

# INFINITE TAPESTRY™



snelly 2002

AN UTIBRAL SOURCEBOOK FOR **MAGE: THE ASCENSION®**

# INFINITE TAPESTRY™

## THE PLACE OF DEAD ROADS

Once, mages boldly trod the many paths to the Otherworlds, creating new realities at whim. Those roads are now closed. The Avatar Storm not only hazards the Gauntlet between worlds, it scours whole Realms. The maps the Traditions once devised to navigate these perilous Realms are useless; whole new realities now exist beyond the barrier. Even the Masters are missing, their wisdom lost to the latest generation of Awakened.

## FORGING PATHS ANEW

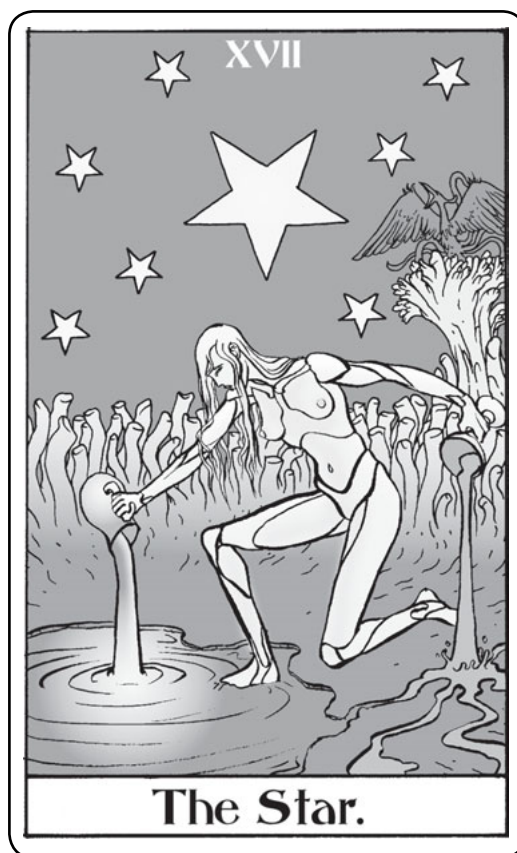
A new era of exploration dawns as Tradition mages once more seek to pierce the Gauntlet and wrest magical secrets from the spirit worlds, to find what was lost and bring it back to their own reality, to once more awaken a bitter, apathetic world to magic. To do so, however, they must travel to the source and survive its chaotic, unstable spiritscape.

## MAGE THE ASCENSION

GAMES FOR MATURE MINDS



# THE INFINITE<sup>TM</sup> TAPESTRy



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**Author's acknowledgements:** Sam Inabinet would like to thank Piter de Parq, Kertész-Börökös, Emrey, Shane, Mike & Willow and especially George & Marjorie for their invaluable help.



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# THE INFINITE TAPESTRY™



## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE OTHER WORLDS	4
CHAPTER ONE: STEPPING OVER	8
CHAPTER TWO: THE LOWER ASTRAL REACHES	36
CHAPTER THREE: THE UPPER ASTRAL REACHES	60
CHAPTER FOUR: BEYOND THE HORIZON	106
CHAPTER FIVE: FROM BEYOND ALL BARRIERS	134
CHAPTER SIX: WALKING THE WORLDS (STORYTELLING)	156
APPENDIX: ROTES, WONDERS AND TRAITS	178



# INTRO⊕DUCTION: THE ⊕THERWORLDS



Reality, as most of humanity knows it, is defined by the collective belief of the six billion people who live on Earth. It's a system governed by immutable laws, a dimension where two plus two equals four, gravity works, and the sun rises in the east every morning. In this "real world," most of humanity remains oblivious to the existence of the supernatural world, actively disbelieving (or at least ignoring) anything that isn't "real."

Every day, mass media chatters on endlessly with its trivial observations, money changes hands, and life goes on.

Mages, on the other hand, are aware of alternatives to this reality. They have awakened to other possibilities. For visionaries who can perceive things outside the physical world, other dimensions surrounding the Earth contain the improbable, the impossible, the idealized, and the imaginary. These are the *Otherworlds*, the Infinite Tapestry of creation.

From the physical world, mages can perceive two of these dimensions, gaining insights into the real world by peering into Astral Space (as described in Chapter Two) or the spirit world of the Penumbra (as described in Chapter One). Whether that vision depends on altered states of consciousness, heightened perception, impossible technology, or magical artifacts depends on the mage's practices and paradigm. Powerful mages can actually enter other dimensions, "stepping sideways" out of the physical world and into the Otherworlds. As magic has

faded from the world, however, the practice has become more difficult — reality is less accepting of magical alternatives.

Once these other dimensions served as reflections of our own world. Some were funhouse mirrors that distorted reality, exaggerating some aspects and minimizing others. Mages could explore those alternatives, learn from diverse experiences, and bring what they learned back to the ordinary world. Freed from the limitations of Earthly reality, they found domains that allowed them to practice incredible acts of willworking, realizing possibilities they could never fully experience on Earth. Whether shallowing into faerie realms, walking through the Spirit Wilds, or contemplating the depths of Astral Space, stepping outside Earthly reality offered new perspectives on life, the universe, and everything.

Now the Earth is undergoing drastic changes. As magic dies, ancient evils return, and powerful forces calcify creation. The impossible has become irrelevant, disconnecting from more immediate and mundane problems. The Otherworlds have become distant and more difficult for spiritual travelers to attain. In centuries past, mages could ascend to other realities, finding worlds that reflected their ideals. Some actually defined "Ascension" as a literal ascension to the heavens, where they could attain a higher state of existence. A few lost their way and surrendered to eternal twilight, never to return, but the most powerful Masters and Oracles actually created dimensions reflecting their personal and magical beliefs.

Earthly reality, in a cosmological act of self-defense, has since isolated itself from these alternatives. Outside the natural world, other dimensions lay beyond supernatural barriers. Astral Realms of intellect, spiritual Realms of energy, and the many hells of the dead wait far outside the boundaries of human perception. Above, below, and around the physical world, if indeed such words can apply, realms of spirit, mind, entropy, and madness offer an escape, but it is only a temporary one. The world we see around us is the one mages must now live in — and if they cannot cope with the supernatural terrors that surround them, it is the world they must die in.

## THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

At the end of the 20th century, a whirlwind of events called the Reckoning swept through all creation. A portent appeared in the Heavens: a red star visible only by certain denizens of the supernatural world. Unknown forces imbued ordinary humans with extraordinary powers, creating armies of hunters armed against the night. Spirits of the dead returned to Earth, seeking and claiming human flesh to inhabit. In the midst of this madness, the Technocracy claimed to stand triumphant — yet even they watched helpless as unknown and unseen forces cleansed the world.

One of the deadliest menaces of the Reckoning was a roiling tempest that swept through the Otherworlds. A vast and primal phenomenon flayed spiritual travelers with primal fury, isolated distant dimensions from the rest of creation, and tormented the spirits of the dead. Godlike Masters of magic found themselves trapped in Realms they had created far from Earth. Oracles and Masters found that they had become too powerful for the world of their origin, but not powerful enough to return.

Within the Technocracy, orbital outposts stationed around the planet briefly lost contact with (and control over) agents, constructs, and territories below them. From private “hyperspace fortresses,” Technocratic masters watched events on the front lines of reality from afar. They could observe and advise agents in the field, but front-line operatives fought the endgame of the Ascension War on their own. Communications have since been restored, but countless loyal agents have been caught out in the cold — and cold war conditions still prevail.

Visionaries who studied the many realms of spirit world always knew the Otherworlds were capricious and deadly, but radical changes in worlds beyond confirmed it. Much of what they had explored had been changed, and even worse, much of what they knew was now obsolete. In a desperate attempt to name what they could not understand, they called this phenomenon the *Avatar Storm*.

For the few Masters left on Earth, this euphemism suggested a freakish turn of events that was as impersonal as a change in the weather. Arriving as suddenly as a hurricane, it drastically altered the spiritual landscape of the Otherworlds. For years, it continued to unleash chaos on creation, and it still does. Secretly, many mages fear its actions are caused by the influence

of powerful Umbrood spirits, the approach of Armageddon, or even the power of Consensus, the collective will of humanity. Theories abounded, yet for all their experience, the mystery and power of Otherworlds confounded the Masters once again.

The Avatar Storm was as deadly as it was sudden. This paranormal force was drawn to Paradox, power, and the strength of ancient souls. Every mage has an Awakened Avatar, even though each one defines and understands it differently. The Avatar is the essence that allows a mage to work her will upon the world. Whether it is an old soul, higher self, Enlightened mind, shard of divinity, or dark shadow does not matter. Because every mage possesses an Avatar, any willworker who stepped outside the physical world — the dimension inhabited by ordinary humans — encountered unseen forces that could wound, cast out, kill, or even worse, render the traveler incapable of ever performing magic again. Spirit worlds filled with the energy of life could mete retribution and death with the same fervor.

The Infinite Tapestry of creation has unraveled. In the wake of the Storm’s initial front, mages can see the devastation it wrought. Entire dimensions have disappeared, or cannot be found. Portals to private chantries on the Horizon have closed, along with the supplies of Quintessence to those dimensions. Creatures and sentient beings isolated from the physical world have changed. Strange winds still soar through the dimensions of creation, laying bare anything left unprotected.

Paradox and power still draw the Avatar Winds. Loss of life is the kindest punishment, for the Avatar Storm is capable of stripping away identity, intellect, or even sanity. Venture from the world you know, and you may return forever changed — if you return at all. The Storm’s initial fury has subsided, at least for now, but the dangers of the spirit world remain. Anyone exploring Realms outside the one we know should do so cautiously, for limitless possibilities present opportunities for limitless change... and limitless horror.

Scholars claim to see the portents of the End Times, the prelude to Armageddon. By their reckoning, all of creation is destined to come to an end. Some fear the Avatar Storm is merely the first of many changes, as they look for a bulwark or haven to protect them. Others gather up threads of the shredded tapestry to rebuild what they can. Traditionalists and Technocrats alike sort the detritus of reality, desperately trying to understand what could have unleashed such madness. Is this the calm before the next storm, or the eye of the hurricane? Is it the end of the world or the dawn of a new one? The answers lie in worlds beyond, awaiting discovery.

## STORYTELLING IN THE OTHER WORLDS

This book provides the basic framework of Realms outside reality. It isn’t a “canonical” listing of what remains outside reality; instead, consider it as a structure you should feel free to build on. Any experienced **Mage** player should already be familiar with the basic frames of reference of the spirit world: the Penumbra, Spirit Wilds, the Astral Plane,

## SUBMITTED FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Sleepers have their own legends of individuals who have peered into the Otherworlds. A few are described below.

*The Don Juan Series:* Decades ago, Carlos Castaneda chronicled the metaphysical journeys of Don Juan, a Yaqui sorcerer who usedentheogens and Native American mysticism to gain glimpses of other worlds. Some die-hard fans insisted the stories were real, but Castaneda expended little effort to correct them. Cultists of Ecstasy may find some intriguing alternatives here, including bizarre ideas and sensations adaptable to the Periphery and Penumbra.

*The Book of Dzyan:* Madame Blavatsky was a 19th-century spiritualist who claimed to receive knowledge from Ancient Masters. Whether she's a mage, medium, or charlatan in the World of Darkness remains a matter of debate. Regardless, she was one of the first people to popularize the term "astral space" in the West. She claimed to receive instruction from powerful sorcerers who had ascended from this world into the astral world. While the writing may seem incredibly turgid to the casual reader, it may give inspiration to anyone playing an old-school Hermetic mage.

*Alice's Adventures:* For a much simpler approach to the Otherworlds, it's hard to go wrong with Lewis Carroll's looking glasses and rabbit holes. *Alice and Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are great inspiration for weird encounters in realms beyond, along with the lesser-known *Sylvie and Bruno*.

*The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath:* H.P. Lovecraft has written several stories set in the Dreamlands, another dimension only accessible to powerful minds and lucid dreamers. A beggar in our world can be a king in his dreams, and a modest scholar can master magic beyond imagination. For Storytellers seeking a blend between fantasy and horror, go straight to this source.

*Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into Contemporary Shamanism:* Daniel Pinchbeck's personal exploration of the strange new worlds hinted at by hallucinogens. You don't have to use the drugs to get Umbral inspirations from the bizarre experiences Pinchbeck collects from psychonauts the world over.

and so on. If not, any character with the Occult or Cosmology Ability should have the chance to learn about them. The capricious nature of the Avatar Storm means that the most impossible, fantastic, or even ridiculous Realm you can think can appear overnight, and then disappear forever — or endure for a thousand years.

We cannot describe everything that's here, but the contents of this book should be a solid start. When all else fails, make up more details. No, really. If reality has limitless possibilities, the Storyteller should have the freedom to use

them. Your players will feel more at home if the basic rules and Umbral geography stay the same, but the Otherworlds are a perfect locale for all those really bizarre ideas you wouldn't dare attempt in an ordinary **Mage** game. No mage can stay outside the material world for more than a few months, but during that time, whatever you can dream, you can do. Unleash impossible magic. Defy the conventional paradigm. Let your imagination soar. As long as your characters can return to the material world afterwards, the sky's the limit — and in some cases, there are no limits.

Previous editions of this book worked like road maps, giving directions to enduring locations in the Otherworlds. This tome serves more as a user's manual, giving the Storyteller tools for building his own spirit worlds. You won't find an exhaustive listing of every locale that's ever been printed on the Spirit Wilds, but you should have the framework to tell a thousand stories within it. In particular, most of the Horizon Realms have vanished, but if your story really needs one of those locales, it can mysteriously reappear as needed, before vanishing once again. The geography of the Otherworlds is intentionally unpredictable, but with a few basic guidelines, it shouldn't be overwhelming. When Storytelling adventures in these dimensions, keep three basic principles in mind:

*The Otherworlds are constantly changing.* Even if a mage can find the same Horizon Realm more than once, it may be subtly (or drastically) different each time she encounters it. No two journeys should be quite the same, even if they both lead to the same destination. Impossible things are still lost outside of reality, so mages can encounter anything your story demands. And just as quickly, the Avatar Storm can erase all traces that it ever existed.

*The Otherworlds are infinite.* Any idea can become reality outside the "real world," if only for a moment. This book contains a few examples of places that may or may not exist, but feel free to use them as examples for other dimensions. If you've got a favorite Horizon Realm that hasn't been "revised" or updated for this book, there's no reason why it couldn't suddenly reappear in your campaign. Most Horizon Realms have been lost, but in your campaign, some of them may be found again, if only temporarily.

*Stories succeed where rules fail.* When building on this structure, don't try to quantify everything in hard mechanics. The rules we present in this book should serve as guidelines, not gospel. There's plenty of "crunch" in here to keep your game running, but dealing with the unknown is not simply a matter of citing rules. To escape from a lost civilization, a mage doesn't say he'll use "a conjunctive Effect of Spirit 5 and Prime 3, with three successes on an Arete roll against difficulty 8." Encourage your players to come up with wild ideas, have them roll Arete, and describe the results. Use magic, not metrics — drama, not dice. If your players find hard rules essential, there will be plenty of time for that when they return to Earth. Let this book serve as your escape, as well.

# UMBRAE

DEEP UMBRAE

ETHERSPACE

HORIZON

EPIPHANIES

COURTS OF THE UMBROOD

ASTRAL REACHES

SPIRIT WILDS

UNDERWORLD

# CHAPTER ①: STEPPING ② OVER

## BASIC C③STI④LOGY



Anything's possible.

The Infinite Tapestry of creation encompasses everything — all that is, all that was, and all that can be imagined. For a frame of reference, mages place the Earth at the center of all creation, if only to understand the mysteries around it. Call this reality *the physical world*, if you like, or the *real world*, if you eschew all alternatives. We call it *Earth*. Mages are human, first and foremost, and thus, they live and die in this world, the sphere inhabited by ordinary humans. When referring to the Tapestry, most rely on the same terms, ideas, and frames of reference they used before the Reckoning. Whether all these ideas hold true remains to be seen. Their planet is no longer the center of creation, and once safe Realms now deceive and destroy the unwary.

Above, below, and around — these are the cardinal directions for places that don't exist. All *around* us is a spirit world we cannot see, a reflection of the physical world. Everything in our world casts a “shadow” of sorts into that dimension; thus, mages often use the Latin word for shadow — the *Umbra* — to describe it. Ephemeral spirits inhabit a realm where nearly everything is alive. Its closest dimension, the

*Penumbra*, mirrors our own. For almost every building and person existing in our world, something forged from ephemeral spirits exists in the *Penumbra* to represent it.

In ages past, mages found it easier to enter the *Penumbra* than any other alternate dimensions. Learned Verbena speak of the Paths of Wyck that once stretched through it to other parts of the planet, forming roads between continents. These were some of the first pathways used to navigate spiritual wilderness. The few trods, airts, and passageways that remain are crafted by spirits, and guarded by them as well. Older willworkers learned to pass through the *Penumbra* on their way to other dimensions, places *above*, *below*, and *around* it. These three *Umbræ* — High, Low and Middle — collectively form the *Near Umbra*; the boundaries of all three extend to the limits of Earth's atmosphere.

*Above* us is a dimension of intellect, a realm where ideas and concept exist in strange forms and living images. Perhaps the word “above” is appropriate because of the lofty concepts that dwell there. For untold ages, the *High Umbra* was only attainable by Masters of the Mind Sphere, elitists who could isolate their intellectual essence in *Astral Space*. Projecting their minds into astral bodies, they once thought themselves superior to lesser creatures unaware of the Astral

Plane's existence. Now, they encounter ancient forces that humble them with impersonal and omnipotent power: courts of Umbrood, alien infestations, and far stranger things only the mightiest minds can survive.

Below us are the realms of the dead, the forgotten, and the victims of entropy. The *Low Umbra* has always been a bleak and violent dimension. Just as the Penumbra reflects life in the physical world, this underworld holds the shadow of death. Where dynamic, living energy thrives in the Middle Umbra, entropic forces conquer and corrupt in its dark shadow. As the Avatar Storm lashed spirits in the Middle and High Umbrae it tortured souls in the Low Umbra. Whether a mage defines it as the *Dark Umbra*, the *Shadowlands*, the *Underworld*, or even *Contrarian* depends largely on his philosophy. Whatever you call it, a massive roiling *Maelstrom* makes it nearly impossible for living mages to enter that dimension at the turn of the 21st century.

