a cabal is discussing the path they're going to take, the Guide can pick one milestone and say, "That's the right way to go."

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

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See  
"Relationships"  
on page 36.

See "Hunch  
Rolls" on  
page 14.

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No matter how daft it sounds to anyone else, that particular task becomes blessed. If the group completes that milestone, instead of rolling one die to see how much it improves the objective, that die is set at 10. If they complete a petty milestone, instead of getting  $1d10+5\%$ , they get 15%. If they complete an intense milestone, instead of  $2d10+10\%$ , they add  $1d10+20\%$ .

Note that this *in no way* makes the milestone easier! It just means that if they do complete it, the reward is rich.

**91%+:** The Guide can offer advice whenever asked. This can't be done in the middle of combat or any other hectic circumstance — the Guide needs at least five or ten minutes to lay out the goods. Other than that time requirement, any question followed by any successful Guide roll can offer a flip-flop.

The one-a-day fortune cookie for the protégé and for people who consider the Guide a guru or mentor? That hunch can now be flip-flopped as soon as it's rolled, though not when the recipient knows what it's going to be used for. It's still one a day per customer though.

## THE HACKER

### ATTRIBUTES

William Gibson observed that the street finds its own uses for things. Prisoners turn toilets into whiskey stills, a substance created to purify ammonia for the space shuttle became a popular sex lube, Lysol was supposed to be for feminine hygiene(!), and bubble wrap was developed as a groovy new wallpaper. Email was supposed to be for arguing about Star Trek, but Nigerian princes have turned it into a scam machine. Kickstarter was meant to democratize art patronage, but instead sees a lot of function as an escrow account for pre-orders. Everywhere you look, someone has tweaked a device or idea into a bold new form. Those people operate in the shade of the Hacker.

Avatars of this archetype build high-powered antennae out of tin foil, paperclips, and some leftover clock parts. He can fix your leaky radiator with oatmeal for a while, and he knows which kind of peanut butter makes the best emergency shaving cream. (Hint: not crunchy.) The Hacker is always making something out of leftover parts and little else. He can be found everywhere there's something to find. The positive side of this archetype is obvious whenever you want to accomplish something but don't have the traditional tools or materials. The negative side, however, lies in the fact that the Hacker can't help himself. He's always got to tinker, and is fixated on making bigger and grander inventions than the ones before. He is no great respecter of boundaries. Remember, the internet wasn't invented to make Bitcoin cons possible, any more than that toy whistle from a box of breakfast cereal was meant to facilitate free long-distance phone calls.

Sure there may be consequences, but the Hacker doesn't care about the side effects. Those come later. He may issue a warning — eventually — provided he stops tinkering long enough to reveal that important detail.

### TABOOS

When an avatar of the Hacker has to make a choice between solving a problem related to his invention or dealing with a social situation, he decides to work on his creations every time. Morally ambiguous, he doesn't care about recognition or adoration, but brightens whenever anyone asks him to hack. It's not the request that excites him; it's the fact that he is tasked with doing something new.

Moreover, using the latest, newest gadget is against type, unless it has been subject to some tinkering. The archetype won't approve of an avatar who uses the latest iPhone as it came from the box, but someone who jailbroke it or immediately started making new apps for it? That guy's OK.

### SYMBOLS

The symbols of the Hacker archetype can be found scattered through history. The oldest, but most common, symbols of the inventor are represented by the tools of the trade: hammer, screwdriver, nails. Over the centuries, however, light became synonymous with intelligence — and inventors, like Ben Franklin, were increasingly associated with electricity. Now, a light bulb signifies the idea-generators, and a subset of symbols, like a motherboard or company logo, may denote the specific type of tinkerer.

Clothes and accessories wildly vary. A techie may wear thick-rimmed glasses, a pair of jeans, and a worn T-shirt while a Hacker who fritters away years in a corporate environment may don a sensible pair of slacks, boring shoes, and a shiny metal pen.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

To see examples of the Hacker in recorded history, you don't need to look very far. Leonardo da Vinci is perhaps the most notable inventor, for he crossed disciplines — art, science, philosophy, religion — time and time again to come up with his greatest inventions. Other examples include: George Washington Carver, who invented over 300 uses for the peanut, Nikola Tesla, the inventor of AC currents, and Stephanie Kwolek, who patented over a dozen inventions, one of which was for her development of Kevlar. Thomas Edison, Shunpei Yamazaki, Archimedes of Syracuse, and Ada Lovelace are in there too.

### MASKS

Daedalus (Greek), Tony Stark (American), John Galt (American), Victor Frankenstein (German).

### CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** When attempting to build, create or repair a mundane machine or device, the Hacker can use whatever is at hand to sublime effect. There are no penalties for poor tools or lack of proper materials. Additionally, once per day the avatar can use his avatar: Hacker identity in the place of a mundane mechanical, electrical, or computer-use skill.

**51%-70%:** The avatar is now more like a Hollywood engineer than a plodding mundane one. With a successful avatar roll, the time required for any technical project is drastically compressed. A project that should realistically require years of development is completed in a back-breaking month. A transmission rebuild that would realistically take a whole weekend is completed in a few oily hours. Note, however,

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that this channel cannot be combined with the first. If the avatar identity is used to compress time, it can't be substituted for the skill to *actually do the task*. So if the Hacker's Computer Hacker or Mechanical Repair or Electrician identity is subpar, this might do no more than let him fail faster.

**71%-90%:** At this level, the avatar of the Hacker has the ability to create what's needed at the right time, in the right place, for the right people, with parts on hand. With a few hours and a successful roll, he can create a single-use device that replicates any minor or significant unnatural effect, or any of the minor effects of adept magick. Doing so must, however, involve an explanation of how the thing works, which can be technobabble or its occult equivalent.

The Hacker can only have one such arcane device built at a time. It falls apart immediately after its first successful use.

**91%+:** This is the level at which certain adepts, who are heavily into entropy-as-good-in-itself, start to really hate the Hacker, because this is when such avatars are able to take adept-made devices and reconfigure them so that they serve the status quo of the Statosphere, instead of being a big poke in the eye to it. If the avatar gets hold of any significant artifact — meaning, something that does a minor effect over and over, or something that has a significant effect one time — the Hacker can change its purpose.

Given any such genuinely powerful relic, a week of tinkering, and a successful roll, the Hacker can remake the artifact to do a different minor effect over and over, or something significant one time. Again, some kind of magickal-thinking symbolic rationale has to be presented for why the rune axe now allows someone to change a giraffe into an elephant, *once*, but as long as it sounds like it might make sense after a few beers, the avatar can do as he wishes.

Avatars at this level often find circumstance presenting them with magick objects ripe for repurposing, causing no end of consternation and murder-rage among their previous owners.

A device created with this channel does not preclude the ownership or creation of a device with the previous channel.

## THE MESSENGER

### ATTRIBUTES

The Messenger carries the news. Anyone who tells you something important, something you didn't know, is weakly echoing the archetypal Messenger. Banishing ignorance and spreading knowledge, the Messenger seems to be a one of the more positive archetypes. But sometimes the Messenger is only as good as the news he brings.

The most powerful avatar of the Messenger in the past couple decades is, or was, Dermott Arkane. He believed that the nature of truth itself was changing. The overwhelming intersectionality of mass and social media was, according to his predictions, creating a truth-optional reality that would, in turn, impact the physical realm in which we all live. It all seemed crazy, until someone tweeted a Photoshopped picture of a so-called Muslim bomber and it got reposted until it became accepted as the truth. Some believe Arkane ascended, and that the archetype is now the Heisenberg Messenger, but old-style Messengers insist that they're still around, and people believe it. People have no choice.

### TABOOS

The one thing the Messenger must never do is deny the truth when confronted. He can passively conceal, he can lie by omission, but when faced point-blank with a fact he knows is true, the Messenger cannot deny it. To some people, this is the secret meaning behind Peter's denial of Christ, and explains why Paul was the greater evangelist.

### SYMBOLS

The symbols of the Messenger in antiquity were the scroll, spur, swift horse, and traveler's cloak. These days, it's more likely to be a mobile phone and a hat with a press card stuck in the brim.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Many believe that Paul Revere deliberately channeled the Messenger; perhaps coincidentally, he was also a Mason. There's more uncertainty about the Greek soldier Pheidippides who ran from Marathon to Athens to announce Miltiades' victory over the Persians, but he was probably an avatar.

### MASKS

John the Baptist and St. Paul (Christian), Hermes (Greek).

### CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** When the Messenger tells the truth, it is hard to ignore or deny. When he makes a true statement about something that's important to the listeners, the GM can call for an avatar roll. If successful, the hearer must either consciously acknowledge that the Messenger is telling the truth, or face a Helplessness (6) or Self (6) challenge. The player chooses between

Described in  
"Minor Effects"  
on page 131.

1: GO

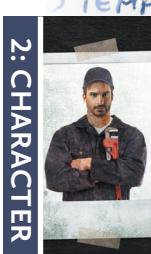
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX ST  
IS NOT HO  
- ORIN B  
AGON W  
OF E  
SEE T  
ON MA  
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T OF NO  
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PIONSHIP  
GHOST  
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TONES MO  
E SILVER  
ICE BLACK

acknowledgement or stress check and the GM decides which type of check is most appropriate.

Note that the Messenger's statement must be objectively true, and the Messenger must believe it firmly. If the Messenger attempts to use this channel to communicate something that he believes is true, but which is false, the channel fails.

**51%-70%:** If the Messenger is delivering information to someone who is intimately connected to it, a successful roll can remove physical barriers between the Messenger and his audience. In this case, a physical barrier is a passive, inanimate problem. For instance, if the Messenger has been gagged, the gag falls out. If the Messenger's car breaks down, he can force it to work until he gets to the location. Locks open, drawbridges drop, and bonds come loose.

Note that this channel does not work on active opposition: if someone is shooting at the Messenger with a scattergun, this won't do a lick of good. It also doesn't affect really big barriers: a Messenger can't use this to walk through walls or part a river to get to the other side. There's an important difference between something that's holding him back, and something that's just in his way.

**71%-90%:** With a successful roll, the Messenger can learn an important fact about a person, place, or thing. This is a powerful and versatile ability, but there are three important limitations. First, it can't be used for something trivial — GM decides. Second, the answer has to be either something vague and general, or a concrete fact that can be stated in three words or less. Finally, the Messenger has to be at the place, or in the presence of the person or thing.

To use this channel, the Messenger can use any of a variety of divination techniques — reading tea leaves, the I Ching, automatic writing, or anything else that can choke out a few words or indicate a concept. In rules terms, it can work like either like *vague information* or like *specific information* where its format of specificity is expressed in three words or less. Moreover, the Messenger doesn't suffer the drawbacks of a fumble, though the GM may certainly apply some other consequences.

This channel can be used once every couple hours.

**91%+:** At this level, the Messenger can get to any important event, as long as he knows it's occurring. He does not have to know where, or even what it is, but he can simply appear in the area. The limitation on this channel is that the Messenger can only go where an event is happening — not where it's going to happen or has happened. There is also a gray area about what constitutes an important event. A presidential assassination, an act of war, or the generation of a major charge all qualify, but for other events it's up to the GM to decide. GMs should be lenient, of course: if it's important to a hundred people or more, this should work.

## THE MOTHER

### ATTRIBUTES

This is one of the oldest and strongest archetypes. It embodies nurturing, comfort, protection, and a powerful sense of a benevolent higher power. Mother stands for comfort, safety, and love. The negative aspect of this archetype involves control and a suppression of autonomy: someone who is always worried about what mommy thinks can never grow into a fully independent human being. Some mothers create a sense of dependence and need in order to keep their children close; such children may have trouble breaking the apron strings.

This dependence — the submission of a child to a controlling mother who brooks no disobedience — shows the dark side of the archetype. The devouring mother who enslaves even as she embraces is the twisted reflection of the archetype's nurturing power. Every see the movie *Psycho*? Mama Bates probably had some of that going on.

### TABOOS

It is completely contrary to type for a mother to harm a child or stand idly by while a child is harmed, or to do nothing while a child is suffering. Of course, everyone is somebody's child; for the purpose of this taboo, it means a person under sixteen years of age, or someone to whom the Mother gave birth. Note that harm may have a different meaning to one who takes the devouring mother route. While she's unlikely to wound her child, she might actually *kill* it rather than let it get corrupted by outside forces.

### SYMBOLS

The Mother has countless symbols, including but hardly limited to the moon, the blue robe, the spiral, fountains and wells, the basket or cup, the dove, the queen of hearts in a standard poker deck, and the following tarot cards: the Empress, the Moon, and the Queen of Cups.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Some people swear Eva Perón was an avatar of the Mother; others vehemently disagree.

See "Vague Information" on page 45 and "Specific Information" on page 46.

### MASKS

The Lady of the Lake (Arthurian), Danu (Celtic), the Virgin Mary (Christian), Isis (Egyptian), Demeter (Greek), Ishtar (Mesopotamian), Guanyin (Pan-Asian), Cybele the Magna Mater (Roman), the Goddess (Wiccan).

1: GO

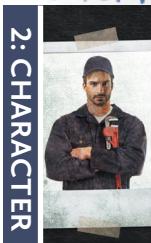
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** At this level the Mother is maternal and comforting. If she's present when someone snaps after failing a stress check, she can try to talk them down. To do this, she simply says comforting things, puts her arms around them, wipes their tears, and tells them everything's going to be all right. Then she makes an avatar: Mother roll. If she succeeds, this works just like *psychological triage*.

This ability can even be used to heal physical damage. A successful avatar: Mother roll will heal someone of five wounds. (Kiss it better indeed.) This can only be done once per week on each damaged individual, however.

There's a limit to the use of these powers. The Mother can only use them on someone who sees her as a mother figure. Her own children are susceptible, of course. Other than them, it has to be someone at least ten years younger than her and someone who sees her as a comforting, superior figure. Anyone who has her as their *guru* or *mentor* is available for this, as is anyone you've designated as your *burden*.

**51%-70%:** Ever hear the old chestnut about getting between a mother bear and her cub? At this level, the avatar is mama bear. If someone threatens her child, or someone with whom she has an established maternal relationship (that is, someone for whom you could use the first level channel), she gains a number of combat advantages when fighting that menace, until the threat to her children is removed. These advantages are:

- Avatar: Mother identity gains the feature Provides Initiative.
- Avatar: Mother identity gains the feature Substitutes for Struggle.
- Any hand-to-hand attack the Mother makes does +5 wounds, in addition to any weapon damage bonuses.

**71%-90%:** Anyone who tries to harm the Mother, either physically, magickally, or psychologically, has to make a Self (10) check to do so. Making this check takes a combat action. She can also use her avatar: Mother identity in the place of Connect. However, in order to use either of these abilities she has to be physically pregnant.

**91%+:** At this level, the Mother cannot be killed while in the presence of an endangered child. When she hits her wound threshold, she can continue to act without penalty until the threat is removed, the child is killed, or she leaves the presence of the endangered child. At that time, she dies.

## THE NAKED GODDESS

### ATTRIBUTES

She's visible, present, close enough to touch. But you can't touch her. Her pedestal is too high, she's too perfect, and you don't even deserve to know her name. She's above you, and worst of all, you put her there because that's what you do with a goddess, right? No one knows what she wants, no one knows what she's up to, her moods are merciful and her passions violent and ever shifting. Everyone wants to tear her down, everyone wants to build her up.

Understanding is stifling to her. She might do the things asked of her, but they have to be for her own reasons. To comprehend her motivations and purposes wounds her soul.

Her avatars are largely doomed. Their taboos play into human nature, and it's arguable that falling is actually a part of a larger cycle. Or else, that's just how screwed up our universe is.

All avatars of the Naked Goddess present as women.

### TABOOS

She must not be known, and rejects clear understanding. If she's known as "that redhead," she changes her hair. If admirers buy tickets to hear her incredible singing voice, she fails to show up or perform. She abandons lovers when they get too close, and betrays trusts as easily as she saves the lives of those she's betrayed, with no perceptible reason or logic. She follows her own heart, they say. Over time, she abandons names used to identify her, and the closer she gets to her goddess, the more her past evaporates. Successful attempts to define, identify, or profile her violate her taboo.

She can go by a name for a good long time, provided it's not her real name, and she can work at a job for months as long as she doesn't let it define her. Rather, she creates a network of subtle lies and half truths about who she was while destroying her past. The things that make her real, concrete, are either illusions or something to change at a whim into falsehood.

See "Therapy" on page 75.

1: GO

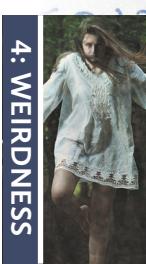
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## SYMBOLS

The flash of paparazzi and red dresses work as symbols. Goddess statues without heads. Literal white pedestals. Makeup brushes and the season's latest lipstick shade. Dark sunglasses and a kerchief tied over the hair. Veils, masks, and anything to obscure the appearance or trick the senses so long as the secret could be beautiful. She's the lady spy, the femme fatale, and the unattainable girl next door.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

No avatars of the Naked Goddess have made history. Yet.

## MASKS

The Naked Goddess is a new avatar, but her ties are strangely ancient. The Venus de Milo is a possible precursor, as is the Mona Lisa and Marilyn Monroe. She may have existed in some part in the myths that grew up around the Black Dahlia. History and mythology are often difficult to separate.

## CHANNELS

1%-50%: Allure. To see her is to be captivated. She can apply this in one of two ways, through straightforward magnetism or through a subtler, itching curiosity.

In the first case, she rolls against her avatar rating and, if it succeeds, the person subject to her glance wants to come closer. Resisting this is a Self challenge of a rank equal to the tens place of her roll. If she gets a 32, it's a rank 3 check.

In the second case, and it's one far riskier to her taboos, she rolls and imposes the same Self challenge, but this time, the impulse to which the target is driven is to find out about her — following her, asking people, trying to take pictures on the sly, and generally acting like a paparazzo pest. This compulsion lasts until the next sunset.

If she rudely rejects or scorns anyone thus spellbound, it's a Helplessness (4) check.

51%-70%: Presumption. Marilyn Monroe once said, "People had a habit of looking at me as if I were some kind of mirror instead of a person. They didn't see me, they saw their own lewd thoughts, then they white-masked themselves by calling me the lewd one." So too, the avatar is seen at all times as the ideals and fetishes that her observers have, rather than who she is. No roll is required for this. It happens all the time, though she can suppress it for five or ten minutes with an effort of will.

Choosing to resist this illusion is a Self (4) check, but at first glance or when looking at her without concentrating, she appears to the viewer as an idealized woman. This idealized vision is specific, person to person, and she doesn't know what they see when they look at her. Only that they probably aren't seeing her for her. She can bluff along with it, though.

71%-90%: Ineffable. Describing the avatar becomes difficult, if not impossible, even when not looking at her. Successfully throwing together a specific narrative about her requires a Knowledge check at -20%. (Identities cannot substitute for Knowledge in this specific case.) Any photo of her becomes entrancingly lovely while beheld, but as soon as anyone looks aside, it evaporates from the viewer's mind. She could walk through a post office full of wanted posters with her picture on them and no one would connect her with the image. As soon as they look at the image, they forget her. As soon as they look away from the image, they forget its details, except that it was lovely and that they would very much like to see it again. But they wouldn't necessarily connect it to the equally beautiful woman in front of them.

With a successful avatar roll, she can scour one memory about her out of a target's mind.

91%+: She comes and goes. With a successful roll, she can leave any location, as long as she's unobserved — even for a moment. If she's under a camera, someone needs to be monitoring it 24/7. That could keep her stuck, until she finds a blind spot, or covers the lens, or tries to escape at the exact moment her watcher blinks.

When she departs, she can opt to have anyone who saw her in the last hour forget her presence. She reappears in the nearest dark theater, nice restaurant, or hotel lobby.

## THE OPPORTUNIST

### ATTRIBUTES

The Opportunist is always looking for an opening, a shot at the goose that lays the golden eggs. It's not necessarily a case of selfishness: Opportunists love a win-win situation where everyone benefits; call it rather a need to optimize outcomes, and an aversion to wasted resources or circumstances.

Avatars of the Opportunist are likely to be walking this path intentionally. It is, after all, in her very nature to exploit an opening like this, to tap into the river of power by taking advantage of its every eddy. She can be found in any walk of life, but tend to go for occupations that maximize chances for big wins: business, diplomacy, entertainment, politics, the military, and so forth. The Opportunist's obsession identity is usually the one through which she achieves their worldly success.

The Opportunist doesn't necessarily care about money, power, or fame for her own sake, but more as benchmarks of achievement, a way to measure success. *Winning* is more important than what you win.

However, the purpose needs to be identified; when creating an Opportunist character, state the character's primary ambition — clearly, in one sentence. It has to be achievable but challenging. "Be recognized as the smartest mind in the room at the board meetings," "Become a billionaire before I'm twenty-five," "Record a #1 R&B single," "Win the Pulitzer Prize." If and when this is accomplished, name a new project.

"Become godwalker of the Opportunist" is valid, but the GM should narrowly define what actions directly support this enterprise, so that this does not become a catch-all and focus is maintained. The best goals are specific and allow measurable progress. The rules for group objectives can be useful tools for this.

Switching plans is possible, but requires a successful Opportunist roll at dawn. Start of a bright new day and all that. If you fail to switch, you're stuck until the next sunrise. Naturally, the *really good* Opportunists are the ones who change direction on a dime to exploit sudden openings.

### TABOOS

The Opportunist cannot pass a chance to seize an advantage. Selfless sacrifice to no personal benefit is right off. However, win-win situations and intangible advantages, such as earning respect through heroic action, don't break the taboo.

But the greatest taboo is to fail categorically to achieve; for example, if her goal was to earn the title of Business Leader of the Year and someone else snatches it from her clutches, she's in violation of taboo. Her avatar identity drops and she must continue striving to rebuild it.

### SYMBOLS

Opportunists may collect symbols associated with luck, such as shamrocks and horseshoes, or with life, such as the ankh or scarab; but most frequently they surround themselves with symbols of the temporal wealth or power they pursue — gold, expensive clothes, crazy-long limousines, and bottles of indecently expensive liquor.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Emperor Constantine, Thomas the 4th Duke of Norfolk, Madame de Pompadour, Empress Cixi, J.P. Morgan, Thomas Edison, Idi Amin Dada.

### MASKS

Hatshepsut (Egyptian), Zhao Gao (Chinese), Odysseus (Greek), Tokugawa Ieyasu (Japanese).

### CHANNELS

**1%–50%:** Once a day when the Opportunist is making a competitive check for something that would afford her an occasion to shine or to score a coup, she can flip-flop her roll. This only works in situations when she's trying to roll better than someone else. She doesn't need to roll her avatar identity first, she can just do it.

**51%–70%:** At this level, she can recognize her hidden opposition, even when they don't know they're competing with you. With a few minutes of observation and a successful avatar check she can see if someone is actively opposing her or her primary design. She can only do this once per person, per day; a failed check means this person is opaque to her until next sunrise.

**71%–90%:** Opportunists go from success to success. Any time she rolls a success, she gets a +10% bonus on her next roll — as long as it's related to an ongoing process. This works great in combat, where if she hits someone, she's likely to keep hitting. But if she succeeds at running from someone and then needs to make a Notice roll, the success of the run roll doesn't apply to perception. These bonuses aren't cumulative. If she's rolled three successes in a roll while charming the deacons at the Church of She Who Tramples, your next Persuade roll still only gets +10%, not +30%.

**91%+:** The truest Opportunists go from success to *crushing* success. This works like the previous channel, only now the bonuses are cumulative, up to a maximum of +50%. However, as soon as you shift focus, or fail, all the momentum you've built up disappears and you're back to unaugmented rolls.

1: GO



Everything is overrated.

2: CHARACTER



The real value is in nothing.

3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS





## THE SOLID CITIZEN

### ATTRIBUTES

Sometimes an ordinary person, seemingly destined for mundane obscurity, is thrown by circumstance into a crucible of fire from which she emerges unexpectedly triumphant, made greater by the experience. The truck driver who selflessly runs to pull the victim of a road accident out of a flaming car, the grandfather on a fishing trip who rescues a drowning man from the ice-cold river, the teacher who hides her students from the crazed gunman may all be examples. You may know the Solid Citizen under another name, like the Everyman Hero — though “hero” can be a misnomer — the Dark Horse, or the Unexpected Leader. Sometimes it’s the obscure little corporal who emerges from a brutal losing war to become a national luminary, then a tyrant. The self-appointed vigilante who shoots a teenager to “defend the neighborhood” may also be a Solid Citizen.

In all cases, though, the Solid Citizen does what she does to express the rightness of her actions. She cares passionately about people, *her* people, and does whatever it takes to protect them, improve their lives, or lead them to take their rightful place. Or at least, that’s how she has to make it look.

Many avatars of the Solid Citizen start on their path accidentally when they have to rise unexpectedly to a challenge. Some, however, have been watching for this opening all their lives. Just because they are, to the outside world, perfectly ordinary until that moment does not invalidate their sense of being exceptional, destined for greater things. Those with a thirst for notoriety are most likely to walk the path intentionally, looking for a chance to become important.

Avatars of the Solid Citizen may pursue occupations likely to put them in harm’s way or to allow them to help others: firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians, soldiers, security guards, lifeguards, search-and-rescue workers, tow truck drivers, nuns, priests, union leaders, and so forth. They tend to be blue collar workers, rank-and-file office workers, or lower-to-middle management, rather than upper management. If they come from wealthy backgrounds, they often walk away from the life of privilege as they embrace their role, consciously or not.

As an avatar of the Solid Citizen, her noble passion acts as her trigger, while her obsession reflects her key mode of action. For example, the small-town teacher who decided to run for office to reform local schools might have the noble passion “Childhood education” and the obsession “Reforming the system” while the security guard who found the pipe bomb before it could detonate might have the noble passion “Protect the innocent” and the obsession “Always vigilant.”

### TABOOS

Avatars of the Solid Citizen cannot pass up an opportunity to help the people they identify with through her signature mode of action, whether heroism, leadership, selfless toil, or cleverness. That doesn’t mean they have to be martyrs or grant every request for help of any kind, but a Solid Citizen identifying with San Antonio Spurs fans can’t quietly walk by when she sees someone in a team jersey receiving a five-on-one beatdown, even if her participation is only going to make that five-on-two. On the other hand, if she sees a guy

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN . OX  
IS NOT HO  
- ORIN B  
LIGON W  
OF E  
SEE T  
ON MA  
ACT W  
T OF NO  
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PIONSHIP  
GHOST  
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RET OF  
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TAKED  
OF B  
TRUNK  
RING T  
OODED  
E CREA  
MUSIC  
NG ON  
CATS - F  
ND RU  
T PRAYE  
OM TE  
GES GEN  
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ING AN  
DE QUE  
OFF YO  
D CHICKEN  
TONES MO  
JE SILVER  
ICE BLACK  
ICE SILVER  
ICE BLACK

in a Spurs jacket helping *commit* a five-on-one assault, she breaks taboo if he says, "Hey, c'mon and get this guy!" and she declines.

## SYMBOLS

Most avatars of the Solid Citizen are not conscious of it but are drawn to symbols representing her people, for example, national flags, icons, and religious symbols; or symbols associated with protection, leadership, and service, such as the caduceus, the red cross or red crescent, police shields, etc.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Napoleon Bonaparte, Harriet Tubman, Che Guevara, Huey Long, Eva Perón, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, Mother Teresa, Richard Jewell, Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger.

## MASKS

Judith (Abrahamic), Spartacus (Greco-Roman), St. Peter (Christian), Boadicea (Celtic).

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** At this level, the Solid Citizen has a knack for being in the right place at the moment of truth. All her hard work and preparation pays off in small ways, allowing her to get where she can help just in time to have a chance to change the course of events. Whenever she is racing against time or fighting against opposition in pursuit of her self-appointed duty, she can flip-flop rolls related to her noble passion in order to be there in the nick of time.

For example, the school reformer could flip-flop a roll to convince a corporate board to hear a request for a financial endowment; the security guard could flip-flop a roll to reach a suspect package abandoned on a park bench before anyone else touches it.

**51%-70%:** By now, she can sense when and where help is needed, if she is the person to provide it. Others speak of her uncanny sixth sense for knowing where to go or who to speak to, and she can sense the general direction she should head in. A successful avatar identity check provides more specific details on distance, location, or type of threat from the GM.

**71%-90%:** If the avatar is directly protecting or aiding a member of her chosen group, she can declare one failed roll to be a success, as long as it's lower than her avatar identity. She can use this channel once per hour.

**91%+:** At this level, once a day the Solid Citizen can make an avatar check to simply walk from her current location to wherever she is most needed, right now. The definition of "most needed" can sometimes be surprising, however. On a fumble, you find yourself in another location where you are also needed but for different reasons — perhaps an enemy "needs" to get even with you, or a fan "needs" you to be their best friend.

Oh, and don't worry about distance and space. No one necessarily sees you vanish or appear, but you can stroll from Paris to Prague in ten minutes if that's where you're required.

## THE STAR

### ATTRIBUTES

There have always been singers, actors, and similar artists who perform for a love of their craft. Others do it for the paycheck. But avatars of the Star become performers to be the center of attention, loved by fans and admired as great artists. For these avatars, success and happiness are defined solely by others' delight. If there is an inner sense of accomplishment, that's nice but not important. Producing an acclaimed album with poor sales is a failure. The Star needs a trilogy of critically-panned films that millions see, or a book series derided by the media but loved by the people.

Yet this isn't some sort of populism or anti-elitism. It's simply a case of numbers. The more people who say he's number one, the more true it becomes. 50,000,000 Elvis fans *can't* be wrong.

This can bring out a dark side, though. The Star can turn mean and hurtful in a quest for the audience's love. If the fans demand racist jokes, exploitative scenes, or even real violence, the Star can head down that rabbit hole with a smile and an adorable wink. As times change and fans find new artists to follow, the Star may get increasingly desperate, and his performances grow more and more wild to recapture the lost attention and love. Then again, sometimes things can start out bad. That teen at school who wasn't a bully, but got egged on by the crowd to mess with the new kid? He was tasting his first caress of heady Star-stuff.

Many avatars of the Star are depressed and sad when not performing. That's why they chose careers with a significant public face: musicians, performance artists, actors, models, and so on. But the Star craves attention through performances, so priests, politicians, and even athletes can become avatars. As long as there is an audience to delight, the Star can be there.

In the past, avatars of the Star needed at least some talent to get into the limelight. Thanks to the rise of reality TV and internet videos, however, ability and training is now completely optional.

### TABOOS

Avatars of the Star must take center stage and gain attention when such a situation presents itself. Sharing the limelight is fine as long as the avatar gets a significant portion of the attention.

### SYMBOLS

The microphone, the camera, and the mirror dominate modern symbolism for the Star, but older symbols like the lyre, the stage curtain, and makeup are still relevant.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Mozart, Paganini, Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, Mae West, El Santo, Dennis Rodman, Liberace, Charles Dickens, Umm Kulthum, G. G. Allin.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## MASKS

Thamyris (Greek), the Boy Who Cried Wolf (Greek), Ichikawa Danjūrō (Japanese), Baron Munchausen (German), Orpheus (Greek), Scheherezade (Persian).

## CHANNELS

1%-50%: The Star has an uncanny sense of when someone is paying attention to him. This is automatic unless the person is watching through technology, which requires an avatar roll. This cannot identify a specific person in a crowd watching the Star, but that becomes moot if there are only a few people in the area. With a successful avatar roll, the Star can determine roughly what direction the sweet, sweet gaze is coming from, and if there's only one person or camera in that direction, it's easy to figure out.

51%-70%: The Star can plaster over personal psychic trauma with a glittery web of regard. To do this, the Star performs and rolls avatar: Star. If successful, a failed notch gets removed from the meter associated with the avatar's fear passion. (If he's terrified of Helplessness, knowing that everyone wants him makes him feel in charge and powerful.) It can't help with other meters, nor can it help other people.

Note that the avatar's actual skill in performing is not used. As long as people pay attention, that's good enough, even if the real reason they're filming it with their phones is they want to post it to social media.

71%-90%: The Star's performance doesn't matter with a successful avatar roll — witnesses are convinced it's fantastic. After some kind of performance failure, the Star can roll this to make it all better. If the avatar roll works, all's forgiven. He can leave well enough alone, in which case the audience is satisfied and that's that.