When the dawning of Anthelios, the Red Star, signaled the start of the Reckoning, tempestuous events in the Low Umbra brought further horrors. For millennia, the souls of the recently deceased descended into the Shadowlands. The most powerful ghosts, often called *wraiths*, defied death with the strength of their passions. But just as arrogant mages were cast from the Spirit Wilds, many of these ancient souls were hurled from the Shadowlands. Cunning spirits of the Restless Dead claimed dead bodies as their new vessels, animating them as *zombies* — and becoming easy prey for human hunters of the supernatural. Some of the oldest souls in the Underworld, the *Amenti*, underwent pilgrimages to restore their earthly bodies, quests that allowed them to emulate the *mummies* of myth.

At the height of the Reckoning, the delivery of souls to the Underworld abruptly stopped. A growing *Maelstrom* isolated the physical world from the lands of the dead. In the years that followed, mages witnessed few new wraiths. Euthanatoi and other scholars of death could no longer descend into the Dark Umbra. The few damned souls trapped in the Underworld during the *Maelstrom* dwelled in unknown and unseen hells. Perhaps one day the storm may subside, but for now, it has made the Shadowlands inviolate. Death became a mystery again, and for the time being, the Underworld remains an enigma.

The Penumbra still has paths leading above and below, from the depths of Malfean hells to the highest ideals of Astral Space. Between these extremes, Penumbral paths lead to the living dimensions of the *Spirit Wilds*. If a traveler can bargain with spirits, follow hidden paths, and most importantly, survive capricious Umbral storms, she may find her way through the Penumbra to living Realms that reflect different facets of the animistic world. Primal forces work openly there, as vast hierarchies of spirits serve the Earth Mother who rules those Realms. Her most dangerous guardians include feral shapeshifters, creatures who can adapt to the many Realms of flesh and spirit. Once mages traveled

through this *Middle Umbra* with impunity, but now the favor of the Goddess has changed. Mages still travel through astral Realms and distant worlds, but after the wrath of the Reckoning, the Spirit Wilds now punish unwanted intruders. Mages no longer belong there.

The Low, Middle, and High Umbra are like the warp, woof, and weft of the Tapestry. The cardinal directions of *above*, *around*, and *below* still remain within these three regions, but the Otherworlds have undergone a severe and profound cosmological shift. Dimensions beyond are at the mercy of the winds of change. It's as if the signs have all been knocked down, and travelers are still desperately trying to remember directions. The Otherworlds constantly evolve, and the farther a mage travels from Earth, the more sudden and violent that change can become.

## BEYOND

Surrounding the Earth, a spiritual gauntlet separates the physical world from vast and terrifying Realms beyond. Countless portals once existed on Earth, leading from hidden places to dimensions far outside the "real world." In the wake of the Reckoning, they have closed. The more impossible or frivolous Realms have softly and silently faded away, leaving no trace or trail. Many of the portals leading to them are gone, and cosmological travel has become unpredictable.

The three Umbrae described above extend to the limits of Earth's atmosphere, contained by a massive spiritual barrier called the *First Horizon*. It forms the limit of Earthly reality and the outermost boundary of the Near Umbra. During the Renaissance, mages testing the limits of creation considered it the edge of the world. Modern mages see it in many different ways. Some Dreamspeakers see it as a churning river of ethereal energy; Sons of Ether monitor its disturbances of cosmic rays; Void Engineers often encounter a barrier of unquantifiable energy as they approach it. Whatever your paradigm, it serves as an obstacle for sorcerers and Technocrats who lack the power to cross it.

The *True Horizon* stretches from the limits of Earth's atmosphere to the hazards of the asteroid belt. Just as Earth casts reflections into the Otherworld, space also casts a spiritual reflection. In the spirit world, deep space has never been a lifeless vacuum; instead, invisible and insubstantial winds soar through it. A vast sea of luminiferous *ether* roils ceaselessly, conducting heat, light, and spiritual energy. In our reality, this area is empty space, a lifeless vacuum, but outside of Earthly reality, it holds infinite possibilities. Some modern mages call this *Etherspace*, but for others, all of this territory is the Horizon.

Pocket dimensions called *Horizon Realms* drift through this dimension as spirit Realms cast adrift in the eternal night. Because the portals leading to these Realms have closed, some are now adrift in the ether — and some are gone forever. A few scientific idealists have devised craft that can sail or soar through this roiling sea to explore what remains. Ambitious

Sons of Ether have constructed most of these *ethcraft*, each capable of bearing travelers through the True Horizon, but such journeys are always perilous. Technocrats repeatedly attempt to travel faster than light through the *hyperspace* around Etherspace, but their technology is so experimental that it always draws Paradox. Instead, most craft in the Umbra travel at velocities approaching the speed of light.

The sea of ether extends to another barrier, the *Far Horizon*, a spherical gauntlet of hazards as difficult to navigate as the chains of asteroids they represent. The paths through this barrier were once charted and dependable. Now chaos reigns. Powerful rituals are necessary to reach beyond this supernatural barrier. The safest rites cast minds and souls deep into worlds beyond, leaving a mage's physical body behind.

Beyond the Far Horizon, the cold and deadly *Void* stretches out to infinity. In the physical world, deep space may be a lifeless realm, but the Void contains horrors entirely alien to mankind's comprehension. Mages try to define this realm through their disparate philosophies, but the minds of men hold no influence on its shadow or substance. Alien forces are at work, and alien creatures demonstrate abilities beyond magic. Spiritualists know this realm as the *Deep Umbra*; Technocrats speak of the *Deep Universe*; both groups are entirely out of their depth within it.

Adrift in the night, spheres of isolated reality promise safe havens from the terrors of the Void. Within our solar system, each of the nine planets holds a *Shard Realm*, and each casts a spiritual reflection within the Otherworld called a *Shade Realm*. Hermetics have documented that each one corresponds to one of the Nine Spheres. Before the Avatar Storm, these reflections were actually cast on the First Horizon. After the Reckoning, the primal connections between Earth and distant planets were lost; thus, spiritual travelers must now journey to other planets to find them. With the advent of space travel (both spiritual and physical), explorers have found other Planetary Realms, from the Venusian Penumbra and Martian Mythical Realms to personal dimensions that test the minds and spirits of mages who seek them.

Any mage with a basic understanding of magical cosmology (and a modest command of the Cosmology Ability) is probably conversant in these ideas. However, most events and places in the Void remain highly theoretical for the average mage. Events on Earth have discouraged them from seeking an escape from Earthly reality. Once mages could travel freely between our world and distant dimensions, but as Armageddon approaches, the separation of the real and the imaginary is becoming more pronounced.

## DISCONNECTION

The Reckoning disconnected many ancient forces from Earth's primal energy. Picture a bubble adrift in space, connected to Earth by a silvery thread supplying it with everything it needs to survive. Now imagine snapping that thread. Stranded Realms have since withered, died, or changed

## A TRADITIONAL SUITTIARY

Some Hermetic mages posit a more traditional view of this cosmology. Imagine the Earth as a physical globe, with concentric circles within and without. The Low Umbra is inside the Earth, containing the Underworlds (hence, it lies *below* where most people stand). The Middle Umbra, known as the Spirit Wilds, is along its surface (*around* where most people stand). The Astral Umbra is the atmosphere (*above*), and the Horizon is everything beyond the atmosphere, out to the asteroid belt's orbit.

These three realms collectively form the Near Umbra, which is contained at the limits of Earth's atmosphere by another "circle" of sorts: the First Horizon. The True Horizon extends from the circle of the First Horizon to a much larger circle at the edge of the asteroid belt: the Far Horizon. The lesser planets — Mercury, Venus, and Mars — drift through the Horizon's sea of night in predictable paths. The Horizon Realms once had regular orbits as well, but now they have been cast adrift, freed from their connections to the Earth. Many were connected to Nodes on Earth that supplied them with Quintessence, but the Avatar Storm has severed all those connections.

In this cosmology, the sun seems to circle the Earth, but a more enlightened perspective suggests that the Earth is merely the Shard Realm of Prime, and that each other Shard Realm had (or still has, in some cases) its own Penumbra and Three Umbrae (above, around, below). Mercurian Cosmologists (see below) often travel through the Horizon to test or prove these theories — and strangely enough, they often find what they seek.

forever. Before the dawn of human history, impossible creatures called Bygones — the dragons and sea serpents of legend — required Quintessence to survive. As magic died, they passed from the world. Horizon Realms have also been dependent on their connections to Earth's Quintessence and the Nodes that supplied it. Without ties to the real world, they have drifted away from Earth and Earthly reality.

In years past, many Earthly mages hoped to "escape" to the Otherworlds, dwelling in Horizon chantries far from Earth's troubles and the iron fist of the Technocracy. With enough command of Spirit and Prime, and a sufficient supply of Quintessential energy, a Master magus could actually create a Realm around himself in the depths of space—but no longer. While Earthly mages still quest for these lost Realms, it is now painfully evident that the spirit world has undergone drastic changes, from the netherworld to Astral Space. Now there is no escape — and for some, no chance to return.

Older mages fluent in the ways of the spirit world are well aware what happens to travelers who remain in the spirit world. Isolated mages in the Otherworlds run the risk of becoming spirits themselves, disconnected from the



physical world. The mage gradually becomes *Disembodied*, losing his material form as he transforms into an ephemeral creature of pure spirit. He literally becomes a ghost of his former self, losing his connection to physical reality. As the Tapestry unravels, more Realms have also lost their primal connections to the Earth. The souls within them have become ephemeral spirits, obedient to the laws of nature governing their alternative dimensions.

For instance, a traveler wandering the Otherworlds may encounter the Grand Chantry of Horizon — or what's left of it. Impossibly high towers crafted by imagination soared over pristine terrain, surrounded by an isolated ecosystem of plants and animals. Here the Council of Nine found refuge from the Ascension War, meeting in secret chambers to discuss the fate of the world. The Grand Chantry was a landmark in the Otherworlds, a dependable destination for mages traveling through the Horizon.

In one of the greatest tragedies of the Reckoning, the mages, consors, and structures of this refuge have become ephemeral, merging completely with the spirit world. Once they were flesh and blood; now they are not. In the few places that remain, you can still look or listen at your surroundings, but touching them or speaking to them takes supreme acts of

will. The ghosts of ancient mages roam the corridors, debating their interpretations of reality on Earth, a realm to which they can never return. Few travelers have seen the ruins of Horizon, and those who have will be afflicted with sadness for the rest of their days.

The storm of the Reckoning has passed, at least for now, but the dangers of Disembodiment now extend *above*, *below*, *around*, and *beyond*. Even experienced travelers look over their shoulders. When Tradition mages speak of Disembodiment, they look to the moon. In three phases of the moon (that is, about three months), a mage in the spirit world — any spirit world — becomes disembodied from the physical world. Some snide Technocrats refer to this phenomenon as a “90 day warranty” on alternatives to reality. Beyond that time, there is no guarantee that a spiritual traveler can return to the physical world. Young mages cannot return without being changed, and powerful magi cannot return at all.

For those who quest for lost Horizon Realms, the implications are devastating. Powerful mages trapped in Horizon Realms have been lost for years, and thus, their Disembodiment from Earthly reality is all but assured. The fates of individual Masters and Oracles remain as mysteries. Perhaps the ghosts

of their former selves are stranded beyond the Horizon, or trapped in dimensions altered by the Avatar Winds. Some may have survived, some may be insane, and some may have become *more than human*, merging with the spirit world in frightening and alien ways. Ancient Masters struggling to survive are now confronted with an ongoing choice: Should they accept their fate and ascend into the Otherworlds, seeking perfection? Or should they help shepherd others into worlds beyond? The trivial conflicts of Earth no longer distract them, for their eternal fate now lies in the balance.

### LOSING CONTROL

Technocrats view the phenomenon of disconnection quite differently, for they have their own suspicions. Throughout the 20th century, many agents were advised by an entity known as Control. Anywhere technology was present, a representative of Control could send information. Control's voice could emanate from any radio, television, or computer screen at any time. Some claimed that Control could appear as an actual person. (Describing it as an Avatar was a sure way to ensure a lengthy stay in a psychiatric ward). Rogue Technocrats suspect that these transmissions may have something to do with the effects of Disembodiment. Perhaps distant Masters can advise, but not directly interfere. Loyal Technocrats would not dare suggest such things. After all, Control may still be listening.

## WHAT REMAINS

Assigning names to the new phenomena of the Otherworlds, and making analogies to old ones, is a communal conceit. Enlightened minds sharing the same philosophy may technically belong in the same Tradition or Convention, but ultimately, they're all individuals. In the same way, they may use the same names to refer to the same concepts, but reality outside the world we know is never as fixed as we would like it to be. Ambitious visionaries attempt to redefine these new worlds simply by giving them different names. Again, how much they still apply remains to be seen.

Petty rivalries and old grudges remain, and the Reckoning has become an excuse to once again blame other factions of mages for real or imagined slights. Some blame the Technocracy for what has happened, claiming that the Union wasted its time trying to "sector" or "solidify" various regions of space. The Avatar Storm, by this interpretation, was a massive backlash against their efforts to know and understand something that could not be contained or understood.

More radical willworkers, including the Emissaries, who follow the mysterious Rogue Council, blame the oldest and most experienced magi, including the Masters and Oracles. Everyone who contributed to the building of Horizon Realms,

## MERCURIAN COSMOLOGY

Throughout the 20th century, cosmologists within the Order of Hermes attempted to document, classify, and categorize the phenomena of the spirit worlds. Using a system as intricate as gematria or the Kabbalah, they used their insight into what they saw as the "true nature of reality" to draw parallels between spiritual phenomena and other aspects of magical knowledge.

The most ambitious scholars attempted to make maps of the imaginary Realms of the Otherworlds. The entirety of this scholarly work was compiled into a system of knowledge known as the *Mercurian Cosmology*. In a supreme act of arrogance and scholarship, representatives of the Hermetic Tradition then attempted to publish journals regarding the structure of the Otherworlds. Each one bears the name of the principle author and the year of its publication. Every time, the title was the same: *Mercurian Cosmology*.

After the Reckoning, the sum total of all this work has been greatly devalued, reduced to a series of historical documents. Much of the information is now obsolete — or so the cynics of other Traditions would claim. Since the past, present, and future are all contained within the Otherworlds, spiritual travelers may sometimes see reflections of places that once were, or places that never existed. As a result, the composite of all cosmological lore (and the applications of Abilities like Cosmology) does not consistently apply to what is encountered in the Otherworlds.

Fragments of the Mercurial Cosmology still hold some relevance, if only to explain how the spirit worlds came to their present state. Hermetic Chantry still support lengthy quests into other Realms, but now, much of the work concerns verifying how much of the original documents are still correct. Although much of the body of Hermetic knowledge is carefully guarded and cautiously hoarded, "Mercurial Cosmologists" still offer to accompany heroic mages on lengthy sojourns through the Otherworlds.

Cynics may argue that the Avatar Storm itself was reality's attempt to rebuild a dynamic Umbra that had grown too static, thanks to the legions of scholars who had attempted to set its meaning in stone. The new sects of cosmologists who document the ever-changing nature of the Otherworlds say they are content to remain "mercurial." Their opponents contest that anyone who attempts to "know" anything as unpredictable as the spirit worlds indulges in a frivolous pursuit. In this way, they forsake profound knowledge hidden beyond the Horizon — including priceless secrets that may help mages cope with the terrors to come.

Horizon chantries, and other “permanent” locations in the Umbra was perverting the natural order of the Otherworlds. The Avatar Storm, they claim, was a backlash against mages who indulged in egotistical attempts to create their own Horizon Realms. The Near Umbra was choked with these vain efforts, and Earth was severely drained of its Quintessence. The very fact that the Ancient Masters are fading away is a sign that their time in the universe has passed.

Many Marauders interpret the Avatar Storm as a sign that the forces of chaos are returning to the world. Dynamic forces are tearing apart all that has been established in the Near Umbra, making the Spirit Wilds into a spiritual wilderness.

In fact, many large populations of Nephandi and Marauders have survived for centuries in the depths of space. Perhaps, they hope, other radical changes will allow outcast madmen to return to the physical world.

And then there are the recurrent theories of the approach of Armageddon. Every society of supernatural creatures has some theory of how the world will end (or be reborn). Throughout human history, the worlds of flesh and spirit have drifted apart, making it progressively difficult to step sideways into the Otherworlds. As alternatives to reality become progressively more improbable, only one reality bound by Consensus remains.

## MANY PATHS, MANY WORLDS



Contrary to what many Umbral veterans, long experienced with the nuances of the Otherworlds, believe, the most significant thing any would-be Umbral traveler needs to know is not the names of dangerous spiritual beings, the locations of the most interesting Realms or even the differences between the pre- and post-Reckoning Umbrae, but instead simply *how to get there*. Without that knowledge and understanding, there can be no journey into the far reaches of these strange and wonderful worlds.

Naturally, the tried-and-true method of finding one's way into the Umbra (the Spirit Sphere's **Stepping Sideways Effect**), while still occasionally tried, is no longer anywhere near as true as it once was. The Avatar Storm serves as an unblinking sentinel against such simple methods of intrusion. Those who have stubbornly refused to seek alternate forms of access to the Otherworlds are becoming a rare breed, most of them having been torn to shreds on their own pride and the screaming winds that hide within the Gauntlet. Fortunately, mages are an inventive lot and it has not taken long for all manner of theories to develop as to better ways of reaching the post-Reckoning Umbrae. Though suspicions now run high between cabals and the relative unity once enjoyed by the Traditions as a whole has suffered in the wake of the devastation of the Reckoning, it is Tradition mystics who have posited many of the best and most successful ideas on reaching the Otherworlds. Gradually, these new rites have migrated, by way of the grapevine, from cabal to cabal and are now coming into common usage across (and beyond) the Nine Mystic Traditions.

Of course, not all of these new methods have found their way into the hands of all Awakened, and some isolated cabals are not even yet aware that there are options other than gritting your teeth and trying not to scream on the way through. Those fortunate enough to count a powerful Stormwarden among their number may not even really care to find other ways of getting to the Otherworlds. In any case, what follow are some — though by no means the only — ways of getting to the various Umbrae.

### THROUGH A CURTAIN OF SWORDS

The Avatar Storm is the single most catastrophic phenomenon to happen to Umbral travel since the separation of the worlds of flesh and spirit in the primordial past. The Otherworlds are now a place far deadlier and more remote than they were even three or four years ago. As the ancient proverb says: *Every journey begins with a single step*. If the would-be Umbral explorer is not careful, that first step can easily be the last.

The Avatar Winds are terrifyingly beautiful and hideous, even for those who use any of the growing number of ways to avoid it (save for Stormwardens, and those accompanying the more powerful among them through physical contact). Lurking in the instant of time when one is neither in the physical world nor the Umbra, it is a sinuous tapestry of jagged spirit-fragments, howling in unceasing torment and yet possessed of the raw, resplendent radiance of a million naked souls. Like so many of nature's calamities, the Avatar Storm is magnificent in its power and horrifying in its purpose.

When player characters cross the Gauntlet, Storytellers should fully describe the awesome elemental fury of the Avatar Winds. Let them catch just a glimpse of the painfully pure light and feel the hot waves of rage and hatred that seethe, impotently, in that luminous tempest. And, of course, when a mage must actually breach the Gauntlet unprotected, descriptions should get vivid. Tell the player how the storm lunges and latches on, greedily, hungering for company with which to share its indescribable agony. Be evocative, conjuring to mind images of the mage and his Avatar screaming as one, as the tattered spirit-shreds of the Avatar Storm are drawn to the character and adhere to him, tearing jagged welts into his soul.

The Avatar Storm is the first step toward making the Umbra again a place of mystery, wonder and fear. When your mages wince at the thought of trying to sneak past it, you're going in the right direction.

Date: 03.02.02 03:46:31

To: Blacklisted

From: malevolence@iamlegion.org

Re: Getting There (was: Screaming Souls)

"Final Prophet" <prophet@kon4mity.com> wrote:

> ive heard that if u have a guiding spirit it can help u to go to the other side but i haven't had a chance to > find out

To tell you the truth, I just find it easier to "step through" a summoned spirit to get into the Worlds Beyond. Granted, it's messy (the thing almost never survives), but what's a guy to do? Besides, it's not as though I'd even consider the alternative. Jasmyn still has scars from crossing over.

- mAL

Date: 03.02.02 04:02:56

To: Blacklisted

From: inanna@afflixxion.com

Re: Asshole! (was: Getting There)

"mAL" <malevolence@iamlegion.org> wrote:

> To tell you the truth, I find it just easier to "step through" a summoned spirit

How can you just kill spirits like that? You don't need to. All I need to do is ask Isabeau to hide my soul inside her when we cross between worlds and I get there just fine. Besides, Jasmyn was stupid about crossing and she's lucky she didn't get worse.

Shauna

P.S.: I've heard that the Things out there get pissed off at you for doing stuff like that, Mal. You should watch yourself.

=====

Priestess, Oracle, Jeweler

——-'——,———@

Elaborate Afflictions (afflixxion.com)

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## THE FLESH INSIDE THE SPIRIT

Stepping through the Gauntlet while hidden by an Umbral native is a particularly innovative strategy conceived of not long after the onset of the Avatar Storm. There are two common ways of going about this.

The easier and far more pleasant means involves using the mage-familiar bond as a shield against the Avatar Winds (see the **Shield of the Soul** rote, pp. 183-184). A mage using this method effectively "camouflages" her Avatar within the spiritual essence of the Familiar, thus preventing the normal reaction to Umbral passage.

The much less kindly version of this idea, and the only one available to those without a familiar, is to compel a spirit to coexist physically with the mage for the instant of Umbral transit, while impressing Quintessence from the mage's Avatar into the spirit's form and drawing some of the spirit's ephemeral being into the mage (see the **Bridge of Blood** rote, pp. 181-182). The Avatar Winds, drawn to the spirit instead the mage, immediately attack the Umbral native, while allowing the mage to go his way in safety. This latter method, however, is brutally cruel and tales circulate of terrible and poetic vengeance exacted by parties unknown. Some speculate that the

mage's Avatar becomes saturated by this spirit-essence and can eventually no longer sustain this Effect. More likely, the spirits themselves single the transgressor out for punishment and carry him away to some final and awful fate.

Either version of this "spirit stepping" Effect may be enacted for the benefit of a single mage or a whole group of them. Naturally, carrying more passengers means more complicated magics, but it is certainly possible to bring even a large number of Awakened through the Gauntlet using only one mage's familiar as a guide. A familiar willing to do this, however, often requires boons of all who wish to partake in its services; it is only fair after all, a gift for a gift. A raven familiar, for example, might require a precious and shiny object from each mage who benefits from this rote, while a mechanical companion might ask that each mage spend a bit of time later entering new information into its drives.

## ON THE WINGS OF THOUGHT

*A fantastic feeling of liberation and joy overwhelmed me when I first acquired sufficient understanding to slip the confines of flesh and move as an entity of pure thought. I had been blessed with a kindly and insightful sifu in the early days of my training and my progress upon the Way was, some said, remarkable for my age.*



*Whether this was true or not, I felt all earthly concerns — pride, self-absorption, arrogance — falling away from me as though they were an ugly garment to be cast off and left behind. I knew then what it meant to see enlightenment, even if only from a distance.*

– From the journal of Valerie Kim, Akashic Brother

For one who doesn't mind confining one's journeys to the Astral Reaches, there is, for those who attain the highest level of understanding in the Sphere of Mind, a much safer alternative to physical transit through the Gauntlet. By creating an astral "shell," a Master of Mind can shift his consciousness into the spiritual realms without the need to ever "step sideways." This astral form can freely interact with the conditions and natives of the High Umbra. Of course, an Adept of Mind is similarly capable of creating such a body, though such a journey must be brief in duration (a matter of minutes, making travel beyond the Vulgate at this level a virtual impossibility).

The primary advantage of this form, obviously, is that it completely bypasses the Avatar Storm, since the body is not physically present in the transit. On the other hand, the astral form cannot travel beyond the (granted, expansive) confines of the Astral Reaches. The Middle Umbra cannot be accessed in any way (currently, at least) with this astral mind. The form at the end of the *umbilicus argenteus* (the "silver

cord" connecting an astral form to the physical body) is best suited to traversing domains forged of the most rarified and profound thoughts, concepts and ideals.

Also, a mage in astral form is truly unaware of the current state of her body, unless she has taken mystic precautions of some sort (and even this is often an uncertain proposition). Further, this form still suffers from the dangers of Disembodiment — the body simply passes away if the mage is gone for too long, provided it has been cared for in some way and hasn't perished naturally in that time — and the mage requires a period of Acclimation just as if he had traveled physically into the Umbra. (See *Disembodiment* and *Acclimation*, below.) Awakened scholars are not quite certain why this is, but it would seem to indicate that the process of deterioration is also psychological and psychic, destroying the human elements of the mind in the same way as it eats away at the flesh. Of course, mages capable of prolonged astral travel are rarer than those able to breach the Gauntlet physically, so the specifics of this matter may not be resolved for some time yet.

The silver cord itself is a liability. Severed, it causes the mind to drift in the strange space of the Astral Umbra (along with any possessions carried over and any familiar brought along), disconnected from physical form and unable, under most circumstances,

to return without outside aid. The *umbilicus argenteus* is severed if the mage loses all her astral Health Levels — her Willpower.

The astral traveler had best have some friends on hand or a healthy dose of luck, preferably a measure of both. A mage with Mind 2 and Prime 2 (or an entity with comparable mystic abilities) is capable of creating a psychic beacon for such a drifting consciousness to latch onto. The beacon's creator cannot himself be adrift without a cord, and the drifting mind must succeed in a Perception or Wits + Meditation or Occult roll (whichever Attribute + Ability total is best), against a difficulty of 9 minus the successes scored by the creator(s) of the beacon.

Without nearby allies to offer such aid, a drifting mage must instead make a Wits + Occult roll, difficulty 9, to find her way back to her body. Either roll may be made once every six hours, subject to the normal difficulty increases for failed rolls. Alternately, a Master may, with a Mind 5/Prime 3 Effect, simply reconnect a consciousness to a body (and may do this for the benefit of herself or another) at will. A mage fortunate enough to have a familiar at hand may be guided back to the Penumbra near to her body, allowing the mind to be restored to the body. Of course, not all familiars know the airts, so this is not necessarily to be considered an "easy way."

Severing the silver cord without first battering down and disrupting its bearer (by reducing her astral Health Levels — her Willpower — to zero or less) is a difficult task for a mage, requiring a Mind 5 psychic assault specifically intended to disconnect the consciousness from the form. This Effect is resisted, like any telepathic attack, by the intended victim's Willpower. Certain exceedingly powerful High Umbral natives may be capable of attacking an *umbilicus argenteus* more directly and efficiently, but few mages have had contact, violent or otherwise, with astral beings of such power.

If a cord is severed in this manner and the mage still possesses an astral form (it has not been disrupted through Willpower point damage), she can quickly will her astral mind back into her physical body — snatching onto one strand of the rapidly unraveling cord — by spending one temporary point of Willpower. Otherwise, she becomes adrift, as above. When speeding back to the body in this manner, she cannot take any possessions with her. A familiar who was attached to the mage with its own silver cord (such as through the **Astral Sojourn** rote, see p. 180) is yanked back with her, although it arrives in the Penumbra around the body's physical location, unless it, too, was astrally projected.

Attn: Magister Marissa Desantos  
From: Gabriel Lafayette, bani Solificati  
Subject: Astral travel experiments 01/23/02

I am pleased to report, Magister, that the rituals were successfully applied to the fabrication of a *truly* astral body, complete with *umbilicus argenteus*, as suggested by the recovered texts. This would seem to indicate that the ancients possessed knowledge of this greater form of astral travel, though perhaps it is simply our expectations that create the fabled "silver cord," in this instance. Matters of the Astral Realms, after all, often boil down to little more than perception and assumption.

This astral body bypasses *completely* the so-called "Avatar Storm" (see 10/20/00 report), by way of leaving the body behind to allow unfettered psychic interaction with the High Umbra. The unfortunate cost of this (as with normal astral travel) is that the traveler's body is comatose and totally insensate to stimuli. Thus, we have strong reason to suspect that a traveler's body might be assaulted while the spirit carries on, oblivious, elsewhere. Worse still, Magister Chase reported having little awareness of how much time was passing while he explored the astral reaches. We must therefore conclude that one could also conceivably perish from dehydration while in astral form. Muscle atrophy is also a concern. Both of these conditions, naturally, can be staved off with magic, but it is, nevertheless, an important factor to keep in mind.

Still, the potential benefits of this new method of transport are incalculable: the astral shell is capable of traveling beyond the Astral Penumbra and into *any* Umbral Realm. Magister Chase reported spending much of his two days in astral form in the Middle, rather than High, Umbra. I don't need to tell you what a fantastic development this will prove to be.

Respectfully Yours,  
Gabriel Lafayette, bani Solificati

Raymond,

Gabriel forgot to mention, Disembodiment  
is still a danger while in this form.

— Marissa

## THE LUTINOUS ROAD

Recently discovered (or, as some have posited, rediscovered) by the Order of Hermes is another means of astral travel, more versatile than that granted by Mastery of the Mind Sphere alone. (See the **Astral Sojourn** rote, p. 180.) Appropriately, it is a means available to more powerful mages, of itself a potent exercise of Awakened will. Requiring great proficiency with the Mind Sphere, as well as some knowledge of the Prime and Spirit arts, this astral body (which also possesses an *umbilicus argenteus* identical to that generated by Mind 4 or 5 astral travel) is capable of traveling into any layer of the Umbra the mage is capable of finding and navigating.

This Quintessential body is statistically identical in every way to the mage's real body and houses her mind and spirit (rather than serving as a channel for the spirit, as the normal Mind 4 or 5 **Astral Projection** does), allowing for the normal use of magic. The body is an idealized form and manifests accompanied only by Wonders, enchanted items and a familiar, if any. As with almost any means of entering the Umbra, this form appears in the local Penumbra and may, from there, go to any Umbral Realm the mage has the desire, the knowledge and the conviction to reach.

Of course, as mentioned above, Disembodiment is still a threat to this "advanced" astral form and one must still Acclimate upon return to the material world. Unless special precautions are made, as with Mind 4 or 5 astral sojourns, the body is comatose and defenseless, unable to eat, drink or exercise.

Many spirits not native to Astral Space are curious about mages they see manifested in such a form. This body is unfamiliar to most of them and attention on the part of interested spirits can range from the scholarly, to the mischievous, to the dangerous.

### SO WE'RE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR...

There are only two differences between the astral form generated by this Mind 5, Prime 2, Spirit 3 rote and the one generated purely by Mind 4 or 5. First, the **Astral Sojourn** allows for non-physical travel into any layer, Realm, etc. of the Umbra. Second, the **Astral Sojourn**, using a Prime 2 **Body of Light** as the vessel into which the consciousness is shifted, mimics the mage's Physical Attributes precisely, rather than substituting Mental Attributes for them.

## T O STAND BEFORE THE STORM

How do I go? I don't know, I just do. Everyone keeps telling me that there's supposed to be some 'wall of horrible, vengeful souls' or something out there, waiting between worlds to tear up anyone who dares to cross the barrier, but I've never seen it. Never even heard it. I have to believe it exists; enough people have told

me about it and I've seen how some of them look when they come through, but it just, well, doesn't exist for me. Who can say why?

— Jason Chang, Cultist of Ecstasy

Some of the most fortunate Awakened in the world today are those who, for whatever reason, Awakened with the miraculous immunity of a Stormwarden or, of course, those who manifested such immunity upon the inception of the Avatar Winds. This blessing seems to choose mages without rhyme or reason and there are staunch Technocrats who possess it and devout Dreamspeakers who do not. It is a rare and special gift, and mages possessing it are sought out by others. Some (Technocrats and Hermetic mages figuring prominently among these ranks) wish to analyze and exploit the ones so gifted, and stories circulate that Stormwardens have been captured and subjected to terrible experiments by those wishing to determine the cause of their immunity. (For further insights, see the Psychopomp spirits, p. 150-152.) Some few merely wish to confirm the rumors that a handful of Awakened exist who are free from the ravages of the Avatar Storm and to draw hope from them. Most, however, fall somewhere between these extremes, seeing the Stormwarden as neither resource nor symbol, but instead simply as a mage with a slightly different ability than most.

Stormwardens do not interact with the Avatar Storm in any way when crossing the Gauntlet; they simply do not perceive it and neither do those who cross over with the aid of mages touched by the more powerful version of this gift. Whether this stems from the presence in the Avatar Winds completely ignoring the mage in question or some other cause is uncertain, despite the research that no few mages have put into the subject. Suppositions that the Avatar Storm is simply not a part of a Stormwarden's reality have yet to be confirmed or denied, but offer intriguing perspectives about the nature of subjectivity and the Awakening.

Of course, a mage cannot choose to be a Stormwarden and no amount of mystic prowess, experience or simple desire will force this ability to manifest. A mage either is a Stormwarden or he isn't. That being the case, it is a resource that most cabals do not have at their disposal and one, considering the rarity of Stormwardens (especially of the more potent variety), that most will never have access to.

## WHERE THE WALLS FALL APART

*I am certain of what I saw, Grandfather. I didn't believe it at first, because it seemed impossible. Still, even if I doubt my own eyes, I cannot doubt what the spirits told me. It wasn't far from the burial ground, perhaps a quarter-mile. The sky was clear and bright and, though the moon was a sliver, I saw well enough. A woman in traditional dress was kneeling by the brook and singing the old songs. She was brushing her hair and staring into the water. She turned as I approached and smiled as I looked into her eyes. I can't say how, but I knew then that she was not from our world.*

*She stood and slid into the brook without making even the slightest splash and I could feel the closeness of the spirit worlds. It only lasted a moment longer, before the sense subsided and I was again alone in the dark. There is a place of power there, Grandfather, and it waits to be awakened again. It opened that door as a way of asking me to make it whole.*

– From the account of John Rain, Dreamspeaker

Ages ago, the Gauntlet was nowhere near as powerful or pervasive a phenomenon as it is today. In some places, the Gauntlet ran so thin, in fact, that it was sometimes not there at all. The Order of Hermes called these points *Shallowings* and they were both dangerous and valuable. Dangerous, because one never knew what might stumble out of them and into the material world, and valuable because they allowed for those with little or no proficiency with spirit magics to bypass the Gauntlet.

Nowadays, Shallowings are all but nonexistent, the Gauntlet having been continually reinforced over the years by the heavy weight of human fear, apathy and disbelief. Even most of the remote and primal places have been scourged of their inherent magic and power. Still, a handful of places still exist in the world where, at certain times or under certain circumstances, the walls between worlds essentially cease to be.

When a Shallowing occurs at or near the site of a Node, denizens of the Otherworlds are able to cross over freely into the physical world without the need for powers of manifestation. Likewise, beings from this world can easily cross over into the Penumbra. Unfortunately, most Shallowings now are temporary affairs at best, meaning that those who leave their respective worlds must make their explorations brief or else risk becoming trapped on the far side of the Gauntlet. Still, when a Shallowing can be found, it is a cause for celebration among post-Reckoning mages, since the Avatar Storm holds no sway in places where the Gauntlet is reduced to nil.

In certain rare cases, particularly fortunate mages sometimes have an inborn affinity for weakening the intensity of the local Gauntlet (see the Natural Shallowing Merit, p. 187) and these sorts can be hotly contested by Chantryes with powerful Nodes, since they can, by their very presence, make it significantly easier to Shallow a locale.