But Stars aren't well known for leaving well enough alone. If he wants, he can re-roll the initial failure, and if that second roll succeeds, the performance is *exceptional* and everyone can't stop talking about how awesome it was. This gives a +30% bonus to one follow-on roll that capitalizes on the success. But if the replacement roll fails, it's a *bomb*. Automatic taboo-break.

Alternatively, the Star can target one individual with the concentrated force of his fabulosity. That individual must gaze at the performance, rapt, lower lip a-tremble until the Star harms him, the Star stops performing, or the star-struck target accepts a Helplessness stress check to wrench himself away. This check is equal to the tens place of the avatar's rating. Thus, if the avatar has 83%, the rank of the check is 8.

91%+: With a successful avatar roll, the Star and his entourage (up to five other people) can appear at any public media event, such as a concert, play, press conference, etc. The Star must know where and when things are happening before rolling, and can only appear just before or during the event.

This is basically a record-skip for reality. People remember how the Star got there, he was *always* invited, his friends were *always* on the guest list. Only the Star and his pals remember the disruption of the world's continuity.

Unless the Star was already scheduled to perform, however, he's not on the bill. Reality only puts up with so much from spoiled entertainers.

## THE SURVIVOR

### ATTRIBUTES

His ship has foundered and wrecked, leaving him adrift on an ocean of despair. He is trapped on a high mountain peak in the middle of a blizzard, no way to move without tumbling into an abyss. The love of his life lies dead before him, his very soul leaking out with the blood. He's been broken and betrayed. His chute fails to open. The wolf stands before him, slavering.

Screw them, he's going to live.

He doesn't give up. He perseveres. Hell, he might even win.

He is the Survivor.

The Survivor is one of the oldest archetypes in the Statusphere, right up there with the Mother, the Hunter, and the Warrior. Survival is a core, basic human drive. Some people live through physical, mental, or emotional trials that would destroy most people, and amaze, inspire, and mystify the world.

Debbie Kiley was shipwrecked off the coast of North Carolina and, where other crewmembers died from injuries, became delusional, or were eaten by sharks, she kept going on. Badly mauled by a bear, Hugh Glass was abandoned in the frontier wilderness of South Dakota, and crawled over 200 miles to Fort Kiowa for revenge on the two men who left him for dead. Juliane Koepcke's airliner was struck by lightning and disintegrated in mid-air; she fell three kilometers without a chute into the Peruvian rainforest, and travelled nine days barefoot, with a broken collarbone, unable to sleep due to infected insect bites, and poured gasoline on her wounds to remove maggots.

Survivors may be ill-equipped, weakened, wounded, maimed, half-dead, three-quarters-dead, but they Do. Not. Stop.

Laurence Gonzales, in his book *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why*, talks about the eerie uniformity of how survivors behave when in dire straits, identifying some of their key modes of thought. These include:

- Seeing what's actually there, noticing all the details, appreciating the beauty; accepting the reality.
- Staying calm, often using humor and letting go of the fear of dying.
- Thinking clearly, acting decisively; being bold and cautious at the same time; doing whatever is necessary.
- Never giving up on survival; individual goals, plans, or tasks are discarded quickly when it's seen they just won't work.
- Playing games with themselves to make tasks lighter, celebrating every success. This may include elaborating on good or ill fantasies for another person — a loved or hated one — that the survivor wishes to see again.
- The rock-solid belief that they will survive.

The Survivor is someone to emulate and fear. Yes, he endures, but he does so with an unnerving calmness, focus, and directness. When it's a true question of staying alive, if you're dragging him down, he serenely cuts the rope and lets you slide off the icy cliff, all the while marveling at the graceful arc your body takes as it falls through the bracing air, and sadly appreciating the Jackson Pollock splashes of your blood when you smash into the cold earth. It was you or him, after all.

### TABOOS

The biggest taboo for the Survivor is, uh, dying. So, don't do that.

The second biggest taboo is giving up, no matter how ludicrous the odds. "OK, I'm in the middle of nowhere, alone; all my gear is lost; I'm only wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and no shoes; everyone with me is dead; I'm suffering a broken arm, blood loss, and a concussion: I'm screwed." The true Survivor then sighs, shrugs, and carries on. This holds true in any kind of overall aim that the Survivor has; he can flee any particular battle, but he still has to keep fighting the war.

The last big taboo is taking unnecessary risks. Necessary risks are fine. Hot-dogging around on a hazardous mountainside when he's part of the ski rescue patrol is not just dangerous and dumb, it breaks taboo; leaping across a wide, icy chasm to get to safety is true blue survival.

### SYMBOLS

The knife is the most basic external survival tool there is, and has been since they were rocks. Swiss Army knives are a classic, though multitools are gaining in popularity. Carabiners are ubiquitous today. Life jackets. Parachutes. Clothes with lots of pockets. Rope. Ice axes. Fire, especially safety matches and campfires.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

Legendarily, Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin (because of what it took to murder him). Beck Weathers (walked down to Everest Camp IV, alone and unassisted, suffering severe hypothermia and frostbite). Steven Callahan (spent 76 days adrift on the Atlantic in a life raft). Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (survived an airplane crash in the Libyan desert). Joe Simpson and Simon Yates (endured a treacherous 19,000-foot descent of Siula Grande in Peru). And memetic badass President Theodore Roosevelt's biography is loaded with examples of Survivorship — physical, mental, emotional, and social (including giving a 90-minute political speech after being shot in the chest by the would-be assassin).

Grendel's mother was not a monster.

She was a warrior.

But you know who gets to write the histories.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## MASKS

Noah, Jonah, and especially Job (Biblical), Utnapishtim (Sumerian), Deucalion (Greek), and Thor's sons Modi and Magni (Norse).

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** With a successful roll, the avatar gains five phantom hardened notches, to place anywhere on his shock gauge; they last for one day. If these phantom notches max out two meters or take him over twenty-five total notches, he does not become *burned out*. They never have any negative effect, but neither do they increase his abilities. They just let him power through crisis, ignoring stress checks at an improved level. The Survivor cannot roll this more than once a day.

**51%-70%:** The survivor is unaffected by any negative shift from thirst, hunger, lack of sleep, pain, inebriation, impaired senses or mobility, old age, infirmity, or magick when he makes a successful roll. He feels it, but it doesn't slow him down.

Additionally, once his phantom notches from the first channel are placed, the Survivor can substitute his avatar identity for all Notice rolls. If he already has an identity that substitutes for Notice, he can also spot magick stuff, even things he's not supposed to be able to see — people moving under mystical camouflage or the like.

**71%-90%:** The avatar can perform superhuman, but not supernatural feats when the stakes are life and death — either his own or another's. Lifting cars off of toddlers, making a leap across a gorge, dodging a hail of gunfire, calculating the exact moment to zig your bike rather than zag — for any one task or tight, cohesive set of actions, he can roll his avatar identity to succeed instead of Fitness or Dodge as he normally might. Naturally, this is only available when it's life or death, and when he didn't directly cause the threat he must now roll to survive.

**91%+:** When something would increase his wounds to his wound threshold or more, he can roll *avatar: Survivor*. If successful, he only takes half the wounds and any damage stops before reaching his wound threshold (so, at his wound threshold minus 1), but he loses 1% off his avatar identity.

Glen has *avatar: Survivor* 93% and gets electrocuted (50 wounds). He makes a successful roll.

If he had no wounds to start with, he takes 25 wounds, leaving him with an identity level of 92%.

If he previously took 30 wounds, he takes 25 wounds, but ignores all but 19 of them, leaving him with 49 wounds and an identity level of 92%.

He can't die from any one thing or the effects of that thing — whether it be a gunshot, poisoning, catastrophic blunt trauma, exposure to the elements, or bleeding out — but as soon as his avatar identity drops to 90%, he's no longer protected.

"Not dying" is within magick-stretched reason, of course. A human being can live three minutes without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food; a high-level avatar could easily triple that, but quintupling it seems to push the limits of the organism. Survivors still die.

## THE TRUE KING

### ATTRIBUTES

The True King represents the unity of the ruler, the people, and the land. Since ancient times, kings and their realms have had a symbolic link — the royal "we" is a remnant of that belief, referring to the ruler and the realm. Avatars of the True King makes that symbolic link actual. As a king's fortunes go, so goes the fortune of his realm, and vice versa. The True King is a caretaker, protector, counselor, and leader of his realm. In today's world, the True King may be more of a spiritual and secret ruler rather than a political and open one.

As a servant of order, the True King could guide his people into a utopian paradise, supported by the unity of vision only he can bring. As a servant of entropy, he could topple nations, aided by the power of a realm blindly loyal and richly rewarded for its efforts. Although the archetype is referred to as the True King, avatars are not limited by sex or gender.

### TABOOS

Avatars of the True King must have a realm they protect and for which they take responsibility. A realm can be an area of land, a group or classification of followers, or a combination of both. Thus you can have the Monarch of 7th Street, the Queen of the Cops, or the King of the Road. This realm of land and/or followers can be of any size, although practical considerations must play some part in the decision — no fledgling avatar could possibly protect a realm the size of Los Angeles or as numerous as all the attendees at a Rolling Stones concert.

The True King may never act against his realm, cannot deny one of his followers aid if they request it, and cannot stand idly by while his realm is harmed. He may send his followers into danger, but not on a suicide mission unless the situation is dire. Protecting the realm means doing whatever it takes to shield his land and followers from outside assault, whether from a gangland boss, the destruction of natural disasters, or even the crushing weight of simple poverty. He is also responsible for those people passing through his realm, as well as those to whom he grants

See "Getting Callous" on page 29.

## 1: GO

## 2: CHARACTER

## 3: CONFLICT

*Life is a burden.*

## 4: WEIRDNESS

*Immortality is anguish.*

## 5: AVATARS

*I wish I had been an abortion.*

## 6: ADEPTS

## 7: QUESTIONS

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sanctuary. If the avatar ever loses all of his land or followers, his identity in avatar: True King drops to zero.

## SYMBOLS

The symbols of the True King are the sword, the crown, and the scepter.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

The quintessential True King is Arthur. Although previous sacred kings surely existed, Arthur has become the nigh-un-shakeable incarnation of this archetype, and all would-be western royal avatars from Queen Elizabeth I to Aaron Burr to Bugsy Siegel have followed his path, even through madness like San Francisco's Emperor Norton or into implacable doom, as various adepts have hinted that JFK foresaw.

## MASKS

Haile Selassie (African/Rastafarian), Etana (Akkadian), Arthur (Arthurian), Tammuz (Babylonian), Nuada of the Silver Hand (Celtic), Zeus (Greek), Jimmu Tennō (Japanese), Solomon (Judeo-Christian), Haroun al Raschid (Muslim), Odin (Norse), Gilgamesh (Sumerian).

## REALM COMPONENTS

**Land:** A True King's land can be as large as the radius of his avatar rating in miles. Someone with True King of the Congo 43% could influence 43 miles of the Congo. This is a maximum, however; in practice, the land can only be as large as the True King has the will and the influence to govern. Kings generally start with a small area and increase it over time as they move along the avatar path and gain followers. If there are other True King avatars in the area, he may challenge or make treaties to set borders. If he defeats a ruling True King avatar in combat, he may claim part or all of the defeated True King's land, depending upon how much the GM believes the victorious True King can hold. Claiming land involves a triple sacrifice of the True King's blood, sweat, and tears — three drops of each in a significant place is sufficient to mark the locale as part of the King's realm.

Lands used to be much larger. But the federation of smaller states exemplified by the rise of America overwhelmed the old-world notions of consolidated kingship;

then when Chicago ward boss "Diamond" Joe Esposito — popularly known as the King of Little Italy — became the True King in 1928, his belief that all politics are local sharply reduced the size of the True King's land. Or that's what followers of Chicago's current True King say, anyhow.

**Followers:** A True King may have a number of followers equal to his avatar rating. To gain a follower, the recruit must explicitly and knowingly offer their fealty and the True King may choose whether or not to accept it. In the event of a battle between True Kings, the defeated True King's followers still have a free-will choice to either offer their fealty, to remain loyal to their King, or to simply abandon their ties. The ceremonial nature of this offer should be appropriate to the nature of the realm. People who live within the territory of a True King's realm may be more predisposed to become Followers, but are not required to. The aura of a King's follower shows indications of this bond.

## CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** The avatar is linked to his realm. If his realm comes under attack, or one of his followers calls for aid within the confines of the land of his realm, the True King can sense it with an avatar: True King check called for by the GM.

An active use of this channel allows the King to call specific followers within his realm to him. The True King's voice echoes out of the shadows or calls softly from nearby radios or televisions, letting the follower know that his presence is desired.

**51%-70%:** The realm itself strengthens the True King. While within the land's borders or within line-of-sight of a number of followers equal to the tens place of his avatar: True King identity, he gains a +10% shift on all actions.

**71%-90%:** The mystical link of the True King and his realm allows the sharing of wound threshold between the True King and land, and between the True King and followers. For purposes of this channel, the land of the realm has exactly the same wound threshold as the True King started with. The True King may deal wounds to the land at his whim, healing himself or others of 1 wound per wound inflicted

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



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upon the land. The True King may also take wounds to heal wounds to or increase the fertility of the land. The True King may only deal wounds to the land if he is standing within its borders. If the True King keeps weakening his land and not recovering those wounds, he violates taboo. Should he increase the land's wounds to the point that he reaches the land's wound threshold, he ceases to be a True King, reducing his identity to zero.

When the True King does this sort of balancing, the GM secretly rolls 1d10 to see how many of the wounds are inflicted. Damage to the land is represented by urban decay, pollution, dilapidated buildings, insect plagues, flu outbreaks, or other blights.

Dealing with the followers of the realm, the True King may only inflict wounds upon them with consent. How he gets that consent, whether by simply asking for aid or by placing the follower under a compulsion like torture, is entirely up to each individual True King avatar. He may transfer his wounds to them as he chooses, and vice versa. He must be in physical contact with a follower to drain or heal, but need not be within the borders of his land to do so. Again, the exact amount is determined by the GM with a 1d10 roll.

Finally, the True King may transfer wounds directly from follower to land or from land to follower, acting as the relay point between.

**91%:** As the True King protects his realm, his realm protects him. With a successful avatar: True King check, the True King can cause the land to initiate unarmed combat at the avatar's own Struggle ability level. (For this one usage, identities can't be substituted. It's more a matter of will than skill.) Damage is done as for normal hand-to-hand damage, plus modifiers for weapon type.

A gang is moving in on 7th Street, and the Monarch isn't having it. With a successful avatar: True King roll, the Monarch can then roll his Struggle ability. It succeeds, and a piece of masonry falls off a building onto the gang's leader, doing melee damage, +6 wounds for being big and heavy.

Used with the True King's followers, a successful roll grants all who can see the True King a shift to any single ability equal to the sum of the avatar: True King die roll. Neither True King nor followers need be within the confines of the land to gain this benefit. The True King must choose the ability to be so enhanced, and it doesn't work on identities — even identities that substitute for that ability.

The shift lasts for fifteen minutes.

## THE UNSUNG CHAMPION

### ATTRIBUTES

Think of the people who make accomplishments possible but go unknown or are quickly forgotten by the lives they touch: line cooks, personal assistants, editors, tech support, air traffic controllers, construction foremen, farmers, second-unit camera operators, 911 dispatchers, soup kitchen cooks, laboratory technicians, etc. But all these people are the protagonists of their own stories, not just nameless, dismissible entries in another's day. The Unsung Champion embodies this very identity as a person's central value: the world revolves around her because they keep it going, even if others don't see.

The positive side of this archetype could even be called the Unsung Hero — one who revels in the joy of accomplishment and touching the lives of others from a distance for its own sake. For her, her rock-solid sense of self-worth keeps them going. But someone on the dark side of this is a ball of resentment and misery, always starving for recognition and angry at not getting enough of it; she takes her indignity and self-assuredness as personal validation.

Like the *Necessary Servant*, the Unsung Champion's nature involves serving others. Unlike the *Necessary Servant*, who is an extension of another person's will, the Unsung Champion's power comes entirely from within — her own self-worth and competence. In fact, she's likely seen as replaceable by her boss or master.

### ROLE

An avatar of the Unsung Champion must choose a role, such as "soldier at important post" or "homeless shelter volunteer." More than a mere job, the role represents their place in society. Because her identity is so wrapped up in the role, changing it puts the avatar: Unsung Champion identity at risk. If she changes it — either because she's promoting herself or because she's making a dramatic life change — she can never take the previous role. That would represent backslicing and lack of competence in life. Once changed, she must continue to show the same level of competence as before, or break taboo.

Taking a vacation or being unemployed for a time is acceptable, provided during that time the Unsung Champion never stops identifying herself as a nuclear safety technician or social worker. Being promoted is risky if said promotion puts the Unsung Champion in view of more people.

1: GO

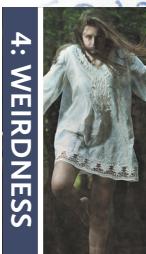
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



Described in  
Book Three:  
Reveal in  
"Necessary  
Servant, The"  
on page 63.

## TABOOS

Avatars of the Unsung Champion must first and foremost promote their work and its grand role in an organization or society as a whole — they are champions, not proles. She cannot show doubt, or make light of her station, or appear wholly incompetent as her role. Failing a check when performing a role isn't enough to cause this, but looking foolish or ignorant while failing does.

That only covers the champion aspect. Unsung Champions also cannot ever take steps to make themselves well known. Introducing herself when showing up to fix a computer is fine, as is being listed in a film's or book's credits, since those are forgettable. Being interviewed about her work, allowing a Wikipedia page about her to stay up once discovered, even blogging publicly moves her away from the archetype. Others might push an Unsung Champion into the spotlight, which doesn't break taboo as long as she can recede from it and become largely forgettable again. Various other forms of recognition, like receiving a monetary bonus or "employee of the month" parking space, skirt the line — as long as the Unsung Champion is forgotten about, this doesn't break taboo. In fact, quietly accepting such rewards is more likely to make you forgotten than refusing them.

## SYMBOLS

The oldest symbols are wheels, carts, and horses — the means farmers used to bring food to towns and cities — but those see less use today. Since the Industrial Revolution, grease and gears have been symbols. Nondescript office wear, white coats, hardhats, keyboards, clipboards, hairnets, and one-way mirrors represent a growing, diverse modernization of the archetype.

## SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

As being famous and recorded in history goes against this archetype, those suspected are more likely failed or subverted by others. Stanislav Petrov and Vasili Arkhipov represent the idea of the military commander who stood at the brink of World War III, but were celebrated when they averted nuclear crises. Sacagawea gets cited as another failed Unsung Champion; her lower status would have diverted her accomplishments to Lewis and Clark in the minds of others, but she became an inseparable part of a national story.

## MASKS

Sancho Panza (Spanish), Watson (English), Iolaus (Greek), Jeeves (English).

## CHANNELS

**1%–50%:** The Unsung Champion's faith in herself is like a fire that warms her and wards away doubt. She can flip-flop failed Self stress checks. Note that failing a Self check while around others could cause her to break taboo. She can also flip-flop others' mundane attempts to belittle her or sow doubt in her mind, unless done magickally. In either case, the flip-flop can only be used to yield a result equal to or lower than her avatar: Unsung Champion identity.

**51%–70%:** At this level, the Unsung Champion preternaturally knows when and where she's needed, or knows that she's about to be called to action, though not necessarily any details. She can make an avatar: Unsung Champion check to glean insight before arriving or being called. This works like a supernatural identity in the *specific information* category.

**71%–90%:** The world respects the Unsung Champion's force of will, and fights to protect its precious cog from harm. If someone attacks her physically or psychologically, she can use her avatar: Unsung Champion identity to defend instead of Dodge. This isn't the avatar defending herself, but the world interposing or interrupting the assault; if the GM doesn't see how that's possible in a given moment, the Unsung Champion has to use Dodge just like everyone else. Moreover, the Unsung Champion does not have to take an action to use this as protection from deliberate physical harm. Normally, you declare Dodge and do nothing but flinch around. Unsung Champions are protected and can continue to act.

**91%+:** The phrase "miracle worker" is thrown around tritely in the modern world, but it concretely applies to the Unsung Champion. Provided no one is watching, or those witnesses have no idea what she's doing, she can make an avatar: Unsung Champion check to instantaneously reduce the effort, hassle, red tape, or other limits on how long it takes to accomplish something for another person. Tasks that take minutes are done instantaneously. Those that take hours require mere minutes. Days turn into hours, weeks turn into days, and so on. This can go beyond aptitude into bending coincidence — a 911 operator finds an ambulance literally a block away, a cameraman grabs some tourists walking by to replace extras that got stuck in traffic, and so on.

There's a risk in overusing this, as it could make one so noteworthy as to break taboo and remove access to this channel — which would itself spiral down as the Unsung Champion no longer appears competent, only lucky, and her prior achievements seem like flukes.

1: GO

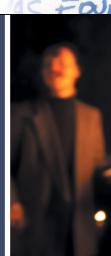
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## THE WARRIOR

### ATTRIBUTES

People have a natural inclination to hate and fear outsiders. Maybe it's genetic — an atavism from apes who excluded many cousins for fear their illness might pollute the pack. Or maybe it's psychological, a necessary downside to affection for society and family. Or maybe we're all sinners, living in a fallen world.

In any event, the Warrior is someone who exists to eradicate some problem, policy, or people he deems dangerous to society. He is a spirit of uncompromising extermination. While he might die for the cause, he's far more interested in killing for it.

As warfare became more complex and sophisticated, other archetypes muscled in on the Warrior's territory — but really, the pie of human butchery had enough slices for the Unknown Soldier and the Bloodless General too. The Warrior is distinguished from more recent military types by his ideological purity — though of course, the ideological killer is as fresh and modern as yesterday's headlines.

The dark side of the Warrior archetype is easy to see — look at a photo of the grinning triggermen of the Third Reich, standing over a kneeling rabbi. Examine old postcards of Ku Klux Klan lynching picnics. Visit Syria.

But at the same time, in an age notable for cynicism and compromise, the Warrior is one figure who draws a line in the sand and says "No further." There were a few medical Warriors when smallpox was still an accident and not a weapon. Their philosophical descendants battle AIDS today. The War on Poverty didn't attract as many avatars as the War on Drugs, but they were there. They're involved in the War on Terrorism, too — for better and for worse.

### TABOOS

Each Warrior avatar must choose something he's against. It can be a people or a gender — or, more attractively, a social ill or malignant philosophy. Compromise with the enemy is the Warrior's taboo. Take, for example, a DEA agent who is a Warrior against drugs. If his own son is found with a single marijuana seed in his car, even if there's a plausible explanation, the Warrior agent must still insist that the car be seized and the boy charged with possession.

Zero tolerance means zero tolerance. Similarly, an avatar who declared war on illiteracy would break taboo if she gave up trying to teach an adult who couldn't read — even if said adult had no interest in learning and was actively, abusively resisting.

### SYMBOLS

The helmet, the bloodstain, and fire. In a standard poker deck, his card is the king of clubs, and his animal is the eagle. His tarot card is the Knight of Swords.

### SUSPECTED AVATARS IN HISTORY

John Brown (at Harper's Ferry), Alexander the Great (against the Persians), Genghis Khan (Mongolian), and any number of Bosnian Serbs.

### MASKS

Huitzilopochitli (Aztec), Marduk (Babylonian), Cú Chulainn (Celtic), Ares (Greek), Hachiman (Japanese), Tu (Maori), Shango (Yoruba/Vodou), Thor (Norse), Mithras (Persian), Perun (Slavic).

### CHANNELS

**1%-50%:** The Warrior does not need to make stress checks while directly pursuing his purpose. A Daesh Warrior makes no Violence checks while fighting against (or murdering) Americans. Similarly, a crusading Warrior against poverty can bypass the sort of Helplessness check that less committed do-gooders must face.

This does not mean that the Warrior automatically gets a hardened notch. The meter doesn't change at all.

**51%-70%:** The Warrior's passion and ferocity inspire those around him. Anyone who fights for the Warrior's cause at his side gains a +10% bonus to a relevant ability or identity. Note that the Warrior himself does not get this bonus, but that two Warriors together could improve each other. No matter how many Warriors are fighting in a group, the bonus from this channel never goes above 10%.

**71%-90%:** The avatar may now substitute his avatar: Warrior identity for one other ability. The ability must be one that has already proven very useful in the campaign for his cause, and once an ability is designated, it cannot be changed.

**91%+:** The Warrior cannot be harmed by individuals who represent his opposition. All attacks automatically fail. If you're in the War on Drugs, drug dealers and users cannot harm you when they're attacking you because you're a DEA agent. If someone who happens to smoke grass decides to kill you for some other reason... well, that's a gray area. The channel may work or may not. If you're a commie fighting a war on capitalism, the defenders of capitalism — cops, soldiers, prison guards — cannot physically harm you. Attacks by people who live in a capitalist system, but who are not inherent supporters of the status quo power structure, are not affected unless they're attacking you *because* you're a communist.

Note that this protects only against physical harm. Imprisonment, strictly psychological torture and mind-controlling drugs or magick all work fine.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## HOW TO EXPLOIT AVATARS AND ARCHETYPES

Archetypes are giant, invisible powers that cannot be summoned nor dismissed by hand of man. Then again, the same could be said of the wind, and we've been making it pull ships and mill grain for generations. Unlike the wind, archetypes are conscious... kinda, probably... enough to hold grudges, anyhow. But hubris makes for good gaming, so here's how you try to make tools out of the closest thing *Unknown Armies* has to living gods:

**Flattery:** Before the whole monotheistic "All Good, All Powerful, All The Time!" idea caught on, gods were limited and petty and it made sense that they would want constant praise. This doesn't work quite the same way for archetypes — they don't give a shit whether you pray to them or not. But if you advance their agenda and maximize their mindshare, and you're lucky, you might find coincidence breaking your way a lot. On the other hand, if you're lucky, that presumably happens anyhow...

**Manipulation:** If you don't want to face the mighty crowd-sourced power of an archetype, an individual avatar might be much closer to your speed. They have freaky powers, which is why it's good to get them on your side. Fortunately, they are, almost by definition, extremely stereotypical. It's easy to predict someone who never breaks character. Avatars who *do* break character become weaker avatars, so if you box them in carefully enough, they either help you or hurt themselves. It's fun!

**Alliance:** If you pick an archetype whose agenda can be brought into alignment with your own, great. But sometimes you have to deal with the avatars you *know*, not the ones who fit best. You can still recruit avatar allies when your agendas are heading east and west... if they're feuding with other avatars. They often are. At lower levels, they play out proxy wars between archetypes, and they might give you some quid pro quo when you do the tasks their taboos forbid. Hell, they might make that exchange even when they're *not* in a big battle. Don't assume that avatars are friendly with everyone else who shares their archetype, either. At the higher levels, the rivalries can be *reliably* deadly.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## I woke up chained to a hospital bed, which is never cool.

I don't know, I suppose it might be cool if you had some kind of blended BDSMedical helplessness kink, but I'm pretty vanilla in the bedroom.

What I'm saying is, waking up after killing Edie the rat empress (again) and burning down her house — well, blowing it up, I guess, she had a gas stove — was not cool. My head hurt, my skin hurt, my hundreds of rat bites (again) hurt, there was all kinds of joint pain. I was a mess.

I moved my arm and the handcuffs clinked. I opened my eyes just as someone loomed over me.

"Hey, you're awake."

"Wha' happen?" I mumbled.

"You blew up," she said, voice flat.

Yeah, I vaguely remembered that. We'd piled everything we could find with a flammable warning on top of Edie's corpse after blowing out the pilot light, and spilled a bunch of hair spray and furniture polish and rubbing alcohol all over the place. We'd gotten lucky that no one called the police about the gunshots, but I'd used a .22 for just that reason. Once we had our accelerants in place it gets kind of hazy... we tried to set it off by throwing a lit road-flare through the window but, just my luck, I bounced it off the sill. I went up to pick the thing up and throw it from closer, and... yeah, total light.

Then waking up restrained. Had they caught Vaughn? I hoped not. Sex Ghost was probably safe. The Vaughn I'd known in 2003 wouldn't have left me behind, but this one, who knew?

"Hey. Hey! C'mon, focus. What happened?" The woman looked impatient, not a good sign when you're all blown up and should be getting sympathy.

"I'm thirsty," I said around my bandages. She rolled her eyes and got me a squeezy-drink water bottle, putting it to my mouth. My vision was starting to clear, showing a blocky woman with a sensible dark bob and a nice, unlined complexion. Brown slacks and a matching blazer with a black nylon shoulder holster underneath it. From the way she held the bottle and the placement of the pistol rig, she was a leftie. No wedding ring.

"Who are you?" I asked. "How'd I get here? What do you mean I 'blew up'?"

"Someone blew up a house at 2214 Rosewood. One fatality. Possible domestic terror angle." She said it like she was bored. It was a 100% cop voice.

"2214... Rosewood? Not Rose Lake?" I have no idea if there's a Rose Lake in Cincinnati. I was freestyling. "I was going to talk to someone there about an accounting job. Tax preparation. That's, um..."

"You had no connection to Edie Esquibel?"

"I don't think I know that name. I'm kind of fuzzy though. I don't even remember your name," I said.

"Renata Dakota. Homeland Security." She badged me, not that I'd know a legitimate one from a fake. I didn't think it was fake, but that's kind of the whole point of a fake badge, now isn't it?

But no. I was pretty confident she really was from DHS. It did not make me feel better.

"Look," she said, glancing at the door. "So far, no one's got you as a suspect. This could go down as a suicide. Sounds like Esquibel had a reputation among her coworkers, you know? I get a few people on the record saying she made some suicidal gestures... or if something of that stripe turned up on her social media..." She shrugged. "Open and shut and no one has to stick their feet into anything weird."

"That poor woman," I said.

"Oh knock it off!" Renata seemed genuinely peeved. "Look, this conversation never happened and I'll say you were stoned and suspicious if you say otherwise, right? OK. You and I both know you kacked that daffy bitch because she made *you* look like Betty Crocker. And you're a batshit crazy

magick skank." Getting it out seemed to make it easier on her, like she was relaxing a notch.

"Uh..."

"You remember the Sears Tower attack, now don't you?"

I gaped.

"That's what I thought. Look, you and me, we're holes in the framework, and I'm in with something that's really badly curious about holes. You had buddies, I bet?"

I blinked.

She snorted. "Wow, you should never ever play poker. You're just one big truckload of tells, ain'tcha? Aight. It's like this. Your buddies can get away clean, I don't give a crap. You can be a suspect but mostly it looks like nutjob Edie topped herself like she was always threatening to on, I dunno, G+. By sundown she can have a backdated Pinterest board full of suicidal imagery."

I narrowed my eyes.

"What's it cost me?" I asked.

"You just have to answer a bunch of questions on a computerized questionnaire," she said, with an utterly mirthless grin.

"What's the catch?"

"The catch is you," she said. "You get caught. You go on the grid with something called GNOMON."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I have no friggin' clue," Renata Dakota said, "But its attention is a damn sight kinder than an arrest warrant for arson and murder."

I didn't move my face at all, but I guess that was a tell too, because she nodded and pulled out a tablet computer. And a handcuff key.



# 6: ADEPTS

The cosmos seethes and flexes between order and chaos, with humankind both the froth on the waves and the matter which composes them. It moves us, but we *are* it and without us, there's nothing to move. Our beliefs and behaviors, our desires and decisions, aren't just important to the universe: in a way more important than mere atoms and photons, they *are* the universe.

On that abstract intangible shore, most of the water shifts with the waves. It surges in. It goes out. It feels the moon-tug and moves, massive, in concert. That's most of us.

Inside the body of the ocean are currents, moving faster together, impelled by temperature (a quality no single molecule possesses) and winds unseen, and the occasional earthquake. Avatars, gutter mystics, the people who have some inkling of where the water wants to go and who can hitch themselves to its urges — they're the currents.

But there's always splashing at the shore, where the fluid and uncaring mass of water hits rigid and alien *terra firma*. Even as most water roars out, some hisses in. Waves go up and down and in and out but churning by this rock and that declivity we find whirlpools where the water insistently circles instead.

With enough force, water may become disconnected from the oceanic mass. There's weird stuff in tide pools or, as their cosmic versions are known, otherspaces.

The ocean is the forge of its own content's disobedience. Order strangles possibility, like an authoritarian governor whose own excesses in the name of security lead people to rebel and depose him. Order fathers entropy, which returns

the favor as the revolution condenses into a new dictator. Be they social or magickal or emotional, forces can't move too long in lockstep without shaking themselves apart.

The dust where they break, the spatter on the shore, the rebel who destroys the state that made him possible... that is the adept.