It must be stressed, however, that Shallowings, despite being perhaps the most favorable method (in terms of risk) of reaching the Umbra, are certainly the rarest. Most mages will go through their entire lives and never lay eyes on one. Most will never even hear a reliable rumor about the location of a potential Shallowing. If a cabal was to come across such a potent and precious resource, no matter how intermittently it might function, its members had best hold onto it tightly and be prepared to fight to defend it.

## THE HARD WAY

*It was an instant of singular agony. My Agama Sojourn was delivered to me by a Rinpoche on the end of a blade and, even then, dying of the wound she had inflicted on me, I did not experience anything like the pain of crossing through, into the Umbra. It was like being born out of a razored womb. The Gauntlet clung to me like a membrane wet with blood and I sensed the things trapped within it grabbing hold of me. I felt as though I had been set afire and then doused by leaping into broken glass. My soul reeled with the pain for many long moments and even the sound of my breathing was ragged, as if the wounds on my body had torn the patterns of my life as well as my flesh. I wept then, for I could not shake the feeling that I had left shreds of my spirit, like raw strips of skin on barbed wire, on the teeth of that tempest of hungry souls. Even today, my wounds bleed of their own accord from time to time. Sometimes, when they bleed, they whisper words to me in no earthly tongue. I do not know the language, but I understand what they are saying: Fool, you cannot pass this way....*

– From the journal of Arjuna Patel, Euthantos

For some, the luxury of the newer and easier ways into the Umbra is simply not an option. Some mages are so solitary or out of the loop that they have not heard of these innovations in Otherworldly travel. Others may lack the mystic proficiency needed for such alternate methods. A rare few refuse to change their ways, despite the horrific cost of their stubbornness. Certainly, for a while after the onset of the Avatar Storm, there simply *was* no other ready means of crossing the Gauntlet.

For those who are not Stormwardens and, for whatever reasons, cannot or will not seek other ways of entering the Umbrae, there is little recourse but to brave the Avatar Winds and to pay their heavy toll. Grievous physical wounds and terrible spiritual lacerations plague those who would continue to pass through the Gauntlet in the time-honored way. Some are killed and those even less fortunate are sometimes subjected to the equivalent of the *Gilgul* rite.

There *are* ways of making the traditional means of passage through the Gauntlet more bearable, however. Anything that allows the mage to soak aggravated damage will allow a soak as normal against the Avatar Winds. This includes certain rites, Wonders and permanent Life Sphere enchantments. Though the advantages of this means of transport are few, there is something to be said for the hard reputation one can make by continuing to **Step Sideways** in the post-Reckoning world and, of course, in accessing the Umbrae by the very means that instantly deters almost anyone else from daring to follow.

Date: 12.02.00 13:47:41  
To: Address Withheld  
From: Address Withheld  
Re: Dimensional Science and Related Issues  
TEXT DECRYPTED

Niles,

As you know, the Bangladesh fiasco of this past summer has left quite a few questions circulating pertaining to extradimensional matters and a decided lack of forthcoming answers. The Void Engineers are uncertain as to what to do; they have lost contact with several Deep Universe posts. Preliminary intelligence indicates that we are dealing with multiple points of incursion from non-Euclidean space and Universes that exist "outside" or "beyond" the forward wave of our own reality's expansion. The nearby wilds of the "totemic" alternate dimensions seem to be all but severed from the earthly realm, which is good news, of course, but it is really some of the *only* good news I have to offer. We are dealing with a period of upheaval and dissent and we cannot begin to forge onward anew until a single, correct explanation is discovered. Put your team together again and get the Time Table back on track in your region. We need hard facts that we can point to. Get me answers, Niles; I'll worry about making them make sense. Best of luck to you.

Hazuko

## TECHNOMAGIC AND TECHNOCRATIC ENLIGHTENED SCIENCE

Technomagic has never been able to adequately explain many aspects of the various Umbrae, and the restrictions on Otherworldly travel imposed by the Reckoning have all but cut off most technomancers from certain Realms. Of course, Technocratic Dimensional Science, more so than even ordinary technomagical views of Spirit magics, always lacked for ready explanations of many Umbral phenomena. What this means is that most technologically inclined Awakened are simply out of luck now when it comes to many kinds of Umbral travel.

Astral travel of all varieties is easily explainable under most enlightened technological paradigms (Sons of Ether, Virtual Adepts and Technocrats). Sons of Ether can point to "the Astral Planes of ancient civilizations," while Technocrats need only look to the Universal Unconscious and the Campbellian Archetypes. Such explanations even allow agnostic scientists (or Scientists) to comprehend the existence of heavens, hells and everything in between.

The Spirit Wilds are a bit more difficult for most scientifically minded Awakened to understand. The Technocracy has been more than happy, by and large, to simply deny the continued existence of these irritatingly and unapologetically "mystical" planes, as even the Void Engineers are hard-pressed to get to them anymore, much less explore them. The Technocracy's denial of the fantastic cuts both ways, it would seem. The Void Engineers are the only ones who appear to be put out by this change, though, so, like so many of their complaints, this one gets filed under "attend to later or never."

Of the non-Technocratic scientific mystics, the Sons of Ether are likeliest to wish to and still be capable of reaching the Middle Umbra. The Virtual Adepts have never had much of a use for places with talking foxes, trees that move and lands where you can walk on moonbeams. Fortunately for the Sons, their particular breed of Science lends itself well to journeys into the amazing and inexplicable. The Avatar Storm is still an ever-present threat for those wishing direct, physical transport into the Middle (or any) Umbra, but their paradigm is not, of itself, a hindrance to such travel.

The Low Umbra has never been a place for the technologically minded. The afterlife is best left to mystics and holy people, not students of cutting-edge arts. Even those who have traditionally had ties to the Afterworlds, like the Euthanatos, have found such places infinitely more difficult to access since the Reckoning. Most technomancers and Technocrats are content to leave the barren and forlorn Realms of the Low Umbra to the dead.

Of the various other Realms and locales scattered across the Umbrae (such as Maya or the Horizon), Awakened sciences have many differing answers. Horizon Realms and the Horizon itself, as well as the points beyond, are no more or less difficult for such Awakened to reach than any others (which is to say, such access is quite difficult and requires knowledge, power and great effort on the part of the traveler). Traditionalist (Victorian and Utopian) Sons of Ether continue to bemoan the apparent loss of their beloved Hollow Earth, though many modernists in that Tradition simply claim that it is, as a concept, becoming phased out of the popular consciousness of the West, along with most of the staples of the old pulps. Most of the other odd Realms (like Maya) were never particularly well-suited to scientific explanation and

will likely continue to remain mostly unexplored by those who see the Awakening through such a light.

Of course, most Traditions and at least a few Crafts also have at least some minimal technomancer presence (House Verditius for the Order of Hermes, the Euthanatos Lakshimists, etc.), but the ways in which such technomages interact with the Otherworlds are often more colored by the views of their mystic fellowships, rather than their particular views on technology and magic.

Deserving of some special mention in all of this, however, is the Digital Web. Despite the Crash and the reboot of the Web, this is, as much as ever, the haven-Realm of the technologically inclined mage, regardless of affiliation. As always, a simple Correspondence 2 effect, coupled with appropriate foci, is sufficient to get a mage, mentally, into the Digital Web (circumventing the Avatar Storm), giving technomages and Technocrats with the desire to do so one of the easiest, safest and most reliable means of access to the Umbra known.

## OPTIONAL MECHANICS: ALTERNATE GAUNTLETS

A pericarp is a barrier separating one dimension from another, much like the one that separates the physical world from the Penumbra. Earth's Gauntlet is the one most mages are familiar with (thus, it's spelled with a capital "G," in the same way that Earth's moon often has a capital "M"). Most spiritual barriers can be crossed with Spirit 3, through the **Stepping Sideways** Spirit Effect. The Avatar Storm always punishes mages who pass through Earth's Gauntlet; other pericarps are free from it (except, perhaps, for the rare, roving Storms described elsewhere in this book).

A mage with Spirit 3 or higher rolls Arete against a difficulty equal to the strength of the Gauntlet (based on the amount of order or stasis nearby). The number of successes tells how long it takes to cross the Gauntlet; on a botch, the mage is trapped, or something nastier happens (like a visit to a Zone). A mage with Spirit 4 can help others across the Gauntlet, usually an additional willworker for each success. Some circumstances may alter this difficulty, such as walking through naked, carrying too much technology with you, waiting for a proper Juncture, or giving chiminage to a Dreamspeaker's totem.

Sometimes a mage can cross a different type of gauntlet by using a different Sphere. In Hollow Earth, for instance, mages may encounter a Matter Gauntlet, or they may encounter a Mind Gauntlet while on a quest in a Uranian Mind Realm. The mechanic works like the **Step Sideways** rote, but the mage substitutes that Sphere for the Spirit Sphere. The difficulty is usually 6 (for a lone traveler) or 7 (when escorting other mages), but bizarre circumstances (coating your naked body with mud to appease a Matter Gauntlet) may adjust the difficulty.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a mage using Spirit can still pass through the gauntlet, but with a +3 difficulty on

the Arete roll. If the Spirit mage has one dot in the corresponding Sphere (for instance, Spirit 3/Matter 1 on the aforementioned gauntlet on Hollow Earth), the gauntlet can be crossed at a +2 difficulty. As an alternative, if the mage is attuned to the local Sphere, and only has Spirit 1 (in this case, Matter 3/Spirit 1), increase the difficulty by 1. Bringing another mage through the Gauntlet works the same way, but requires a fourth-rank Sphere (such as Matter 4/Spirit 1 or Spirit 4/Matter 1). For added drama, don't ask the players what Spheres they're using; let them improvise their own ritual, look at their character sheets, and declare their difficulty. Then let them roll Arete.

Why add this level of complexity? First, keep in mind that it's *optional*. For players questing on distant worlds, these mechanics clue them in that the Sphere you're mentioning is *very* important in the story that is to follow. The added detail gives them options, preventing them from being shut out completely. For instance, the Storyteller may require the characters to pass through a Correspondence Gauntlet to enter a window in Mercury's City of Brass (see pp. 119-120). Navigating through the city and dealing with the local spirits requires frequent use of this Sphere, so it keeps out mages who aren't ready for such challenges.

In a very brute-force way, this method can also foreshadow places the mages can go later in a campaign. Once they encounter a Mind Gauntlet they can't penetrate, for instance, they know it contains challenges they aren't ready for yet. If they've encountered this phenomenon before, the strength and "Sphere" of the Gauntlet gives them fair warning of what they're about to experience. They may try to tackle it with Spirit 4/Mind 1, but they'll probably do better bringing someone with Mind 4/Spirit 1.

# A SHATTERED COMPASS



The Mercurian Cosmology, long held by at least several Traditions as a workable model of Otherworldly geography, is now hopelessly outdated. Some Realms have been laid to waste entirely, while others have shifted their positions and, quite possibly, altered their purposes and appearances. Some new worlds seem to have come into being, as well. In short, nothing is as it was even five years ago and no one is quite sure how to navigate the landscape of the post-Reckoning Umbra.

Between the various parties researching the changed faces of the many Umbrae, two significant constants seem to have emerged. First, and perhaps most importantly, no matter where one is in the Umbra, the moon always seems to accurately appear in its current phase. This has always been and, to the relief of many, seems to still be the case. In some Realms, the moon is, of course, a bit harder to find than in others but, once located, it usually serves as a constant measure of time. As Disembodiment is almost always accurately charted by a lunar calendar (according to research conducted since the Reckoning), this news comes as a great help to many. Second, the locations of the various levels of the Umbrae do not seem to have moved, regardless of how individual Realms fared. Thus, one is not apt to move directly from the Penumbra to the Horizon, for example, and the Elemental Courts, though they might now be harder to find, seem to be right where they always were.

Those who have explored the Umbra to any degree since the Reckoning have likened it to walking into a settled region after a long period of abandonment. Familiar structures are still there, but are often so overgrown as to be nearly unrecognizable. It is a sight akin to the pyramids of South America or the ruins in Southeast Asia. Realms mapped for centuries and well-known are now once more wild and untamed. Often, it behooves the would-be explorer to find a guide, in the form of a spirit native to the Realm being studied, for the spirits seem to have an intuitive sense of the Umbral landscape and most are in no way disoriented by the recent tumult that has overwhelmed their homeland. Naturally, few guarantees can be made when it comes to spirits, but most will generally give (largely) accurate information in exchange for favors, whether those come in the form of services, Tass or something else.

Of course, a few Wonders have been made since the rise of the Avatar Storm, in the hopes of making Umbral navigation a bit less hit-or-miss. Some of these use bound spirits, taking advantage of their amazing Otherworldly direction sense, while some use principles of one or more of the nine Spheres to divine direction. Others are constructed from materials taken from various Realms and create a sort of Umbral triangulation, using principles of contagion and

sympathy, to gauge distances and plot courses. These latter type, however, seem to be less effective than they once were, as the fabric of certain Realms is still not quite settled into a new fixed form and navigational tools using such Realms as beacons are, consequently, sometimes unpredictable.

In terms of actual Sphere Effects, most mages find conjunctional Correspondence/Spirit Effects to be most helpful, with Mind thrown in if one is intending to navigate Astral Space. Of course, some Realms respond better to more esoteric applications of the Spheres, making Entropy, Prime and Time also marginally useful for the purposes of finding one's way. In certain Realms (like Shard Realm Time, for example) navigation is all but impossible for any save perhaps Masters and Archmages, and these places are best avoided entirely by younger and less experienced willworkers. (See the *Ephemeral Mechanics: Magic in the Umbra* sidebar.)

## INVISIBLE ROADS

Once a mage has figured out how to get into the Umbra and has established for herself some sense of a desired destination, she must now address the complex issue of actually reaching said destination. This has never been an easy matter in the Otherworlds and it has only become more difficult since the devastation wrought upon the spirit worlds. In even the most navigable Realms, there are now obstacles and broken paths, while the most remote and impassable worlds have become all but hopeless causes for the would-be visitor and nearly insurmountable roadblocks to one who must pass through them on the way to somewhere else.

All travel into the Umbrae, save in a few isolated cases, follows a set progression: Umbral perception, bypassing the Gauntlet, arriving in the Penumbra, departing for the Low, Middle or High Umbra. Once a mage arrives in her desired layer of the Umbra, she can set a course for a Realm found in that layer or may forge out toward the more distant Realms on the fringes of Creation. Naturally, however, such bold and intrepid journeys start with baby steps.

## LOOKING INTO THE OTHER WORLDS: THE PERIPHERY

By using the Awareness Ability, mages are capable of peering into the Penumbra. For most, it is just a momentary flash of heightened perception, a sense that things are somehow more *real* (or, in some cases, surreal) than they were the moment before and will be the moment after. Chills down the spine, a feeling of "having one's grave walked over" and an overwhelming surge of feeling "in the moment" can all be, at least occasionally, attributed to contact with the *Periphery*. If getting into the Umbra requires a doorway, the Periphery is a lot like the light that shines through the crack under the door or the muffled sounds one can sometimes hear through it.



Dreams can also serve as a means of connecting to the Periphery and daydreams sometimes fulfill the same function. Particularly imaginative (or, conversely, insane) individuals may experience frequent contact with the Periphery. Mages have the option of using the sensory effects of the Mind or Spirit Spheres to intentionally glimpse the Periphery, as well.

## THE GATE TO ALL WORLDS: THE PENUMBRA

The Penumbra is reached directly upon entry into the Otherworlds and has more or less earthly laws of space and distance, obviating the need for any special means of transit in them. Save for cosmetic variations (such as exceptionally vivid colors in a particular park or a palpable mantle of death clinging to a cemetery) and a constant aura of moonlit twilight that illuminates everything, things are reasonably normal here. Penumbral London exists “alongside” normal London and is across the Penumbral English Channel from Penumbral France. Travel through either medium, physical or spiritual, will follow the basic geographic patterns of the Earth.

From here (unless the mage’s desired destination is the Penumbra), a mage will need to decide where, exactly, she is going. There are three aspects to the Penumbra, each one corresponding to one of the three layers in which all Realms within the confines of the Horizon exist. Most mages will, by default, end up in the Astral Penumbra, in which sensory input seems cleaner, more crisp and focused. This Penumbra epitomizes intellection, reason and pure concepts. Most shamanic mystics, on the other, hand, will find themselves in the Middle Penumbra, where everything exists in brighter, more vital shades and the world seems more alive and real. A primal forest will be the most grand and splendid wood a mage has ever seen, while a factory will be choked with smog and pulse with a cancerous malignance. Of the Low Penumbra, perhaps only the Euthanatos and certain Hollow Ones are apt to see it. It is a place of sorrow, solitude and decay. Everything seems more muted there: colors, sounds, light. The differences between these three Penumbrae, however, are, for the most part, purely cosmetic. Three mages, each perceiving a different Penumbra, standing in the same clearing, will all still see one another there (through the particular lens of the Penumbra with which each is most comfortable).

## EPHEMERAL MECHANICS: MAGIC IN THE UMBRA

Certain Spheres influence reality differently in the spirit world than they do in the physical world. If you're planning on using the Umbra for more than a few hours in your chronicle, consider adding these additional details.

*Correspondence* usually works differently in the spirit world than in the physical world — one cannot simply teleport past the Penumbra to the ruins of Doissetep on Mars. A mage can use *Correspondence* to access another destination in the same dimension, but cannot cross from one Realm to another. Gauntlets and pericarps impede such progress. In the Penumbra, teleportation is also perilous; if you score less than three successes on your Arete roll, your Storyteller can reset your destination to whatever best serves the story. It probably won't kill you, but it will probably inconvenience you.

There are safer methods of travel with this Sphere. *Correspondence* can help find the correct path to other Realms and destinations through the Penumbra. Three successes on a roll may lead to a short cut that drastically reduces travel time, while fewer successes may give you a hint of the type of path for which you should seek. Such routes typically “correspond” in some way to their destination. For instance, if you're trying to find a yawning chasm where chaos consumes anything that approaches it, the path may involve stepping on cracks on the sidewalk. If you're seeking a realm where order has calcified everything that has entered it, look for spider webs, or listen to the cachinnation of insects signaling you in Morse code. This Sphere won't help you interpret what you see, but it may give you hints (often in sensory impressions) of where you're going. Close to home, even basic *Correspondence* can help you estimate the distance between major landmarks; beyond the Horizon, such concepts no longer apply.