Adepts care about the same things as everyone else, often much more so, but *wrongly*. They have a different view, one incompatible with the common perspective, impossible except that it works.

Someone obsessed with the novels of Colette, but who stacks them up unread is, by the common understanding, *doing it wrong*. The patient who tries to trick a doctor into performing surgeries, not to provide health, but as an aesthetic statement, is *doing medicine wrong*. The mathematical savant who, after instantly memorizing your name and phone number, cannot rest until he's written down a formula that shows how they're connected is *doing identifiers wrong*. Any of these could be adepts.

Or they could just be eccentrics. Because the other face of the adept coin is will, a burning, inflexible belief that their way is right and that everyone else, all the billions of them, are *wrong*. It's a rare combination. Most people can't disagree with everyone around them consistently and coherently. Within that limited group is a smaller subset that can do that and *be right* by sheer force of determination.

Adepts set themselves apart and move in their own strange orbits. But their gravity lets them pull the world along with them.

*The fire  
is not  
what is  
burning.*

## WHAT ADEPTS ARE

Adepts are human beings. They aren't born special, they aren't heirs of the Merovingian bloodline or reincarnated monks or hosts to powerful spiritual aliens. They are people like you and me who learned how to do magick.

Adepts possess a vision of the universe that allows them to warp, distort, or pervert it. It's not a hobby, a pose, a style, or a trend. It's an all-encompassing, obsessive, and idiosyncratic worldview. It could hinge on... nearly anything, really. It's typically something big, too big for most people to consider head-on — language, sex, time, math. Or maybe just the sound of the city at night.

Whatever their focus, every adept thinks they are the first person to ever truly see it, the first of humanity to grasp how this aspect of the world works. By the grace of their staggering will, they're functionally right.

Of course, when you're incapable of thinking of anything other than a hammer, every aspect of your life is going to start looking like some form of exotic nail. Adepts can relate just about everything they encounter to their private lens. On the other hand, while x-ray vision can make you unique and give you fabulous, extraordinary insight, if you can't turn it off you're going to have trouble relating to people. Not to mention how handy it can be to sometimes see the surface.

## DISTINCT

if you think and act and believe like the others  
you will be used and discarded  
and forgotten like the others.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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## THE ADEPT IDENTITY

If you make an adept character, you buy up Magick or Sociomancy or Fulminaturgy as an identity and roll it when you cast spells. But it must be your obsession. So, on the plus side, you can flip-flop rolls to get better results, which one generally wants when tinkering with the fundaments of existence.

An adept identity always gets the Casts Rituals and Use Gutter Magick features for free. However, what adepts really focus on and get the most use out of is the ability to generate and store charges, based on the school of magick that they're obsessed with. Playing an adept means either choosing an existing school of magick from this chapter (there are more in *Book Three: Reveal* and in other sourcebooks and future supplements) or by making one up with the gleeful assistance of your GM.

An adept identity does not come with the "Of course..." element, nor does it substitute for an ability, which makes it a special kind of supernatural identity.

Adept identities improve by failing, just like other identities, and unlike avatars, which are the inverse.

When you create a character with an adept identity, you know all of the spells in your adept school, and you have 8 minor charges. Don't spend them all in one place. If you pick up an adept identity later on, you don't get any freebie charges, though. See "Starting Out" on page 127.

## THE LAWS OF MAGICK

There are multiple schools of the art, all burning different fuels to make alien heats, but three laws bind them all. Maybe these rules were inscribed by the Invisible Clergy to contain the damage adepts do to their generated world, or maybe they just indicate the limits of what humans can understand and what they can't. Either way, these laws are not optional.

**The Law of Symbolic Tension:** All magick is based on some sort of paradox.

**The Law of Transaction:** Magick requires sacrifice.

**The Law of Obedience:** To be an adept is to put magick front and center.

## SYMBOLIC TENSION

Magick doesn't make sense to normal people. Lucky thing, too. Otherwise *everyone* would be doing it. The friction between contradictory ideas ignites the arcane, and adepts are the people who navigate those conflicts. They can make sense of the senseless.

Of course, from the adept's perspective, everyone *else* is wrong and they're the only ones who can see what's clear. Usually, they believe that this is because they are so much cleverer.

Most people's brains disengage when confronted with a paradox. "Huh. That can't be right... well, I'll deal with it later if it continues to be a problem." Adepts look at paradoxes with the acquisitive lust of a thirsty man picking which beer he wants from the sampler six-pack. "A paradox! Cooooool!"

Why is this? Well, everyone has a theory and few can shut up about them.

Some say the universe is shoddily constructed and falling apart. (Thanks again, entropy! You asshole!) Paradoxes are the holes in the curtain where you can peek through and see what's *really* going on. Gawking at the car wrecks of standard logic lets adepts play in reality's smeared-out brains. This attitude appeals to schools that emphasize destruction.

Others go the opposite way and insist that the sensual world's common pool of perceptions (sky, blue; water, wet; fire, hot) is all *māyā*, illusion. The whole truth is beyond the grasp of that feeble meatloaf in your skull, but we get glimpses through paradox. That's when the illusion breaks down, the bird peeks out of the magician's sleeve, and the universe contradicts itself. Adepts who charge up by shaking down a hidden order are more inclined to this perspective.

The consensus reality theory, which suggests that the sky is above and water slides feel good only because we all think they do, leaves reality vulnerable to human will. People are too sloppy to build a cosmos that fucking works, so adepts can pry off the cowling and steal bits from the engine. Anyone could if they weren't so lazy. Adepts whose magick is social and depends on human will, or influences it, often believe theories of this type.

Finally, there's good ol' solipsism, the theory that everything there is, exists as an extension of the observer's own mind. No one else is real, they're just imaginary friends. Adepts of this stripe see themselves as gods at play with the action figures of humanity. It's a view that appeals to skillful manipulators of systems and charade, and also to shitty, amoral, selfish monsters regardless of magickal practice.

Whatever the rationale, the need for paradox is real. Agrimancers flip-flop order and chaos, nature and artifice, so violently that the distinction becomes as limp and wiggly as cornsilk in late summer. Fulminaturges use firepower to earn respect, win friends, direct the course of society... it's like they can do anything with a gun except shoot someone with it.

Without paradox, there is no magick.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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## TRANSACTION

The universe is pay-to-play. If you want an effect, you need to add energy to the system. It's like Isaac Newton's third law: what you get out of it is equal to what you put into it.

For adepts, this means they must charge up before casting spells. Every school has distinct and discrete methods for engaging paradox to create energy. They store this energy in their bodies, or their minds, or their imaginations, or in hyperspace, until they either piss it away, as explained under "Obedience," or use it to create an effect.

There are three types of charge: minor, significant, and major. They're not just different denominations of the same currency, either. You could build up a thousand minor charges and not have enough juice for a single significant one. Though, if you're willing to let entropy take a cut, you can turn one sig into ten minors or a major into ten sigs.

Minor charges come from minor acts or behavior concessions, and they create mild effects. Significant charges are from more meaningful actions and produce more impressive effects. Major charges, though — major charges are the shit. They require tremendous effort, danger, and trouble to acquire, and they pay off with similarly boggling outcomes. A minor charge can light a cigarette. A significant charge can set a house on fire. A major charge can burn down a city.

Magick cannot generate charges directly. If someone, for example, injured himself to create charges, injuring himself with magick wouldn't cause a charge. Someone who got charges by altering her consciousness wouldn't charge up by using magick to enter a visionary trance. Charges don't make charges.

Just so you know, if an adept attempts a spell and fails the roll, the charges don't go away. If you don't get what you want, you don't have to pay for it. Doesn't matter if it's minor or significant.

Major charges have different rules though. Let one of those get away from you, and it's gone. It also probably does something interesting and thematically ironic to the caster, too.

Charges don't go away on their own. If an adept chooses to violate the core of his school or, more likely, gets forced to do so, all charges are lost. This is called breaking taboo and is described under "Obedience."

There's no upward limit on how many charges an adept can hold. Some have held hundreds. Such crackling stockpilers of arcane energy tend to act odd, and odd by adept standards is certifiably barking to normals, but maybe you have to be extra nutty to build up that much mojo without spending it.

Adepts sitting atop a horde of charges are especially prone to side effects, but even holding one minor charge can leave one vulnerable to *unnatural phenomena*. These are the incidental flukes that attend upon violations of causality. They're

## CHARGING RITUALS

There are rumors that there are prescribed rites that produce charges, though most adepts just laugh at this notion. If such things exist as described, they replace an adept's normal charging concessions with mumbo jumbo and geometry and ritual tomfoolery. Instead of hurting herself, that flesh mage could charge up by casting the charging ritual. Similarly, instead of getting high, the consciousness-bender could use the same ritual.

An adept's school is their lexicon of magick, and others' charging systems seem as alien as a different alphabet. Charging rituals would be more like those international pictograms that indicate whether a bathroom is for women or men. They're useful, but not exactly writing.

If a magus *did* try a charging ritual and found out it worked, they would have a powerful incentive to keep that secret, since some sacrifices for charges are dangerous and effortful. Then again, if they acted sensibly, they wouldn't be adepts in the first place.

unexpected symptoms that arise when events bruise or poison the cosmos. Adepts can sometimes summon them, but rarely fully control them.

## OBEDIENCE

The final law means that, when someone follows a school of magick, that's their *thing*, forever and always 'til the wheels fall off.

You can't follow more than one school of magick, any more than you can have two obsessions. It's just not feasible. It's like trying to drive a car forward and backwards at the same time on the same road. Even if someone managed it, it would probably involve splitting in half. Maybe each hemisphere of the brain would get one school of magick, but it doesn't sound like anything healthy for PCs and other living things. It would stick five failed notches in every meter of their shock gauge, for starters.

Finally, adepts must live up to their magickal ideals all the time, not just when it's convenient. Just as certain behaviors charge up their magickal batteries, because they move the adept in accordance with the school's principles, other actions drain those batteries dry with no payout. Those actions, known as taboos, are forbidden. An adept who breaks taboo, be it on purpose or by accident or under duress, loses all the charges he's holding. But this isn't so bad because taboos are usually things that seem repugnant to the adept anyway.

As described in "Unnatural Phenomena" on page 80.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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6: ADEPTS

## STARTING OUT

Where do adepts come from? Broken homes, mostly. Getting into a staring contest with reality and playing until you win or until your retinas fry holds reduced appeal to those who are loved.

Once they decide to Show Them All, adepts either fold in on themselves and navel-gaze until they form a singularity and intuit magic, a process which gives them one hardened notch and one failed on a relevant meter, or they look for a mentor. If they find one, which ain't easy, they go through some kind of apprenticeship, which *really* ain't easy, and wind up with an education in their chosen magick and either one hardened notch and one failed notch in a single shock meter, or one in each of two different shock meters. Typically, they either have a creepy adoration or sullen resentment complex towards their teacher, too.

Players who want to become adepts during play need to describe their fiendish obsession, their maniacal pursuit of illumination, their bizarre experiments. When the GM decides it's appropriate (maybe after "Manny becomes an adept" is completed as a group objective but maybe not) the character takes a hardened notch and a failed notch on such meters as the GM deems appropriate and gains their magick identity at 15%.

Unlike players who start the game with an adept identity, those who pick it up during play don't get any freebie charges. Earn 'em honestly.

## LESSER MAGI; OR, "I DO MAGICK. IT'S COOL, I GUESS."

Being an adept is demanding. You have to spend all your time curled up in the sweat-stained sleeping bag of your private ideology. You have to avoid taboos, which may be things that appeal to your more sensible side, like having a home or letting others take care of you or sobering up. You have to charge up which, again, may involve activities that concern your superego, such as eating money or self-harm or murder. Some try to balance out having a normal life and having a backstage pass to occult reality. That's fine.

I mean, usually it doesn't work out that *well*, but if a PC adept wants to only get minor charges and resist magick, or just break taboo and live normally for as long as she can stand it, that's all right. A good GM is probably going to waggle temptation in her face early and often, but it's a totally legit course. Players who want to do magick with one hand behind their back — possibly because the alternative is wearing a metaphorical blindfold — are fine. They aren't playing wrong or anything like that. They're just atypical adepts, and most magickal operators are already so weird that "atypical adept" is practically redundant.

## QUITTING MAGICK

Is it possible to decide to just stop being an enchanter? Um... *kinda*.

It's a little like deciding to stop being an alcoholic. If you want to do that, it's laudable, taking control of your life and so on, but... you have to not drink, no matter how tempted you are. Take it a day at a time and every day you don't, you've avoided alcoholism. For twenty-four hours.

But recovering drinkers still call themselves alcoholics for a reason. It just takes the one... and maybe you take that drink and that's fine and you walk away. Or maybe you take it and pick up right back where you started.

Same thing with adepts. You want to stop being an agrimancer, you leave the farm, settle in the city, cross the ocean, violate taboo, fail to harvest charges, and act normal. Nothing to it. Literally nothing.

But it's always waiting.

The identity Agrimancy 43% never goes away and never stops being your obsession. Even if you never hear the farm report or pick up an almanac, it's *in you*. And if you need to, you could pick up a carving knife, do a ritual sacrifice to charge up, and be right back in the game.

It's always there, patiently waiting, if you happen to need it.

On the other hand, you feel like you need it 'til the day you die.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

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Enough is enough.

That's why they call it enough.



# HOW SCHOOLS OF MAGICK WORK

The practice of magick in *Unknown Armies* breaks down into these components:

- A central theme and paradox.
- A taboo.
- A way to get charges — minor, significant, and major.
- A domain that determines the sort of effects adepts can produce, in keeping with the theme.
- A list of formula spells, usually about fourteen, with effects that are as reliable, codified, and predictable as anything in postmodern magick gets.

If you want to use one of the schools in this book, or in some other *Unknown Armies* book, you're set: you charge up with the behaviors, avoid the taboo, and produce effects both random and predetermined.

If you want to make your own school, you're going to have to analyze things more. First off, it helps to have an idea of what you want to do, why you want it done, and the most you're willing to pay for it. Don't try to game the system. All that really does is screw over the other players. Magick has to come with a price, and if you want to get a lot out of it, you need to put a lot in. Figure out ways to push limits.

After that, you have to strive for balance with the other effects of other schools. This is constantly a work in progress for GMs, who have to decide on the fly how many charges this effect or that one costs for random magick. With formulas, however, we can offer guidelines.

Meet  $\Omega$ .

$\Omega$  is the symbol that measures how forgiving the practice of a school is. If your  $\Omega$  is low, your harsh school martyrs you to power: its taboo is burdensome to living a normal life and its charging structure puts you at risk of physical, metaphysical, fiscal, legal, or emotional harm *a lot*. If your  $\Omega$  is high, the demands of your practice are gentler. You can almost live a normal life, and if you're rich enough, people call you "eccentric" instead of the more evocative "bugshit weirdo."

Calculating  $\Omega$  is a little bit subjective, so you and your GM should argue bitterly about it before you grudgingly give in.  $\Omega$  can theoretically range between -2 and +2, and factors on individual spells can take that as low as -4 or as high as +4.

The cost of a spell, in charges, depends on  $\Omega$ . If you have a low  $\Omega$  from crawling over gravel and gargling broken glass, you won't have to spend as many charges on your effects. If your  $\Omega$  is high because charges are raining from the sky and you just have to run out with a bucket, you can expect to spend a lot more of those easy charges to get anything done.

Note that no matter how demanding your school is, and how low or negative your  $\Omega$  is, spells always cost at least one charge. Nobody rides for free.

Rudy wants to build a magick school he calls Refumancy, based on the noun and verb meanings of the word "refuse." Refumancers reject the notion that the needs of a capitalist society, which they call "the avarocracy" or "Gierkultur" or simply "the ratking," outweigh the choices of an individual. They drop out, recycle, steal, ignore laws, dumpster dive, and in all ways reject consumer culture. The radicals among them want to eliminate the idea of ownership altogether. Most, though, accept that owning things, but not land, is OK... just way less important than everyone thinks. Adjusting the power balance between self and community can only help both, according to these crustypunk philosophers-by-deed.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

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Rudy and his GM talk over Refumancy and he proposes "meaningfully partake in consumer culture" as a taboo. When pressed for what that even means, he decides that owning land is definitely out. His GM suggests that taking any job where tax is withheld is clearly knuckling under to The Man as well, as is buying any new product that was produced in a lot of twenty or more. Rudy agrees.

As for the charging structure, he foresees a lot of Occupy-style actions. For a minor, it's protesting, undermining or resisting the Gierkultur in a symbolic way – adbusting a billboard, protesting at a bank, chaining himself to mining equipment. The significant version is to concretely diminish or change the avarocracy in a way that affects a hundred people or more, like driving a bank out of business, unveiling corporate wrongdoing that sends a stock price plummeting, stopping a dam from spoiling a fragile ecosystem, or burning a factory to the ground.

"What about killing a cop?" Rudy's GM asks. Rudy blinks and suggests that his character isn't going to go that far, but she presses him. "You don't think you're the only trashman in the world, do you? Does assassinating a judge affect a hundred people?" "If it was a corrupt one, in the pocket of big business..." "Nah," says his GM, "Every judge is an essential part of the justice system. Your school's thing is that it's all compromised, right? That's why you went with "ratking," because their tails are scabbed together and they can't get out. I think you get a sig by killing any cop or judge, because even the incorruptible crusaders give ordinary folks more confidence in the system."

Rudy agrees. With that, the GM decides that his taboo is about average, good for  $+0 \Omega$ , but that his charges are sufficient for  $-1 \Omega$  since even the minor stuff means he's either planning something controlled, or doing something illegal.

## DOMAIN

Every school has a **domain**, an idea at its core, a grand passion, a fascination that generates its fundamental paradox. It's something broad like quiet or travel or relationships or plants. It's something so commonplace and reliable that people rarely bother to think about it.

Adepts think about their domain all the time, and they do it in a way that the mainstream run of humanity would call just plain wrong. There's more on this below but for the purpose of pricing out spells, domain matters as a category of what the school is about. If you're focused on quiet, you can kill sounds and voices and probably have an associated power over tranquility or with things associated with silence. If you're fixated on plants, you might be able to mutate them, kill them, or make them grow strong. But, always and only, in accordance with your school's paradox.

If an effect is clearly teed up right in the center of the school's philosophical thought-space, it might merit a  $-1 \Omega$  adjustment for that spell only. If it's a stretch, give it a  $+1 \Omega$  penalty for that. Most, however, are probably just fine using the unmodified  $\Omega$ . Maybe  $\Omega + 1$  for something particularly strong or situationally useful.

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## PARADOX

Schools of magick depend on large issues that concern everyone. But while an idea that everyone shares has its power, it's not the kind of power adepts crave. The engine at the core of the serious, big, mind-and-matter distorting magick is forged by having an entirely different view of a topic than everyone else and having the will and intelligence to hold your own against *all of reality* in defense of your position.

Take, for instance, food. Everyone knows what you do with food, you eat food. A food magus would see food not as a vital fuel, but as a *prison*. (Yes, there is a grotesque and explicit parallel with anorexia here.) The paradox would be that the behavior that everyone else considered to be physically weakening him would be his source of strength. That adept would gain charges by foregoing food, possibly living on a liquid diet or through IVs, or just by going on fast-based vision quests and casting a bundle of spells before finally cracking and binging on cheeseburgers, tears of self-loathing running down his face.

A completely different food adept would consider food's nourishing powers entirely secondary to the artistry of flavor and presentation. She would not only be indifferent to nutrition, but largely unable to consider it at all. Food that was beautiful, like exquisite wedding cakes, butter statuary, and elaborate sushi rolls would nourish her power. Eating anything that didn't look and taste exquisitely appealing would crash her powers.

If it seems like being an adept is a terrible way to live, you're getting it. There are reasons that people have commonplace, unconsidered attitudes towards things like sleep and breath and love and communication and identity: society has adapted itself to our bodies and minds, supporting notions that work pretty well for most (don't kill that guy, food goes in here, hands off the fire) until they're invisible.

To be an adept is to see the invisible and to reject it in favor of a blazing pyre of new thought, a holocaust upon which common sense and everyday logic burn, along with the fetters that hold commonplace humankind back from enslaving matter, force, and others' thoughts with chains of will and personal sacrifice.

To be encyclopedically correct, there are little half-power obscure things based on common but generally non-worldshaking ideas like hair or pets or limericks. They're often one-man shows. They're outliers. Don't worry about them.

## EFFECTS AND COSTS

Many adepts are actually perfectly content to just focus on the eerie beauty of their mutant worldview, gathering charges and never spending them, or else pissing them away on convenience and comfort — much the way common folk spend money to learn a trade, then pursue that trade to make money. But an adept who doesn't do much doesn't matter much. The ones to worry about have *agendas*.

If you think casting a spell means dressing in a black robe and intoning a chant inside some complex pattern... well, that can work, but that's ritual magick. Adepts regard that the way someone with a bulked-up Ducati motorcycle regards a three-speed Schwinn. Nice for some things, maybe, but not really *impressive*, y'know.

Adepts build up charges by performing their symbolically resonant acts. Casting a spell? You just think the thought and release the charge. No chanting or candles required.

As for what those spells *do*, a list of general effects follows. If you want to make a spell that does something different, your GM can price it out based on how it compares, within the bespoke confines of her game, to those other effects.

Some spells include complications that can reduce  $\Omega$ , within reason. A spell you can cast any time should require more mojo than the same effect if you can only do it at night, wearing a white nightshirt and matching nightcap. Spells that come with meaningful complications baked in deserve  $-1 \Omega$  or even  $-2 \Omega$  if it's really hairy. But, as with domain, most spells are just fine with the calculated  $\Omega$ , no adjustments.

## RANGE AND DURATION

There are four categories of duration:

**Instant:** It happens once and then is done. This is best for things that amp up one roll, or break one thing, or cause big, physical effects like lighting fires or causing a tree to suddenly be dead or starting an earthquake. A GM could add a delay to this, if she felt it was appropriate. "You can start an earthquake, but it doesn't go off until twenty-four hours after you cast the spell. Because you want time to get away... don't you?"

**Minutes:** The effect lasts for a number of minutes equal to the roll or, if it's a little more powerful, for a number of minutes equal to the ones place. This is better for things that give an ongoing change to an ability or identity, or alter perceptions, or work physical changes on objects that aren't permanent in the way that being burned to the ground is permanent.

**Hours:** If this isn't a significant or major effect, durations of hours are probably only appropriate for deniable, subtle, coincidental, or psychological effects. GMs may agree to exceptions, but by and

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large, a tangible change that lasts that long is beyond the scope of minor magick. Again, this can be hours equal to roll for mellow stuff, hours equal to one of the dice for stuff that's more impressive.

**Long Time:** Once you're dealing with effects that last longer than hours, it's all GM fiat. It could be a month, it could be 'til the end of time, depending entirely on what the effect is and how the GM judges its impact on her plotlines. Spells that last a long time are usually significant or major. If they aren't, their effects should be *really* picayune and deniable, the kind of thing you could achieve with work or good luck.

Similarly, there are four categories of range:

**Self:** If a spell only affects the caster, that's pretty straightforward. A lot of healing and self-improvement magick is limited in this fashion.

**Touch:** If you have to touch someone to cast the spell, it's often a bit more serious. Either it's having a lasting effect, or it's something they really don't want to happen, or it's a big physical alteration.

**Eyeball:** You can cast the spell on someone you can see clearly. "Clearly" in this case means you can see their face. Binoculars work, sure, but CCTV or Skype count as really far. Minor spells at this range are OK if they're subtle and deniable, instant effects like most blasts, or not physical. Anything outside those categories is probably significant, if not major.

**Really Far:** As with long time effects, this is an area where GMs can customize for the best fit. Could be miles equal to one die, miles equal to the roll, or anywhere. But if you're casting a spell on someone distant, that's only a minor magick if it really fits your magick's style or the person is receptive, if not *eager*, for the effect. Usually, anything far out of sight and specific is significant work at least, though if you've got a major charge, hey, anything goes. You're the boss. Don't hurt me.

Significant magick at really far ranges still requires some connection to the target — a hair sample, seeing 'em on a G+ Hangout, construction of a creepy mannequin stand-in — that replaces their actual presence.

Hopefully these guidelines give GMs support without constraint. Usually, minor magick is touch and hours or eyeball and minutes. Significant magick is eyeball and hours unless it's something really big and physical, in which case it can drop down a category for either or both. If you want to extend a factor, tack on another charge. You could even make a spell cost fewer charges by restricting its effective distance or making it briefer... as long as the GM is cool with it.

## ON SPACE AND TIME

There are two ways a game designer can deal with the entirely legitimate questions of "How long does an effect last?" and "How far away can the target be?" One way is to be highly specific, to develop a formula that yields a firm result, maybe broken down into minutes and meters. That's kind of how charges work with  $\Omega$ , because charge-gathering drives behavior and hard choices, and a character game like *Unknown Armies* pays a lot of attention to that.

Minutes and meters are of less interest. Not everything can be razor-sharp and steely-strong, and fortunately the magick of *Unknown Armies* is already so chaos-tinged that a little more variance isn't going to cause trouble, we trust.

In a lot of cases, the duration of an effect is pretty obvious: it happens and causes a permanent change. But when you create a spell that lets you talk to invisible entities, how long does that last? What about when you implant a false memory? Is that permanent or does it wear off?

### MINOR EFFECTS

**Acquire Relevant Object:** The spell conjures up a small object, something you can hold in one hand. Maybe it finds its way to the caster through happenstance. Maybe it just appears like an act of legerdemain, then disappears again when no one's paying attention to it. Whatever it is, it has to be relevant. If your school has a strong fire element, you could conjure a lighter or a cigarette or even a small open flame, but not a plank of wood or wad of cotton that just happens to be flammable. If your school is all about looking cool and presenting your best self, it might let you bring up a small piece of jewelry or a nice hat, but it couldn't get you a gun or a magnifying glass. Cost: 2.

**Alter Minor Perception:** Briefly and deniably change the appearance or sound or aroma of something that's actually present. You can make a gun look like a banana or your wanted poster look like Bruce Banner, but you can't make a yacht pass for a sea monster. The time limit on this is measured in minutes, too — the roll in minutes (a roll of 47 is forty-seven minutes, for example) for something hand-sized or smaller, and the die in the ones place determines how many minutes for anything larger. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

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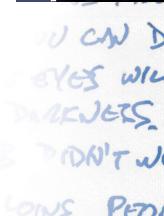
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**Alter Stress Check:** Changing stress checks is tricky stuff, so use with care and make sure it fits the school. For minor charges, you might be able to:

- Increase or decrease the stress check's severity by two points.
- Shift it to a different, but somewhat plausible, meter.
- Delay the roll by a number of minutes equal to the roll.

Under no circumstances can minor adept magick enable someone to avoid or ignore a stress check. Moreover, no adept magick can change a stress check inflicted by charging up or casting a spell. If you have to skin yourself to cast a spell, that spell can't mitigate the psychic toll of doing that. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Alter Small Tangible Object:** Reshape or corrode something, making a crooked stick straight or disintegrating that photo of your ex and her new husband. If you want to fix something, that's *another minor effect*, so this can't make a thing that's stopped working start again. It's actually easier to change things entirely with magick than it is to recover or repair them.

If you use this to change or damage something, it's probably permanent. If you use it to improve or strengthen something — making a ham sandwich able to feed five people, say — it only lasts until you're done using it or, in the sandwich example, eating it.

As a guideline, improved objects that don't have an obvious narrative effect give a +10% bonus to relevant rolls for one scene. This works for improving people's muscles or reactions as well. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Avoid Damage:** Mechanically, there are two ways to avoid damage with minor spells. One is big and brief, the other is puny but dogged. Both are limited to specific types of injury.

To avoid all damage of a particular type, cast the spell in response before the attacker rolls. If your spell succeeds, one attack misses, regardless of what your uncouth assailant's dice say.

For ongoing reduction of a particular damage, cast the spell well in advance. It lasts for a number of hours equal to the roll. Any attempt to harm you with the relevant assault faces a difficulty of 20%. Any attack rolls under 20 are misses, unless it's the unstoppable o1.

For both these types of protection, the type of harm has to be narrow. Deliberate attacks, fire, animal predation, gunshot wounds, and totally unexpected events are all examples of kosher categories. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Emotional Reaction:** Making someone happy or sad or suspicious without conscious reason

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As described in  
"Fix Damage"  
on the next  
page.

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is pretty common minor magick. It lasts ten to twenty minutes. If you want it to last minutes equal to the roll, throw on another charge. This doesn't make anyone *do* anything, and doesn't make them necessarily decide anything. There are no hard and fast mechanical effects here. People are usually rational enough to shake off a mood swing. If you want them to take a particular action, that's a *compulsion*. Cost: 1-2.

**Fix Damage:** Healing and repair seem to resist magick. Most schools can't heal people at all, and if they can, it's because they're either health-centered or it's in constrained circumstances. A fire-based school might be able to repair burn damage but not bites. Magick based on appearance might only provide cosmetic repair while leaving the injury throbbing and dangerous. Spells centered around sensation and pleasure might diminish or eliminate the pain and impairment without taking you one millimeter farther from death's door.

At the minor level, magick can heal relevant damage equal to the ones die of the roll, or restore a broken object to about 80% of full function for 1d10 days. It's also sufficient to knock out minor colds and flu-level illnesses. You're on your own for sarcoidosis or tuberculosis. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Hunch:** Hunches are cheap, magick's good at these. As a general rule, people should only be holding one hunch at a time though, or else it gets fussy to track. You can set this up as "pre-roll your next roll of any type" or "pre-roll your next specific \_\_\_\_\_ roll." Fill in that blank with "stress check," or "attempt to coerce," or "use of my Rocket Scientist identity," or some other situation requiring a roll. Note that you can also cast this on other people to get a hunch about *their* next roll while they remain clueless. Cost: 1.

**Minor Blast:** Inflicts wounds like a hand-to-hand attack and adds an Unnatural (5) stress check as well. Pretty simple. You can tart it up with appropriate variations and raise or lower the cost depending on whether those complications make it better or more of a hassle to use. But the standard is "roll, succeed, add dice together for wounds." Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Minor Compulsion:** Magick can't *make* people do things, and the best minor magick can do is make people kinda sorta want to do things. Specifically: the spell's target either does the thing or faces a stress check. The meter targeted depends on the nature of the school. If it's persuasion, usually the attack is Self because the target feels guilty if he resists or it might be Isolation because resisting could cost him valuable friendships. It won't happen, but it feels that way. Terrifying someone into acquiescence is a Violence stress. It's a rank 4 stress check on whatever meter it targets. It

has to be a simple order too, something you can explain in one breath. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Minor Inform:** This is a big narrative catch-all for gaining information through enchantment. Expanded senses are popular, as are visions, messages from the Statosphere, empathy, mild telepathy... whatever you can justify to the GM. But with minor magick, it's generally either ongoing access to a new sense, that you have to use cleverly to learn what you need or a one-time info-dump, often obscure or incomplete.

If you come up with a new sense, you can use it for a number of minutes equal to the roll. If it's just a hit with the clue-by-four, that's totally a GM call. But most GMs are pretty generous with the information you need to get to the next hard choice, peril, or ghastly revelation. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Minor Roll Improvement:** The common effects for minor magick improving other abilities and identities are to remove all difficulty and penalty, or to give a +20% boost. Either way, the cost is about the same. It lasts minutes equal to the casting roll. Cost: 1-2.

**Minor Stress Check:** Magick can perform the psychic equivalent of licking a finger and sticking it in someone's ear, only instead of a finger, it's the adept's vis or chi or mana, and instead of an ear, it's the frontal lobes. Particular spells may always target a particular meter, others may be random, but minor magick produces a rank 3 check. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Offer Roll Flip-Flop:** Whether it works by honing concentration, improving appearance, or just by wrenching probability to bring circumstances into line, roll flip-flops are common minor magick. Sometimes it's on the next roll of any type. Other times it's on the next roll of a particular ability or category of identity. In any event, it's one flip-flop per spell. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Substitute Magick for Relevant Identity or Ability:** Again, the key here is *relevance*. *Viaturges* can quite sensibly substitute their viaturge identity for automotive uses of Pursuit, or Road Navigation, or Digest Truck Stop Food, but subbing it in for Brain Surgery makes no sense whatsoever. Similarly, a school based on radio, be it talk, news, or pop, could sub in for electronics repair but not for brawling. Cost: 1.

As described in "Minor Compulsion" on this page and in "Significant Compulsion" on page 136

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Rudy has rough ideas for seven minor spells, each of which he prices out with his GM's assistance.

*One Man's Trash* turns a piece of waste paper into a \$20... for about an hour. After that, it turns back into what it was before. Any stains remain throughout any changes, so it's usually one raty double-saw. This falls under Alter Small Tangible Object, which costs  $\Omega$ . The base  $\Omega$  of Refumancy is -1, but since every spell has a minimum cost of 1 minor charge, this spell defaults to that.

*Rebel* forces the agents of the ratking to confront their own complicity in the nightmarish oppression of the individual and encourages them to change sides, at least for a moment, and obey one command from the system's refumancer enemy. It's a simple minor compulsion: the cop or security guard or bank teller either obeys one brief command or takes a rank 4 stress check. Rudy suggests that this be against Self, since mankind is born free, etc. The standard cost is  $\Omega + 1$ , but this has a limiting factor since it only works on people who are tools of The Man, so that knocks its cost down to  $\Omega$ . Once again, the default is 1 minor charge.

*Refuge* is a spell that manages the hassles of squatting in squalor. For each casting, it removes one of the following issues with crashing out vagrant-style: vermin, stench, exposure. The effect lasts for twenty-four hours.

This spell kind of squirrels from the typical spell costs, but eyeballing it the GM shrugs and says "2 minor charges?" Rudy whines and suggests 1, since it's not going to make people obedient or find him information or anything really useful. Rolling her eyes, the GM agrees. 1 minor charge.

*Repair* takes the cast-off technology of our haste-and-waste product cycle and restores it. Objects fixed in this fashion are obviously Mad Max-y messes of electrician's tape and epoxy and scavenged components, but they work. This is Fix Damage, clear and simple at  $\Omega + 2$  and with a  $\Omega$  rating of -1, it's another spell at 1 minor charge.

*Restore* lets Rudy, or anyone on whom he casts it, shake off the health hazards of chronic travel and low-level exposure, such as scabies, trench foot, and bronchitis. It's another Fix Damage only for people. 1 minor charge.

*Scavenge* lets Rudy root around in a bin and find any commonplace object that might get thrown out in that particular dumpster, working via synchronicity. If he goes behind a grocery store, he can find some decent produce. Behind an industrial site, he finds tools that are only slightly off-kilter. Behind a Best Buy he might find a trove of damaged-but-fixable electronics, and so on. It's an acquire relevant object spell for a flat 2 minor charges.

*Up Your Banners* should make him a better public speaker when he's encouraging people to eat the 1% and burn down Walmart. When asked how he wants to do this, he waffles between Other Roll Improvement and Substitute Magick for Relevant Identity or Ability before settling on the latter. When he tries to convince people to turn on, drop out, and recycle, he can use his Refumancy identity instead of Connect. This costs 1 minor charge. He could not, of course, substitute his power for Connect if he was haggling over a new Lexus or trying to get someone to give him a ride to the Phish concert. ("Phish ain't punk!" "Easy there, Rudy.")

See "Viaturgy" on page 166.

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## SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

**Alter Significant Perception:** OK, now you can make a yacht look like a sea monster. It also sounds and smells and feels like one. It can't do physical damage or leave any sort of impact on the environment. It lasts a number of minutes equal to the roll.

Alternately, you can modify something exactly like the minor version, but have it last a number of hours equal to the ones place of your roll. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Alter Significant Tangible Objects:** Transforming a boulder into a statue or making a door explode out of its frame is the realm of this category. It can affect anything up to the size and weight of one of the smaller SUVs. Should you want to alter or disintegrate bigger items, do it piece by piece, as per Fix More Damage Also, while this spell can obviously create circumstances for damage, i.e., when you collapse the roof over someone, it doesn't directly harm people. You want a blast for that.

It also doesn't work broadly, across every conceivable category of object. Keep it thematic. If you have a destroyer school, it can probably destroy a lot of stuff, but if it's not uniquely violent, you may only be able to destroy things that stand athwart the values of your worldview.

If you change something's composition — turning a desk into water? — it snaps back to shape, undamaged, after minutes equal to the casting roll. If you alter its form into something similar — an old cheapjack motorcycle becomes a vintage badass motorcycle — the change is permanent. Ditto if you just wreck shit. If you change an object and give it entirely new capacities ("The dishwasher is now a hoverboard!") the effect wears off after minutes equal to the casting roll, unless you have some kind of heavy-duty concession to keep it around longer. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Fix More Damage:** Little is reliable in the world of *Unknown Armies* except intentional damage and the collateral kind. If fixing flesh and bone is an obvious fit for your school — not a stretch with a contorted rationale, but something where anyone can sensibly see the connection — then you can use this to recover wounds equal to the roll. If you're repairing the inanimate, this is enough to make something the size of a car substantially less wrecked.

Assume that there are six stages of fucked-up-ness to homes, vehicles, and computer systems, going roughly like this:

1. Busted.
2. Crappy.
3. Worn.
4. Broken In.
5. Gently Used.
6. Mint Condition.

Each casting of a Fix More Damage spell on an object improves it by one level. If you're trying to fix something bigger than a car, like your mom's house, or an aircraft carrier, use it on bite-sized subsections, like individual rooms in a building, or individual engines on a giant battleship. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Forbiddance:** This is a lot like damage avoidance, only instead of preventing someone from shooting you, it prevents them from suing you or foreclosing on your house or asking for your phone number. You cast the spell, and your thuggish old pals Coincidence and Synchronicity move in on the event you forbid, cracking their probabilistic knuckles. Circumstances conspire to prevent the event from happening a number of times equal to the ones place of your roll. The guy who was going to ask for your number gets hiccups. The clerk of the court goes on a perfectly in-character bender instead of conscientiously filing the tort papers. Your foreclosure gets miscategorized because of a faulty software update.

It won't stop someone who is good and goddamn determined to make something happen, but it gives you some breathing space while they huff and puff and blow your credit rating down. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Give Paranormal Ability:** You can allow one of your mundane homies to use a specific minor effect from your school, as determined when you design the spell, one time. If you have a minor spell that can let you have aura sight, you can give aura sight to someone who isn't an adept, but she's only going to marvel at the colors for minutes, as per Minor Inform. If you give someone a minor blast, they have one that they can hold and discharge at will. Neat, huh? Cost:  $\Omega + 2$ .

**Interact With the Unnatural:** There are unnatural creatures that you need no magick to interact with, but some are normally imperceptible, or invulnerable to harm by mortal hands, or they do stuff to your brain and then wallpaper over the damage so you can't tell. This catch-all category lets you pick one specific type of weird entity and interact with it on a more even footing. The exception is demons, who are such cosmic shitbirds that they get their own surcharged entry.

Generally, this means you can treat the entity more like a human being or, in some cases a stray dog, than a monster. If it's intelligent and you normally can't communicate with it, the spell would let you do that. If it's normally invisible, you can see it. If it normally wipes memories, you can recover what was elided, or at least see the scars where your thoughts got damaged. Just remember that this is specific. A spell that helps you with astral parasites, possibly by letting you hit them with a golf club, won't do diddly against other species of intangible fauna. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Invoke Demons:** Really? You want to talk to beings whose names are *synonymous with evil* and whose primary folkloric niche is "entity that wants oh so badly to cheat you on a deal?" All right. You're either much smarter than everyone, or the opposite. Spells that let you call up spirits from beyond the veil cost  $\Omega + 1$ . The *different* spell you need to actually do a specific thing to them has the same cost. Some of the things you might really, *really* want to consider doing whilst dabbling with infernalism include...

- Trapping the demon in one place.
- Sending the demon back beyond the veil.
- Forcing the demon to only tell you things that can, at least, be *construed* as the truth.
- Hurting the demon.

1: GO

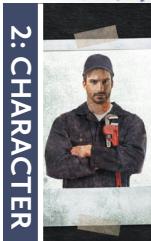
2: CHARACTER

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4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





Each of those effects, along with bringing it to the table in the first place, requires a different spell. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Objective Movement:** While adepts tend to be selfish, anti-social pricks who resist community and sharing and cooperation, they tend even more strongly to resist conforming to stereotypes. So there are helpful ones out there, and they use magick to pursue objectives. But adept magick can only influence objectives relevant to their nature. A viaturge could influence objectives that focus on roads and transportation, and a fulminaturge could influence the ATF, but not vice versa. When applied appropriately, a significant-charge spell counts as an *intense task on local objectives*, and a *petty task for weighty ones*. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Permanent Identity Increase:** Adepts can change people, making them better, stronger, faster... or maybe just more able to hold their liquor, depending on the nature of the art. The powerful spells in this category either give someone an entirely new identity at 10%, or they put a free experience check on an identity that person already has. Identities still can't rise more than one time per session, no matter how many times the spell is cast. But with enough charges and time, it's not hard to get ahead of the curve. Cost:  $\Omega + 3$ .

**Significant Blast:** Woo! You gonna fuck someone up! With *magick!* Woo! Woo. All right. This works like a gun with no damage cap. You cast the spell and it deals wounds equal to the roll. As a bonus, you inflict a Violence (5) stress check. Also, it leaves no fingerprints or forensic evidence. You'll show them all! Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Significant Compulsion:** This can work one of two ways. The soft version is much like Minor Compulsion only way less minor. You tell someone to do X, where X is an action you can describe in five minutes or less, and if they don't at least attempt X, they face a stress check equal to the digit in your roll's ones place. The meter targeted could be random, or could be baked into the nature of the spell. If you get to choose which

meter every time you cast it, add another significant charge to the cost.

Now, considering that the soft version means "do what I say or face a potential rank 10 crazy-maker," the hard version is clearly very hard indeed. With hard compulsion, you take over the person's body and move it like a puppet as it does your will. You can't be moving yourself while piloting their flesh, so get comfortable. You also can't use your senses while you're walking a mile in their shoes, so do it from somewhere safe. Having your body pried out of your control, doing stuff while you helplessly observe, is a Helplessness (6-7) check, and that's just if the body does innocuous things. For stuff really violating, higher checks are almost certain.

Hard compulsion lasts a number of minutes equal to the ones place die. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Significant Inform:** This is the big-kid version of Minor Inform, and like its lesser cousin, it either provides an entirely new sense, or it takes an info-dump on your brain.

If it gives you a sense — Empathy, Detect Statospheric Entanglement, Know How Many Hardened and Failed Notches Someone has on One Shock Meter Per Roll, Astral Perception, or whatever else you can get your GM to approve — you start out with it at a percentage equal to the total of the dice rolled. Roll a 47, you get it at 11% because  $4 + 7 = 11$ , roll an 09 and get it at 19 because  $10 + 9 = 19$ . It improves normally, but if you cast the spell that gave it to you, you can get an experience check without rolling the identity.

The "I have a vision that explains or unveils a whole lot!" method is up to the GM to administrate, and she's going to give you as much as she can without spoiling the plot or dicking over the other players. This is likely to be less than you want, or maybe less than you feel entitled to, but suck it up. There's a reason all those *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes had to nerf Counselor Troi's mind-mojo. Too much information isn't just distasteful on the internet, it can also derail plots. Depending on what you perceive and how, you may be just *pleading* for stress checks, so do be careful. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

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**Significant Roll Improvement:** If you boost a roll with significant magick, you cast the spell to amp yourself and, if the spell works, you get the benefit on your next single roll. The benefit is, all difficulty and penalties are removed, and your identity or ability gets a +10% increase, multiplied by the ones place of your roll. If you roll a 19 and succeed, you get a +90% bonus on your next roll.

Alternately, you can get all that for a *series* of rolls, equal in number to the tens place roll, but only if the ability or identity is preset within the spell *and* there's some other situational hassle. Maybe you can get an incredible boost to your Medical Doctor identity, but only in perfect darkness. Remember, all difficulty and penalty is gone, so it's still doable even without nurses or vision. Maybe your Notice ability goes hypertrophic, but only when you're trying to find out embarrassing things. Cost:  $\Omega + 1$ .

**Significant Stress Check:** You can either go wide or deep with this one. If you go wide, you inflict a rank 3-4 stress check — meter decided in advance or at random — on a number of people equal to your ones place die. If you go deep, one target undergoes a stress check with a rank equal to the total of the dice you rolled. If you cast this with a 43, it's a rank 7 check ( $4 + 3 = 7$ ). The maximum is 10. Cost:  $\Omega$ .

**Synchronic Pull:** Similar to the minor charge trick of acquiring objects, a Synchronic Pull lets an adept reel in a *situation*. It's far from unlimited, but it's slippery and damn versatile. It does not, however, obviate the need to actually accomplish things. Say, for example, that you want to rob Fort Knox. You could pull your way to a chance encounter with a member of the United States Mint Police who's somewhat amenable to helping heist it... but it won't convince him to join up. It won't carry out the plan, or open the vault, or move one troy ounce one angry inch. It's good for useful coincidences, but only ones that are plausible. "A door gets left open" is plausible, or "someone drops their phone" or "one guard has an undiagnosed condition that will have sudden-onset debilitating symptoms." "Every guard gets debilitated at once" or "all the doors are left open" or "I happen to guess a 16 digit passcode on the first try" are beyond the reach of this level of coincidence. Cost:  $\Omega + 2$ .

## MAJOR CHARGES

You'll note there's no list of set effects for major charges. That's because they're the stuff that dreams are made of. They can't quite complete an objective (collective reality hates being bullied by lone cosmology hackers phoning it in from their private Qliphoths) but just about anything else with a percentage rating can be tweaked, hard, by an adept with that goal in her sights and a major charge in the chamber. Want to add an identity at the result of the casting roll? Sure, I guess so. Zero out an inconvenient relationship — your own, someone else's? Go nuts. Invoke major unnatural phenomena with scalpel-like precision? Sure. Edit an inconvenient decision out of reality? Yeah, though there may be inconsistencies and causal scar tissue. Raise the dead? Honey, you wouldn't be the first.

Major charge use is still constrained by the thematics of a magick school, but within those parameters they're the real epic deal, and at that level of reality-deformation, themes tend to get broad. The GM can still veto stuff that sends all her plans into a cocked hat, but you might be surprised what you can get away with. Major charges are risky and hard, so the payoff is generous. For just a moment, deploying such might, you have the kind of authority over the setting and the course of events that most games reserve for the game master.

Handle with care.

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1: GO

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Rudy prices out the seven significant spells of Refumancy.

Mark of the Oppressor is a curse. Rudy wants to be able to put it on the smug agents of the Gierkultur and make their lives hell for a while. Specifically, he wants to target people and make everyone else kinda hate them.

His GM asks how he can know if someone is an oppressor. Scratching his head, Rudy suggests that the spell can only be cast on someone who is, at that moment, carrying more cash than the adept. She nods. Then she wants to know what "kinda hate them" means, and he shrugs. Her counter-proposal is that anyone who helps the marked target has to take a stress check, like facing a minor compulsion. That works for Rudy.

Unfortunately for Rudy and his GM, there's no "make people take stress checks for helping someone" on the list, so they look for the closest fits. Minor Compulsion is kind of close, but it's not just a one-time thing, and it's not asking them to do something but to avoid something. That makes it closer to Forbiddance, but it's ongoing. His GM proposes that for 1 significant charge, the spell makes the next person asked for help take a Self (4) check or else refuse. Rudy counter-proposes that for 2 charges, everyone the target asks has to refuse or roll, for minutes equal to the roll. She thinks that sounds just fine.

Reduce destroys an object that was mass produced. Clearly that's just Alter Significant Tangible Object and ought to cost  $\Omega + 1$ . Since everything has to cost the minimum of one charge, that's the price.

Resist lets him hulk out his Struggle ability when he's imprisoned or fighting with legitimate authorities. Again, not complicated. This is Significant Roll Improvement and its  $\Omega + 1$  cost defaults to 1. He can jack up a number of rolls equal to the tens place of his roll, and gain +10% for each point in the ones place of his rolls, while avoiding all difficulty and penalties, but only when The Man is getting him down. If he rolls a 42, that's a +20% boost to his next four Struggle rolls directed at cops or security guards.

Reuse lets a refumancer build some kind of unlikely machine out of trash. It has to be the right kind of trash – put him in a scrapyard or cut-price junk store and he can probably construct just about anything. If the only available trash is a compost heap, then no. But hey, trash is everywhere, right? That's kinda Rudy's point.

He wants to be able to build a machine that can do anything a modern, scientific, mass produced device of the same size could do, and the GM is fine with that, as long as his weird gadget looks obviously bodged-together and clunky and he only has one such device at a time. He sulks a little at that last one, but gives in when she says that would count for the heavy-duty concession that lets it stay around for a while. Making an iPhone out of broken toasters and dusty TRS-80s and dead Tamagotchi's costs 1 significant charge.

Revolutionize is a jumped-up version of Reuse. It, again, lets him make an object out of glued-together junk, but in this case, his machine does something impossible for standard consumer technology. So he could make a gizmo that breaks military-grade encryption out of four old clocks, or a mill that turns corn syrup into type O- blood, or he could weave a no-shit invisibility cloak out of used-up plastic trash bags. Again, he wants this thing to be able to last, and he's willing to accept having only one at a time. His GM says that he can build a gadget that does anything an  $\Omega 0$  school would do for 1 significant charge, and it has to be impossible – meaning, no machines that harm people, since there's already a shit-ton of free-enterprise consumables that do that. Cures for the incurable are OK, but not for anything that can be treated conventionally. Moreover, this spell's going to cost 3 significant charges, because she just can't see letting him have anything this ongoing and versatile for less. He has to pay every time he builds a new gadget, and as soon as he does so, the old device conks out. Rudy agrees.

Siphon drains life from its target (i.e., deals wounds) and bestows it onto the caster (recovering wounds, or temporarily increasing the caster's wound threshold). In this, it's a combination of Fix More Damage and a Significant Blast. Either of those effects individually would cost a significant charge at least, and doing both concurrently with one roll is clearly superior to doing each consecutively with two rolls. So Rudy's GM declares that the spell costs 3 significant charges. She almost adds another, since Refumancy as described isn't really about hurting others or healing oneself, but she decides that the strong parasitic vibe of the school makes this legal at 3 charges.

Sovereignty makes it less of a hassle to move around without identification. Rudy and his GM decide to do this as a Forbiddance. When he casts the spell, circumstances intervene to keep people from pestering him about his lack of driver's license and Social Security card and passport. Cops who want to see his papers are going to have something distract them, or get a more urgent call. ("Wait, you mean my spell caused a nine-car pileup to keep me from getting carded?!?" "Who can say what caused what, Rudy?") Cops who are paying attention for some other reason ("Put down the Molotov!") are not affected.

1: GO

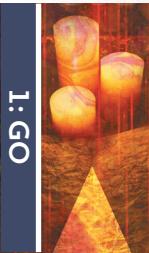
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



# AGRIMANCY

## AKA LANDBREAKERS, TAMERS, SODBUSTERS

In the beginning, we were alone at nature's mercy, naked and afraid, ignorant animals. But we did something the flying birds and racing horses and screaming tigers could not. We gave names.

We said to the wolf, "Your name is dog. You serve me now and I do not fear you."

We said to the lightning, "Your name is fire. You serve me now and I do not fear you."

Floods struck us and we named it irrigation. Our food spoiled and we named it fermenting. One by one, challenge by challenge, we took nature's chaos and bent it to the service of the human order. This is the oldest, deepest, most profound magick. What we call science is a collection of triumphs so old and chewed-over that their novelty is gone.

We seize from nature and make it feed us, clothe us, protect us.

We say to the world, "Your name is farm. You serve me now and I do not fear you."

### STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** To generate a minor charge, the agrimancer takes back the life she has given. By personally slaughtering a small animal she raised from pup/egg/infancy, she recalls to herself the effort she put in — with a dividend. It's OK to eat the animal afterwards.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Significant charges require a more significant animal sacrifice. Killing a steer raised from a calf, or a sow she's owned since it was a piglet, releases a greater store of occult energy.

Alternately, instead of taking power from nature and bending it to human will, she can change the course of human energies directly. The fertility ritual takes about fifteen minutes and a sharp knife, and culminates in human sacrifice. Some landbreakers insist that this is a corruption of the art, either because they're squeamish about murder or, more commonly, because it's a cheapjack shortcut around wrestling with Mother Nature.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Fully domesticate a species previously unknown to science. Feed a million people at once with the output of a single farm. Control a farm of a hundred square miles or more for a single year, or a ranch of over a thousand square miles. Note that once an area has had a major charge harvested off it, it can't produce another for ten years. To get another major before that, move to an entirely new plantation that has no overlap with the old one. Commit prolicide on your adult child.

**Taboo:** When nature gets the better of the sodbuster, their mojo fails. Being discomfited by weather or treading in manure aren't sufficient to drain the agrimancer's charges, but being bitten by any wild animal does it. So does weather that's bad enough to force some sort of roll. Driving through rain or snow breaks taboo, even if the roll to keep the car on the road or your horse under control succeeds. Finally, crossing wild water — an ocean, sea, or great lake — breaks taboo. That includes flying over them. Most ponds, small lakes, and rivers aren't powerful enough to steal charges,

but the mightiest rivers of each continent can drain a landbreaker if she crosses it by boat. Those rivers are the Amazon, the Mississippi, the Volga, the Nile, the Yangtze, and the Murray-Darling. Oh, and technically the Onyx, if your farm-wizard ever makes it to Antarctica.

**Random Magick Domain:** Agrimancers have a fairly narrow field of random magick. They are mostly concerned with taking what is chaotic in the natural world and bending it to a human order through renaming and organization. They have little power over other people's minds, and civilized devices are already tamed and therefore resistant to their influence. But anything that grows, and isn't already serving someone's commercial or agricultural interests, could be subject to meddling by a landbreaker.

### AGRIMANCY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

#### BARN RAISING

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Any time the landbreaker is taking part in a cooperative endeavor, whether that's raising a barn, pushing a tractor out of a ditch, or holding Vito so her husband can hit him, she gets a +20% bonus to the relevant roll.

#### BREAKING THE PREDATOR'S FANG

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** Cast this spell on someone and the next deliberate, physical attack on them fails. It can be a gunshot, snakebite, or kick in the shins — the assault is foiled. Unlike many cast spell/avoid damage effects, this one lingers. You can cast it on your kid's tenth birthday and, in the unlikely event that no one takes a poke at him for a decade, it's still there to save him when a robber swings a crowbar at him when he's twenty. Or it may just make Uncle Ned's knee go out when he tries to give the lad a birthday spanking.

Only one such shield can protect anyone at one time. Multiple castings burn charges but have no additional effect.

#### CONSULT THE STARS

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Seeing the future in the stars, the wind, the patterns of flying birds, and the entrails of animals are really all just one knack, and landbreakers have it. They can get inklings about fate from the shape of clouds or the way the leaves grew on a strand of kudzu. Or, yeah, by looking at the night sky. Whatever natural phenomenon they consult provides a hunch. This spell won't work with artificial patterns. Roll the dice and keep the result for your next roll of any sort.

1: GO

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3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



I: GO



## 2: CHARACTER



3: CONFLICT



4: WEIRDNESS



5: AVATARS



6: ADEPTS



## FERTILITY

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** A person, animal, or acre of land becomes more fertile. People who have had vasectomies or hysterectomies can and have conceived when whammied by this spell. Barren desert can bloom, if sowed and watered. But it's only good for one harvest/litter/child.

This spell is typically cast by making a soup or vegetable purée and feeding it to the target, or sprinkling it over the land to be enchanted. In North America, it's most commonly made with pumpkin.

## ORACULAR FEAST

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** By killing, roasting, and eating an animal, the adept gains access to its sense memories. She can recall everything that creature saw, smelled, or otherwise sensed in the last few days of its life. If it heard someone speaking, the conversation is comprehensible as long as the caster knows the language. If she doesn't know the language, she can still write it down phonetically.

Yes, it works on people, but it is gross. Deliberate cannibalism is a Self (7-8) check. The caster only has to eat about a half-pound of flesh, or less for tiny animals.

# RAISE FROM STONES

Cost: 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** This spell can only be cast over open dirt, and it has to be a space at least five paces on a side. If successful, a number of grey, blobby entities crawl up out of the soil and report for duty. Their numbers equal the total of the casting roll, so if you roll 56, you get eleven miniature servitors. They stick around for a number of minutes equal to the roll, so in that example, you'd have them for almost an hour.

They can see and hear, but they have no voices and can't write. They lack all aggression, though if you immobilized someone first they could probably hold him down while you let go. They're about a foot tall and twenty pounds each and the consistency of rocky dirt. A single kick, gunshot, or smack with a hockey stick is sufficient to dispel one, but until they're broken or run out of time, they obey the cast-er's commands to the best of their ability. They're surprisingly strong — each can carry double their own weight, and each has an effective Fitness ability of 30%. They cooperate well. Three of them can combine to produce Fitness rolls as if they had an ability rated at 90%, but it tops off there. They can't swim or float, but they can carry, lift, break things down, and scare the bejabbers out of people. Seeing these squat, silent dirt-things waddling at you is an Unnatural (3) stress check.



## WHAT THE DIRT SAW

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** This works much like Oracular Feast, only instead of eating an animal, you eat dirt. About a handful is sufficient. Finicky landbreakers have been known to boil it into a stew, but most just eat it straight because they're so damn hardcore. If you eat it and the spell works, you become aware of everything that happened near that dirt over the last couple days. It's not any kind of shamanic trance: you just recall scents and sounds and sights as if you'd been standing there for forty-eight hours. It has to be *dirt* though. Pavement, concrete, or other artificial substances can't work the magick. Just as well, probably. Tyvek does terrible things to your tract, I reckon.

## AGRIMANCY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### ACT OF GOD

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** The weather is the most recalcitrant of the agrimancer's servants, but in time its anger can be provoked and directed. With this spell, the agrimancer indicates an area and calls lightning to strike it.

The hitch is, the lightning strike occurs 168 hours, to the second, after the casting roll. That's one full seven-day week. Which is not so wonderful when you're mad right now, but you know what they say: "Revenge is a dish best served with deniable electrocution, however you can manage that."

The bolt is enough to blow up a car or flame out one room in a building. Depending on circumstances and how dry the atmosphere is, it might start a fire. If people are present at the strike, it targets a number of them equal to the ones place die of the roll: roll a 17, hit seven people. If there aren't that many there, it only hits *everyone*, worse luck. If there are more, it hits its victims at random. The bolt does significant blast damage, so those seven folks standing around would take 17 wounds worth of searing.

### BOUNTY'S REJECTION

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This curse lasts a number of days equal to the tens place die. During that time, everything the target eats tastes rancid and repulsive, unless he hunted it or gathered it from the wild.

Eating something so vilely flavored requires a Fitness roll to keep down.

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## CROP LABYRINTH

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** This spell affects a square acre of cultivated crops. They have to be something deliberately grown and well-tended: a lawn like a fairway would work, but a lawn that's mown every couple weeks and infested with dandelions? Probably not.

Once the spell is cast, anyone inside it and anyone who enters it becomes confused. Even if the crops are low to the ground and there's a clear line of sight in every direction, space seems to warp and fold and refuse to let people out. Attempting to leave the field requires three successful Knowledge rolls, and even then you don't get out on the side you wanted unless one of those rolls was a crit or a matched success. Each Knowledge roll to get through, successful or failed, represents ten minutes of head-scratching befuddlement.

The spell creates this confounding effect for a number of minutes equal to the casting roll. At the end of that time, about 70% of the plants in the field wither up and die.

The caster is exempt from the confusion, as is any blood relative and anyone else he designates.

## DOMESTICATE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** The spell ensorcells an animal — wild or tame, but not humans — and makes it obedient to the caster. For a number of minutes equal to the roll, it follows the commands the caster gives, up to and including painful and self-destructive acts. It doesn't become any smarter, so it can't do things like solve Sudoku puzzles or operate a stick shift, but anything a well-trained collie could do is on the menu.

## TOIL

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Casting this spell replicates the effects of eight hours of peaceful, uninterrupted sleep.

## VITAL BEAST

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** Having an animal as a pet or watchdog or beast of burden is great, but having a great beast is, clearly, greater. With this spell, the tamer improves the body of one of his creatures. It increases the creature's wound threshold by five, permanently. It also gains five points on a physical identity it already had, something like Chase or Struggle or Sic 'Em, Brutus! There is no upward limit on the improvement presented by repeat castings of Vital Beast. Each casting lets it gain 5% of its body weight in muscle and bone. Doesn't work on people though.

## WHOLESOME

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, the agrimancer bakes something. For some reason, in the US it's typically date nut bread. Anyone who eats the whole thing avoids the effects of one year of aging. It can't be shared. It doesn't undo damage or prevent the harm of events that happen in a year. If you get in a car crash and lose a leg, this doesn't prevent that. But liver spots, gray hair, metabolic slowdown, persistent lower back pain, brain senescence? All that stuff gets a time-out.

Wholesome only works once per year per target, but if you get in good with an agrimancer, you can theoretically stay physically at your present age indefinitely. Don't think agrimancers underestimate the value of this, either.

On the other hand, this is generally not something they advertise widely. It isn't a miraculous effect where you shed weight and wrinkles and your bald spot grows back. It preserves you as you are, it doesn't restore you to the way you were.

Other than "only works once per year for one year," there is one other restriction on Wholesome. It only works on people who are physically mature. Any time after age 13 if you're precocious, to 17 for a late bloomer, you can start stopping the clock.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Transform into a partially vegetable fertility goddess, immune to aging but visibly inhuman and permanently disconnected from mortal concerns. Blast all the arable land in a fifty mile radius, making it barren and wretched. Globally cure bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*She came  
down from  
the sky*

*and*

*completely  
ignored me.*

# CAMERATURGY

## AKA LENSERS, IMAGINERS, PAPARAZZI

It used to be that producing an image was the domain of a privileged few, those who had access to pigment to put on a cave wall, had the time to do so and, most importantly, had the inner eye that takes the transitory and unique *image that I see* and transforms it to a permanent and universal *image that I display*. As humankind became more sophisticated, and our paintings gained fidelity, the technical demands on their makers became more stringent.

The camera changed all that.

With a box you could hold in your hand, you could cage light, freeze time, show the world something that existed only for a moment in the reflection of your eye. The chemicals that fix the photo to paper are alchemical, and the darkroom an underworld from which the hero returns, triumphant, with wisdom to show the tribe.

There is the world you know and directly experience but there is, too, a much vaster world you've seen only through pictures. Pictures span space to show you the pyramids, the war, and the mountains of Tibet. They transcend time and offer resections of it, a sailor embracing a nurse at war's end, the face of a princess, people long dead but immortal in photos, Edgar Allan Poe and Marie Curie and Aleister Crowley.

These images fix the transient, take what is momentary and make it infinitely repeatable, and they *steal souls*. For while the image can unveil the nature of what it depicts, or preserve it forever, it can also eclipse it. It's possible that nurse was actually a dental hygienist and she didn't want that sailor to kiss her, but history doesn't care. The image is in the gallery of the world's mind, and that matters so much more than mere fact.

Cameraturges are those who recognize how important it can be to take a picture of something that doesn't look like what it looks like.

## STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Every hour spent setting up and taking photographs yields a minor charge, as soon as an image so created is safely stocked away in the lenser's gallery. The gallery is part of the taboo.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Cameraturges get one significant charge by taking a picture of a unique moment of emotional intensity, which is why some of them are wedding photographers and some of them are creeps who hang around emergency rooms snapping furtive shots of weepy kids.

You only get one charge per episode: a wedding is worth one charge, maybe two if you also happen to catch a bridesmaid and groomsman lustfully hooking up. One car accident or disaster, similarly, is only good for one charge. Have you considered becoming a war photographer?

**Generate a Major Charge:** Take a defining photo of a critical moment in history — the last chopper out of Saigon, Earth seen from the moon, or Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*.

**Taboo:** There are three things that can drain a cameraturge of all charges. The first is using a digital camera. To a lenser, if it's not on film and developed chemically, it ain't real.

Secondly, going twenty-four hours without taking a film image of some sort breaks taboo, and usually leaves the adept extremely anxious and unhappy.

Finally, if someone burgles his gallery, the imaginer loses charges immediately. A gallery, in this instance, is where he keeps his images. It could be a handsome room full of framed beauty on the walls, or it could be a storage locker with thousands of tacked-up Polaroid creepshots. What matters is, this is where the images *belong*, and when they're removed, the whole thing goes out of whack. He can gain new charges after that, but recovering a stolen picture won't return what was lost. It's OK for the cameraturge to take pictures out of the gallery, but *leaving* them anywhere but there is trouble. Developing them is permitted if there's no way to do that on-site.