*Spirit* magic typically makes the user shine like a beacon, and it acts against spirits the same way. *Life* magic works against living creatures. Against ephemeral objects, it works the same way *Matter* does against non-living objects.

*Time* and *Matter* Effects have a +1 difficulty.

A character who can fly in the physical world can do so in the Umbra; the easiest method involves the **Astral Wings** rote (see pp. 180-181).

can simply wander there with the intent to reach it; they will soon arrive in the Vulgate.

If, however, the mage has arrived by way of “normal” (Mind 4 or 5) **Astral Projection**, the only place to go, so to speak, is up. The mage will only briefly pass through the Astral Penumbra, arriving almost instantaneously at the Vulgate. Should a mage be seeking the High Umbra via the **Astral Sojourn** rote, on the other hand, he has the option of remaining in the Astral Penumbra or bypassing it immediately, at his discretion.

See Chapter Two for more details on traversing Astral Space.

Navigation in most of the Astral Umbra requires *Perception* + *Cosmology* rolls, while finding one's way in the Epiphamies and other such Realms of rarified thought calls for *Intelligence* + *Enigmas* rolls.

## THE MIDDLE UMBRA, OR SPIRIT WILDS

The Middle Umbra, which now makes up the greatest portion of the so-called “Spirit Wilds” is still (relatively) easily accessible by modern mages and has its own rules of travel. Those who, by whatever means, physically enter the Umbra are virtually always, by default, in a position to pass into the Realms of the Middle Umbra. Likewise, those who have used the **Astral Sojourn** rote to pierce the Gauntlet may enter the worlds of the Middle Umbra if they wish. Other astral travelers are confined to the High Umbra.

The most common means of getting from here to there in the Middle Umbra are the “Moon Paths” (so named because they seem to glitter as though in pale moonlight and are known to wax and wane with the moon, as well as disappear completely during the daytime). Another option is to seek out the secret roads traveled by Middle Umbral spirits themselves. Though hard to find, these paths are usually quite safe. Mages, however, must often bargain with the guardian spirits of such roads in order to have access to them. Some spirits like to engage in games of riddles or chance, while others demand sacrifices and still others will settle for a Dram or two of Tass. Though this way can be tricky, the roads of the spirits connect to every Middle Umbral Realm. The last option for the would-be Middle Umbral traveler is to use the strands of the so-called “Pattern Web” itself. Once again, this bizarre construct touches on virtually every Realm of the Middle Umbra, but it is thick with spirits of Stasis, most of which perceive any intrusion into their territory as an incursion by Dynamism and chaos and respond accordingly.

In addition to connecting Realms in the Middle Umbra, both Moon Paths and the spirit trails tend to connect points of significance within larger Realms. Once again, though, many of these paths have been damaged or rearranged by the recent spiritual backlashes that have rocked the Umbra, and the inexperienced traveler is warned not to wander too far in, lest she lose her way and be trapped long enough in

## THE HIGH UMBRA, OR ASTRAL SPACE

If a mage wishes to travel from the Penumbra to Astral Space, her options for doing so are determined by her method of arrival. Those who have physically bypassed the Gauntlet must enter a meditative state and “will” themselves into the High Umbra (roll Willpower, difficulty 8) — unless they are mages (they have Awakened Avatars), in which case, they

the Umbra to lose her human self and become a thing of spirit. Beyond the omnipresent danger of Disembodiment is also the threat of malevolent beings that have begun to stalk the bridges between and within Realms in record numbers in recent years. Even the spirit roads, once largely inviolate, are no longer anywhere near as guarded from the trespass of such entities as they once were (though they still remain the safest method of transit while in the Middle Umbra).

There used to be a bit more rhyme and reason to the organization of the various Realms in the Middle Umbra, but the worlds that comprise it are now somewhat more haphazardly arranged from the perspective of the Awakened. Paths that led to particular destinations may be broken, lead to nowhere at all now, or carry the traveler to a destination very different from the one he had envisioned. This is true even of the spirit paths, though the natives of the Middle Umbra seem to have little difficulty, for the most part, in figuring out where a given road leads.

There are other trails that wind through the Middle Worlds, and these — though less safe overall than the Moon Paths and spirit trails — are probably a bit easier for most Awakened to find and use. Of course, there are few guarantees when it comes to what roads lead where. In general, the spiritual mirror offered by the Umbra makes picking some paths a bit easier (given a choice of two roads, one of which is a misty stream and the other of which is cobbled with the crowns of skulls, the average traveler has an idea of which one is more apt to take him to his preferred destination), but this is not always the case. Paths of terrifying aspect sometimes serve as a crucible to keep the unworthy or cowardly away from beautiful Realms and splendid, silver-lined roads have been known to lure unwary mages into hells better left unimagined.

More detail on the Spirit Wilds can be found in the **Umbra** sourcebook for **Werewolf**. The Middle Umbra is less unique to mages than it once was; where once mages perceived its Realms differently than a werewolf, it has concretized somewhat, and mages who travel there often experience the same things as werewolves.

Navigating the Middle Umbral Wilds requires Intelligence + Cosmology rolls (when traveling between Realms) or Wits + Enigmas rolls (while traveling within a single Realm). Certain Realms may buck these rules (such as Flux, in which direction is as meaningless a concept as form), but these are, nevertheless, the rules of thumb.

## THE LOW UMBRA, OR THE AFTERWORLDS

The Low Umbra, also known as the Afterworlds, is largely inaccessible to most Awakened now. While some Euthantos and perhaps a handful of Craft mages still retain knowledge of how to reach some of the lands of the dead, those rites are largely useless now. The unquiet ghosts who once populated these Realms thickly are, almost without exception, simply gone. A few motley stragglers have made claims of a terrible storm of spirits roiling up out of the maw of Nothingness

## THE IDEALIZED SELF

Mages are mortal, first and foremost — their world is that of mankind. Even the most mystical Dreamspeaker is a creature of flesh and blood, no matter how adept she is at interacting with the spirit world. In this sense, mages don't really belong in the Spirit Wilds, but they can adapt to their surroundings. The Spirit Wilds distort their appearances.

**System:** Mages in the physical world cast vibrant shadows in the Penumbra, depending on the strength of their Arete and Avatar. These represent their strong will, supernatural strength, and influence on the world around them. When a mage steps sideways into the Spirit Wilds, the effect is more pronounced. A mage is obviously a mage, and her appearance subtly shifts to adapt to the local environment. Her Resonance and Spheres may alter minor features about her. Even a mage with the Arcane Background is revealed in this way, although he may appear blurred or out of focus at times.

In the physical world, a very powerful mage may unintentionally summon minor physical phenomena about herself based on her Spheres. A master of Forces is probably energetic, for instance, while an Oracle of Spirit may move with a grace and élan that suggests unheard music. Mages of any potency may summon such effects from time to time, particularly when casting magic. They can (and should) be more obvious in the Spirit Wilds. By contrast, certain technological or magical items do not function in some Realms; they might just disappear until the traveler leaves.

If you're using the rules for Resonance Traits, then every mage has some degree of dynamic, static, or entropic Resonance. In the physical world, Resonance is mainly evident when a Paradox Backlash occurs, but in the spirit world, it is evident all the time. The number of dots a character has in this Trait influences her spiritual appearance. The clothes of a dynamic mage may crackle with a static electrical charge. The garments of an entropic mage may be frayed at the seams, while the raiment of a static mage may have an astronomical thread count.

For any of these phenomena, this means that an Awakened observer can deduce something about the mage by scrutinizing her with a Perception + Awareness roll. Making a simple observation is difficulty 6, but at the Storyteller's option, complicated insights into the practitioner's paradigm and approach to magic may have a difficulty as high as 9. By this method, hidden truths may be revealed.

itself, a storm that has yet to die, but they can offer little insight beyond that.

According to the few mages who have had any contact with the Afterworlds since the destruction of Bangladesh, it would seem that the storm that laid waste to the Low Umbra coincided almost exactly with the onset of the Avatar Storm



and destroyed most of the denizens of those Realms or banished them elsewhere. The closest Realm of the Low Umbra continues to reflect a morbid and decayed vision of our own world, and travel through it roughly approximates what one might expect in physical reality. The far-flung and grimly fantastic “cities of the dead” are either fallen into ruin or cut off from contact by the living, as the roads to them no longer seem to work. The various “heavens and hells” once found among the Afterworlds seem to be likewise battered beyond recognition or hope of salvage and cannot be accessed. For the most part, only the foolish or truly desperate enter the Low Umbra anymore and only madmen would dare to attempt to penetrate the farther reaches of its Realms. Strange beings — spirits of things never born or dead since the inception of time and being — skulk in even the Skinlands now, made brave by the greatly diminished numbers of souls that remain here.

Finding one’s way through anything but the Low Penumbra is nigh impossible at best. In the unlikely event a living mage finds herself in the Afterworlds, it is best remembered that those who journey down among the dead in the time after the Reckoning are almost always fated to remain there.

Storytellers who wish to allow players to enter the Underworlds are advised to consult the relevant **Wraith** sourcebook for the region they plan to traverse.

## MOVING BETWEEN

When attempting to move between layers of the Umbrae, the difficulty and magics involved depends largely upon how exactly the traveler got where he was. Those who have physically entered the Umbra have the most choice in this regard, as they can always try to walk wherever it is they want to go. Getting to the Astral Umbra requires a keen and disciplined mind (or, in certain rare instances, a portal of some sort), though travel there can only be accomplished from the Penumbra. Masters of the Mind Sphere may essentially directly access the Vulgate, while those less skilled in such arts must often make a longer journey, conceptualizing their way into the “higher” Realms.

If one is physically in the Umbrae, getting into the Low Umbra can be accomplished from almost anywhere, provided one has the mystic knowledge to do so. This form of travel (called an **Agama Sojourn** among the Euthanatos) requires considerable talents with Entropy, Life and Spirit Sphere mag-

ics. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of those wishing to leave the Afterworlds; such a journey often requires the location of a gateway or the aid of a guide (both of which have become increasingly rare in the time following the Reckoning and the coming of the Avatar Storm). In general, while physically within the Umbra, the Middle Umbra is easiest to access, though the doorways that lead to it are often one-way. However, the dangers inherent in physically breaching the Gauntlet make it much safer and wiser to undertake one's journeys astrally.

There are a few constants that seem to work between Umbrae, however, even if they do not as easily or surely connect the levels of the Otherworlds anymore. The most noted of these is the Alder Bole or World Tree — a great, ancient tree that stretches both above and below to far beyond the edges of perception, transfixing all Umbrae at once. The crown of the tree is nestled among the Realms of Astral Space, while the majority of the trunk is found within the Middle Umbra and the roots coil in the fetid depths of the Low Umbra.

Finding the Alder Bole (also known as Mount Qaf — see sidebar) is quite difficult in most places, requiring multiple Intelligence + Cosmology rolls to locate. Navigating the World Tree once it is found from one layer of the Umbrae into another is elementary, if one is not discerning as to where one ends up. For those seeking to have some say in their destination, Wits + Cosmology rolls are in order. Note, however, that those who are astrally projecting into the Umbra using only Mind 5 *cannot* leave the Astral Umbra, regardless of how.

Beyond this, there are a handful of doorways into and out of the three layers of the Umbrae. In general, most such portals are dangerous and unpredictable now, though some of them still lead more or less where they were intended to. It is important to note, also, that the implications of “low,” “middle” and “high” are conventions, not altitudes and that doorways leading from the Astral Umbra into the Afterworlds are as common (and rare) as those leading from the Low Umbra to the Middle or the Middle to the High.

## AND ELSEWHERE

Naturally, despite the fact that the three layers of the Umbrae (Low, Middle and High) make up the majority of the Otherworlds that would be of interest to most Awakened, there are other places still to go and, sometimes, compelling reasons to seek them out.

Getting to Paradox Realms is, unfortunately, all too easy for most mages. Paradox is drawn to Awakened will and sometimes mere proximity is enough to pull a hapless willworker in. Certainly, the reckless use of the gifts of the Awakening will eventually open the door to a Paradox Realm for any mage. If, by whatever strange chance, a mage actually needs or wants to enter a given Paradox Realm, let common sense be the watchword.

Getting into a Paradox Realm while in the material world simply requires locating the telltale “reality warpage” of Paradox and using one of the normal means of stepping into the Penumbra from there. Instead of reaching the Penumbra, the mage will

find himself within the Paradox Realm. Getting into a Paradox Realm while in the Otherworlds (where they are suspended on the edge of the Horizon), however, is sometimes even simpler and sometimes far more difficult. Realms of Matter or Forces tend to be pretty straightforward and getting into them is often an uncomplicated (if not always safe or easy) matter. Paradox Realms formed on principles of Correspondence, Entropy or Time, however, can be fiendishly difficult even to find, let alone enter. In general, Realms created by Pattern Sphere (Forces, Life, Matter or Prime) are more easily navigable — though not necessarily safer — than those formed by more esoteric Spheres. (See the *Ephemeral Mechanics: Magic in the Umbra* sidebar.)

Finding one's way around in any Paradox Realm will most likely require rolls against one or more Mental Attributes and Abilities including, but not limited to: Cosmology, Enigmas, Meditation, Occult or Survival. As a rule of thumb, it is a hell of a lot harder to get out of a Paradox Realm than to get in and, under most circumstances, it is nearly impossible to extract the mage or mages meant to be imprisoned there before the allotted time of incarceration is through.

Details on traversing the Horizon or beyond can be found in Chapter Three.

Finally, as to lost Realms, initial explorations indicate that the shadows of such destroyed Realms persist, fueled by Awakened belief in them and sustained by the Tellurian's inertia. Mages can access these “afterimages” normally and some might not even be aware that the Realms no longer truly exist. These dead Realms are slowly fading, however, and in time, presumably, most of them will cease to exist.

## WHAT GOES UP...

In general, the physical laws of the Umbra are close approximations of those found on Earth. A thrown object gradually loses momentum and lands on the nearest solid surface, and sources of light allow for the sense of sight to function properly. Now, in many cases, the thrown object may drift along lazily for an impossible length of time, or colors may be all wrong, but, in most cases, the understanding and experiences common to most adult humans prove sufficient to at least get by in a majority of realms.

Of course, there is certainly no small number of places where, for example, what goes up exponentially increases in velocity, out to infinity, or light only serves to create hideous cacophonies of mind-shattering noise that is heard as much within the soul as on the eardrums.

One of the most annoying and potentially dangerous fluctuations in physical law in the Umbra is the distortion of space/time. Moving in the spirit Realms can sometimes get you nowhere, while standing still has been known to result in remarkable progress toward a destination no sane man would wish for. Likewise, some unlucky souls have stepped out of the Otherworlds after a few days, only to discover that weeks or more had passed, while some have toiled for years in strange Realms, emerging in the world of flesh perhaps hours after first crossing the Gauntlet.

## MOUNT QAF

The following manuscript was purchased through a Syrian dealer in antiquities by an unnamed Master on behalf of the Council of Nine around the turn of the previous century. Scholars from various Traditions have embellished it with addenda and commentary in the intervening years.

### **Kitab al-Mir'aj al-Kahin ("The Book of the Ascent of the Magician")**

*Speak, O virgin parchment! Bear witness to those wonders*

*Which no eye hath beheld. Speak words no ear hath heard.<sup>1</sup>*

*Those that seek wisdom, let them read thee and learn.*

*They who would be wise, let them shut their eyes.*

*Let them so shut out the world, be blind to its sights and deaf to its clamor.*

*Let them be at peace within, that they might know the inner wonders.*

*Let them see the world within, which is reflected by the world without.<sup>2</sup>*

*Let them see its cities and wildernesses, let them chart its courses of thought.*

*Let them Orient themselves, turning their face to the light of morning.*

*And Lo! Rising up at the left hand, the most glorious green mountain!<sup>3</sup>*

*Clouds of silver wreath its peak, the lands of men surround its base,*

*Rippled like unto a bed-cloth. Let the seeker venture therein,*

*Marking well the manners of its natives; let him attend to the lore they impart*

*For it is their role to assist, if the seeker can but know their tongues.*

*As he makes his way, let him refuse no gift*

*For these are the lands of knowledge, the Eighth Clime whose substance*

*Is the stuff of legend, whose very soil is composed of understanding.*

*Yet let him be not dazzled by its wonders, nor stray into its enticements,*

*But hold ever true to his path, ever following his own inner light.<sup>4</sup>*

*For this is the land of mazes and mirrors, the labyrinth of the soul;*

*Its paths are as numerous as thought, each diverging one from another,*

*Like branches of the Tree of Life itself. Its twigs brush the outermost firmament.<sup>5</sup>*

### **Notes:**

1. Our unknown author begins in the fashion of the ancient kings of Mesopotamia, who addressed their clay tablet directly, commanding it to speak and thus tell their subjects of their proclamations. — Cornelius, Order of Hermes

2. Do the Subtle Ones believe that the physical world is a reflection of the spirit world? Later the poet suggests otherwise. This is typical of the Batini, who turn everything inside out and back again, as will be seen. Note that the journey begins by using the techniques of Astral Projection, rather than Stepping Sideways; this might mean the author was drawing from much older sources dating back to an age when the Gauntlet was not as strong as it is today. — Uqbal LaPanga, Dreamspeaker

3. Many Traditions begin their most basic rituals facing toward the east, "orienting" themselves, as it were, to the sunrise. There is probably a salutation to each cardinal direction, in clockwise order, which has been omitted as beyond the scope of this treatise. That the mountain lies to the north is common to most spiritual traditions of the northern hemisphere, identifying their spiritual center with the celestial axis of Polaris, the pole star. — Cornelius

4. In other words, the Avatar can be relied upon for guidance, especially in this plane that is now called the Vulgate. The spirits have much to teach us, but they still have their own interests and motives, and often try to draw the seeker into their own little games. — LaPanga

5. Although the reference is, I would assume, Qabalistic, this is the first hint that Mount Qaf can be identified with the Alder Bole. Later verses make it clear that it served the same function for the Ahl-i-Batin, as a conjunction and intersection for the Umbra as a whole. The planes of the Astral Umbra, with the Vulgate below and Epiphamies above, are already clear, but the Batini apparently made no particular distinction between this and what we know as the Midrealm. This extreme compression of ideas — putting all their eggs in one basket, so to speak — was probably a major factor in their undoing. — Sangræale, Verbena

## DIMENSIONAL HAZARDS: ZONES

Many of the most dangerous dimensions are Realms that draw the traveler into an alternate reality, sometimes without his knowledge. These pocket dimensions, called Zones, follow their own laws of physics and create their own alternatives. Anywhere in the Near Umbra, including the Spirit Wilds, a mage can encounter Dream Realms, Mirror Zones or Null Zones, dimensions that act on the whims of unseen forces.