Note that inviting someone in doesn't break the taboo, nor does the power fail if someone enters and leaves respectfully without disturbing anything. But as soon as an intruder steals a picture or damages one, or even moves one, the charges disappear... and the lenser knows it.

This does not forbid the lenser from making copies. He could sell them or publish them or donate them to a museum. But the first print and the negatives must, *must* be safe in the gallery.

**Random Magick Domain:** Images, reflections, sight, the preservation of things in time and the disconnect between things as they are and as they're depicted.

1: GO

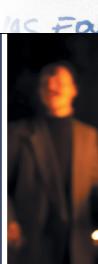
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



## CAMERATURGY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

### AURA SNAPSHOT

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, the lenser has to take a picture of its target. When the photo is developed, which could take only minutes if the adept is using a Polaroid, or with an application of the spell Jiffy Print, the target's aura is visible on it to anyone who looks at the picture. It may look like weird lens flares or developing errors to the uninitiated, however. It can reveal mood, whether someone's an adept or an avatar, though not necessarily what type, and whether they're under occult influence. If so, it could offer a vague idea of what that spell's nature might be.

### FROZEN MOMENTS

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, the lenser takes a picture of someone who's in distress — physical, emotional, or whatever. With that image in hand, she can force that person to revisit the sorrow or pain depicted. This usually provokes a rank 3-4 stress check on some meter — Violence for an injury, Helplessness or Isolation for emotional pain, Self if they were photographed doing something shameful.

This spell can only target the person suffering in the picture, so it's of limited use unless you're in the habit of *making* people unhappy and then documenting it on film. However, if you take a picture of someone suffering in order to get a significant charge, you can later use that picture to direct Frozen Moments. This can go to a very dark place very fast.

### JIFFY PRINT

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** The nice thing about digital photos is the instant gratification, though don't try to tell a lenser that unless you want a lecture about how inferior and flat and soulless and tamper-prone digital images are. Seriously, the only thing that bugs them more is when you call them paparazzi. Normally, a film photo takes some time and effort and expertise to develop but, if you want it *now now now* you can replace those laudable qualities with a dab of magick.

If you wrap your camera in a piece of unexposed photo paper and then cast this spell, one image of your choosing from the film roll in that camera appears on the paper. If you want to then use that picture to get a charge or cast a spell, that's fine. Note that any exposure of the photo paper to light (other than darkroom safelights) before the spell is cast will darken it, rendering it useless.

### PHOTO ID

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** This spell allows the cameraturge to automatically succeed at forging credentials as long as there's a photo involved and the adept has actually handled or examined the documentation in question. It doesn't create the infrastructure of information that follows a driver's license through cyberspace, and it won't put a magnetic code on a keycard, but this can create a passport or company ID that no amount of eyeball scrutiny identifies as fraudulent.

### THE EX TREATMENT

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** This is the cameraturge minor blast, playing off all those creepy correspondence ideas that to violate a vodou doll or image or, yup, photo is a great way to harm someone.

You can only cast this on someone if you have a picture of them. Part of casting it involves burning or cutting out the photo image's eyes. It still only works at short range, so it's not really spontaneous, but if you know who you want to hurt, this is a silent and deniable way to do some damage from eyeball range.

The injury takes the form of hemorrhaging, usually in the nose and throat but occasionally it hits the lungs, anus, or ocular cavity.

There's an important drawback to this spell, however: after you deface the photo to cast the spell, you have to keep it. You can carry it around or put it in your gallery, but if you lose it or destroy it or it gets stolen, that's a taboo violation and you lose any held charges. Which might be a price you're willing to pay to avoid explaining why you have a picture of someone with their eyes poked out in your wallet.

### TIMING ERROR

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Instead of being cast on or through a finished picture, this spell creates one. By developing an unexposed piece of photo paper and spending the charge, an image appears that offers some form of guidance, advice, or forewarning about a coming event.

In story terms, you cast this on a blank sheet and develop it, and the picture that appears helps you... somehow. Mechanically, this help takes the form of a flip-flop on the next roll you make. Usually, that's a good time for the GM or adept's player to describe what the image reveals.

### X-RAY FILM

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** If you really want to know what's happening on the other side of an opaque wall, cast this spell on your camera and take a picture. When you develop it, it's like the obstruction isn't there.

1: GO

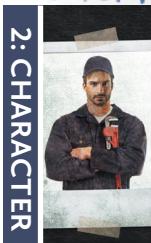
2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*She sat  
for the  
photograph,  
a sheet  
over her  
head, but  
it was  
she who  
saw me.*

## CAMERATURGY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### AURA PORTRAIT

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This works much like Aura Snapshot, in that you take a picture of someone and, once it's developed, it shows what their aura looks like. But this beefed-up version has two major differences. The first is, only *you* can see the aura on the photo, so the information is private. The second is, it constantly updates in real time. Once you have an Aura Portrait of someone you can know their mood and condition 24/7. But once you've made an Aura Portrait, you need to keep it in your possession or in your gallery. Losing it's a taboo violation.

### EMPATHY

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** Despite the generally positive connotations of its name, this spell's a nasty piece of work. Casting it requires you to have a picture of someone who's genuinely suffering. Using someone else's picture of a gunshot victim or grieving widow won't work — it must be one of *your* photos. When you cast the spell, show the picture to your target. The target briefly experiences the trauma depicted. Unlike Frozen Moments, you can use this on anybody, not just the person in the picture. The target of a successful Empathy spell endures a stress check equal to the digit shown in the ones place of the roll: if you succeed with a 45, it's a rank 5 check. The GM decides which meter is targeted, depending on the nature of the photo used. With a sufficient library of images, you could target any meter.

Empathy also inflicts a Self (3) check if its normal check hits a meter with too many hardened notches to penetrate.

### THE GREAT DIVORCE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This is the significant version of the Ex Treatment, and its name refers to the way you get rid of pictures of your ex-spouse, not anything to do with C.S. Lewis, probably.

As with the Ex Treatment, you need to take and develop a picture of your target before casting, and then deface it during the casting. In this case, however, it's OK to rip the picture in half or burn it up completely. You don't have to keep the damaged image in your gallery. It still only works from eyesight range.

The damage done resembles the mode of defacement. If you burn up the picture, the target looks like they got burned. Tear it in half, they look like they were hit with a chainsaw or a machete. Scribble on it with a black Sharpie and they get covered in bruises and contusions.

### PHOTO OMEN

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Like many Cameraturgy spells, this one requires you to take a picture of someone and then show it to him. But while the photo looks like the portrait you shot to you, and to everyone else, when the person depicted looks at it that first time, he instead sees a glimpse of his future. This is considered a *Significant Inform* effect with all the loosey-goosey GM judgment that implies.

### SOUL THEFT

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** You know how primitive tribes supposedly believed that photographs could steal your soul? Turns out they weren't so primitive.

To cast this spell, take a person's picture. Once it's developed, the person takes a penalty to all magickal rolls, including avatar identities and adept schools, equal to the casting roll. Roll a 42 and the target's rolls are at -42%.

Every day, the target rolls a d10. The penalty is diminished by an amount equal to the roll. You can't use Soul Theft on him again while he's still diminished for a couple reasons. First off, because you *can't*, but secondly because people under a Soul Theft curse don't show up in pictures properly. *Digital* ones are unaffected, of course, because they're mechanistic and mundane and, basically, the dry sex of photography.

The picture you take to steal the soul begins to fade as his soul leaches back to him. By the time his penalty is zero, the picture is totally blank, and at that point it's all right to throw it away. If it leaves you or your gallery before that, though — taboo violation. You can eliminate the penalty points by destroying the photo, as can anyone else. If someone else does it, that breaks your taboo. Even if you let them do it, or asked them to. You can, however, release the curse without losing charges.

### SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** This one's a little offbeat because, instead of enchanting a picture, it ensorcells the camera itself. Pay the charges, roll the success and the film-not-digital camera you cast it on permanently changes in two very useful ways.

First off, you can see ghosts and other immaterial entities through the viewfinder. Note that *you* is specifically "you, the caster of this particular spell" not a generic "you" that could encompass the caster, her housemaid, Michele Bachmann, or anyone else. The *caster* and other cameraturges can see the uncanny through the viewfinder, not anyone else.

Secondly, if you take a picture with a ghost or other miscellaneous non-corporeal bogeyman in it, that entity is visible on the picture when you develop it. Anyone can see *those*, and this means literally anyone. Moreover, those pictures, while

See  
"Significant  
Effects" on  
page 135.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





I AM TOLD NO VIRGIN GIRLS ARE COLLECTED FROM THEM SINCE THEY PROCESSED IN THE  
FACTORY AND ALL THE GIRLS ARE KILLED.

they're yours, aren't under the purview of taboo. You can give away your spirit photos, or lose them, without bleeding out charges. It's OK to sell them, send them threateningly through the mail, or destroy them. They don't have to be squirreled away in your gallery.

## TIMELESS IMAGE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Take a picture of a person, object, or location, then cast the spell. Develop the photo and keep it in your gallery or on your person. Doing otherwise breaks taboo. The picture looks like the thing.

That is, it looks the way the thing looks at the moment of regard, not the moment of capture. Suppose you take a picture of Stacy's house on a nice sunny day and that house is the *subject* of the photo — not just a backdrop. It's one subject per image. Later on you develop it at night and look at it. You see Stacy's house at night, though it remains a still image. A month later, you look over and see that it's a photo of a house on fire. Better call the fire department and see if Stacy's OK.

Alternately, if you took a picture of Stacy herself, you'd see what clothes she's wearing today, you'd know if she got a haircut, or if she finally went for that facial tattoo.

It looks this way to every onlooker, not just the cameraturge.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Retain your youthful looks while a photo of you ages in your stead. Permanently trap an otherwise unstoppable entity in an image. Take a photo so beautiful that looking away from it is a rank 10 challenge on the target's meter with the most failed notches.



# CINEMANCY

## AKA AUTEURS, CLICHÉS, TROPS

You know movies are life. People watch movies over and over until they accept the clichés, hack writing, and unrealistic ideas as real. Then it's your turn to direct.

From the chanbara of Japan to the dance spectacles of Bollywood, cinema has become a global, pan-humanity thing. You may think anything starring Adam Sandler is horrible, but chances are you've seen at least one of his films. So have people in NYC, London, Tokyo, Moscow, Riyadh, São Paulo... You can't get away from this crap.

Because many writers are lazy, and because many movie-goers seem to prefer it that way, many movies have the same conventions, clichés, and tropes. When one character in a horror film won't leave with the rest, someone says, "Fine, then you can wait here by yourself" and walks away. What happens next? Exactly, that character gets spooked and runs to catch up with the group. (And usually gets murdered.) These tropes have been driven into the collective mind of humanity, like ruts driven into the ground by the same damn car riding on the grass.

Everyone knows you can cure amnesia with a blow to the head, right? Except you can't. That only causes more brain damage. But it's been used as a cheap writing technique in so many movies that it's become part of our collective knowledge. More importantly, people believe in that amnesia cure. If only a few people believed that, no biggie. But so much of humanity has seen that cliché so many times, the illusion is more real than the truth.

That's where cinemancers come in. Not only do they see those ruts in the ground, they can get other people to agree that it was caused by a 1998 Nissan Sentra that wouldn't start when a monster was creeping up on it. Cinemancy uses magick to make clichés real. After all, everyone knows about them already. Magick just gives the tropes a push needed to manifest in our world.

The central paradox in Cinemancy is that movies are fake but more accepted than reality. When you think of a newborn, chances are you picture a pink, impossibly large baby of several weeks old rather than the tiny, jaundiced wad that newborns really are.

Cinemancers are often called clichés or tropers. They like to call themselves auteurs, but other people only use that term when they've been properly scared.

## STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Much of a cinemancer's power comes from humanity remembering these clichés. Thus, when they get someone to remember and describe an overused cinematic cliché, the troper gets a minor charge. Thinking about it isn't enough; it must be described either verbally or in writing. Neither the cliché nor the person can be reused until a week has passed. Quoting a memorable line is typical, though it has to be verbatim, acted out, and can't just be repeating what the auteur says. So if a cinemancer tricks you into a Darth Vader "NOOOOoooo!" it only works with your hands out, back arched, and head back.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Scenes and plots are not the only clichés used in Hollywood. Many times, entire characters are walking clichés, their role in the film easily recognizable the moment they come on screen. A cinemancer can build a significant charge by acting as one of these stock characters for five straight hours. This doesn't have to be a specific character from a movie, just the type of character. The cinemancer doesn't have to play Jamie Lee Curtis in *Trading Places*, just a Hooker with a Heart of Gold. Examples of these cliché characters include the Hardboiled Detective, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, the Dumb Jock, the Magical Negro, and many more. The mask cannot drop or the cinemancer must start from scratch.

**Generate a Major Charge:** None of these tropes and clichés ever happen in real life. Yet if the cinemancer can get people to act out one of these without knowing it's a cliché, she can get a major charge. This must be planned by the cinemancer — she cannot stumble upon this happening and get the magick — and those involved cannot be in on it. But the cinemancer can spend as much time and effort as possible to encourage people to act it out.

**Taboo:** Because cinemancers are dependent on these tropes manifesting in real life, they cannot see the beginnings of a cliché and not fill whatever role necessary to ensure the cliché finishes. If a cinemancer is driving in a chase and sees a fruit cart, she must ram it. Otherwise, she loses all power. They tend to be polite but reserved in order to avoid the entanglements of the dreaded meet cute, as the behavior of a character in a romcom is usually legally actionable.

**Random Magick Domain:** Cinemancy is focused on movie banalities. It's powerful magic for creating illusions, especially those based on popular movie tropes. But Hollywood is far from real, so its Cinemancy is weak for creating anything permanent or concrete.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## CINEMANCY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

### THE BANANA PEEL GAG

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Take a banana. Eat the banana. Toss the peel on the ground, spend your charge, and name someone that you know is walking or running behind you. That person steps on the peel and falls down. Hilarity ensues. Note that while this does no damage, because no one gets *really* hurt by a pratfall, the target can't get up and do anything to you until that person takes wounds, breaking the ha-ha tone, or succeeds at a Fitness roll. If they fail three Fitness rolls in a row, they can get up automatically, because comedy's rule of threes prevents the gag from going on too long.

### STOCK WARDROBE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Hollywood often gets the outfits of police, military, doctors, and similar professionals at least partially wrong. Not all doctors wear blue scrubs, and soldiers don't usually wear fingerless gloves and mismatched camouflage. Yet no one in the movie seems to notice, so why should anyone else? If the cinemancer dresses in the traditional outfit of a professional — police, soldier, doctor, and so on — no matter how laughable the disguise, she's viewed by others at that professional's job as legitimate. A cinemancer could dress up in a police costume with a plastic badge and the wrong patches, but still get accepted down at the precinct house. ("Her? New gal, I think. I'm sure she's fine.") Note that accepted is not the same as blanket privileges. But as long as she doesn't give people a reason to suspect her, she can wander freely as normal for the role.

One requirement is that the cinemancer only speak in jargon and clichéd dialogue related to that profession. ("Move along, now. Yes, I have a warrant. You have the right to remain silent...") This lasts for thirty minutes and can be extended in thirty-minute increments, up to three hours, by spending more charges.

Also note that it only works on people in the mimicked profession. The civilians are going to notice that *one* of those alleged soldiers is fifty pounds overweight and carrying an airsoft gun instead of a real rifle.

### DOES THIS SMELL LIKE CHLOROFORM?

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** In reality, chloroform won't knock someone out in seconds. The chemical starts to degrade as soon as it hits air, it can take several minutes to kick in, and even then, it has a nasty tendency to cause heart attacks. But that's not how it works in the movies, so that's not how it works for a cinemancer. With this spell, you don't even need the actual drug. You just need a white cloth and to come up behind unawares. Then you

can cover the victim's mouth with the handkerchief, cast the spell, and the poor sucker drops into a deep sleep for about five minutes. Anything that would wake someone from normal sleep breaks the spell.

### I'M THE GUY WITH THE GUN

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** Try not to count the bullets fired by that action hero — it ruins the whole film. The heroes and the bad guys shoot over and over again with a seemingly endless supply of bullets preloaded into their gun. It's like reloading only happens if you remember about it. With this spell, that's exactly what happens. A cinemancer who casts this spell before combat, up to one hour previous, can continue to fire bullets long after he would normally have emptied the clip. However, the key is "continue." Once the cinemancer fires, she has to keep pulling the trigger or the spell ends, and so do the magickal reloads. She can't fire, then take an action to dive behind cover, then fire again with an unending stream of bullets.

### WHAT COULD GO WRONG

**Cost:** 1–7 minor charges.

**Effect:** What happens when a character in a movie says, "We'll be fine!" or "What could go wrong?" Right, they get attacked, hit, arrested, lost, or beat down.

Anytime someone else predicts something like, "X won't happen" and this spell is cast, whatever "X" stands for happens. How much it costs depends on that variable. The bigger the event, the more it costs. Here's a guideline:

- 1 charge: "We're not going to run out of gas."
- 2 charges: "Like I'm going to run into my ex-wife at this strip club." Note that this spell can't be used to violate anyone's free will. That is, if the ex-wife wouldn't willingly go to such a place, or there's no one about who's going to drag her there, the spell can't be used for that.
- 3 charges: "It's not like I'm going to get arrested."
- 4 charges: "Calm down, I'm not going to get shot."
- 5 charges: "It's not like a freak snowstorm will trap us in this cabin."

Vague predictions like, "Nothing bad's gonna happen" or "We'll be fine!" cause a serendipitous injury with  $1d10$  wounds per charge, up to five charges. These dice are added together like hand-to-hand damage.

The cinemancer can't cast this in response to something she says herself. If cast in response to someone who knows how the spell works, there's a 2-charge surcharge, because artificial serendipity is a lot harder for magick to tweak than the real thing.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*The flicker of the frame is the moth to the flame.*

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN . OX ST  
IS NOT HO  
- ORIN B  
LIGON W  
OF E  
SEE T  
ON MAR  
ACT W  
T OF NO  
CLOCK  
IOPNSHIE  
GHOST  
T GARD  
ARABIC  
K IN THE  
A BL  
OF THE  
AS A  
SSROAD  
E, TH  
EAD, U  
THAT  
DOES  
IN LO  
S STAR  
IS K  
NSTUFF  
BOX WAS  
CHED  
RET OF  
ETS Y  
TAKED  
OF B  
TRUNK  
RING T  
OOED  
E CREA  
MUSIC  
NG ON  
CATS - F  
ND RU  
PRAYE  
OM TE  
GES GEN  
E THEM  
ING AN  
DE QUE  
OFF YO  
D CHICKEN  
TONES MO  
JE SILVER  
ICE BLACK

This spell only causes coincidences! "She'll never fall in love with me" is not subject to this enchantment. It changes circumstances and objects, not people's feelings or thoughts.

But within those parameters, the only negative that cannot be made real is something incredibly nasty or deadly; no spending five minor charges to kill someone or whip up a hurricane. Any event that lasts a while, like a freak snow-storm, ends after one hour.

### TALKING AND DRIVING

**Cost:** 1 charge per minute (up to 5).

**Effect:** Driving normally needs your attention, but not in the movies. And thanks to this spell, not in your life either. For each charge spent, up to five charges, you can be in the driver's seat of a moving vehicle and do anything other than actually pay attention to the road. The vehicle drives by itself, safely and accurately. You could talk to a passenger, shoot at someone, apply first aid, or build a scale model of Mount Doom, while your car stops at red lights, merges into freeway traffic, and probably drives better than you normally do.

The car *always* drives safely, so if you want to take risks, you have to take the wheel. But if someone's trying to force you off the road, any Pursuit checks to stay on succeed.

Any moving vehicle works — car, truck, boat, space shuttle, etc. If you are heading to a specific destination, the car continues towards that destination. If not, it simply drives in circles around blocks or parking lots. It is a very good idea to take control once your time is up.

## CINEMANCY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### AIN'T GOT TIME TO BLEED

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Whether the hero gets thrown through a window, mauled by a tiger, sliced up with a knife, or even tossed from a moving vehicle, chances are he stands up, brushes off some dirt, and is ready for action. Just as heroes can ignore injuries that would incapacitate normal folk, the cinemancer can use this spell to ignore the effects of any non-lethal injury. The wounds are still taken, but no Violence check is necessary and the wound does not affect any other abilities or activities: you can walk on a broken leg, a cut closes that would normally bleed out, a sucking chest wound doesn't suck, etc. Any lethal injury is still that — no walking around with your decapitated head in your hands.

In order to activate the spell, however, she must say a bad joke or pun related to the injury or scene. If you were thrown from a car, you could say, "Was it something I said?" or, "Glad I know how to roll with it." But don't worry, it just has to be a quip. It doesn't have to be funny.

### STORMTROOPER COMBAT TRAINING

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** If Dr. No's guards and similar movie mooks really knew how to shoot their guns, the good guys would be a pile of bullet-ridden meat. Or arrow-ridden, or laser-ridden. You know what we mean. But that would end the movie early, so writers have the guards fire almost randomly, repeatedly missing the A-list actors pretending that you can actually duck or outrun bullets, arrows, or lasers. Once cast, for as long as you remain in the same room or area you cast it in, any gunshots from people who work as security guards, regular police, low-ranking soldiers, or something similar automatically miss. Even point-blank shots go wide.

The room or area in question has to be no bigger than a football field. Anyone with management status, like a detective or sergeant, is unaffected by the spell. Plus, the common folk targeted must be on the job. That off-duty mall cop can still put a bullet in your head. The effect lasts for up to 13 shots, and can be extended for another 13 by spending another significant charge — but just one extension. The effect also ends once you leave the room or area you cast it in.

### RIGHT TURN, CLYDE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Your next punch hits. No matter what you roll when you take that wild haymaker, your Struggle ability is temporarily increased to match it. Even a *fumble* hits, doing 20 wounds when improved by Clyde power.

You have to cast this spell on one round and attack the next. You can't use a weapon or the spell doesn't function. Also, you can only cast this when you've already been hurt in the fight. Finally, the attack has to be *plausible*. It won't let you hit someone twenty feet away. But if you're outclassed at fisticuffs, this evens the odds.

### I'LL JUST HACK IN

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** Real computer hacking requires time and skill. Even then, it's bloody difficult. Thankfully, movies have trained us to think hackers just need to try *real hard* to break into just about any place. To begin this spell, the cinemancer sits before a computer, names a place to hack into, and starts typing randomly. Within five minutes, the cinemancer has hacked into whatever site, server, or database she wants. Clackity-clack, you're in the Pentagon! This only applies for getting past digital security and doesn't help with finding data, making changes, and so on. Plus, network security on the other side likely knows something wrong is happening.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## HE'S RIGHT BEHIND ME, ISN'T HE?

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** You already know what this spell does just from the title, don't you? See the power of Cinemancy? If the cinemancer wants to find someone, he turns his back on a doorway, road, hall, or similar path and starts talking shit about that person. Not just something disrespectful, but downright mean. The kind of stuff that you'd be thoroughly embarrassed to be caught saying about that person. When the charges are spent and the cinemancer says the magic words ("He's right behind me, isn't he?") the universe quickly and quietly arranges to have that person come up behind the cinemancer. This isn't some kind of teleportation. Events are just changed so the guy you're talking about just happens to have been nearby all along, and walking up behind you was a natural procession of events for his day.

Be careful about the repercussions that a given person might bring. Use this spell to bring the President of the United States of America up behind you, and say hello to all the nice, heavily armed agents from the Secret Service. Busting someone out of jail can also have ugly blowback.

## MUSICAL MONTAGE

**Cost:** 4 significant charges.

**Effect:** In a lot of movies, editors compress time and skip boring parts using a montage, usually with heroic '80s hair-band music in place of any dialogue. We don't need to watch the actual process of turning a run-down shack into the best looking, most luxurious frat house on campus. We just want to see some wacky scenes and cut to the chase.

The cinemancer can tap into that idea to speed up time needed to make something. Before the spell can be cast, you must start a song at least three minutes long, at the very beginning. Then go to work, constructing a homemade tank or raising a barn in the time it takes for the song to play.

You still have to build the thing... kinda. You need the tools and materials, and you have to succeed at some relevant mundane identity like Automotive Repair or Turn Junkyard into Armory or the like. If the normal roll fails, the charges are pretty much wasted. You just failed in a few minutes instead of failing over the course of days or weeks.

It won't work if there's nothing to build; the montage cannot speed up travel or combat.

The music doesn't have to be performed by Kenny Loggins, but it wouldn't hurt.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Bring someone back from the dead, even if there was one hundred percent solid proof they died. Change your life history so that all documents and evidence indicate that it parallels some famous movie character. Gain the skills of a well-known film creation. Become a movie icon.

Bring a character to life, independent and real, complete with documentation. Remove a film star from reality entirely, except for their body of work. Step into a movie and live in the world of its setting, for the rest of your life, happily ever after.

## NO TV SHOWS

If a cinemancer preys on people's knowledge of clichés, can they generate charges or cast spells based on television tropes? Nice idea, but nope. True, there are some crossover clichés (no explosion can hurt you if you turn your back on it while walking slowly away) but here's two reasons why TV shows don't generate the same mojo as movies.

- Movies have global releases. Thanks to Mr. Internet and Mr. Torrent, one country's shows can be downloaded anywhere, but that's a far cry from a worldwide theatrical release. That means movies are much deeper in the collective unconscious of humanity and therefore more readily available for use and abuse.
- Movies are still the gold standard. TV shows have really improved over the years and provide more options for character development and storytelling than the traditional one and a half hours of a movie. But neither of those matters to a cinemancer. He wants clichés, not quality. Besides, people still hold movies as the pinnacle of video work. Who gets more red carpet press, a sitcom star or a movie star?

### 1: GO



### 2: CHARACTER



### 3: CONFLICT



### 4: WEIRDNESS



### 5: AVATARS



### 6: ADEPTS



# FULMINATURGY

## AKA ARMIGERS, GUNSELS, SLOPPY SECONDS

Picture an oblong that you can hold in one hand, or maybe two. It must be fed with carefully prepared reagents, copper and lead and less common minerals, all arranged in an exacting form. When thus prepared, the device needs only to be pointed, and invoked, to call forth light and fierce thunder.

If that doesn't sound like a magic wand, I don't know what does. Or, if you want to imagine a shotgun, perhaps a wizard's staff. I was picturing an ordinary black 9mm pistol. Though, of course, when it's pointing at you, there's really nothing ordinary about a handgun.

This is not a school about violence, however. The thousand-yard stare of the gun mage is fixed, not on some sordid squabble, but on the disconnect between the crystal-clear individual and the amorphous mass of humanity. In the frontier era, one could take a rifle into the wilderness and thrive or perish, separate from civilization. That's less of an option now, but the gun within the city is still the tool that steels the individual to resist coercion when outnumbered... or that forces him to knuckle under... or that culls him when his resistance is insufficient.

Fulminatures are known to each other and their friends as armigers. Those with less kindly inclinations towards the school call them gunsels or sloppy seconds in what is presumably a reference to the Second Amendment to the US Constitution.

Fulminatures often have multiple firearms, sometimes entire arsenals, but there is always one gun that is *theirs* in a uniquely meaningful way. This is referred to as their totem weapon, and it's critical to their charging and taboo structure. A fulminatuge must have the totem weapon to cast any spell, though it doesn't necessarily have to be out and brandished. If you've got the gun in your purse, it can stay there.

### STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Any time they move around in a public place openly carrying their totem firearm, they get a minor charge. They can amass a minor charge every two hours by doing this. For charging purposes, it must be visible. For this, you *can't* be carrying it in your backpack. The fulminatuge's own property is usually considered public as long as it's visible from a road. If some stranger *could* drive by and see them marching around armed, that's good enough.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** The significant charge also depends on the prized totem gun. Carrying the weapon secretly, for ten hours or more outside their home, generates a significant charge. It does not matter if the weapon is spotted or briefly revealed, as long as the fulminatuge knows that he is carrying it hidden from common view. Naturally, this is a lot easier if your totem is a small derringer than a sniper setup. That said, carrying a disassembled

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



totem rifle in a briefcase works fine. The weapon can be in pieces, as long as all the pieces are present. It doesn't even have to be loaded.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Designing a gun that was crucially important to human history, such as the AK-47 or the Gatling gun or the Winchester lever-action — that could get an armiger a major charge. The M-16 is probably an edge case. Alternately, a fulminaturge could make himself a new totem weapon, and its bullets, unaided and *entirely* from scratch. If he mined all the iron and saltpeter and copper himself, made his own forge, his own charcoal, his own hammer and tongs, and built the weapon with no help from anyone, touching it with no tools but those he made himself, then he could get a major charge if the gun was any good. This would require a successful roll with an identity like Gunsmith, but first the very attempt would need a successful local objective roll.

**Taboo:** There are two main strains of Fulminaturgy, and their philosophical divisions are reflected in their taboos. One strain, which sees firearms as fundamental tools for the enforcement of civilization, loses their charges if they ever shoot a human being with any gun. Bows and arrows are OK, rocket launchers are not.

The other faction, which regards guns as the key means by which the individual offsets encroachment by over-reaching authority, loses their charges if they are ever disarmed. Any time they leave their house or vehicle without some form of firearm, their charges dissipate.

Both branches, however, are bound by an additional taboo, in that they each lose their power if anyone else takes their totem gun.

**Random Magick Domain:** Fulminaturgy is concerned with the relationship of the individual to society. Guns are very often found on the hips and in the hands of civilization's anointed defenders — cops and soldiers. They're also a very fast path to being rejected by the community. The reason the debates about open carry and gun control aren't just tranquil discussions about regulating a machine, is that a gun is a lever that changes how society relates to you, and how you relate to it. So fulminatures have power over perceptions of social position, and some influence when it comes to the Self, Helplessness, and Isolation meters.

## "A GUN MAGE DOESN'T SHOOT ANYBODY?!?"

This popped up loudly in playtesting, where a player wanted to be a badass magickal triggerman and shoot all the bad guys. Or somebody. He was sorely disappointed that this was not encouraged.

Look, if you want to be the awe-inspiring John Woo-ish gunslinger, you don't need a school of magick. Put many points in Gunslinger, make it your obsession, give it features that provide initiative and firearm attacks. But magick in *Unknown Armies* is about people who go *against* expectations. They see things in a way that is violently different from ordinary folks, and need that opposition to fuel their will. From what I've seen, in RPGs especially, "I have a gun to shoot people" is the exact *opposite* of unexpected. Or run it through Google. "Gun, hunting" gets about 83 million hits. "Guns kill people" gets 140 million, even though one would

expect a three-term search to be *narrower*. It's not conclusive, but it certainly suggests where the mind-share's at.

That's without considering the *alternate* taboo, embraced by paranoid loner adepts, that forbids them to leave their home or vehicle without a firearm. *They* can shoot as many people as they like, they just surrender their charges as soon as the SWAT team disarms them.

## FULMINATURGY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

### STAND ALONE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** The fulminaturge stands out from the crowd. He is distinct and more worthy of attention than those around him. He seems, in a word, important, or at least significant. There are times when being noticed is the last thing you want, of course, but when you want to catch someone's attention, Stand Alone makes you seem to matter. This can give a +10-20% bonus to a relevant roll if the situation fits.

### SERIOUS Demeanor

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** The fulminaturge is no trifling figure, but rather someone of grave appearance whose words have weight and whose opinions must be carefully considered. Attempting to laugh at, demean or dismiss an armiger who has Serious Demeanor in effect forces a Helplessness (3-4) check as the mocker realizes the gravity of his foolish actions.

Serious Demeanor lasts a number of minutes equal to the casting roll.

### STEADY HAND, STEADY HEART

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** The armiger can cast this spell as an instinctive response to a failed stress check. A hand flies to the totem weapon and in that moment, panic fades and clear thought resumes. The gun mage still takes the failed notch, but does not have to decide between fleeing, freezing, or fighting.

### GIMLET EYE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** The fulminaturge makes a clearly stated threat and meets the gaze of the spell's target, who then faces a Violence (3-4) stress check as feelings of impending doom crash in.

### A ROUND IN THE AIR

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, the fulminaturge must actually fire a bullet straight up in the air. When successfully cast, every animal within a radius of yards equal to the caster's fulminaturge identity panics and flees at top possible speed. Humans, for the purposes of this spell, are not animals. This spell also forces a roll on any unnatural creatures within the radius, provided they were never human. The specific trait or identity rolled is up to the GM, since there's a lot of variety. Whatever it is, if it fails, the creature moves away as quickly as it can.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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## BULLSEYE VISION

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** In the armiger's worldview, to know someone's weapon is intimate knowledge indeed. With this spell, the fulminaturge can intuit all three of a character's passions and their obsession, if there is one. But this stream of visions only arises if the fulminaturge closely examines a firearm owned by the target, or if the target successfully shoots the fulminaturge. (Hey, can you think of a more spiritually significant way to interact with a gun than get shot by it?)