*Maya*, or the *Dream Realms*, float at seeming random throughout the Umbrae, composed of pocket realities based on dreams or collective folk beliefs. A Dream Realm that grows big enough, either through collective belief or being visited by many travelers, might become a Mythic Realm, localizing itself on the Horizon or in the Spirit Wilds — or even on a Spire in the Astral Reaches. Maya may be visited in dreams, through willful meditation, or by bodied and bodiless mages in the Umbra. This Zone may at first appear small, but it is vast, perhaps as vast as the entire Umbra, and seems to mirror its progression from an initial Penumbra into deeper Realms, leading into alien dreamscapes that perhaps exist beyond the Far Horizon. Sometimes dream lords, called the Oneira, appear as legendary archetypes — perhaps figures from the Major Arcana of the Tarot. Also, the fae, or spirits resembling them, often appear. Some believe Maya is the gateway to fabled Arcadia, the courts of the fae.

*Mirror Zones* offer sudden and alternate possibilities to local reality. Everything is possible in the Otherworlds, if only for a little while — which is precisely why these places exist. A mage may believe he has returned to Earth, only to discover that the Technocracy is gone, or dragons are soaring over New York, or humans have devolved into hyper-intelligent reptiles. While these kinds of alternatives are dramatically amusing, most Mirror Zones depend on greater subtleties. Some are so incredibly insidious that a visitor may mistake it for his own reality until it's too late to escape. While it may be tempting to remain in a Mirror Zone without war, the Technocracy, or evil, a mage who remains in one will eventually become ephemeral, and a Zone is under no obligation to remain permanent.

A minor Mirror Zone may breeze by in a heartbeat, showing sudden changes in a mage's companions or surroundings. Experienced travelers call these "Zone moments," but are still completely unprepared (or unaware)

when they happen. Suddenly seeing the people around you demonstrate wildly uncharacteristic behaviors may give you insights into your perception of them. Then again, it may test your sanity as well. A devious Storyteller may use a Zone moment to trigger a Paradox Backlash for Quiet.

*The Null Zone* has been described as "backstage at the theater of the mind." It shows the scenes "behind" reality, like the backstage of a massive theater showing a thousand plays, films, and stories all at once. You can't enter the performance because you've been relegated to a passive role in reality. This place is more nightmare than playground, as it's a realm where magic fails and technology ceases to function. Time and space are meaningless, and outsiders doubly so. If you step through a Gauntlet or pericarp and fail, it's probably the last place you want to be.

Dark, damp tunnels connect most areas and manifestations of the Null Zone. Ephemeral stagehands periodically rush by with imaginary props. Survivors speak of "stepping out from behind the scenery" to enter the real world again, while others have narrowly escaped by stepping sideways. Like the exit from a cheap movie theater, the doors of perception close behind you when you leave. For Goddess's sake, don't try to prop open the door.

*Vistas* are panoramas of alternate realities. They aren't so much places as massive "Umbral movies" of events you cannot influence or control. At the moment a witness enters, something critical has just occurred. The Big Bang, the End of the Universe, the viewer's own death — these are three of the most commonly encountered phenomena. The experience often afflicts the witness with fatalism, as if these events are ordained, but a mage who sees more than one never has the same experience twice. A willworker cannot affect a Vista. He is merely a spectator, and occasionally a victim.

**Optional Rules:** If you must use rules for this sort of thing, anyone viewing a Vista should make a Willpower roll (difficulty 10, minus the spectator's Arete). On a failed roll, the witness loses a point of Willpower; on a botched roll, he loses two. Once all Willpower is gone, the viewer may accept his fate as final, losing all will to leave.

Finally, the *Digital Web* is a unique Zone populated by technomages and other freaks. It crashed once, but is now back in business. See the **Digital Web 2.0** sourcebook for more details.

## TRAVEL MADE (RELATIVELY) SIMPLE

Place	Normal means of travel and navigation
Periphery	Dreaming or using the Awareness Ability, Mind or Spirit sensory Effects: no navigation necessary.
Penumbra	<b>Stepping Sideways*</b> (Spirit 3), <b>Breach the Gauntlet*</b> (Spirit 4), Shallowing, <b>Astral Projection</b> (Mind 4 or 5 — Astral Umbra only), <b>Astral Sojourn</b> (Mind 4 or 5/Prime 2/Spirit 3; navigate as though in the material world).
Astral Umbra	As Penumbra for the Awakened, or roll Willpower (difficulty 8); navigate with Perception + Cosmology (Intelligence + Enigmas in the Epiphamies).
Middle Umbra	<b>Stepping Sideways*</b> (Spirit 3), <b>Breach the Gauntlet*</b> (Spirit 4), <b>Astral Sojourn</b> (Mind 4 or 5/Prime 2/Spirit 3), Shallowing; navigate between Realms with Intelligence + Cosmology and within Realms with Wits + Enigmas.
Low Umbra	<b>Agama Sojourn*</b> (Entropy 4/Life 2/Spirit 3, or Entropy 4/Life 3/Spirit 4 to send another through); navigate with Perception + Cosmology or Enigmas
Realms	Portals, gateways, Anchorheads or Umbral exploration: navigate with appropriate Mental Attribute + Cosmology, Enigmas, Meditation, Occult or Survival.
Paradox Realm	Locate (through Prime senses) and use any of the normal means of accessing the Penumbra (if on Earth), physically enter if at Realm's location in the Umbra; navigate by appropriate Mental Attribute + Cosmology, Enigmas, Meditation, Occult or Survival.
Horizon	<b>Break the Dreamshell</b> (Spirit 5); navigate by Perception + Cosmology
Deep Umbra	<b>Deep Umbra Travel</b> (Spirit 5), or life-support of some sort to survive; navigate by Perception + Cosmology
Between Umbral layers	All: Alder Bole (Mt. Qaf), gateway or as though entering from the Penumbra (those traveling via <b>Astral Projection</b> [Mind 4 or 5], however, cannot access any layer of the Umbra other than Astral Space).
Realm to Realm	Portals, gates and pathways

\* Any Awakened person using this method of entry suffers the Avatar Storm, unless he “steps through” with a totem, familiar or other spirit.

For the most part, human beings are advised to stay far from Realms with physical laws so far removed from the terrestrial as to be totally alien or nearly so. Not only do such Realms contain unknown potential for harm to the individual, but also there is no telling what manner of deleterious aftereffects exposure to such places can bring. In certain rare instances, mages have visited such bizarre worlds, only to begin to age in reverse, have senses permanently altered beyond the scope of normal human consciousness or to undergo inexplicable transformations of other sorts.

Some believe that spending time in certain Realms can be so damaging to the consciousness and psyche that a descent (slow or otherwise) into Quiet is the only possible recourse for a fragmenting sense of sanity. More than one Marauder has likely been made through prolonged exposure to a spirit world where things are, in one way or another, just *wrong*. In the days following the Reckoning, such “Mad Realms”

seem to be a bit more common, though some speculate that it is perhaps more a case of Umbral tidal motion sifting out the shattered remains of “nearby” Realms, while drawing in worlds further removed and bringing them closer in the Umbral landscape.

The Realms that border on the physical world (the Penumbrae) operate under laws that are almost always compatible with those held to be true by the majority of contemporary humanity. Being reflections of the ordinary world, this is unsurprising. Likewise, most worlds just beyond those generally conform to standard physical laws. It is when a traveler begins to become more remote than this from Earth that the rules under which the world operates begin to degrade. In some Realms, these variations are minor (such as a great Umbral chasm that swallows all light), while in others it is far more pronounced (such as the Epiphany of “non-Euclidean geometry”).

## EPHEMERAL HAZARDS

The most powerful Umbral winds are more violent and soul-crushing than Earthly phenomena. They aren't just storms: they're the spiritual essence of storms. Hurricanes and tornadoes merely inflict physical damage, but an Umbral storm can rip your soul apart. The most powerful storms, *Umbraquakes*, represent the fury of powerful spirits. A lesser Umbral storm can change the landscape, eradicate airts and moon paths, and drastically hurl mages off-course. In other words, don't expect to raid a sacred site in the Umbra with impunity.

**System:** During an Umbrquake, everyone in the vicinity may be thrown to the ground for one to five dice of aggravated damage. Victims of an Umbral wind make Stamina rolls against a difficulty of 6 to 9; the intensity may depend as much on what the mages have done as where they are. Subtract the number of successes on the Stamina

roll from five; the result is the number of levels of lethal damage inflicted (thus, a character who scores five or more successes is not hurt). On a botch, roll again the same way, but inflict aggravated damage. If the second roll botches, hurl the character from that dimension to somewhere else.

**Optional System:** At the Storyteller's discretion, a roving Avatar Storm may roll through a Realm at any time. This is a message from the cosmos that the Realm is about to undergo a profound change. Mages are advised to seek shelter or leave the Realm as quickly as possible — these are the sorts of storms that can flay sanity, damage an Avatar, or kill in a heartbeat. Such occurrences should be rare, but they do happen. A Storyteller who abuses this power should expect powerless mages to flee every time the wind picks up (or just give up on the game). Use this idea with caution.

## A WORLD OF SPIRITS ONLY



Above and beyond the dangers inherent in stepping into the lands of the spirits, there is a considerable risk to body and soul to be found in the Umbra. For centuries now, some mages who have tarried well overlong in the Otherworld have gradually metamorphosed into beings of spirit, losing their human identities and degenerating (or evolving, depending upon one's perspective) into creatures that are no longer even remotely human. Since the

Reckoning, the time required to affect this transformation is considerably reduced. Further, most mages report a kind of "sluggishness" or "unfamiliarity" to their physical bodies upon return, as though the very act of stepping physically into the Umbra now begins to degrade earthly flesh. Considering the number of mages stranded out in the various Umbrae when the Avatar Storm first began to rage and the destruction of the wards shielding most Horizon Realms, this bespeaks a grim probability for the Awakened population of the world.

### DISEMBODIMENT

"Yes, I remember you now, little one," it said to me. "You have grown some, but it has not been long at all. No, not so long. I see your fear and frustration; they are written on you as plainly as the power that flows within your soul like blood. Do not fret, little one."

At this, it reached out with its hand, its fingers each longer than a man's arm, and gently stroked my cheek in what it must have construed to be a comforting fashion. Raw Quintessence boiled on the tips of its crystalline claws and so powerful was the

sensation that I hardly noticed the tiny rivulets of blood that flowed from the cuts it left on my face. My eyes burned with tears, for the fatherly gesture, despite how grotesque and monstrous it had become, was familiar to me. The elemental had not lied; what floated in the ether before me had once been Antonio de Roma, Master of the Ars Vis and my pater.

— From the journals of Veronica Underwood, bani Bonisagus

The step from mage to spirit was once a long one, long enough that it almost required a conscious effort. Often, with the proper precautions, one could last for up to a year without succumbing to the siren song of the ephemeral world. Not so now, in these days after the Reckoning. The coming of the Avatar Storm has heralded an omen perhaps even grimmer and certainly far more insidious. After dwelling in the Umbra for three full lunar cycles (each cycle being phase to phase, about twenty-eight and one-quarter days each, or about 84 days — 12 weeks — total), a fully terrestrial being, such as an animal, Sleeper or mage, almost certainly will become a spirit permanently, losing connection to the physical world and taking on the characteristics of an Umbral native. Though some elements of the original personality and identity of the newly born spirit may show through, the entity that now exists is no longer a thing of flesh and belongs fully to the Otherworlds.

Each week spent in the Umbra beyond the third lunar month requires a Willpower roll (beginning at difficulty 8 and increasing by one for each week thereafter, using the same rules as for magic difficulties above nine). If a roll is failed, the mage must seek to escape the Umbra quickly (within a few hours at most) or else be transformed forevermore into

a spirit. This affects even mages in Horizon Realms, which were once immune to disconnection.

No one knows why this has happened, save to say that the metaphysics of the Umbra seem to have been fundamentally altered on many levels. Those of an apocalyptic bent are quick to point out theories involving the end of time, citing the Reckoning and this accelerated timeframe for Disembodiment (among other things) as proof that the world is spiraling out of control, toward annihilation. Some believe that the Tellurian is fighting back against the depredations of humanity and is doing so by shielding its soul in the only manner it can — by dissuading most of humanity to keep away. Whatever it is that causes the physical form to rapidly degrade in the Umbra, it is a reality with which the Awakened must now contend.

There are a few means of stalling the process of Disembodiment, but some of these are rather gruesome (such as the Biotemporal Maintenance Field Generator, p. 184) and only a handful are in any way reliable. Those with the Umbral Affinity Merit (p. 187) or, of course, Dreamspeakers with Totems have better options in this regard (see pp. 34-35), but most mages have little choice but to get any business in the Umbra done within three lunar months and, as some have speculated, perhaps this is for the best. The world, after all, is not going to be put back on track through any kind of vast Umbral quest. Knowledge and experience gleaned from the Otherworlds, these mages contend, is better suited to improving life here on Earth, rather than being set to the purpose of creating make-pretend realities far from the Sleepers whose protection and education are the obligation of the Awakened.

Date: 02.23.01 19:23:56

To: Dr. Robert Goldfarb <rgoldfarb@staff.paradigma.org>

From: Lynette Anselm <novagirl@staff.paradigma.org>

Re: Weird

Just got back from my interdimensional clinic and I feel strange, Bob. I've done this six times before (of course, the whole schedule was completely thrown off by the energy disturbance in the interdimensional membrane) and now I feel... sick. I don't know how to explain it; it's like having a flu or being constantly just a bit tired. Worse still, some of my advanced lessons in the Pattern Sciences are eluding me, as though I've contracted a memory retention disorder. The feelings have lessened with the passage of even just a couple of days, but I have to wonder what all of this means. I'll have more detailed reports for review by the board within a week or so. I just need to get over this thing. Talk to you soon.

L

## ACCLIMATION⊕

Just as when stepping off of a boat onto land for the first time after a prolonged sea voyage, there is a certain amount of disorientation and readjustment inherent in returning to the world of flesh from that of spirit in the wake of the Reckoning. By most, it is described as a feeling of slowness, heaviness or awkwardness, as though the body is responding only sluggishly to the mind's commands. There is a feeling of being somehow less substantial. The mind cannot focus as well on the temporal and, at more advanced stages of this *Acclimation*, even the mage's magic suffers for it.

This *Acclimation* did not exist for most before the Reckoning, so most scholars of Umbral matters have lumped the phenomenon in with the myriad other changes that seem to have been swept in with the eddies of the Avatar Storm, despite the fact that the two are not likely to be directly related to one another.

The need for *Acclimation* is almost certainly a direct symptom of physical deterioration (given the inevitable result that follows final-stage *Acclimation*) through the process of Disembodiment. Thus, no ordinary medical or other purely physical cures can assist it. Likewise, the *Acclimation* process seems to be rather resistant to acceleration or negation through the use of Mind of Spirit Sphere magics. It is possible that certain clever uses of Life, Mind and Spirit conjunctionally *might* be able to hasten a mage's *Acclimation*, but very few things seem to be capable of cutting out the need for it entirely. A few mages have demonstrated a greater tolerance for Disembodiment than others and have, consequently, suffered somewhat less on account of *Acclimation*, but such mages are the exception to the rule and their immunities don't seem to be able to be learned, any more than one can try to become a Stormwarden.

## THE LONG ROAD HOME: ACCLIMATION

After extended jaunts into the Umbra, wherein the body becomes saturated with ephemeral matter and the form begins, almost from the moment of entry, to slowly lose solidity of Pattern, most mages require a bit of time to fully readjust to the material world. This *Acclimation* is a mere nuisance for those who have just spent a few days in the Umbra, but can be a more serious concern for those who have stretched their Disembodiment tolerance to its limits. The penalties endured during Acclimation are as follows:

Length of Journey	Penalties
Up to one week	None. However, the mage may experience some slight disorientation for journeys approaching the four-day mark, and this should be roleplayed.
Two to three weeks	+1 to the difficulty of any physical application of an Ability for one day after returning.
Four to five weeks	+1 to the difficulty of any physical application of an Ability for two days after returning and +1 to the difficulty of all Pattern (Forces, Life and Matter Spheres) magics for one day after returning.
Six to seven weeks	+2 to the difficulty of any physical application of an Ability for two days after returning, lessened to +1 difficulty for three days thereafter. Further, +1 to the difficulty of all Pattern magics for three days after returning.
Eight to nine weeks	+2 to the difficulty of any physical application of an Ability for four days after returning, lessened to +1 difficulty for a week thereafter. Further, +1 to the difficulty of all Pattern magics for one week after returning.
10 weeks +	Even if the mage is not Disembodied, he accrues a final Acclimation penalty at this point: +3 to the difficulty of any physical application of an Ability for four days after returning, lessened to +2 for a week thereafter and +1 for the week after that. Further, +2 to the difficulty of all Pattern magics for three days after returning, lessened to +1 difficulty for one week thereafter.