## PRACTICAL MARKSMAN

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** This spell has one of two effects, depending on where it's cast. If it's cast out in the woods while on a hunting trip, the fulminaturge successfully hunts an impressive quantity of game. With any special success, it's actually an awe-inspiring result, like a 240 scoring non-typical buck.

If cast on a shooting range, the fulminaturge simply shoots with spectacular precision.

## FULMINATURGY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### .45 CALIBER EXORCISM

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** For a number of minutes equal to the casting roll, the fulminaturge can shoot demons, immaterial spirits, and similar unnatural entities with normal bullets. They can use any firearm for this, not just their totem weapon. It still requires a successful roll on something relevant, but it does damage just like a gun does to the living. This does not allow anyone else to harm immaterial entities, nor does it give the caster the ability to perceive spirits that aren't already visible.

### THERE ARE MANY LIKE IT

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** Armigers take care of their guns. They know what a rifle or a pistol truly needs. Other people are careless with their weapons, or they try to strip and clean them, but there's no real connection. Only the firearm of a fulminaturge is fulfilled, and therefore it alone can be trusted.

Simply by looking at a gun, the armiger can make the weapon stop shooting. It is nonfunctional until it is completely disassembled and carefully cleaned.

This spell cannot be cast on another fulminaturge's totem weapon.

## WINCHESTER'S PERFUME

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** There is a reason that so many Hollywood heartthrobs get cast in action films, and there's a reason it's not at all difficult to get a calendar of curvy women posing with firepower. Guns are sexy, at least to some people. Under the influence of Winchester's Perfume, they're sexy to everyone.

This spell gives a +20% bonus to rolls in circumstances where being perceived as really alluring and desirable is an asset. The effect lasts a number of hours equal to the casting roll. The fulminaturge can only cast this spell on himself. It can also cure impotence and infertility for the same duration.

## FIRM OF PURPOSE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This is an up-armored version of Steady Hand, Steady Heart. You cast it and you ignore the next stress check. It's dispelled if you violate taboo, but other than that, any successful roll lets you simply bypass a challenge to your sanity, gaining neither a failed notch nor a hardened one.

## BULLETPROOF

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** The fulminaturge taps the weapon of enchantment on one target, himself or another, and shields that person or object against gunfire. When successfully cast, Bulletproof makes a number of gunshots equal to the result of the roll's tens place simply miss. No one picks which shots miss, it's just the next ones that fire. This spell can't be layered: subsequent castings simply fail.

Sternberg casts Bulletproof on Estelle, touching her with his magickal 2" Chiappa Rhino pistol. He rolls a 35. The next three gunshots at Estelle are fated to miss.

## MAO'S GARDEN

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** Chairman Mao famously said "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." In the long run, that's true collectively. In short-term instances a mob overwhelms the community values of a city or town, it can be true individually.

In other words, when a crowd starts to riot, a fulminaturge can wave her totem weapon in the air and direct them.

This is not lockstep obedience, it's not mind control and it's not body control. Anyone who wants to opt out of her suggestion can take an Isolation (4) check and risk the anger of the mob. But unlike a typical minor compulsion, this spell affects everyone in an angry crowd.

It won't work on just any gathering, but if people are muttering, maybe chanting? If sensible folk are suddenly finding somewhere else to be,

I  
was powerful  
because  
I had guns.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

or teargas is flying, or if a soccer game just ended badly for Argentina? If someone standing up on an overturned trash can, holding a gun aloft and bellowing “Get ‘em!” seems like a natural and organic development? Then yeah, Mao’s Garden works on that crowd.

When cast, the fulminaturge has two options with the spell: prosocial and antisocial. If she goes prosocial, she makes some kind of appeal to calm, rationality, the better selves of a nation of patriots, and so on. If that’s the route she goes, a number of people equal to her roll calm down, feel ashamed of themselves, and slink away. The *riot roll* has a -20% penalty.

If she goes antisocial, the riot starts. She can direct it against an initial target, so long as it’s something she can bellow out in four or five words (“Burn down the high school!” or “They’re in the Hartsburg Motel!” or “Let’s wreck the bank!”) but once it starts, she’s either going to have to keep casting or accept that you can’t create a monster and then snivel if it knocks down the wrong building.

## NOW I’M A GUN

**Cost:** All remaining charges (minimum of 1 significant charge).

**Effect:** This is the significant blast for Fulminaturgy. (There’s no minor blast.) To cast it, the armiger has to point a firearm at her target and say something like “I’m a gun” or simply “Bang.”

The gun does not go off, there’s no sound or muzzle flash, no ammunition is expended, but the target hears a shot and sees smoke and flame from the weapon. The target feels the sledge-hit of impact, the shearing of flesh and the spray of hot blood. The pain is, to the target, entirely real. To everyone else, it’s entirely hallucinatory.

This means that it ignores armor, and possibly light cover, it leaves no forensic traces, and it can set the target up for Helplessness or Self checks when doctors insist that he’s fine and it’s all in his head. He, meanwhile, continues to see a bloody, seeping wound. Dodging does not protect against this spell. There is no damage cap.

The target can perform first aid on himself, but no one else can diminish the wound with mere science. Magickal healing can fix it, however.

The downside for some fulminaturges is that casting this spell represents a breakdown of their gun-mediated positions of individual and society. It is a violation of taboo: as soon as the fulminaturge casts this spell, it costs all the charges held, and it can only be cast if she has at least 1 significant charge. But hey, since she’s already broken taboo, nothing is holding her back from firing conventionally. But that’s only for the ones with that taboo variation. The paranoids who must constantly be tooled up only pay one charge for this. Handy if the gun is unloaded, for some reason.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Become permanently immune to all firearm attacks. Curse someone to *always* be hit when fired at. Transform all munitions within a twenty mile radius into inert sand, excepting your own.

Riot Rolls are described in “Riots: When Society Fails a Stress Check” on page 94 of Book Two: Run.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

# MOTUMANCY

## AKA FLAG-BURNERS, ANARCHS

People are sheep, and sheep are meant to be led. A person can be more than a sheep, but only in the singular. To shrug away the wool and push back the shepherd's crook, a person must break the taboos that hold her back, and destroy the labels that limit what she can become.

Reality is a lie, the Invisible Clergy exists only to limit who we are by forcing us into roles that are as unnatural as a fish on a bicycle. We made the world what it is by blindly buying into the system, and breaking out means breaking everything. If enough people practice strong magick, it can shatter the whole structure from the Statusphere down, propelling everyone to godhood in a systemless cosmos of pure potential.

The problem is people. The weak believe they need tribes, labels, and controls to be safe. They love their chains, knowingly or ignorantly supporting constructs like racism, nations, and the Clergy itself because they're afraid to break free. Every rebellion, every incredible rush of boundary-crossing transgression fuels the motumancer. The best juice comes from convincing someone else to break their own taboos, defy their own labels, and rebel against their own reality.

The central paradox of Motumancy is that when you define yourself as a rebel against definitions, you're still defined. If you free someone who resists freedom, have you really enhanced and respected their individual agency? Motumancy needs structure and order to destroy order and structure. You can't scatter the flock if there was no shepherd to gather them.

In short, they need people to do things too.

## STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Do something that would force a stress check based on your fear, noble, or rage passion, except that you're too hard for that now. That is, if you have four hardened notches in Isolation and are scared by being lonesome, you can get a minor charge from something that would provoke a rank 1 stress check on that meter, like being by yourself all day without seeing anyone you know. You don't need to roll a check, but you still need the situation.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Testing the edges of your limits isn't enough. You need more. Do something that forces a stress check based on your passions, suck up the roll, and either gain a hardened or failed mark. Hardcore!

Or maybe you'd prefer the route that *isn't* a minefield of self-loathing and lawsuits. If you'd rather do it the easier way, be involved in having someone else take a stress check based on their own fear, noble, or rage passion. Like anything else an adept does, though, you cannot use magick to make the other person to test their limits. Persuasion works fine. So does throwing a snake on someone who's deathly afraid of them.

**Generate a Major Charge:** To generate a major charge, the motumancer has to push against who she believes herself to be at the core and judge herself weak. She must do something that forces a stress check of all three of her passions at once. And she has to fail.

**Taboo:** Any activity that involves building lasting structure or order. Helping out with Habitat for Humanity, working at a school, or obeying a police officer behind his back all rob a motumancer of all charges.

**Random Magick Domain:** Motumancy is about breaking down systems, stirring up trouble, and pulling away the lies society slaps on top of its designs to keep us all complacent. Motumancy is about transgression and becoming powerful through rebellion and violence against order.

Motumancy also takes advantage of and uses those people still in the system. People who power their own oppression because they are too weak to resist or hoping to somehow get ahead by buying in are all fair game. Break free, or be broken. It's true for the motumancer and it looks good spray-painted on a cop car.

## MOTUMANCY CHARGING TIPS

How fast a motumancer can generate charges depends on how he operates. Going solo is rough, because the limit for significant charges constantly moves as you get hardened, unless you're getting fails, which is an entirely different kettle of suck. Getting minors just involves a lot of constant engagement in distasteful behavior: if your rage stimulus is Israel's actions in Gaza, you're going to have to shrug dispassionately whenever someone mentions that.

The other option is to build a cadre of fellow traveling reality-revolutionaries and push *them* to psychologically dangerous extremes. The drawback to this is that you cannot, *cannot* organize them yourself because that's taboo. Though, if you do it when you're already charge-dry, you lose nothing...

The ideal is to have a St. Paul figure organizing your admiring disciples, leaving your hands clean as you decry their adoration. The peril *there* is that your right hand may tire of playing second fiddle. Moreover, a group that's exclusively "people who receive the contempt of the person they admire without quitting" That's a recipe for instability. Which, of course, a truly committed motumancer celebrates.

## MOTUMANCY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

### LABEL

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** To break down systems, first you have to see them and identify their supporters. With this spell, the motumancer gets a sense of which political, spiritual, or philosophical movement the target identifies with most. The label can be political, like the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, spiritual like the Jains, or even a social group like a diehard member of the Soap of the Week Book Club. The person doesn't necessarily have to self-label as a part of a system. Once a motumancer has identified a person and labeled them, other motumancers can see this label without casting the spell. This spell lasts until something paranormal breaks it, even if the target completely revises their opinions.

In the instances where a motumancer uses Label on someone with no affiliation stronger than say, their family, the motumancer gets a false flag. The universe randomly

1: GO

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assigns a group to the person, they are slapped with an identifier and Motumancy assumes the label is true. This is why it's especially dangerous to use on young people or those who have lived sheltered lives. Motumancers cannot recognize a false flag when it happens. In fact, the school is so new and small that the motumancers in existence haven't observed that this happens. Most would reject the idea that it's *possible*, insisting that the label must be correct and the target's protestations and behavior are just elaborate, hypocritical rationales. ("Sure, it's easy to dismiss him as an anti-Semite if all you do is look at the terrible things he says about, and does, to Jews. But I know what he's *really* like... an anti-vaxxer!")

### PLOWSHARES TO SWORDS

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Any crowd is a riot waiting to happen, given the right stimulus. A motumancer can't cause a spontaneous riot with this spell, but they can push a group toward destructive instincts. Any otherwise mild group of more than a dozen people can be targeted.

On casting the spell, the motumancer must suggest to the group something that could legitimately piss them off. Taxes work almost universally, but a more targeted suggestion is fine too. At that point, the crowd starts to murmur and complain among itself about the irritating subject. Mundane social manipulation is necessary, but the group is primed and breaks into mild to major mischief should the manipulation prove successful.

Using the *riot rules*, this just adds a +10% bonus to the base roll. Multiple castings stack, so if someone casts this three times, the riot roll has a +30% bonus.

### DRAW A CROWD

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** No matter the time or place, motumancers know how to draw a crowd. With a successful casting, the motumancer draws people to where she is. These people may be annoyed about being interrupted but thanks to the spell, their mood is curious as well.

The size of the crowd depends on the roll. Whatever the result, add the dice together and multiply it by 2 to determine how many people wander up to see what's going on. If you roll 37, that's twenty onlookers (3+7, doubled). This can't draw in anyone who has pressing business elsewhere. A fire truck with sirens running isn't going to pull over to hear the motumancer hold forth.

It can't be cast anywhere with fewer than a dozen idlers in a thousand-yard radius. If you try it in a deserted farmhouse at midnight, you keep your charge and nothing happens. Try it in a city, you're probably good to go.

### I DON'T EVEN KNOW THESE CREEPS

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** It takes a lot of effort to change a person's mind, but nudging it in a direction is simpler, especially with magick. After a victim has been hit with the Label spell, the motumancer can use this spell to shift the identifier to a group with similar outlooks or shared world views. A GM should use her best judgement as to what groups a person could be shifted to, but a good argument is better than perfect logic here. So for example, a person who has already been labeled as associated with Greenpeace could be shifted to PETA with a use of this spell. Other motumancers see the label in its edited form.

People.

I must have them.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

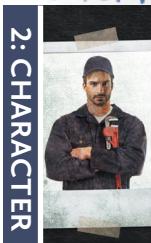
5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

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HUGE! LOT



TEMP



IN '77



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LONS PEDA

The shift lasts six months, at which point the person can choose to stick with new philosophy or drift back to her original beliefs. This doesn't change the person's mind, but they find that any roll that aligns with their new label gains a bonus of +10%. It's some powerful encouragement. This new way of looking at the world just works somehow. It's up to the GM to decide when a roll's in alignment. If it's been going on for too long, the spell may weaken, at her discretion.

As a part of this spell, the motumancer must have a conversation with the victim about the similarities between the groups.

### HASHTAG'S LINGERING CURSE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Once a person has been targeted with Label, a motumancer can extend the reach of that designation. After Hashtag's Lingering Curse is successfully cast, its victim projects her label subliminally through any form of record or communiqué. Benign emails she writes to her boss suggest a political bent. The HR staffer reviewing her personnel file finds it subtly suggestive of her label. Anyone who dislikes the projected identity finds the target suspicious based on the slimmest documentation — even just handling her credit card or driver's license. Those aligned with the label find her agreeable, of course.

This spell lasts twenty-four hours.

### TAKE THE RED PILL

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** To break a person down and make him want to free himself from his constraints, a motumancer must first expose their victim to how dangerous these structures can be. After successfully casting this spell, a labeled victim begins to perceive all the ways in which the world machinates to build and manipulate the constructs that contain him.

The victim sees conspiracies everywhere, and every bad thing that happens to him and the people around him must be the fault of a group he's directly opposed to, as suggested by his label. There is nothing to say that he is right or wrong about the conspiracies and webs of lies he's seeing everywhere. He sees them if they're there or not.

This spell lasts about one day, and it does not necessarily make its victim *believe* in the plots and schemes suggested but... the thoughts come whether or not he wants or trusts them. He may dismiss it all as ridiculous, logically. That may not be comforting though.

## MOTUMANCY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### CALL-OUT CULTURE

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** A label is only any good if people are aware of it. While motumancers are able to use and manipulate labels themselves, it takes a significant spell to really broadcast a label to people outside the school of magic.

Once a person has been labeled, Call-Out Culture amplifies that label to the point that even the most mundane sense it, even if they don't see it consciously. Victims of this spell appear to be active and diehard members of their group, even if their connection is simply casual. People who might oppose the label's stances and views identify this about the victim and dislike them more regardless of other social interactions. "Jerry's a nice guy and everything, I just wish he wasn't so religious, you know?" It doesn't matter if Jerry's openly religious or not, just that his label burns bright thanks to this. People within the label or close to it may see him favorably, but also may make a lot of assumptions about him based on this.

Each casting of this spell lasts a number of days equal to the ones place of the casting roll.

### WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN AT WAR WITH EASTASIA

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** So long as people cling to groups, they can and will be used. A motumancer can manipulate the local branch of any political, social or religious group after labeling a member, or after shifting a label to that group. With this spell, the motumancer can alter one of the group's basic ideologies or beliefs along a similar line, even if it conflicts with the group's other intentions. Thus, a group of concerned senior citizens worried about pensions could suddenly find that instead of also worrying about the school board, they're very concerned with the militarization of the local police force. Or a racist hate group might suddenly come out in favor of marriage equality. Members of the group are not convinced, personally, of the new ideology, but understand their group stands for it. Members enjoy a +10% bonus to rolls that support that ideology.

This spell is regional, not being much bigger than a group in a city, but thanks to the connectivity of the internet and other regional and even global organizations, this ideology change can spread pretty quickly.

As a part of this spell, the motumancer must speak with a few people within the group about the new ideology. The shift lasts a number of days equal to the total of the casting roll. Cast it with a 55, it lasts ten days.

### FAKE GEEK BOY

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This brutal manifestation of Motumancy strips a person of their established label and replaces it with whatever group identity the motumancer desires. Friends and allies among his previous associates suddenly distrust him and spin stories to explain his defection, though he may not understand why they're responding that way. Any relationships based on the identity decrease by 10%, permanently. Further, people who share the new label aren't sure

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



if he's the real deal. They check his credentials and test him constantly to see if he's a fraud or not.

Worst of all, he's forced to question who he was while trying to figure out who he is now. Events that cause him to question either his old label or his new one trigger a Self (4-5) stress check. The idea here is to force the person to face how fragile his associations are, and have always been, in hopes of spurning a desire to transgress all labels.

To finish this spell, the motumancer must both have a conversation with the victim about his new label as well as *be seen by others* having that conversation.

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

**Cost:** 4 significant charges.

**Effect:** No matter where or when, the motumancer can summon a group of like-minded revolutionaries from thin air. To cast the spell, the motumancer publicly vandalizes something symbolic, something that could provoke strong feelings in a particular group. With that done and the charges spent, a group of anonymous people fitting whatever label the motumancer declares show up primed and ready for action. If she's looking for feminists for a campus crusade, angry educated women show up with banners. If she's looking for anarchists, a dozen sturdy young men with bandanas over their faces appear, armed with crowbars and Molotov cocktails. The number in attendance is equal to the casting roll.

These folks aren't real. They're magickal simulacra embodying the cause, and as such they're immune to stress checks. But the flip side of that is that they can *only* behave stereotypically. If you summon soccer hooligans, expect them to riot, because that's practically the definition. Talking them into doing flood relief is against the simplified label's remit. Motumancy's contempt for group identities probably plays into the generally obnoxious behavior of these entities as well. If you need a house put together, you're better off summoning guilty liberals from Habitat for Humanity.

Each summoned activist has an identity relating to their nature, rated at 40%. They stick around long enough to perform one task, as long as it can be done in two hours or less. They have no fingerprints or ID, but carry whatever simple tools the caster's prejudices would presume.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Create an entire group or system from nothing, whole cloth, only to have people automatically drift to fill in and support that system. Demonize a construct in the minds of every person outside of that construct who is aware of it.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

# SOCIOMANCY

## AKA FANBOYS/FANGIRLS, GROUPIES, OTAKU

*You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.*

Mahatma Gandhi

*In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity.*

Hunter S. Thompson

You started out as a casual reader. Jane Austen was your mom's favorite, but it took you awhile to get into it. Then, as you got older, you read her entire oeuvre. You joined a Jane Austen book club where you dressed the part for each meeting. Eventually, that wasn't enough. You found others like you and, once a year, you'd spend a week in New England in a period-accurate town pretending to be characters from the books. No one ever spoke without an accent. If someone said something out of character, there were stockades.

One day you were in New York City, your nose in your fiftieth reading of *Pride and Prejudice*. You didn't see the cab coming. Your life, with all its missed Mr. Darcys, flashed before your eyes. You would have died, but the cab became a carriage drawn by horses, and the horses reared up before colliding with you. You bolted then, forgetting your novel behind you. You had just stumbled onto something big. Subcultures have power.

There's magick in the world, and you want more.

In the occult underground, conformity sometimes gets a bad rap. For sociomancers, this is not the case. You believe that people, even separated by hundreds or thousands of miles are, if united by thoughts and obsession, a single organism.

In the same way that you, the reader now reading this, regard all the cells in your body as a distinct organism, the sociomancer views you and everyone who shares your tastes as the members of a larger body. Whatever ideas create this meta-being, it is still unified. So, all true fans of Star Trek, or all fly fishing obsessives, are a single being. All believers in ancient aliens or Gnosticism are a specific entity. Democrats. Neo-Nazis. Hindus. The sociomancer interacts with these greater beings, which this school of magick calls Egregores.

The collective unconscious of any given group of true believers is a powerful thing. They act as one, reifying their ideations into the Egregore. It is from this which sociomancers draw power. The more power they draw, the more deeply they are subsumed by the collective. Eventually, they can lose themselves entirely. This is, ironically, both the pinnacle of their working and their greatest fear.

Sociomancers walk the edge between being an individual and disappearing into the society in which they invest themselves. The end result of any sociomancer's life is either abandonment of the school or disappearing forever into the collective, becoming one with the Egregore.

But a sociomancer is also prone to fads and fashions. They don't stay attached to any one subculture for too long. Like a vampire, they suck the life from one fanatic group and move on to the next big thing. Let's say Abelene, a sociomancer, was really into scrapbooking for awhile. She

drew tons of power out of her scrapbooking circle, but it didn't take long to get to the limits of scrapbooking's intensity. She started in on jazz, the serious bebop stuff that you have to really grit your teeth to understand, and that held her for a year, but there is only so much jazz you can acquire or experience before it loses its novelty. Now, she's doing crank. The depths of physical addiction and the lengths to which people go to feed it? That's going to keep her occupied a good long time.

## STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Immersing yourself in your society for a couple hours is worth one minor charge. This may mean a marathon of *Lost* on DVD, going canvassing for the GOP, or tailgating for your favorite sports team. However, the sociomancer is always careful not to stand out too much. Their obsession is clinical, practiced. It's fanaticism, but quiet. A true sociomancer must blend with those around them.

Attending a convention for your society is good for lots of minor charges, as is leading some kind of group effort. Having sex with someone from your subculture is worth a minor charge too. So are purchases geared towards membership — a Harley Davidson jacket if you're a biker, a set of precision pens if you're hanging with artists, a study Bible if you're immersed in Catholicism.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Acquiring unique or historical artifacts can yield significant charges. If you're a Democrat, a set of JFK's cufflinks can give you that jolt, once.

But for most significant charges, you must alter your life to fit with your subculture. This is where things get tricky. Once you've made a specific adjustment, it's good for three significant charges, and then won't work again. So if you're a Bears fan, you can get a significant charge by watching a game on TV... three times. Then you have to wear orange and blue all the time — even to the office. But after three days of Bears garb gets you three charges, you're going to need to go to games at Soldier Field, then get a skybox, then go to games on the road... eventually you're picking fights with anyone in a Packers hat or trying to seduce the quarterback because those are the only avenues you haven't mined hollow.

The more you've taken from your society's Egregore, the harder it is to get charges. That's why sociomancers shift focus. They use one Egregore as much as possible and move on. Ingest it, then divest it.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Major charges are an act of subsuming the self to the group. You are altering your personality and beginning to disappear. Resistance is futile, because you want to be assimilated. Your mind begins to think in terms of the Egregore's wants. Today's society needs to reflect the values of the Qur'an. Every situation in life can be related to an Agatha Christie mystery. Veganism doesn't go far enough, you have to harvest the organics you eat by hand.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Things like this begin to turn you into one of the group. Every time you do something for your assumed identity that's drastic enough to cause a rank 7+ stress check on any meter, you might get the major charge, depending on what you roll. If you succeed at the check, you get a significant charge. If you fail, you get a major charge, but you've lost some of who you were. Naturally, finding something that can drop a rank 7 check on you is harder if your category is home repair rather than anti-abortion terrorism.

**Taboos:** You must never be alone — except while sleeping — for more than one hour. Being alone is anathema to you.

A sociomancer must always wear some symbol of the subculture to which they currently belong. The sociomancer must never go against the mores of their subculture. A Gnostic might wear the fish symbol. A progressive might wear an Elizabeth Warren button. A progressive might also have to give to charity. If Abelene was a progressive, and passed a donation box during the holidays, she might lose charges unless she dropped something in — even just a penny.

You can only charge up off one culture at a time, and you can only start harvesting charges when you've been involved for a week or more. However, you can partake in as many cultures as you like, which makes it much easier to transition to a new one when the old loses its flavor.

**Random Magick Domain:** Society, particularly the subculture by which you are obsessed. It's good for learning about people within the Egregore's current sphere, or facts relevant to it. It's also good for misleading, bamboozling, or confusing those within the subculture. Significant effects can shift reality to make it conform to the group's beliefs, or even their fantasies. But it's always locked into the Egregore from which the charges were drawn, and once the adept changes fixations, the abandoned society is off limits.

## MINOR SOCIOMANCY FORMULA SPELLS

### BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME?

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** You draw on the collective's possessions to bring a minor item to you. This can be no bigger than a toaster, and must be something someone in your group would likely own. A Juggalo probably has face paint, for example. Someone in the NRA probably has *some* kind of gun somewhere. The object appears immediately in your hands, taken directly from another member of your group. Not surprisingly, you sometimes find objects of your own go missing. You might fish in your pockets for the 'Nam-era Zippo lighter you prize as part of your collection only to find some other sociomancer needed it before you did.

### NOTHING TO SEE HERE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** By summoning the collective will, you can make others believe they see something small, no bigger than the aforementioned toaster. The object isn't real and doesn't work in any sense, but if you want to be seen holding a cell-phone or a switched-off megaphone or a pair of limited-edition Air Jordans, this spell makes it work for a minute or two.

## SOCIOMANCERS AND MOTUMANCERS

Both these schools are based around interactions with social structures, but where sociomancers draw strength from Egregores, they would regard motumancers with terror and loathing — Egreccides are trying to *kill the societies* they need. It would be extremely ugly.

As yet, the two strains have not encountered one another. But how long can two predators chase the same prey without conflict?

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

You may change the way your face looks, though it likely takes the form of a noted member of your group. A Democrat might find they look a bit like Hillary Clinton when they alter their appearance. Someone in the drug game might resemble Pablo Escobar.

The illusion is convincing enough for a casual look, but doesn't hold up to great scrutiny. You are bending the mind with the Egregore, not breaking it. Breaking requires more charges. This power also fools cameras, though the image is likely to be crap quality. It looks like you're holding *something...* maybe that rare 12-inch GI Joe, or maybe just a sandwich. Can't tell from the pixels.

The spell lasts about five minutes.

### A FACE IN THE CROWD

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** Anywhere there is a crowd of five or more people, you may effectively disappear. Your face becomes an amalgam of those around you, a constantly shifting topography of blandness onto which the mind cannot lock. No one is going to be able to spot you. You have effectively disappeared. But it needs surrounding people. You're a human mimic, not a chameleon.

Again, cameras are fooled, but only kinda. You show up on them smeary and weirdly lit and unidentifiable. This spell lasts a number of minutes equal to the casting roll.

### THE TEAM TAKES ONE FOR ME

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** This spell allows you to shrug off damage. You reduce the wounds done by fists or firearms or explosions by 10. This may negate the damage entirely. It works for a number of minutes equal to the ones place die, but you can never blot out more than 10 wounds per day with it. Meanwhile, everyone in your subculture (globally!) soaks the damage in the form of stubbed toes, shaving incidents, and canker sores — nothing that adds up to even a single wound for them.

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## PARIAH

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** The target of this spell believes he's been ostracized by the collective. The feeling of being a complete and sudden outcast is overwhelming. The victim takes psychic damage from the loss of ego and must immediately make a Self (3) stress check.

## CROWD SOURCE

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** You may immediately access the Egregore for knowledge you do not possess. Like a supernatural Wikipedia, this spell allows you to glean information you would have no other way of knowing. Someone, somewhere in your group must have plausible access to this information. If you're an anime fan, it could let you speak Japanese for a half-hour or so, or know how animation works, or glean some specific bit of trivia. If you're involved in veterans' rights, you might find out where some of the missing millions that were supposed to rebuild Iraq went, as long as there's one protesting veteran who has an idea. Or it might let you know what that mean-ass sailor's tattoo implies.

This spell is good for specific facts and languages more than for deeds and skills. That vets' rights activist won't intuit how to fire a tank gun if she doesn't already know. It doesn't replace identities, but if the knowledge is plausibly possessed by one of your ilk, or if you convince the GM so, you get the desired information. Granted, it may not take the exact form you wish, but something helpful is delivered to you via the psychic channels of the Egregore.

## SHOW ME HOW TO DO THAT AGAIN

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** You obtain an identity you do not possess, or bolster one you do, by connecting your mind to someone who can already do what you want to learn. The percentage you rolled is added to the identity in question for a number of minutes equal to the total of the two dice added together. For example, if you rolled a 39, you increase your identity by a 39% shift for twelve minutes. If you're acquiring a new identity, you'd get it at 39% for twelve minutes. This, too, lasts for a number of minutes as above.

You only get identities with this. It can't improve abilities. Additionally, the identity has to be connected to your current Egregore in some obvious and meaningful fashion.

## SIGNIFICANT SOCiomancy FORMULA SPELLS

### TRADING PLACES

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** You literally replace yourself with another of your group. Wherever they are, you now appear. They, likewise, appear in your place. This can be very nasty for the target of this spell if, say, you're currently in jail. But the good of the many outweighs the good of the one, right?

The switch is merely positional. You do not look like the other, and if you have an angry ex trying to serve you papers, he's not chasing this other person, convinced that was his spouse.

You have to know the person you're switching with by name, but there's no range limit to this. You can only swap with the living, and being suddenly magickally moved in this violent fashion is an Unnatural (6) check, in addition to being damn inconvenient.

### SOCIAL MAGNET

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** Whatever your individual or group desire is, your can pull it toward you. It doesn't simply reveal itself, of course, but you've tapped into the whole network of your peers, and they subconsciously do things to make it happen. Maybe a power company worker temporarily shuts down a traffic light, allowing a man to make it to an interview on time. The hiring manager is a fishing fanatic. He hires the guy but cannot say why. Next month, when you're trying to get into that secure facility? Guess who's on duty? And yeah, he loves fishing too.

When you cast this spell, your local objective gains 2d10 percentiles, or your weighty objective gains 1d10 percentiles. It isn't strong enough to move cosmic objectives and can only push objectives that are related to your Egregore *du jour*, either by their ends or their means.

### SUMMON EGREGORE

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** Like it says on the tin, you summon your Egregore in a tangible, singular, embodied form. It is real, it has capacities according to its innate nature, but for a while you can command it.

If your group is people who buy serial killer mementoes on eBay, it might take the form of Jeffrey Dahmer. If you're into silent movies, you may have just summoned a likeness of Theda Bara. Whatever form the Egregore takes, it's yours to control for a number of minutes equal to your roll added together. After that, the Egregore is free to do what it wants, and it remains embodied for 1d10 hours. It might not like having been used as a puppet. Bob Vila might take a drill and try to trepan you right there in the middle of the street. Remember, crowds are fickle things and can turn on you without warning. Sort of like herding cattle, that way.

The Egregore has a relevant identity at 90%, and all its abilities are rated at 60%. It knows whatever is common to members of its subculture, but has no other specific knowledge or ability. When its wounds reach its wound threshold, it just lies there for 1d10 minutes before getting up with all the damage healed. Ideas, they're durable.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS





# VESTIMANCY

## AKA TAILORS, FIG LEAVES, EMPTY SUITS

Animals are naked.

People say that the difference between us and the wolves and scorpions is that we have *reason*, but there are plenty of people out there who lack reason. You don't lose your humanity by being brain damaged, you lose it by failing to partake in civilization. The entry ticket to civilization? Clothing.

(Do not even bring up nudist colonies as if they're anything but the most artificial and self-conscious attempt to differentiate oneself from the mainstream. Oh, do your pants *chafe* and make you *uncomfortable*? Well, so does paying taxes and crossing at the corner, but people do it.)

Clothing is what people immediately made when they ate Eden's apple and became something more than a pair of copulating gorillas. Naked apes don't write masterpieces of poetry, or invent the steam engine, or ascend to the Invisible Clergy. Our coverings place us separate and unique, elevated above the demands of mere nature. More, they place us within our culture. The police uniform encases its wearer in authority and garbs him in terrible might. The white hood elicits disgust, the white lab coat reassures.

There's a reason armies wear uniforms. There's a reason prisoners are forced into orange jumpsuits. There's a reason extreme weather mountain gear is so expensive and distinctive. There's a reason that a physicist who makes the biggest announcement of his career wearing a shirt bedecked with bosomy cartoons loses all credibility if he wants to reply to the assertion that "Scientists are good at math but kind of clueless about social stuff."

The reason is, clothing is a language, but unlike words or letters, it's a language with tangible, physical reality. The necktie or scarf you wear to your job interview is an ode to your employability, but while it's transient and impermanent and can be traded for a dashiki and cutoffs on the weekend, it could remain and be used years after your dead body is ash or dirt.

What you choose to wear determines how your place in the world is read by everyone around you, just as your place in the world dictates what you can acceptably wear. The symbols of our garments are thickly layered with meaning, and meaning is connection, and connection is power.

What do you wear? Who does it make you?

I like the way you look.

## STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Create a new garment. Note that throwing a sheet around your shoulders and calling it a toga is not creating a garment. Sew a shirt, make a dress, block a hat, knit a scarf, or crochet a banana hammock. Take what is raw and refine it until it expresses civilization.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Create an entirely new outfit. You don't have to hand-make every component, but it has to all go together in a unique and stylish way that transcends grabbing the closest ensemble off the rack at Nordstrom. A suit must be tailored. Resold clothes must be carefully sorted and checked and tried on, let out or taken in and made to match and blend with one another. In actual practice at the gaming table, this could simply amount to "I spend three to four hours shopping in the garment district," but if you're not willing to spend the imaginative energy vividly describing unique getups for your character, Vestimancy is a poor choice.

The other way to get a significant charge is to acquire a legacy garment — something that was worn by someone important, or that was worn at an important event. Any garment that someone died in is a legacy garment. The clothes they were buried in? Not necessarily. But between weddings and prom night virginity losses, tux shops are often a goldmine. Buying wedding dresses on eBay is another option, but the charge only happens when you get it in your hands.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Design a new type of garment that gains wide recognition. Examples include the wetsuit, the bikini, the hoop skirt, camo-pattern fatigues, or the first space suit.

**Taboo:** Be seen naked. Stark naked clearly costs all charges, but even stripping down to *one* garment violates taboo. Glasses don't count as a garment either, and a pair of socks or gloves is a single item of clothing. If you're photographed unclad, the picture has the power to break your taboo only the first time someone sees it.

**Random Magick Domain:** Social roles, the functions of garments, appearance and assumptions, shape and identity.

## VESTIMANCY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

### CAMOLEVLAR

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, you must be wearing some form of protective clothing. A camouflage patterned jacket, a bulletproof vest, a firefighter's coat or a motorcycle helmet would all work.

In addition to any mundane protection offered, the spell wreathes you in magickal defense. If someone physically assaults you, they suffer a -10% penalty. If you're also dodging, this penalty combines with the penalty your dodge imposes on your attacker.

This protection is extended for a number of enemy rolls equal to the tens place of the casting roll. Camolevlar does not offer any protection against anything that doesn't produce *physical* injury. It won't protect your feelings or your sanity or your cash money.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

### DEAD MAN'S SHOES

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** This is the Vestimancy minor blast. It operates a little bit differently from most evil eye-type blasts, in that the magick creates a weapon. To cast Dead Man's Shoes, you prepare a cursed garment. It has to be something associated with death — it belonged to someone who's now dead, or was worn by a killer, or by a funeral director, or was made in that factory in Dhaka that collapsed and killed 1,130 people.

You can prep the garment at your leisure. The next time someone puts it on, willingly or not, the blast discharges and you roll. If the roll succeeds, you spend the charges and do damage. If you fail, you don't lose charges. As long as someone's wearing the garment, you can continue to spend charges and roll to attack, which makes this a little bit nasty if you enchanted a serial killer's straitjacket.

While the necessity of garbing the target makes this less practical than point-and-shoot magickal assassination, it does mean that you can booby-trap someone's wardrobe with death socks and then feel the charges go as soon as they put them on, no matter how far away you are. Still freaky, more sneaky.

The damage from Dead Man's Shoes resembles acid burns on the part of the body the clothing covers. It rarely leaves serious scars, but the blistering and pus-weeping can be disfiguring.

If you want to use this directly, by cramming a dead man's SWAT helmet on someone's head or by wrapping them in a funeral scarf, you first have to make a Struggle roll to get it on. You can roll to cast the spell on the next round.

### DRESS FOR THE JOB YOU WANT

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, you need to wear a single item of clothing associated with a particular job. This could be a politician's red-tie-with-flag-pin, army boots, or a poet's rumpled tweed jacket with leather elbow patches. When you cast the spell, you can substitute your vestimancer identity for some other relevant identity or ability, for one roll. With a lab coat, you could roll your vestimancer identity instead of Biologist or Coroner. With high-end running shoes, you could use magick instead of Fitness.

### GARMENT TAG

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, you must first handle and remember a particular piece of clothing. If you successfully cast the spell, you have a sense of its location — what direction it's in and how far. If you grab Kwei's forearm while shaking hands, you can tag his suit, as long as you give it a once-over and recognize it. Or if you come up behind Tina, put your hand on her shoulder and test the fabric of her blouse ("Oh, is that a cotton-poly blend?") you can tag and find it. But you won't know whether the owner is wearing it or if it's in a suitcase or a resale shop.

### GLAD RAGS

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Whatever you're wearing looks good. It therefore makes you look good. Therefore, you make the clothes look even better. It's basically a fashion/style feedback loop.

Mechanically, it lets you flip-flop a Connect or Status roll because you look so put-together and engaging and, well, *pretty*. It also works for any identity that substitutes for those abilities.

BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX  
IS NOT HO  
- ORIN B  
LIGON W  
OF E  
SEE T  
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ACT WA  
T OF NO  
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PIONSHIP  
? GHOST  
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TONES MO  
VE SILVER  
ICE BLACK

## SO LAST SEASON

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** When you handle a garment and cast So Last Season, you look through time itself, as imprinted through its changes on the cloth. You know a brief history of dress or scarf or necktie — where it was made, when it was bought, who owned it, brief glimpses of occasions when they wore it.

If you spend an extra minor charge, you can delve deeply into a specific scene from its history. If you had the socks JFK wore when he was killed, you could examine that fateful day in Dealey Plaza. Or, at least, that fateful day as perceptible from within a few feet of his ankles. These flashbacks are complete with sound.

## WALK A MILE IN THEIR MOCCASINS

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Effect:** Casting this spell requires the fig leaf to put on an item of someone else's clothing. With a success, he intuits one of the target's passions, as determined by the GM. You could put on Rob's glove and realize he's afraid of hospitals, or you could wear Gina's scarf and find out that drunk drivers really piss her off.

## VESTIMANCY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### A VERY FANCY HAT

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** To cast this you need to be wearing a hat that symbolizes authority. It could be a police officer's helmet, a papal mitre, or even a crown. Cast the spell, bark out a command in a single breath, and watch as people obey you. Well, most of the time they choose to obey, since the alternative is taking a Violence stress check equal in level to the number on the ones place die of your roll. Roll a 17, they have to do what you say or face a Violence (7) check.

### DRESS FOR SUCCESS

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, you need to be kitted out, head to toe and skin to air, in the garments of a particular profession. Something instantly recognizable, like a pilot or a surgeon or a clown. A three-piece suit is not, for this spell, the costume of a banker or a politician or anything other than someone in nice clothes.

When you cast this spell, for one hour you can substitute your vestimancer identity for *any* roll that's stereotypically part of the role for which you're dressed. If you're in firefighter's gear, you can roll magick to haul people down ladders, get dressed quickly, or perform first aid. If you're dressed as a pirate, you can fight with swords, handle your liquor, and sail an old galleon.

Note that this has to be "dressed as" and not "costumed like." If you want to dress like a jet fighter pilot, it takes more than a jumpsuit and a helmet. You need the *actual* flight suit and the right helmet, and if you mix a WWII bomber's jacket with a modern set of boots, that's not enough. Everything has to be from the same period. Obviously, this is easier with some jobs than others.

## DRESS THE PART

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** To cast this spell, put on at least three garments owned by the same person, or that have been owned by her at some point. When you cast the spell, you turn into the clothing's owner.

You become the target as the target is now, unless the target's dead, in which case you become the target as he was the last day of his life. You can use all the target's identities and abilities, you have his fingerprints, you know his PIN number and internet passwords and how his wife takes her coffee. You are *indistinguishable* from the target.

In fact, you not only have the target's memories, you forget your own. While the spell is in effect, you think you're that guy. You have his goals and ambitions and sympathies.

Dress the Part lasts for a number of hours equal to the combined dice of the casting roll — roll a 21, you're her for three hours. It can be broken prematurely if the transformed adept violates taboo. In that case, not only does the fig leaf lose all charges, he changes back into his own form, with his own memories.

After changing back, he recalls his actions while transformed, but deeper memories and motives are foggy and unreliable.

### GYGES' CLOAK

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** Invisibility, sucka. To cast this, you need to make some kind of invisibility cloak, whatever that looks like to you. Yes, in the original myth of Gyges it was a ring and not a cloak, but I guess whoever formulated this spell wanted to go to Hogwarts instead of Mordor. Put on the cloak, spend the charges, and move unseen for a number of minutes equal to the result of the roll, or until the cloak gets removed or ruined. Having a bunch of paint dumped on you ruins the cloak. A big cloud of flour or chalk dust probably just gives a vague idea of where you are.

Keep in mind that invisibility doesn't make you inaudible or odorless or hide your footprints, or your blood trail. It *does* make crossing the street a giant pain in the ass.

You also show up clearly to anything that reveals hidden or immaterial presences. But normal cameras don't pick you up, and anyone who attacks you has to make a successful Notice roll first. So even if you're fighting someone with an awesome Notice ability and good attacks, he's still only attacking every other round.

Also, you have to spend the charges every time you activate the cloak, but you can reuse the garment.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## LOUP GAROU COUTURE

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** This spell requires you to make a shirt or cloak or jacket out of wolf skin. If you put it on at night and cast the spell, you transform into a wolf's form while retaining all your human intellect. It's a werewolf kinda deal.

As a wolf, you get a maximum wound threshold of 70, unless your native stats are higher, in which case you keep them. You also get to use your vestimancer identity to run, fight, track by scent, digest small animals, and do other lupine stuff. You still take wounds from sticks and stones — you're not invulnerable to everything except silver — but when you change back, all the damage to your wolf body is reflected as damage to the garment, not your body. If you chomp someone, it's hand-to-hand damage with a +3 bonus for your bitey-whitey teeth.

No one has yet determined if a vestimancer who's injured in wolf form leaves behind wolf blood, or human blood with all its distinctive DNA markers.

Once you're a wolf, you're a wolf until sunrise. Moreover, the instant you turn into a wolf, you lose all your charges. Animals are naked, remember? So casting spells is out of the question. If, heaven forfend, you get killed in wolf form, you stay in it and your body probably gets cremated by Animal Control.

You have to spend the charges every time you use the garment to transform, but as long as the garment is undamaged, it's reusable.

## MEDEA'S SHROUD

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This is the significant blast version of *Dead Man's Shoes*. Like that spell, you need some kind of death-aspected clothing and you have to get your target to wear it. As long as it's on the target, you can pop in charges and do damage like a handgun. The injuries still look like they were inflicted by strong liquid acid, but are now more likely to leave scars on the body parts covered by the garment.

See "Dead Man's Shoes" on page 164.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## SWAN MAIDEN WINGS

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** Make wings, or some kind of other feathered garment that goes over your back or shoulders. It has to contain some genuine swan feathers, too. When you have it done, put it on and roll. With a success, you spend the charges and transform into a swan. You have to spend the charges every time you change.

As with Loup Garou Couture, you lose all your other charges as soon as you change, but in this case you can remain in swan form, with all your mental faculties intact, as long as you like. As a swan you have a wound threshold of 30 and roll your vestimancer identity for swanning about, including flight. Flight is pretty cool. And no one ever suspects the beautiful swan.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Pick a haute couture designer and inflict total retrograde amnesia on the next twenty people to wear their creations. Create a global craze for your handmade mittens, forcing their aftermarket prices into tens or even hundreds of thousands of euros. Create a new color that everyone else remembers as always existing, which happens to share your name. "Oh, that red, white, and greg sweater is *rilly cute!*"

# VIATURGY

## AKA BROKEN HEROES, WHEELERS, RAMBLERS

There is a fundamental American sensation to firing the ignition your car, when it's got a full tank of gas and is ready to roll, to eat highway, to head west, to light out for freedom and the horizon. Every country has cars, and lots of people love cars, but the United States of America is, perhaps more than anywhere else, *about* cars.

The car and the road are the yin and the yang, the male and female, the alpha and omega of self-esteem, self-determination, and self-actualization. Forget talk therapy — get behind the wheel with talk radio, set out for a demonstration and change the world. Need money? Why? Money is just fossilized freedom, time turned into tokens, and on the highway you can get the real thing. You can get all the money you need for Fritos and gas by hauling cargo, smuggling dope, or playing speedy cab for a week.

Better yet, get a broken-up, abused 30-year-old hulk of a car from some chump who doesn't respect or understand it, restore it gently, lovingly and carefully, and resell it to a collector who appreciates it. Or to one who *thinks* he gets it but keeps the damn thing in a climate-controlled garage and wipes it down with a diaper and never *flops* it. Or to a rich douche who's going to ruin it again before someone with eyes to see and hands to fix picks it up and starts the cycle again.

Where the rubber meets the road, that's where the individual interfaces with the world. Where will becomes direction. Where the future is where you go instead of something done to you.

And when you die?

Die making your own pyre, an earthbound comet at 90 miles an hour, burning steel and a broken hero, scarring the road and sending you on another journey. Better to die bright and fast and in-between than to sink into the ground, so stolid and still it's hard to tell you died instead of just... ran out of gas.

### STATS

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Any time the viaturge drives 100 miles without casting a spell or taking a break, it yields a minor charge.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Ramblers don't do well being tied down, but they thrive on new places, new circumstances, new situations and, often, new pieces of hot ass. Any time a viaturge sleeps for a stretch of six hours or more in a building where she never has before, she gets a significant charge.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Wheelers get the big juice from permanently altering automotive culture. If one guy could take credit for hybrid cars, and that guy was a wheeler, that would be worth a major charge. Someone who designs a seminal car, or performs a record-breaking and mind-bogglingly dangerous stunt could also pick up a major charge.

**Taboo:** Ramblers drive. They are active agents of direction who show up, get attention, make trouble, and skip out one step ahead of the consequences. They are not passive passengers passing through. Being in a motor vehicle that is

controlled by someone else robs them of all stored magick. No jet plane trips, no ferryboat rides, and if they get shot or stabbed or thrown from the wreckage, they better walk to the hospital or write off their charges along with the cost of the ambulance ride. Of course, if they're in such bad shape, how many charges could they have stored up?

**Random Magick Domain:** Travel, freedom, new places, and the appeal of all those things. Viaturges get out, get going, and get away.

### VIATURGY MINOR FORMULA SPELLS

#### GET OUTTA MY DREAMS

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** A car is great and all, but sometimes it gets lonely and the stretch of empty bench seat can seem as barren as the Kalahari desert. That's when it's important to invite some company to get into your car.

Whatever role is presented for the potential passenger (copilot, date, mechanic), this spell hypnotizes them into climbing aboard. The allure of the vehicle seems nigh irresistible. An exercise of will can, however, shake off the compulsion. Anyone who does *not* get in the car faces an Isolation (4) check as they watch the promise of freedom, excitement, and hedonic fulfillment roll off down the street, untasted.

#### I FEEL SAFEST OF ALL

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** Don't mess with the driver. Don't touch the radio. Don't make me turn this car around.

You may only cast I Feel Safest of All on someone in a car with you, while you're driving. Should that person opt to physically assault you, they must first deal with a Violence (4) stress check. That rises to a rank 10 stress check if the vehicle is actually moving at the same time. Taking the check occupies the action that would otherwise be used to attack. This lasts until the assault is attempted, or a week, whichever is shorter.

#### LIFETIME PILING UP

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** A car wreck is scary as hell, even if no one's physically harmed. It's loud and disorienting and sudden and it treats your body with all the care and gentleness you reserve for a stick of chewing gum.

The spell Lifetime Piling Up inflicts that horror and confusion onto one person, in the shape of a Helplessness stress check. The spell can only be cast while driving a vehicle, and the rank of the check depends on the target's position. If the target is outside the car, it's rank 3. If they're in a different car, it's rank 4. If they're in the car with you, it's rank 5.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



BAD NEWS  
RE OF CATS  
RET LEVEL  
EN - OX  
IS NOT HO  
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## RED LIGHT

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** This spell can be cast in one of two ways, depending on whether the car it targets is moving or parked.

If you cast it on a parked car, it won't start or go into gear until it's had its transmission rebuilt, or until it's subject to *Jesus Built My Hot Rod*.

If you cast it on a moving car, that car's driver fails his next automotive Pursuit roll automatically. This cannot be cast upon other viaturses, but it does work on identities that substitute for Pursuit, as long as it's a car chase.

## TIRE MARKS

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Effect:** By examining a car minutely, a viaturge can divine information about its past. The method varies from caster to caster. Some whisper into the exhaust pipe and then bend over to listen as if it was an old-timey telephone. Some feel the wheel wells and squint at the tires and draw far-fetched but perfectly correct conclusions from the nature of the grime on the windshield or the matter stuck in the cracks of the backseat cushions. Still others regard the engine and see patterns in the rust and grease and residues the way ancient haruspices read the guts of sacrificed animals.

However it's done, the caster can either know exactly where the car has gone in its last hundred miles of driving, down to the block, or tell who has been in it for the last hundred miles it was driven.

## GREEN LIGHT

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, your next Pursuit roll is a basic success, as long as you're behind the wheel. Resolve the roll as if you'd rolled an 02.

## GHOST ROADS

**Cost:** 4 minor charges.

**Effect:** When you cast this spell your car, and everyone in it, is physically transferred to the astral plane for a number of minutes equal to the result of the roll. If you roll a successful 30, you can drive through the invisible world for a half hour.

This means that non-tangible creatures like *astral parasites* can see and chase you but, by the same token, you can now slam a car door on their many legs and punch them and run over them. You can drive through walls and mere mortals without resistance — without even being seen. People with a strong emotional connection to you might, with a Notice or relationship roll, get a weird feeling when you roll right through them, though. People in the tangible realm are visible from the astral plane, but in the form of auras and symbolic overlays. Animals are just sketchy outlines.

When you pull off the ghost roads and onto the objective streets of matter, you are briefly cloaked by a psychic shroud that confounds the sights of the uninitiated. Specifically, they notice that your

car has shown up, but if it's on a typical street, it doesn't arouse their attention any more than any other passing vehicle of its type. If you emerge inside a building, that's another issue, but as long as the spell wears off when your car is somewhere it could sensibly be, no one's going to notice or even care. Same thing happens when you leave the physical realm. Onlookers assume it's not their problem.

## VIATURGY SIGNIFICANT FORMULA SPELLS

### CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** This is the viaturge blast... sort of. It's constrained by circumstance but, within its parameters, pretty nasty. When you cast it on someone, you doom them: the next time they step onto a street with at least some light traffic, they get hit by a car.

There is no way to avoid this fate unless they find some kind of spell-breaking technique that can disconnect spells that are just hanging around waiting to do their thing or they never set foot on a road again unless it's *completely abandoned*. Failing one of those two recourses, they unavoidably get car-smacked when they next cross a boulevard, highway, or thoroughfare. Best to just roll the damage from the car as a typical crash rather than bother keeping track of the wounds rolled by the caster. No dodge, no way the victim or anyone else can see it coming, and it inevitably seems to be an utter, *utter* coincidence.

### I AM THE HIGHWAY

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, space seems to stretch out in front of you like a rubber band while time slows to a treacly crawl. Then the world contracts and squishes in, compressing a route from *here* to *there* across roads for a span of ten miles and permitting you to cross that distance in the blink of an eye.

It literally lets you go ten miles in an instant, or less if you want, after seeing what's on the other end before committing to going there. Moreover, the transport gets... discredited... by any witnesses. People don't see your car evaporate, they just lose track of it the way you've lost track of any number of vehicles. Similarly, people aren't shocked when it shows up at its destination, any more than you're surprised when another vehicle turns onto the lane behind you on a day of busy traffic.

It's a great way to get where you're going, but it is not without restrictions.

- You can only cast it while driving. No way to do this taking a stroll, sorry.
- You can only take your car to a road you could reach driving. There has to be an

See "Jesus Built My Hot Rod" onpage 169.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

Check out "Astral Parasites" on page 14 of Book Three: Reveal.

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DARKERS  
D DONT W  
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1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



unobstructed route. Traffic, however, does not count as obstruction. A gate or a river with no bridge would block you, but lesser cars? You just slip around them.

- You can't cast this spell if someone is actively pursuing you. If they're just tailing you and spying, this works fine.

### RAMBLE ON

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Effect:** Keeping a wheeler stuck in place is not easy, as cutting loose and riding off into the sunset is their whole *idiom*. Ramble On lets its caster escape from or disable one tangible and deliberate impediment between him and his vehicle, or between his vehicle and the open road.

What is a tangible and deliberate impediment? Handcuffs, locked doors, prison bars, walls, speed bumps, gates, leashes, straitjackets, a set of four-point cuffs, chemical restraint injections, ball gags, those tire-slashy barrier gadgets, strangleholds, and both half- and full-nelson holds. Something circumstantial like a train crossing? Not a deliberate impediment. Lack of road? Not tangible.

### JESUS BUILT MY HOT ROD

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** The wheeler can lay hands on a vehicle and repair it like a faith healer encouraging someone to shuck their leg braces. Crushed metal goes smooth, loose brake calipers tighten, and thrown gears in a transmission straighten up and act right. The scratches where some asshole keyed "FAG" into your lavish flame job seal over as if they'd never been.

This can't take a car crushed into a cube and turn it into a pristine screamin' machine all at once, but if you're willing to cast it over and over... yeah, you get there. Assume that the decay of a fine automobile fits into the following stages:

1. Brand New.
2. First Ding.
3. Used.
4. Beater.
5. Shitbox.
6. Utterly Ruined.

Each casting of Jesus Built My Hot Rod improves a vehicle by one stage. Cars at the Brand New, First Ding, or Used stages don't really have any penalties. A beater belches blue smoke and is covered with rust. A shitbox car doesn't run, not without a couple hours of coaxing and love and fifty bucks at the junkyard, and even then it only goes for a number of miles equal to the roll used to briefly bring it out of its coma. Utterly ruined means just that — no tires, no glass, no wires, engine 100% seized, frame warped, it'd be cheaper and easier to just get a shitbox running.

### VIA LIBRIS

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Effect:** A good eighty percent of ramblers believe the name of this spell means "The Road of Liberty," but even in the execrable dog-Latin typical of 'murican adepts, that would be "Via Libertas." No, this spell's name means "The Road of Books" if your grammar is imperfect, or maybe just "The Books."

But while the name may be confusing, its effect isn't. It frees you, much like Ramble On, only its liberty isn't from mundane impediments. It cuts you free of magical entanglements.

Via Libris can only be cast inside a moving car, while putting distance between yourself and the origin of whatever magickal effect you're shaking off. If you're heading the wrong way, you automatically fail but don't lose the charge. If you're going away, though, a success severs any unwanted magickal effect, and "unwanted" means "however you want to define it." "All spells on me" is a failsafe, unless people are helping you behind your back. "Whatever is letting that doll made of dildo-chainsaws find me" is also highly recommended. It doesn't block instantaneous spells like blasts, it just hangs up on ongoing effects. If something has already changed, like the damage from a blast spell, it won't fix that. Something intangible like diddled memories? Up to the GM.

## ROLLING THRONE

**Cost:** 4 significant charges.

**Effect:** This spell can only be cast while in a vehicle that you own and are driving. Moreover, and this is somewhat subjective, the vehicle has to be cool. Badass. Superfly. Feckin' schweet. Something like that.

It has to be your favorite ride.

Once you cast Rolling Throne on the car, it becomes yours in a very special, very personal, very distinct way. It is now *your* Further, your Batmobile, your General Lee. This gives it some very potent magickal effects.

- You can now flip-flop all Pursuit rolls when driving your Rolling Throne.
- You can substitute your Viaturgy identity for Pursuit while you're behind the Rolling Throne's wheel.
- The car won't start for anyone else without your express permission, or unless that person has a relationship with you rated at 25% or higher.
- Synchronicity always arranges for you to get a great parking spot, if it's at all possible.
- Trunk space mystically doubles.
- If you spend a significant charge while separated from your Rolling Throne, it starts up and moves towards you at about 5 miles per hour above the posted limit, obeying all traffic signals and succeeding at any task that would prompt a Pursuit roll. It drives itself to you until it arrives, or until it covers a number of miles equal to the result of the casting roll. It won't go through walls or anything, of course.

While that is all indisputably awesome, there are some additional restrictions placed upon you, because a Rolling Throne is a jealous steed.

- You can only charge up while driving the Rolling Throne.
- If this totemic vehicle gets damaged, you can't gain more charges until it's immaculately repaired.
- You lose all charges if you drive anything else.
- It develops a nasty knock and rattle, unless you fuel it exclusively with premium gas.

## UNCHAINED

**Cost:** 4 significant charges.

**Effect:** Just as there are spells that free ramblers from physical constraint and paranormal confinement, there is a spell — this one — to unshackle them from emotional chains as well. When you cast this spell, name someone and accept that you are about to slice off your feelings for them. Cast the spell successfully, and nothing that person does can give you a stress check again, nor can anything that happens to them. If you have a relationship with that person, it drops to zero, of course, and no relationship with that person can ever be rebuilt.

## MAJOR CHARGE EFFECTS

Curse someone to become a car, unable to act on their own but conscious as humans physically *climb inside* and force them to go here and there. Create a self-conscious, self-directed, self-repairing magickal vehicle like in the novel *Christine*. Make a permanent shortcut between two places that any driver who speaks a password or carries a specific talisman can access.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

# CONSTRUCTED ARTIFACTS

Squirreling some mojo away for a rainy day when taboo is a bitch or the charges ain't easy seems like an unusually sensible action for an adept. Most don't make artifacts for those reasons. They make them because they *can*, or to trade for something they really want, or to prove a point or because someone said it was impossible.

But regardless of motivation, they all work the same way. Adept-made artifacts come in two levels: minor and significant. A constructed device can simulate the effect of an adept's formula spell of the same level. When you trigger a constructed artifact, assume the hypothetical roll for its effect is 12 — not a great success, but it works. As with *natural artifacts*, you might have to make a roll related to triggering it, but if you do, resolve effects as if you rolled a 12 instead of your actual result.

Constructed artifacts are a bit more codified, as they're made with one punter's will, not that of the cosmos. They come in **single-use**, **limited-use**, and **eternal**. Single use and limited use items function a certain number of times before they stop working, and only the adept who makes them knows exactly how many. Eternal artifacts are viable forever, but they're built with a one-level surcharge: a minor effect could be made eternal if built as a significant artifact.

Major constructed artifacts might be possible to create, but they're indistinguishable from natural artifacts, and would require a major charge, or charges, to construct. This category includes eternal artifacts that would do significant effects.

## MAKING ARTIFACTS

Adepts for many schools of magick can learn how to make artifacts, and the rules for making them are the same for all schools. Three caveats: you can only imbue an object with a magickal effect you can do; the object must be symbolic of the intended function; and for some reason, technological devices invented after the millennium can't become constructed artifacts — everyone's still arguing about why. Even something that merely *contains* newer tech within it doesn't work. A compass or dowsing rod could point you to something you're looking for, a coffee mug could imbue a drink in it to keep you awake for a day, or surgical gloves could let you rip an organ out of someone's body. You couldn't use a pen to harm someone physically, even though a regular person could stab someone with a pen, because that doesn't fit the metaphor. It's only mightier than the sword when it's not used for swordplay.

You spend charges to attempt making artifacts, then roll your magick identity just as you would for casting a spell. Unlike casting spells, failing means the charges are spent without effect. Though, getting a matched failure or worse could

mean something happens, and it's the GM's job to make sure you don't like it.

When you make an artifact, you can add in one trigger or limitation to it, like "Only someone wearing a symbol of the Horned Hound can use this" or "This can't be used to harm the creator." These are just simple statements. If you have to use "and" or "or," that's actually multiple triggers or limitations. If you want to add more, you can by spending one extra minor charge for each statement.

It goes without saying, but the object has to be mundane. You can't double-up on an artifact.

### SINGLE-USE ARTIFACTS

Making single-use artifacts costs the minor or significant charges you'd use to create the effect, plus one more minor charge. The artifact is minor if the effect is minor, and significant if the effect is significant.

You can also spend an extra minor charge to make the artifact's effect use the result of your magick roll instead of 12. Naturally, you add this in before rolling.

### LIMITED-USE ARTIFACTS

Making a limited-use artifact costs the charges you'd use to create the effect, plus one significant charge. If you succeed, the artifact has a number of uses equal to the sum of the dice on the magick roll. Like single-use artifacts, the artifact is minor if the effect is minor, and significant if the effect is significant.

You can't change the artifact's effective roll on limited-use artifacts. It's stuck at 12.

With limited-use and single-use artifacts, you can recharge them by doing the process over, as long as the object is intact. There's no special benefit for this, beyond not having to scrounge up another appropriate item.

### ETERNAL ARTIFACTS

You can only make eternal artifacts for minor effects. Making eternal minor artifacts costs the minor charges you'd use to create the effect, plus one major charge. The object then becomes a significant artifact. As with limited-use artifacts, their effective roll stays at 12. Each trigger or limitation you want to add to it costs a significant charge rather than a minor one.

Making an eternal artifact do a significant effect falls under major artifacts. Maybe you find a way to make it happen. And maybe you get enough mojo to pull it off.

Described  
in "Natural  
Artifacts" on  
page 85.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

# RITUAL

Denizens of the occult underground believe in magick. They have to.

Sometimes they have to believe the way people buying lottery tickets have to believe they're going to win. It's a willful hope despite previous outcomes.

Sometimes they have to believe the way you believe in gravity after you fall off your house. It's an invisible force, sure, but it just broke your goddamn legs. They believe, no matter how much they'd rather not.

Moreover, believing in it is pretty much the *definition* of being in the underground. So there you go.

But once you accept that unseen powers influence your life, or even govern it, how long before you try to control it? How long before you buy a lottery ticket? Or, if you can't manage that, how long before you start avoiding the roof?

There are two paths open to most people. One is rigid, ancient, and constrained. The other is fluid, chaotic, and often feeble. The first — conservative, traditional ritual magick — is referred to as Thaumaturgy. The second is disdainfully referred to as gutter magick by outsiders and rarely called anything at all by those doing it. To them, it's just... life, and how you live it.

Beliefs about enchantment are like martial arts schools, there are a bunch of them, all with different names, and most think the others are bullshit. There's no guru so prestigious that no one's hated on his style. There's no point so high that someone can't crap on it.

(Except for adepts, of course. Everyone knows they're the genuine article.)

## THE HARD WAY: RITUALS

Rituals are like magick recipes. You get the ingredients, you combine them properly, and you get some kind of result. It doesn't rely on faith, any more than a microwave oven does. Unfortunately, one of the ingredients is always intense desire.

Consider two women with a ritual to make land bountiful. One really believes in magick but is just doing it because she enjoys gardening. The other has strong reservations, but if the crop fails she loses her property. She's already tried everything except murdering her creditors, and that's next on the list. The second woman has a much better chance with her fertility rite, doubts and all.

Nobody can make new rituals. Nobody's sure where the old ones came from. While many have the trappings of medieval European arcane pageantry (eye of newt, invocations of Saturn or Satan, weird math symbols), or of ancient faiths from elsewhere around the globe, others have no acknowledged source. Some resemble old culture and religion about as much as the Konami Code. People claim they're embedded fragments of previous universes, typos in the Kabbalah, glimpses into the mind of an unknowable deity or proof that the world is a simulation on a computer running Windows Vista.

Most rituals have been lost. Many don't work anymore, either because of transcription errors or just because people don't *think* the right way to understand them. Some functional ones don't do what they say. The most reliable way to recover old rituals is to learn them from demons, who are *all liars*. Without a serious carrot or stick, a demon's

## ADEPTS

Thaumaturges with dusty old books get an effect one time in twenty and half of those are useless in a modern world. Gutter magick operates entirely through synchronicity, so much so that it's often hard to tell if anything more than the placebo effect is achieved.