## SPEAKING WITH DREAMS, WALKING WITH SPIRITS



*If you listen to what other members of the so-called "Nine Mystic Traditions" have to say about the realms of spirit nowadays, you would think that the people of the Earth must confine their journeys into such worlds to a matter of days or, at best, weeks. Well, I feel I should expose such words for the lies they are. Most practitioners of mystic arts are chained to the lands of men, but We Who Speak with Dreams have other options available.*

*You see, even though I am called to the service of the spirits of steel and neon lights, I understand our invisible brothers and sisters and the worlds they dwell in far better than any ordinary man or woman might; far better, even, than most of our fellow Traditionalists. Because of that, the unseen realms know me and shelter me as they do their own native children. So long as I perform my sacred duties and do not break trust with my guiding totem, I am welcomed into the Otherworlds with open arms and accepted among the spirits.*

*It isn't something you can quantify with charts or figures and it doesn't fit in neat little circles surrounded by words in dead languages. No science will capture it and no explanation will suffice. It just is and that is enough for us and those we serve. Don't try to understand.*

— David Takawa, Dreamspeaker

When it comes to matters of the Umbra, Dreamspeakers are simply not playing by the same rules as everyone else. This is to be expected, given their unique relationship with the Otherworlds and the close kinship they share with the spirits. In many ways, the Dreamspeakers enjoy the best of both worlds. Considering, however, that they must often carry the weight of both of those worlds as individuals and as a Tradition, this is only fair.

While Dreamspeakers still have to contend with the Avatar Winds, just like everyone else, they know, hands down, the most effective ways of bypassing the Storm. Odds are, if a means of safely crossing the Gauntlet exists, a Dreamspeaker somewhere knows it. Even enmities between shamans are put aside when it comes to matters of disseminating information about evading the winds between worlds, since all have a sacred duty that transcends human squabbles and infighting.

Many Dreamspeakers are capable of calling on the power of their Totems (see below) to defend against the Storm and circumvent the process of Disembodiment. While this protection does come with the price of a loss of a bit of their sense of self, most Dreamspeakers are happy to endure it in order to retain their powerful connection to the Otherworld and the ability to move around in them at

will and for as long as desired. Some Dreamspeakers even see this subjugation of the self to the greater power of the Dream as a blessing, a sign of favor and a privilege. No other person, Awakened or otherwise, after all, can achieve such closeness with a Totem as to think, feel and be as one with it for a time.

Even for those Dreamspeakers who lack such totemic defenses, there are options. The Umbral Affinity Merit (see p. 187) is, for example, more common among Dreamspeakers than among members of any other single Tradition, Convention or Craft. Also, since the Reckoning, fetishes to stall the process of Disembodiment have been created, with varying degrees of success. A persistent Dreamspeaker is capable of remaining human in the Umbra for longer than just about anyone else might.

## DREAMSPEAKERS, TOTEMS AND DISEMBODIMENT

Dreamspeakers occupy a unique position within the hierarchy of spirits. They are servants of great power who must be respected. Though not born to the Umbra, they are regarded by Umbral beings as fellows and peers. They are, in many cultures, seen to be as much spirit as they are human. Thus, it is only fitting that such primal mystics be afforded a greater degree of protection against the rigors of the Avatar Storm and the gradual physical dissolution that

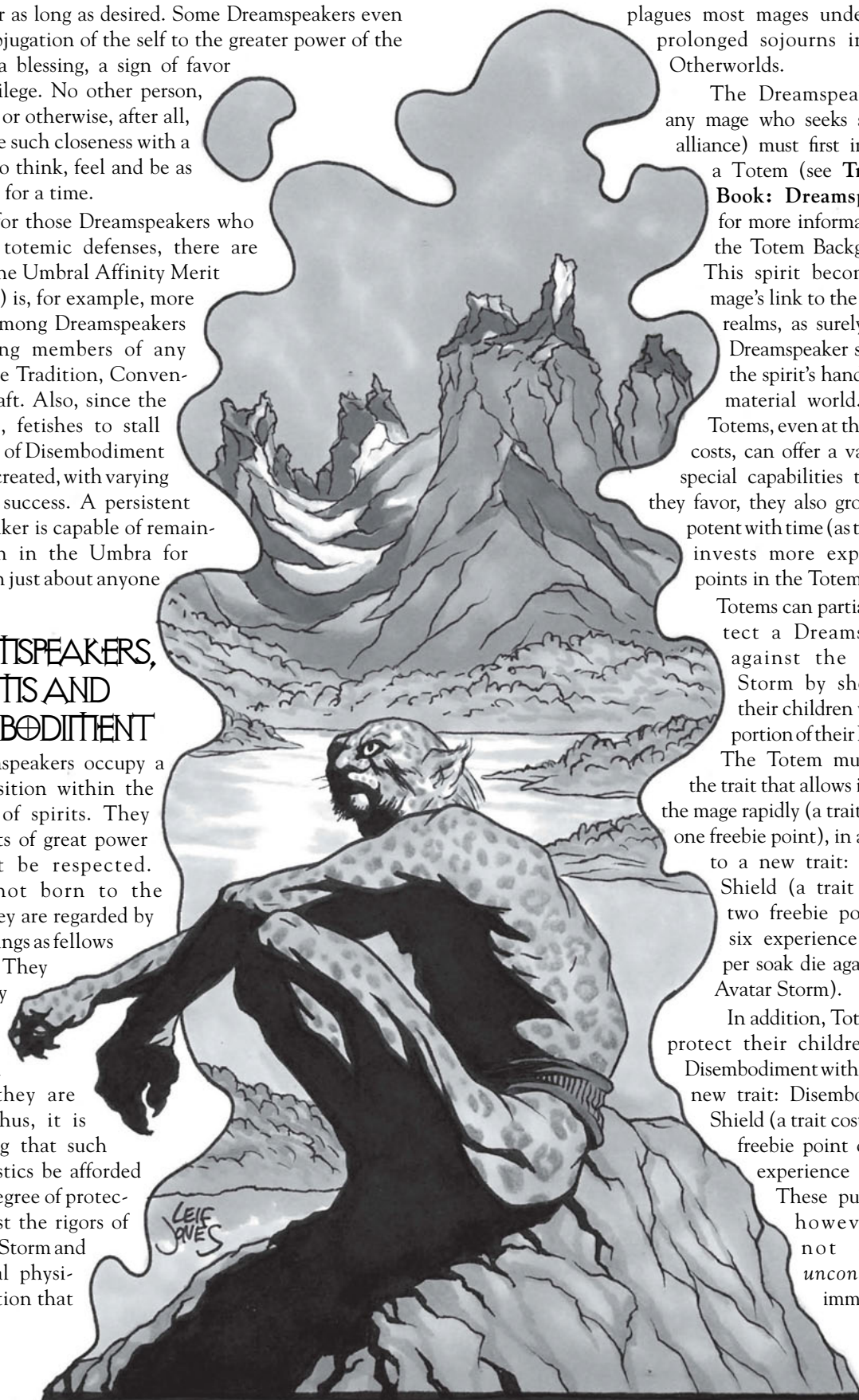
plagues most mages undertaking prolonged sojourns into the Otherworlds.

The Dreamspeaker (or any mage who seeks such an alliance) must first invest in a Totem (see **Tradition Book: Dreamspeakers** for more information on the Totem Background). This spirit becomes the mage's link to the Umbral realms, as surely as the Dreamspeaker serves as the spirit's hands in the material world. While Totems, even at their basic costs, can offer a variety of special capabilities to those they favor, they also grow more potent with time (as the mage invests more experience points in the Totem).

Totems can partially protect a Dreamspeaker against the Avatar Storm by sheathing their children within a portion of their Essence. The Totem must have the trait that allows it to find the mage rapidly (a trait costing one freebie point), in addition to a new trait: Essence Shield (a trait costing two freebie points, or six experience points, per soak die against the Avatar Storm).

In addition, Totems can protect their children from Disembodiment with another new trait: Disembodiment Shield (a trait costing one freebie point or three experience points).

These purchases, however, do not confer unconditional immunity.



## THROUGH THE EYES OF A SHAIKIAN

While most wanderers in the Otherworlds are easily confused by the changes that have overtaken the Umbra, Dreamspeakers are still reasonably sure in their ability to navigate the Spirit Realms. Like spirits themselves, the shamans have a measure of intuitive direction sense in the Umbra and they alone among mages may choose the Cosmology specialty: Airts, which allows for the re-rolling of 10s when navigating the Umbra. This, coupled with the inherent empathy most shamans have with the denizens of the spirit worlds, proves one of the only universally applicable axioms of the Otherworlds: when traveling in the Umbra, it pays to have a Dreamspeaker by one's side.

Whenever the mage steps into the Umbra, she has the option of merging her Umbral body with the ephemeral form of her Totem (she *must* do so if she wishes to gain the Essence Shield benefits listed above). This creates a slight superimposition while in the Penumbra. Thus, a servant of Coyote may physically have canine eyes, fuzzy, pointed ears, a slight narrowing of the jaw and somewhat sharper teeth. A psychological transformation also takes place, imbuing the mage with certain facets of the Totem's mentality, as well. One pledged to Spider will tend to be patient, morbid and predatory, whereas a Dreamspeaker bonded with Otter will be curious and play-

ful. Should the mage opt to delve into deeper reaches of the Otherworld, her own psychological characteristics diminish, while those of her Totem grow stronger. Eventually, the mage will act less like a human being and more like a spirit.

In the deepest regions of the Umbra, the shaman must make Willpower rolls to avoid engaging in behavior appropriate to his Totem at any opportunity to do so. In the example of Coyote above, the mage would need to hold trickster urges in check, while one sworn to Cat will tend to be self-absorbed, finicky and lusty.

## VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

There is a considerable amount of debate going on right now in Dreamspeaker circles as to whether to consider the current complexion of the many Umbrae as a catastrophic setback or a significant victory. After all, the worlds of the spirits are, if anything, more remote than they once were from the world of flesh, but this has also served to keep harmful intruders out. While the Avatar Storm is dangerous, the Dreamspeakers quickly found ways to cope with it and are now finding Otherworlds more wild and primal, more connected, perhaps, to the ancient wellsprings of wonder, fear and imagination from whence they came. Only time will tell if the Reckoning was truly the herald of the End or the harbinger of a new beginning.



# CHAPTER TWO: THE LOWER ASTRAL REACHES

*O, what a world of unseen visions and heard silences, this insubstantial country of the mind!... A secret theater of speechless monologue and convenient counsel, an invisible mansion of all moods, musings, and mysteries, and infinite resort of disappointments and discoveries... A hidden hermitage where we may study out the troubled book of what we have done and yet may do... Heraclitus, in particular, called it an enormous space whose boundaries, even by traveling along every path, could never be found out. A millennium later, Augustine among the caverned hills of Carthage was astonished at the 'mountains and hills of my high imaginations,' 'the plains and caves and caverns of my memory' with its recesses of 'manifold and spacious chambers, wonderfully furnished with innumerable stores.' Note how the metaphors of mind are the world it perceives.*

— Julian Jaynes, *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*.



Jaynes goes on to write, "There is not much we can do about such metaphors except to state that that is precisely what they are." In saying this he demonstrates the difference between the Sleeper's view of Astral Space and that of the Awakened. To the overwhelming majority of mortals, this "country of the mind" is unique to the individual, locked up in each person's head with inviolable privacy, "a hidden hermitage." One cannot travel to another's country except by proxy, exchanging thoughts and feelings only through the medium of words spoken or written, of artistic expressions, of actions and behavior which are imbued with particular significance.

Mages know better. (Don't they always?) To the Masters of Mind and Spirit, ideas take on a shared objective existence in a continuous realm that does not simply vanish when the

one who contemplates them finally turns away, loses interest, or falls asleep. These masters immerse themselves in pure thought until the physical world recedes, to be replaced by a world composed of meaning rather than substance. From this vantage, the human mind (asleep or Awake) appears less like an independently functioning engine of abstraction, generating its idiosyncratic stream of thought according to its own whims and wants, and more like a receptacle or radio receiver that tunes into and is filled with filtered-down notions from a vast upper reservoir of higher truths, divine plans, pure speculations or extravagant, nonsensical whimsies.

This is the abode of idea and thought. Mages call it Astral Space, the Astral Umbra or the High Umbra. Sleepers may also be aware of it, though they cannot experience it directly and so do not consider it to have any sort of objective reality beyond the thoughts of any given individual. At

various times and in various places, Astral Space has been described by Sleeper mystics and philosophers by such names as the Ideosphere, the Noosphere, the Realm of Similitudes, the Lands Beyond Substance, Mundus Imaginalis, Mundus Intelligibilis, or simply Idea Space. (Many of these terms are derived from the paradigms of Awakened Traditions, as will be noted where appropriate.) Just as the Middle Umbra can be said to be composed of the collective feelings and instincts of the world, the High Umbra is composed of the world's thoughts and intellectual abstractions.

Although the Astral Umbra may appear differently to all who enter it, seemingly comprised of billions of separate, mutually contradictory realities, the work of the Mercurian Cosmologists centuries ago showed that, where some accounts agreed, a roughly continuous ideospheric geography could be stitched together and posited with some degree of certainty. The lowest level of Astral Space, which is adjacent to, and corresponds most closely to, the Penumbra, is the *Vulgate*. This is the *idea* of the world, and mimics physical reality in general look and behavior, if not in the specifics of place and time.

There is no clear demarcation between the Penumbra and the Vulgate, so it is possible to wander from the mists of one into the mists of the other without realizing one has done so, except by recognizing and interpreting certain landmarks. Rising above the lowlands of the Vulgate are innumerable Spires, impossibly steep mountains with craggy rock faces, whose peaks are lost in distant cloud banks that hide the abstract Epiphamies — the highest of the High Umbra — from the view of those below. Atop the Spires, the seeker may encounter the Courts of the High Umbrood, spirits of transcendent power who may appear as the archetypal gods of ancient mythologies, imparting the sacred wisdom required for safe Epiphamic navigation. Above the Epiphamic cloud layer arches a dramatically magnified aetherial version of the sky as seen from earth; the astral sun and moon loom so closely that one can feel their gravitational pull even from the Vulgate, and the naked eye can make out planetary details like the rings of Saturn, Jupiter's storm and sometimes canals on Mars. Beyond the local planets, the constellations crowd in to outshine the dimmer stars amid the thick belt of the Milky Way and broadly smeared features of distant nebulae. When they appear, comets seem to hurtle directly toward the astral observer in agonizing slow motion, then veer off and fill the sky for days before passing.

Thought is (or at least should be) an ongoing dynamic process, and the topography of Astral Space evolves over time in accord with the changing philosophical inclinations of humanity, Awakened and Sleeper alike. The Avatar Storm hit the High Umbra like the equivalent of a major seismic cataclysm, obliterating some realms and radically changing the nature and relative positions of others. Many mages who frequent Astral Space are learning that what they believed to be well-founded independent realms have

faded to mere shadows since the Storm, gradually dissolving into oblivion or being replaced by strange new idea-places, unless their tenuous hold on existence is aided by strong Spirit and Prime magics.

## BOONS

Why visit the High Umbra at all, if one can find wisdom through study or contemplation? Aside from searching for hidden Masters or rescuing those who failed to return from a spiritual sojourn, what is the point of navigating the twists and turns of the Vulgate, climbing the treacherous Spires to the distant courts of the gods, or making the leap of faith it takes to step out into a cloudy, vaporous Epiphamy? Why intrude upon the home fields of the spirits when they can be contacted in visions induced by fasting, dancing, drugs, tortuous ordeals or simply curling up with a really good book?

To complete the monomythic plotline, a hero must obtain the elixir — that which means salvation for her community — and return with it so it can be used to heal her injured land. The streets of the World of Darkness are about as injured as a land can get, and only those Awakened by the call to adventure have the means to seek out the elixirs long banished from static reality. When hope and inspiration are gone from the material world, it is up to the mages, those who have learned to walk in the lands beyond substance, to bring the unreal back into the real, to reunite the estranged twins of matter and spirit. It is up to the enlightened willworker to bring back together, little by little, piece by piece, a world sundered by the Gauntlet, to make the land whole again.

In **Mage**, any reward to be won in the High Umbra is called a Boon, and may take the form of a new or difficult idea, a bit of lost lore or raw data, a different way of looking at something, an intense feeling, a heightened ability, an unprecedented degree of skill or obscure knowledge, a work of art, a poem or song, or even a tangible object with some magical property. Mages may set out upon an Umbral journey with a specific Boon in mind as the object of their quest, or may stumble on one while pursuing some unrelated matter. Finding a Boon should not be an easy task, and Storytellers would do well to be creative — but fair — in placing obstacles and challenges along the astral path that leads to it.

(Even knowing the existence of a particular Boon should not be a simple affair, but a quest in itself, involving research into arcane tomes, interviewing wise and learned characters who value their privacy and solitude, or recovering the seldom-recounted legends of ancient or swiftly-vanishing cultures. If the necessary information does not exist in the physical world, the heroes may need to spend time doing research and legwork in the Vulgate, poring through its libraries and museums, following furtive figures through its back alleys or petitioning for admittance to its palaces and temples.)

Some Boons can be found in the Vulgate, but these tend to have simple and direct effects that can only be used once,

or for short periods. More powerful Boons are to be sought in the more rarified realms of the High Umbral Courts, where archetypal spirits beset the seekers with tests and ordeals to determine their worthiness to possess such power. The greatest Boons of all, of course, are to be found in the Epiphamies, and seldom take the form of a specific object or well-defined piece of information. Epiphamic Boons tend to manifest as unique insights or wisdom that must be internalized, incorporated into the psyche of the seeker, in order to be of any use in the material world. In game terms, these Boons may take the form of permanent additions to Attributes, Spheres, certain Backgrounds and Merits, and even Arete or Willpower. With their Masters lost during the Reckoning, many younger mages may not be able to progress in their magical development except by visiting the Epiphamies themselves.

Bringing a Boon back to the physical world is easy enough if it is intangible, like a bit of memorized knowledge or a new or increased Trait, but those that take the form of physical (or, rather, ephemeral) objects can be problematic. Most of those from the Vulgate or the High Umbral Courts are of this sort: conventional objects or magical Talismans, Devices or Fetishes. These must be carried through the Gauntlet by **Stepping Sideways** (Spirit 3); the former may need to be Enchanted with Prime 2 in order to retain their shape and qualities in the material world, while Wonders that possess an Arete rating are subjected to the same dangers of the Avatar Storm as the mage who bears them.