Adepts can reliably change things. They are a different category of being. They've been known to scar faces with a caress, wipe memories with a grimace, and build fire-breathing dragons out of old alarm clocks. If you see someone turned to stone, levitated into the treetops, or set on fire without a spark, an adept probably did it.

That, or you were fooled by really good stagecraft. But how many Harry Houdinis are running around out there?

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

much smarter play is to say "Oh yeah boss, this ritual makes you totally invulnerable to bullets" while, in fact, handing over a ritual that makes you totally vulnerable to demonic possession. It even works: some people who would never accept an opened beer bottle from a mere human in a bar cast magick spells on the say-so of an immaterial entity whose whole identity is evil. Moreover, because the success rate is low, even for trap rites, they may transcribe the ritual in good faith, thinking that it worked. Consider an old west gunfighter who bargains for a bulletproofing spell and, instead, gets that possession rite. He tries to cast it and fails, but manages to not get shot because he's lucky or his enemies are nearsighted. He truly, fully, and deeply believes he's scribing a spell of bulletproofing, and no one can say otherwise until someone with actual *ability* tries it and winds up under the demon's thumb.

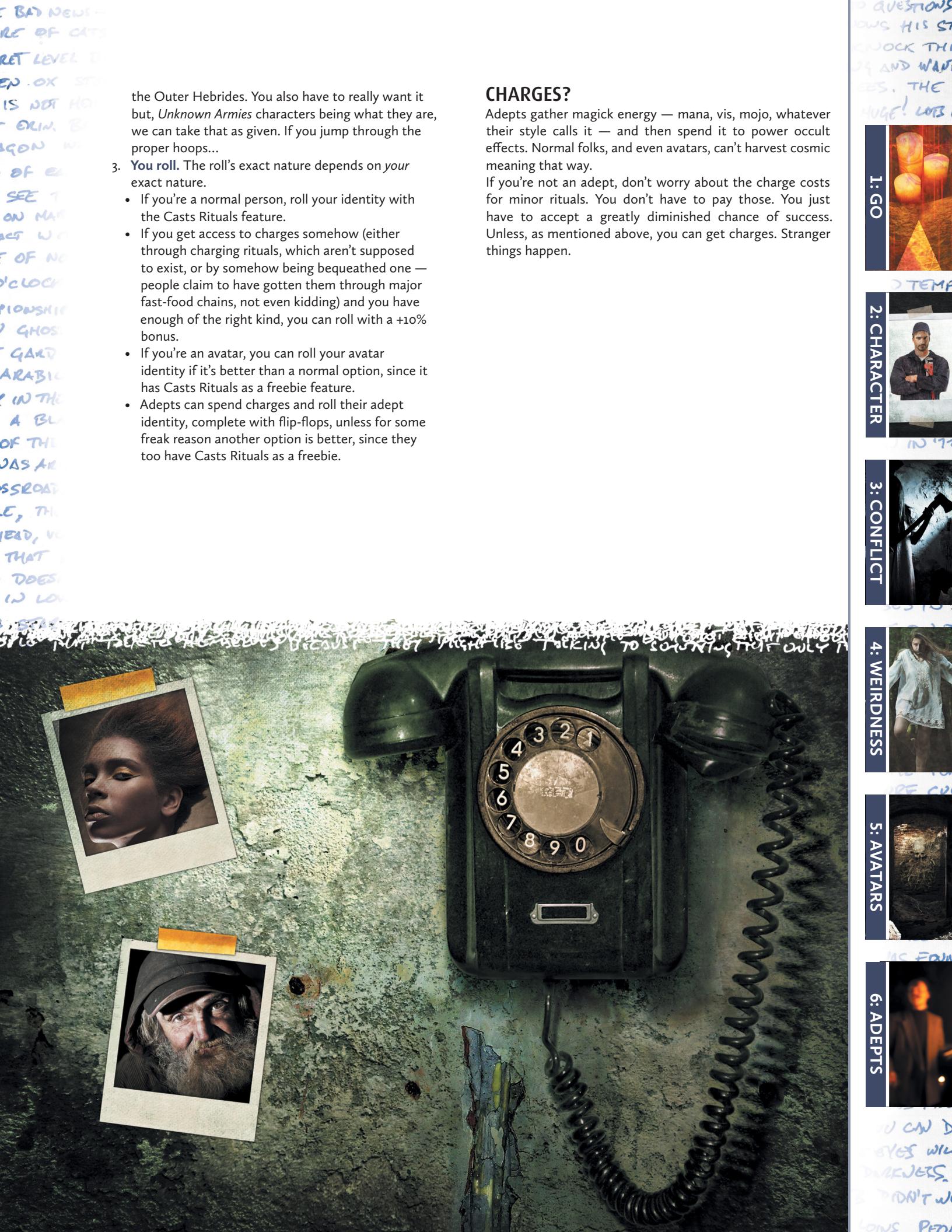
Finding a ritual in some old tome, or getting taught one by a geezer you met through Craigslist, is kind of like finding a slice of pizza in the street. Are you hungry enough to eat it? After all, it *might* be OK.

Using a ritual that a demon told you just 'cause you asked nicely is like eating a slice of pizza cooked by Typhoid Mary. It's just a plain old pony move.

## HOW TO CAST MINOR RITUALS

There are, as mentioned, three elements to casting a ritual.

1. **You have to know one**, either by finding it in a book or other source, or by being taught by a human, or by learning it from a demon. If it's legit, then...
2. **You carry out its ritual actions**, correctly, which could be as simple as making three knots in a piece of string, or could be as complicated as human sacrifice on the spring equinox on a particular altar in



## SOME MINOR RITUALS

### BLESSINGS OF PASSION

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual action:** Triple distill a pint of water and dissolve a troy ounce of pink salt in it. Add in a minim of grain alcohol and consume it beneath a full moon while chanting the phrase "Habadda ulrom uttar bavab." Drink some before and after and some between each word in the chant.

**Effect:** This purports to make a man irresistible to women, imbuing him with preternatural charm and charisma. Instead, it automatically opens a caster of any gender to possession by any random demon that's highly sexually motivated. Some people have, indeed, been inhabited by smooth-tongued seducers, though they remained in total blackout throughout the possession. Other possessors are much, much worse.

### THE GREEN PHONE

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual Action:** You must find one of those olive green or drab green rotary phones and get it hooked up to a phone line. The phone doesn't have to function, but it must be connected to a live line, this is important. On the second of the month, make a series of calls on the phone. First, dial the first phone number you memorized as a child while thinking about school friends. (You can't cast this if you had no friends as a child. Or no phone.) If you hear static, you're doing fine. Next, call the first number you ever called, even if it's long since disconnected. Do *not* think about who you would have been calling or that person may be cursed. You should hear breathing on the line. If you hear crying, you've failed and are in danger. Finally, call the number of a dead relative. If you hear sobs *this* time, you're doing fine. While still on the line, dial the number of your current cell phone or any number where you want to receive mysterious messages.

**Effect:** If you do this ritual correctly, your cell phone gets random phone calls giving you useful information or leads to trails you didn't even know you should be following. This ritual is very difficult to perform correctly, and versions of it often have minor errors, so it may take many attempts to get right. Supposedly there's a significant version of this ritual that is more consistent.

If the ritual works, you get a number of calls equal to the tens place of the roll you made to cast it. Roll a 41 and you get four calls. They come over the course of a month or so. They could be good for a *hunch* or they could just direct you to somewhere the GM thinks your character can be interesting.

### MADDENING INVADER

**Cost:** 3 minor charges.

**Ritual action:** Using a high-speed steel drill bit with a titanium nitride coating, drill a 1/8 inch hole in your victim's skull. Location does not matter, as long as it's a point over the dura mater. As you do this, recite the following verse three times: "Pierce the bone and pierce the hide, spirit groan and come inside!"

**Effect:** If successful, the spell calls a demon and puts it inside the body of the poor sap you're drilling into. Note that bone dust can really mess up your lungs if inhaled, so get a mask. Safety first. The victim automatically succumbs to the demon's possession for one to ten minutes after the conclusion of the spell, but after that *the standard rules of possession* apply.

Obviously, this is an evil thing to do. That's obvious to you, isn't it? Also possibly dumb, since demons have no integrity and you're giving one exactly what it wants, access to a living body. That said, if you have some way to pick which demon's closest when you cast this, and you make it clear that you can keep the warm bodies coming, a maddening invader can give a would-be diabolist a big bargaining chip.

### NEPTUNE'S AWAKENING

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Ritual Action:** This ritual can only be cast on the eastern edge of the Pacific Ocean — so, on beaches in Alaska, California, the west coast of Mexico, and so on. You braid a cord of silk, hemp, and cotton, in three different colors, tying a stone the size of your foot on each end. As the tide is coming in at night, walk out into the water stark naked until you're knee-deep, face the shore, and sit down. Wrap the cord around both wrists, tightly, binding them together, and then fling the rocks up and back behind you, towards the ocean, while lying down.

**Effect:** If you survive, and the spell succeeds, you gain one significant charge. As a charging ritual, this is tightly held and treasured by those who understand its value.

Holding a charge, if you aren't an adept, feels kind of like a warm, itchy sensation about two inches behind your belly button. Like a caffeine high, it makes you feel jittery and like you should be doing something. If you're already doing something, it makes you feel like you should be doing two things.

Obviously, screwing around in the ocean at night with your hands tied together is not a risk-free endeavor. When performing this rite, roll to see if the ritual works first. Regardless of how that turns out, there are a couple other rolls involved.

First, roll Fitness to get your head back up above water in time to breathe. If you succeed, great, you're out. If that roll fails, face a Helplessness (3-4) check as you more or less waterboard yourself. If that roll succeeds, you can get free. If it fails,

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

See "Demonic Possession" on page 103 of Book Two: Run.

See "Hunch Rolls" on page 14.

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picking flight gets you out of the water, but you can't get back in it that night and it's a Self (3-4) check to force yourself to do the ritual again.

Once the ritual succeeds, it can't be cast again until sunlight has touched the ocean. Meaning, no matter what stress checks you pass or fail, you can't get more than one charge per night with this.

## OLD MIRROR

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual Action:** Get a mirror. The older the mirror is, the longer the ritual magic clings to it. For every decade of age, up to a century, the mirror lasts a day. For every century beyond the first, it lasts a month.

At midnight, no later, set the mirror in front of yourself in an empty room. The room should be dark except for one candle that lights your face but does not show in the mirror's reflection. For the next thirty minutes tell your reflection all the things you don't like about yourself. Dredge up the mistakes you've made in the past, and especially touch on things that you've done that are humiliating. Fill the mirror with the darkest parts of you. If you cannot drive yourself to tears with the confessions, the ritual fails and the mirror shatters explosively at 12:31, cutting you for 1d10 wounds.

**Effect:** You create a mirror that shows anyone who looks inside their real face. This is both figurative and mystical, and so the mirror shows people important information about themselves, not the least being whether they're enchanted or have some immaterial entity lurking around them.

On a deeper level, this gives the player a chance to comment upon — reflect, if you like — on the character, and offers a rationale for insights or changes of heart. Whenever a PC looks in this thing, the GM should ask, "And what do you see?" Listen to the answer. Nod thoughtfully, then tell the player if there's an immaterial mound of teeth and tentacles invisibly sucking on them from the astral plane.

## RECALL IN TRUTH

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual action:** Draw a straight line in white on your face, starting where your left earlobe attaches, passing through the left corner of your left eye. Do the same with a red line from right earlobe and right eye. Take a needle that's at least 40% pure silver and insert it where the lines cross on your head. As you do this, concentrate on a memory and recite the phrase "Essi gogor krugaz ayonveet."

**Effect:** The memory in question resets from whatever it currently is to an immediate experience of the episode. That is, if you cast this while thinking of your first kiss, your current memory of that kiss is replaced. The replacement memory has fidelity to the actual events, equivalent to remembering it anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour after it happened.

Most people don't think they need this ritual. Most people accept that misremembering happens all the time, to others. It's very hard to accept that it happens to oneself. But neuroscience indicates that every time you remember an event, the memory changes. The things you recall the oftenest are, therefore, the least reliable. That's without getting into the kind of memory-diddling that some adepts or other... things... are known to employ.

## THE PASS-OUT GAME

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual Action:** Children play this game quite naturally, but it is, in fact, magickal. Put your forehead on the ground, you may lay flat or be on your knees. Breathe as deeply as you can for thirty seconds to a minute. Stand up as quickly as you can and spin once, counterclockwise. If you don't pass out, the ritual failed. If you turn in the wrong direction, the ritual fails, though you might still convince yourself you're having a vision. Additionally, if you are over the age of majority, you must not eat or drink anything but water for seventy-two hours prior to casting.

**Effect:** This game results in you having strong visions, powerful glimpses of the Statosphere. You may or may not be able to comprehend the visions you are given.

The thing is though, if you look into the Statosphere with this ritual, it looks into you as well. People who complete the ritual find themselves victims of unusual and weird coincidence for the next three to seven days.

## UNVEIL THE INNER EYE

**Cost:** 2 minor charges.

**Ritual action:** Prepare a three-foot-wide mandala along a precise pattern, using sand of three different colors. The process of laying the mandala, which requires two hours and a successful Fitness roll, leaves you stuck in its center, where the spell can be cast. If you disturb the pattern before casting, the spell fails. To finish the spell, lick the skin of a psychoactive toad or frog — *Bufo alvarius*, *Phyllomedusa bicolor*, *Agalychnis callidryas*... they all work.

**Effect:** If the spell works, you get a vision of immaterial reality — ley lines, demonic possession, hauntings, avatarism, adeptry, access points to strange realms and entities that aren't fully real are all made manifest to the sight of one who has succeeded at this spell. Its effects last a number of minutes equal to the activating roll. Note that while some texts that describe the spell come with an instruction manual describing what various colors or shapes or hallucinations mean, they're useless at best: the caster's mind interprets the new data in completely different symbolic forms, personal to her experience and culture. They are consistent across castings for each ritualist though, so if a red haze of flame over

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS



*Oh so that's  
how it's done.*

*I will mark  
it well.*

someone's face means "adept" this time, it means that next time too.

The drawback of the ingredients is that, unless the spell succeeds, you get a bufotoxin high instead of magickally augmented perception. Since the player fails the roll, the player gets to decide what the character experiences for minutes equal to the failed roll. This can include sensations of profound spiritual awakening, a feeling of velocity, heart arrhythmia, or a horrible crushing weight. Spells that had lengthy descriptions of what one is supposed to experience may, on a failed roll, be worse than useless, as a suggestible occultist sees exactly what she was expecting.

Of course, for many dabblers, a failure is just as rewarding as a success.

### WICKED SALT

**Cost:** 1 minor charge.

**Ritual Action:** Over the course of a year, once every three months you need to make someone cry by acting with cruelty. It's better and easier if it is someone who already trusts you. When they begin to cry, collect their tears on a silver-colored silk handkerchief. At the end of the year, the last collection, you can burn the handkerchief. Instead of ash, it turns to a pile of salt. This salt, wicked salt, is an essence of rotten human intention, and angels cannot pass through it.

**Effect:** This ritual creates a special salt that can be used to make a circle of protection against angels. Why you would need that, of course, is probably terrible. Many chargers suppose that this ritual would work to protect a person from the Cruel Ones talked about by demons, but since no one knows what those really are, it's hard to say. Demons often recognize this stuff, however, and if they're embodied, many try and get hold of it.

### HOW TO CAST SIGNIFICANT RITUALS

There is a big difference between a significant ritual and a minor one, though of course most people performing rituals don't know this and the rituals themselves aren't labeled. But keeping all that ignorance in mind, here's the big difference: significant rituals *need* charges to cast. Charges, remember, are almost the exclusive prerogative of adepts, who are not notoriously big on sharing anything, except their opinions on the stupidity of non-adepts. When the phrase "muggle" entered the common lexicon, adepts were on *that* like yellow on a marshmallow duck.

Significant rites, then, are most useful to adepts, who pretty much *need* to think their way is the only way and who, consequently, rarely care to weed through the horseshit of false and misleading rituals while hoping there's a pony in there somewhere. But the fact is, significant rites exist, they work, and some adepts figure that out. Moreover, some authentic thaumaturges have minor rituals that produce significant charges. These charging rituals are among the closest-held secrets in the occult demimonde. If you knew what some adepts go through to get a significant charge, you'd understand why a shortcut to them is so damn valuable.

To enact a significant ritual, then, one must do the following:

## THE AUTHENTIC THAUMATURGE IDENTITY

There are all kinds of mystic societies out there with robes and hats and interesting traditions, but this identity describes membership in one that works. They really do train people to think, act, and feel in patterns that make magick rituals work better, or at all. The nature of an individual character's thaumaturgical training is up to the player, and may imply different features, but here's a pretty standard stock version:

*I'm an Authentic Thaumaturge, of course I can read a couple dead languages, spot mystic symbols incorporated into everyday objects, babble disturbingly.*

**Substitutes for:** Knowledge.

**Feature:** Casts Rituals.

**Feature:** Every Authentic Thaumaturge starts play knowing two minor rituals of the player's choice, or two chosen by the GM as being particularly likely to be useful (unique).

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

## SOME SIGNIFICANT RITUALS

### DRYAD ABIDANCE

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Ritual Action:** You can only cast this spell if you are a woman, and injured. Embrace a living tree that's at least as old as you are and whisper "Tree, today, hide me away, let me rest pressed 'gainst thy breast."

**Effect:** If the spell works, the caster vanishes into the tree, seeming to sink into its surface like someone going under quicksand. She feels as if she's in a deep slumber, and while encased, she heals at an increased rate — 1d10 wounds recovered for every day spent inside. She cannot leave until she is completely healed.

If someone cuts the tree down when she's inside, it is a gory mess. Whatever tool's being used on the tree does damage as if it was a full-on attack, the woman wakes up, and she's still encased in the wood. If it doesn't seem like there'd be space for her, sawing down the tree kills her outright, and her bones are scattered throughout the inside of the branches and trunk.

### THE ELEVATOR TRICK

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Ritual Action:** Find a building with at least ten floors. You need to press the buttons for the third floor, fifth floor, fourth floor, eighth floor, then second floor. If anyone gets on the elevator in the process, the ritual doesn't work. If you hit the wrong button in the process, the ritual doesn't work. If the ritual begins to work and you hit the button for the ninth or tenth floor prematurely, you or someone you love gets terribly ill within six months. If you love no one, that's you. After the elevator reaches the second floor and opens, you can then push the button for the first floor. If the elevator goes up instead of down, you've conducted the ritual correctly. Once you pass the ninth floor, you have been successful. When you reach the tenth floor, get out. The hallway will be all in black and white. If there is anyone in the hallway, don't talk to them. Go back to your life, with all friends and associates having forgotten you. Color never returns to your life.

**Effect:** Sometimes you need start over, and in theory, the ritual does just that. When it's over, it's like you never existed in the hearts and minds of the people in your life. People who don't know of you are unaffected. Paperwork showing you exist, like marriage certificates and your Social Security number, remain. The possibility is pretty strong that you have actually entered an alternate reality and that's why no one remembers you.

Also, it inflicts permanent colorblindness on the caster, as mentioned.

### FELINE GHOSTBREAKER

**Cost:** 3 significant charges.

**Ritual Action:** Get an all-black kitten and feed it the blood of poisonous snakes for a year. When it's grown, put a silver medal depicting the Archangel Michael or St. Francis Borgia around the cat's neck on a red silk ribbon.

**Effect:** If the ritual succeeds, the cat becomes able to see and harm intangible entities as long as it has the medal on the ribbon around its neck. Assume it has a Bite and Scratch identity at 50% but does negligible damage to mortal targets. Against astral parasites, demons, and similar non-solid paranormal entities, it does damage as a hand-to-hand attack. Every time it maxes out a creature's wound threshold, the haunting thing is destroyed — the feline literally devours it — and the cat adds 5% to Bite and Scratch.

### THE HELL'S HEART BULLET

**Cost:** 1 significant charge.

**Ritual Action:** Pour a bullet, any caliber, into a mold after warming the lead with a fire that contains a copy of the unexpurgated Moby Dick. Prick your finger with a crow quill and spill a drop of blood onto the bullet as it cools, whispering "From hell's heart I stab at thee."

**Effect:** When this bullet is fired, the shooter doesn't roll an identity, just a percentile die. If the result is 50 or less, the bullet strikes the shooter instead of the target, inflicting wounds like a normal firearm attack. If the result is 51+, it strikes the target, inflicting wounds per normal.

There's more weirdness than that, however. The bullet leaves an exit wound, but has no point of entry: it seems to have materialized, at full speed, in the middle of the target's body. It bypasses armor, cover... even clothes. But other than the wound, it doesn't damage anything. Clothing gets bloodstained but not burned or shredded. Finally, it does full firearm damage even against creatures and people that have some kind of protection against such harm. With a Hell's Heart Bullet, you can shoot immaterial spirits, if you can see them.

If you fire a Hell's Heart Bullet at a fulminature, the GM has the option to flip-flop the roll. If you don't know what a fulminature is, don't worry about it. It's an edge case.

### TRAIN

**Cost:** 2 significant charges.

**Ritual Action:** Go to a subway. Those with strong yellow shades in their design and tile work best, giving a +10% bonus to casting. Go at an hour when the trains would otherwise not run, so a holiday, the end of the night, or during construction. There are some words you must say, and a handful of flower petals to fling in the air.

If you succeed at the ritual, a train passes without stopping. Then a second. The third train stops and opens its doors. Do not get on that train, it goes specifically to hell. A fourth train comes, stops, and opens the doors. Go to the fourth car on *that* train and get on. Do not sit in the seats for pregnant women and the elderly. Anywhere else is fine. If there is anyone else on the train, do not speak to them no matter how interesting they appear. Other than you, only demons and revenants ride this train, and if you interact with them they can follow you off it. Get off after three stops.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

**Effect:** This train takes you to the train station closest to where you need to go. Not where you *want* to go, but where you *need* to go. You may think you know where you need to go. You might even be right.

## THE SOFT WAY: GUTTER MAGICK

Rituals are codified and absolute, and that's how most people regard magick. You don't just make it up on the fly like a magician pulling the collective unconscious out of his hat.

But that view, the view of the authentic thaumaturge, was conceived in the shadow of the Renaissance. The world before science was superstition and myth. Beginning in the Renaissance, the western conception of the world began to shift toward a more orderly alignment. Thaumaturgy was an attempt to housebreak magick and make it act like science — like turning a wolf into a dog.

Ill-educated peasants never forgot the old ways, and pendulums swing back. The current, post-modern, Heisenberg-flavor-blasted zeitgeist insists that not only is there the scientifically unknown, there is the mathematically unknowable. (*Math makes it true!*) So play-it-by-ear occultism — also known as gutter magick or reality bruising — is enjoying a resurgence. You might conjure up a vodou doll made with a GI Joe and bathed in the photons of your target's social media page. You want put a curse on someone? A lock of their hair, their SSN, and the posts they deleted before being made public could be all you need.

The Statusphere rumbles and shifts. Gutter magick taps into the loosest veins of this rich ore. While adepts and avatars work the grander themes and dramas, the reality bruiser sits by, waiting to pick up the leftovers. This doesn't make it ineffective. It's *less* effective, but being obsessed and taboo-bound is its own punishment.

There's nothing codified about reality bruising. It's all symbology, tweaking reality with whatever is handy. Semiotics run the dream logic of this process.

Whether the symbol is known only to you and the target, or to the whole world, you're making connections between things that are, ostensibly, not related. When you make this connection, you get to tug at those wires that tie everyone together. You manufacture a limited coincidence. Sometimes, the Statusphere does what you want without consequence to you. Sometimes, you bruise the cosmos and the cosmos punches back.

Reality bruising is improv magick. Improv doesn't have a plan.

## LEARNING GUTTER MAGICK

You can't really teach someone how to cast a particular gutter magick spell. In fact, no spell can be repeated the same way twice. But though it can't be taught, it can be learned, or intuited. Anyone with even one hardened notch in the Unnatural meter can roll their Secrecy ability to perform a gutter magick ritual. Just be careful. This stuff messes you up if you toy with it before you're ready. Hell, it can mess you up even if you are.

### MAKING UP RITUALS

To build an effect, you need a set of symbolic elements. These are items that represent you, as well as items that represent the target. These can be whatever makes sense, but samples include old clothes, roof tiles from their childhood home, your target's diary, access to their iCloud account, and the like.

The second item needed is a collective object. You must use something that's tied into everyone's collective unconscious, or at least that of the culture in which you live. This might be a movie where a man gets hit by a car, if you're trying to put that kind of whammy on your enemy. A shaving from the wood planks in an Underground Railroad station can help you break a friend out of jail. Remember, the utility of the object is of little or no consequence. It's the symbolism that holds power.

Therefore, you need up to five items each in the following categories:

**You:** Your driver's license, your carnation from prom, your bronzed baby shoes, the current phone number of your first love.

**Your Target:** Their underpants, the date on which they lost their virginity, a sample of their DNA, a list of the last ten books they checked out from the library.

**The Collective Unconscious:** A movie, a song, a pebble from the Berlin Wall, a first edition copy of *The Great Gatsby*, a Model T windshield, hair from Benedict Cumberbatch's razor.

Once you have all these assembled, you make up a ritual. It has to make sense to you, and it has to convince the cosmos these disparate things are, at least temporarily, connected. The more items you have that relate to your goal, the more likely the spell is to succeed. Also, you have to *believe*. But if you didn't, you wouldn't be doing all this stupid stuff, now would you?

Chaos  
breaks down  
reality into  
ingredients  
for a new  
reality.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

3: CONFLICT

4: WEIRDNESS

5: AVATARS

6: ADEPTS

YOU CAN  
EYES WILL  
DARKNESS  
DON'T W  
LIONS PED

## WHAT HAPPENS

There are six common categories determine the mechanical effect of your inspired mumbo jumbo.

### BLESSING

Blessing an endeavor makes it more likely to succeed. This is just using gutter magick at the appropriate scale to add percentiles to an objective. Applying gutter magick to them isn't complicated. You come up with your ritual, perform it and, if you succeed, get to puff up your objective. Simple.

### BONDS

You form a bond between yourself and someone else in the universe. Maybe you connect to an enemy, maybe the girl you have a crush on. It doesn't matter who you're tied to. What's important is that you've symbolically bound the two things so that, when the cosmos looks upon them, they're treated as one.

With a bond, you get a bonus of +10% when you're trying to explain something to, or cooperate with, the person to whom you're bonded. It lasts until it has made a difference.

### BOONS

You want something to go right, for fate to pat the head of a certain person or situation. The universe can be very unfair, and you try to make up for this. Sometimes, the crazy guys have to finish first, right? You may give the boon to yourself or a single other target. In game terms, the boon equates to a single beneficial 20% shift on a roll relating to the boon you want. You must create the conditions which evoke the boon and they have to be really specific. You can't just get a +20% bonus to Notice, but you can get it when searching for fingerprints, or when you're trying to find Paula Rampling. You can't add a +20% bonus to your next Fitness roll, but you can do it for the next time you use Fitness to compete in downhill skiing. It remains in effect until it has made a difference.

### WHAMMIES

The opposite of a boon, the whammy takes some of that inherent unfairness the cosmos is so fond of and redirects toward a person, or situation, of your choice. Like a boon, you're tweaking the laws of probability in a direction of your choosing.

If successful, this creates a -20% shift which you may apply to your opponent's roll. If that cop who's been bothering you is going to see you boost a car, you can make his Notice roll shift against him. Maybe you really, really do not like your boss and have been cheating on your time card — same thing.

## STICKY BRUISES

Gutter magick is sticky. It penalizes or benefits the target *until the effect makes a difference*. If he succeeds despite it, or would have failed without it, it hangs around until it's the deciding factor.

*Mel's identity is Hit Man 50% and he's on the street having declared that if he sees you, you're dead. You sensibly concoct a magickal pastiche and put a -20% whammy on Mel's gun hand. When the showdown occurs, Mel fires and rolls a 71. Even though his identity is effectively 30% after your whammy, he would have missed anyway. The whammy remains. Next round, he shoots and gets a 21. Ouch! Even with the whammy, he hit, so it still sticks around. As you try to limp back to your car, he fires at your back and rolls a 44. Normally, that'd be a matched success and probably the end of you. But because the whammy has decreased his identity, it's a matched fail.*

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As with a boon, you have to target this with exacting specificity. It can't just be whichever guard is driving the armored car, it has to be a particular guy with a name and an address. But thanks to this very precision, you can ensure that a defense attorney takes a -20% shift when she's trying to talk the judge into suspending your enemy's sentence, not just the next time she does anything litigious.

Whammies are *sticky*.

### CURSE

Maybe you're more than a little bit mad. Maybe you really want to hurt someone rather than protect yourself from them. What you want is an old fashioned evil-eye *curse*.

A curse employs synchronicity and coincidence to injure the target. You're pulling at the strands of fate to kick someone in the astral nuts. It does 1d10 wounds.

Maybe they're crossing a street and a car comes by and clips them. Maybe they break their nose opening the door to the office. In this situation, your target doesn't need to be anywhere near you — and it's probably better that they aren't — when the curse goes off.



## ROLLING TO BRUISE REALITY

When it comes time to make your ritual be something more than a random page from a stolen diary, a glass of corked wine, and thirty-seven gears from old watches scattered in a sacred pattern, you roll to power it. Gutter magick rites are based on your Secrecy ability or a relevant identity.

Adepts can use reality bruising, but it's so low-rent that they usually won't bother. Avatars can use their avatar identity, drawing on their connection to the Statusphere. Everyone else can roll Secrecy, or an identity with the feature Use Gutter Magick (which adepts and avatars get for free).

Depending on how you do the ritual, you might have positive or negative shifts on your roll, usually by 10% or 20%. The GM might grant a positive shift for one of the following:

- Taking more time on the ritual, in a way that matters.
- Using especially potent components, such as an artifact, something intimately tied to your target, or a sacrifice from yourself.
- Performing the ritual in a mystically potent place or at a cosmically significant time.
- Getting an adept to drop a minor (+10%) or significant (+20%) charge on it.

On the other hand, these could cause negative shifts:

- Rushing the ritual.
- Working with too few components, or low-quality ones.
- Performing the ritual in a place that is anathema to it, like hexing someone's fertility from inside a greenhouse.

If the GM judges the negative shifts to exceed -20%, don't roll for the ritual; it just won't work. A matched success means the ritual works a bit better than expected, whether that's lasting longer or giving a bigger bonus. A critical success *could* do all that and also bedevil one of your enemies with unnatural phenomena. Or it could just work and discharge a storm of weird stuff at random.

If you succeed at the roll, the ritual goes off as you expect. If you fail normally, nothing happens — you reached out to the cosmos, and it ignored you. A matched failure or critical fumble means the ritual backlashes, or possibly just has unpredictable effects that make things more... interesting.

## HOW TO USE AND EXPLOIT RITUALS

In a lot of cases, the uses are obvious. You want someone hurt so you do a harm ritual. You need some information or guidance so you cast a ritual that gets you that. But there are subtler options as well.

**Freak the Squares:** Even impractical rituals can have effects that are visibly unnatural. If you want to coerce someone's Unnatural meter you could do worse than to make a threat and a Thaumaturgy roll. Specifically, you could fail the roll. That would probably be worse. Depending on target and rite, you might provoke a stress check just by letting the ritual do what it actually does.

**Validate:** If you have a real codified ritual from old times and can make it work, that's proof that you're serious about the surreal. There's an old misogynistic joke about a dancing dog, with the punchline being "you don't expect the dog to dance *well*, it's impressive that it can dance at all." Similarly, you don't need a Thaumaturgy rite that does something cool to convince thaumaturges you're a cut above the other checker jagoffs, as long as it's a rite they don't already have. They tend to be very eager to collect new ones — the way scientists are with subatomic particles. As for having a rite they *do* already know, that's almost as good. It shows them that you, like they, are members of an educated elite that can sort the rubies from the rubbish.

**Get People to Act Stupid:** It's not kind, but if you show gullible people that a series of seemingly nonsensical actions can provoke good luck or effects inexplicable by science, then it becomes exponentially easier to convince them that anything you ask is a good idea... as long as you frame it as part of a ritual. You can make an honest man steal if he thinks a stolen ring is needed for the ritual to cure his daughter, or you can make an unbalanced loser kill if he thinks human sacrifice is required. Occultists have been using this to get laid for centuries.

1: GO

2: CHARACTER

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