Mages who are traveling by using the technique of **Astral Projection** (Mind 4) cannot, by definition, carry an ephemeral object directly into the physical world. They may, however, leave the object nearby in the Penumbra, rejoin their astral form with their physical form, then use **The Spirit's Caress** (Spirit 2) to reach across the Gauntlet and retrieve it, assuming they can stand taking damage from the Avatar Storm. (Of course, there is no guarantee that the object will not be snatched up by a passing spirit or other Umbral traveler in the time it takes to do this; coordinating one's actions with a Spirit-wise companion on the other side of the Gauntlet would be safer, when possible.)

Mages who are using the new technique of **Astral Sojourn** may physically bring objects across the Gauntlet with them when they return to their bodies, but Awakened Wonders still suffer Avatar Storm damage.

## ASTRAL SUBSTANCE

*Your best magical tool is yourself.*

— a teaching from Galeotian Wicca

While physical objects and actions have their reflection and consequence in Astral Space, those mages who visit regularly have learned that astral ephemera forms and reacts according to the meaning and significance attached to it. Newly encountered astral phenomena must be examined in light of what abstractions they represent if any real useful knowledge is to be gained from the study of them. Travelers in the High

Umbra get nowhere by asking “What is it?” rather than “What does it mean?” Likewise, the intentions that propel one's actions are just as important, if not more important than the specific actions one takes, even when the outcome of an action differs from what was originally intended.

This aspect of the higher Umbral planes becomes more pronounced the higher one climbs into Astral Space, but does not apply to the Middle or Low Umbrae. Objects carried into the High Umbra tend to perform only the specific functions for which they were intended; all incidental physical qualities — weight, hardness, even size and shape — seem present in the Vulgate, but gradually diminish as the items are carried up the Spires. At the level where reside the High Umbrood, only the purely sensory aspects of an object — what it looks like, how it feels when brandished or worn, the way it sounds when used, what it smells like — remain to signify what it does. Nearing the Epiphamies, physical objects are translated into pure functions that act as natural extensions of their bearer's own innate faculties. This subtlety of astral existence is frequently misunderstood by novice voyagers, who often believe that they are being forcibly deprived of material possessions as part of the passage to the higher realms of abstraction. (An apt interpretation, for this can happen literally as one approaches certain Epiphamies.)

For instance, a mage manages to step sideways while carrying his brand new athame, a custom-crafted dagger he has begun to use as his focus for magic involving the Sphere of Forces. While recovering somewhere in the Vulgate, necessity finds him employing his dagger for other uses. Its keen edge slices smoothly and cleanly. The sides of the blade are smooth enough to reflect light like a heliograph, and if well polished can serve as a narrow hand-mirror. The flat heavy pommel can be used as a hammer, to drive nails or bust heads.

Later, he becomes ensnared in the intrigues of the High Umbrood Court, where the inhabitants might remark upon the dagger's striking design and fine craftsmanship. When a misunderstanding with a short-tempered Umbrood lord forces the mage to use his athame as a defensive weapon, however, he finds that the blade will no longer cut, no matter how well he strikes with it. In the lord's dungeon after he loses the fight, even the massive pommel cannot smash the ancient, rusted lock on the bars of his cell door. Fortunately, the athame still functions as a very serviceable focus for Forces, and he blasts out the wall of his dungeon and continues on his way.

Later still, bound up amid the ethical perplexities of some deeply moral Epiphany, the mage wishes to take action in some emotionally charged scene appearing before him, but finds his feet rooted to the ground by literal tendrils of doubt that coil and stretch up his legs just as uncertainty about his intended course of action grows in his mind. Instinct tells him to whip out his trusty blade and slice through the soft clingy tendrils, but when he reaches for the belt sheath it is empty. He hastily tries to cast a Forces effect to burn the

tendrils away, but without his favorite focus he cannot manage it. The tendrils continue upward, to engulf his body and pin his arms to his sides while the doubts in his mind swell into full-blown hopelessness. In desperation he calms himself and tries the effect once more, this time visualizing himself using the athame focus as he normally would. Doing this, he gains the benefit of the focus and forcibly dispels both the literal bindings as well as the more profound incertitude that kept him from charging into action. (Which he now does....)

Note that, in this example, it is the bearer's intended purpose for the object that manifests, rather than any purpose assumed by the manufacturer. In other words, a dagger not used as a magical focus would, in these same situations, become the epitome of "knife" or short-edged blades in general, and hence would only be capable of cutting but insufficient for any other purpose, like focusing Forces.

Mages who traverse the Umbra by the method of creating an astral body using the **Astral Sojourn** rote may equip that body with Wonders, foci or other spiritually significant objects with another Prime 2 effect, **Enchant Weapon**. Astral equipment thus formed is immune to this "pure intentionality effect" (as some call it), and retains all "physical" properties even in the Epiphamies. If the mage in the preceding example had traveled via astral body, his blade would have worked as a blade throughout his journey, to draw blood from the High Umbrood lord or cut through the tendrils of doubt without the use of magic.

Mages who travel via the Mind Sphere effects **Astral Projection** and **Untether**, referred to as "bodiless" travelers (as opposed to "bodied" travelers who use **Stepping Sideways** or **Astral Sojourn**), have discovered the opposite of this effect. In the first place, only items that the mage has already formed a close personal bond with and psychologically internalized could actually be included as part of the mage's Projected or Untethered consciousness. The newly acquired athame of the example above would not accompany the mage if he were Astrally Projecting himself into Idea Space, unless he had already spent some time attuning to it (by, say, anointing it with oil, inscribing runes and naming it in a rite of dedication). And if he had done so, the athame would not appear as a "physical" dagger — even in the Vulgate — but only as a kind of immaterial focus for casting Forces effects.

(Prospective astral explorers should take note. The implication here is, foci that do not involve any sort of physical object — dancing, Do, formulae, language, some ordeals and sex, or song — are automatically "carried" by a mage who is Astrally Projecting or Untethered. Masters of Mind often favor immaterial foci.)

Objects treated with the Spirit 3 Effect, **Awaken the Inanimate**, may accompany an astral visitor no matter what method she may use to reach the High Umbra. Animate objects retain their objective qualities throughout Astral Space, but become susceptible to other laws of particular spiritual realms.



Items with willing spirits perform every function well, whether used in the intended manner or rigged for some improvisational purpose. The Storyteller may even allow an animate object to exceed itself in some way, such as a gun that never needs reloading, or a knife whose blade does not break when especially stressed. Animate objects inhabited by unwilling, recalcitrant spirits or mistreated by their owners may not function properly in every capacity; the Storyteller may even wish to make some sort of “morale” check for animate items in the High Umbra. The exemplary athame above would, if awakened through Spirit 3, perhaps “try harder” during the duel with the High Umbrood, adding its own Rage roll to the mage’s combat rolls; in the Epiphany, however, it may be transfixed with the same doubts as its wielder, impairing its ability not only to cut in a physical manner but its utility as a focus as well.

Umbral objects may be transported to the physical world through the Gauntlet, but suffer from a complementary phenomenon that reduces them to their basic physical properties. All spiritual qualities recede from the item, leaving it a lump of lifeless matter unless Enchanted with Prime 2. Spiritually animated objects originating in Astral Space may retain whatever consciousness they possess, but are forced back into Slumber by passage through the Gauntlet. They may be re-awakened by casting **Awaken the Inanimate** on them again; this time only half the original number of successes (round up) is required. Especially animated items can attract the attention of Paradox Spirits if they insist on acting too alive around Sleepers.

Of course, the Storyteller may decide that all this is too arcane for her type of chronicle and ignore it completely. Or she may wish to loosen up the restriction somewhat by expanding the parameters of the “pure intentionality effect” to include habit and history. Let us say that the athame of our example is not a new, custom-made item but an old, conventional knife with some history of practical use: a family heirloom used for barroom brawls, surviving in the jungle or even just for butchering livestock. Here it would keep the ability to cut regardless of where in Astral Space it is taken. Most Traditions frown upon employing a consecrated focus for such mundane uses, but many Dreamspeakers and Verbenas tend to laugh at a knife that doesn’t cut.

## ASTRAL TIME

*If I ask you to think of the last hundred years, you may have a tendency to excerpt the matter in such a way that the succession of years is spread out, probably from left to right. But of course there is no left or right in time. There is only before and after, and these do not have any spatial properties whatever — except by analog. You cannot, absolutely cannot think of time except by spatializing it. Consciousness is always a spatialization in which the diachronic is turned into the synchronic, in which what has happened in time is excerpted and seen in side-by-sideness.*

— Jaynes, op. cit.

In general, time appears to pass at the same rate in the Astral Umbra as in the physical world, but variance and distortion can be quite common in many circumstances. Masters of olden times sometimes spoke of embarking on prolonged quests through the higher realms that took months to complete, and of learning that only a few days had passed when they returned to Earth. Others complained of spending days engaged in some fruitless research in a remote astral library and afterwards finding that weeks had passed in the material world during their absence. No instances of such extreme can be verified in the modern era but similar stories persist, and Masters of Time who visited the High Umbra agreed that astral time does not flow in a constant ratio with physical time except for the periodicity of the astral moon’s phases, which are always the same as the physical moon’s. An astral lunar month, however, can be comprised of any number of days, and astral days or nights can take, in game terms, anywhere from one Scene to one Chapter. When the astral sky cannot be seen for whatever reason — overcast Epiphanies, in the shadow of a Spire, being underground or simply indoors — there is no correlation at all between physical and astral time; minutes can seem like years and vice versa, although such extremes are rare. But if the sky can be seen again, the exact date in the physical world can be reckoned by a trained astronomical observer with three successes on an Intelligence + Science or Cosmology roll. (The Storyteller sets the difficulty according to which celestial bodies can be observed at any given moment.)

Those who keep track of such things have, in comparing notes on their respective experiences, developed a rough theory that may explain these time-flow variances. Astral time, they hypothesize, is equivalent to the way humans subjectively experience the constant passage of regular time. When a person is engaged in an enjoyable scene, or is diligently applying her consciousness to a particular task, she perceives time as moving by much faster, perhaps discovering later that something that seemed to last only a few minutes in fact took hours to happen according to a clock or an uninvolved observer. Conversely, when someone is suffering through a difficult or uncomfortable occurrence or is waiting for something specific to happen or simply finds himself with nothing to occupy his attention, he feels that time is passing much slower than it normally would, even to the point where the hands of his watch seem to take longer to move. In theory, the ratio between physical and astral time would vary in proportion to this difference between objectively recorded time and subjectively experienced time.

When a mage in Astral Space is actively pursuing an acknowledged goal or working to accomplish the task at hand, he will find that less time has passed in the physical world than her astral adventure seemed to take. Conversely, a mage who wanders the High Umbra without direction or purpose, or who cannot manage to concentrate and apply himself to whatever his immediate goal might be, will reenter

materiality to find that it is much later in the day than he thought it would be. Astral time seems to measure itself in qualitative factors of purpose and accomplishment rather than in quantities of speed and distance. Experienced astral travelers often exhort novices to “be unhurried, but move with purpose.” In other words, don’t go there without a good reason and don’t allow yourself to be distracted or sidetracked from doing what you went to do, or you may end up wasting far more time than you realize.

Storytellers who choose to utilize variances of astral time in their chronicles may need to make value judgments about what their party of player characters is doing at various stages of their High Umbral adventure. Time spent in idle argument with fellow player characters or Umbral denizens, irrelevant discussion, pointless obsessive examination of the surreal details of Astral Space and any sort of procrastination or straying from the quest at hand can cause time to speed up on the material plane. The Storyteller may find some way to alert players to the ticking clock back home, perhaps by allowing a conjunctive use Correspondence 2, Spirit 2 and Time 2 that enables an Umbral party to glimpse what is happening on the physical plane. Because the act of doing so might be considered a waste of astral time or might be directly relevant to the party’s immediate purposes, visions of the material world so obtained could be delayed images from the recent past or likely projections of the near future. It may be impossible to tell which until the party reenters materiality to see for themselves.

## ASTRAL POPULATION

*POPULATION: NONE. It is known that there are an infinite number of worlds, but that not every one is inhabited. Therefore there must be a finite number of inhabited worlds. Any finite number divided by infinity is as near to nothing as makes no odds, so if every planet in the Universe has a population of zero then the entire population of the Universe must also be zero, and any people you may actually meet from time to time are merely the products of a deranged imagination.”*

—Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*

It has been said that, in Astral Space, there is no such thing as a random encounter. Treat every spirit you meet as though it had some great wisdom to impart to you, some Masters once said, for the substance of their lives and the medium through which they move is meaningfulness and significance itself. One can readily understand this in the upper astral reaches, where Epiphamies shine with transcendent truth and even the doings of the High Umbral Courts are charged with profundity and poignancy. But what of the lower Vulgate, which, though initially seeming like a deserted ghost town, appears in its densest regions as populous as any modern city? Some astral explorers go so far as to describe these “huddled masses” of lesser Umbrhood as hidden teachers waiting in the wings for some visitor that they can nudge in the direction

of understanding. Even novices have noted a tendency to “bump into” a spirit who happens to know whatever scrap of esoteric lore they currently seek.

Some of this can be attributed to the view that Astral Space is created by thought, and thus anything that happens in Astral Space is caused by whomever it happens to. Any entity one encounters is brought forth and formed by one’s conscious and unconscious expectations, needs, desires and fears. A similar theory, seeking to account for the objective ontologically precedent nature of Astral Space, defines spirits as non-local fields of magical energy vibrating with a very specific Resonance, that coalesce into specific persona types when called upon, forced into action or triggered by some particular event. The spirit fields collectively comprise the source of human thought and feeling, with the most powerful forming the basis of all shared racial psychology and personality drives, and are in turn fed by human contemplation, remembrance, devotion and celebration. These are the archetypes, vast complexes of awareness that may appear to mortals in the guise of Ancient Gods or Natural Law or even Human Nature. Those long recognized and defined by worshippers in antiquity through the faded pantheons of the Courts of the High Umbrhood. Newly discovered archetypes — and archetypes as old as mankind but that have never been completely defined — are found on the uppermost slopes of the Spires and in the Epiphamies.

Less powerful spirit fields are also sustained by human belief but do not express the same sort of deep connection to all human souls and their relation to the universe that characterizes the archetypes. These lesser types have been labeled “stereotypical” and seem to derive their specific forms from the unexamined assumptions and expectations humans hold toward each other. (Whereas an archetype invariably surpasses whatever a human might assume or expect of it.) One thing that distinguishes the two types is that, while an archetype usually appears as a single figure, a person, place or thing of power, a stereotype may appear in large numbers and seems to expand to fill particular astral niches. When an apparent individual is approached or engaged by a mage, the stereotypical field focuses into that spirit to manifest its persona. First impressions are important in dealing with stereotypical spirits, since the tone of an initial meeting can affect all other subsequent encounters with spirits of the same type.

While the old socio-politically charged stereotypes based on gender, ethnicity, lifestyle, etc. are certainly well-represented in the Vulgate, this is not to say that lower Astral Space is inhabited solely by spirits programmed to act out images of humanity’s worst biases and bigotries. Stereotypical fields seem to be more closely aligned with professional and vocational categories; the Vulgate boasts an endless variety of decrepit, bespectacled scholars, prim librarians and robed, shaven-headed monks. Another aspect of these fields is how they can be shaped and influenced by the narrative media in human culture; a stereotype is like a stock character in a

book or play, and may sometimes resemble those ubiquitous but unrecognized character actors that permeate film and television. (“Hey, it’s that guy. You know, that guy... from that show....”)

Some Traditions teach that there are basic categories of stereotypical field, which some equate with the 12 signs of the Zodiac, the phases of the moon or the hours of the day, and others relate to the various personality types of modern psychological theory. Hermetic and Batini mages boast of subduing hordes of what must have been stereotypical spirits using appropriate astrological sigils. Hollow Ones and Orphans, so often ignorant of that style of classical occultism with its endless tables of correspondences, have long been sensitive to the distinctive personality types that emerge in any close group, and how stereotypical spirits often show up to fill in for absent or even nonexistent members of a traveling party. An astral-bound cabal, whose heavy-hitting martial arts expert gal-with-all-the-guns had to stay behind to protect the ailing bookworm, will be presented with many opportunities to enlist the aid of soldiers and scholars on the streets of the Vulgate. Unfortunately, they are just as likely to attract other “missing” types like the charismatic natural leader (or, if they already have one, the jealous rival), the loyal but overzealous follower, the griper, the mooch, the guy who doesn’t know what he’s talking about but refuses to stop talking about it, the chick who tries too hard to make everybody happy, the hot-headed, hot-blooded hotshot kid, etc.

Despite such negative aspects, any stereotype can be a useful ally regardless of its power or rank in the spirit world, provided the party understands its type well enough to incorporate it into the group dynamic. Nearly all Vulgate stereotypes are literate and take a special delight in research, legwork and the kind of mentally repetitive work that makes humans bored and restless. Spirit scholars in particular can easily be induced to expound profusely on their pet subject, or any other presented to them, at great length (though, it must be noted, not always accurately). Discerning the true type of a spirit can be accomplished using Spirit 2; forcing one’s will on a lesser spirit to change its behavior or attitude, as some Traditions do using zodiacal correspondences and sigils, requires Spirit 4. Even mages untrained in the Sphere of Spirit can use such occult lore to bolster rolls for social tasks with regard to spirits; a preliminary roll of Wits + Occult (or Spirit Lore, or another appropriate specialty), can complement attempts to use Charisma or Manipulation on a particular lesser spirit. The true nature of an archetype might be discerned in this way as well, but the roll is Wits + Cosmology (or Court Lore) and these powerful Umbrood can take measures to prevent their actual selves from being revealed.

In play, those who demonstrate some esoteric knowledge of the spirit they are dealing with can reap simple but far-reaching benefits beyond what magic has to offer. The sigils,

names, numbers and emblems associated with a spirit seem to be regarded by the spirit itself as personal and private matters, just as each human regards their own individual memories, hopes and fears. A stereotypical spirit addressed by, say, its Zodiacal affiliation, will react the way most mortals do when they meet someone who shares their musical preference or hobby, or who can talk shop about their particular job or who follows the same sports team. The Zodiac signs can prove especially effective in this regard, since even some mages and Sleepers still identify themselves with their astrological birth sign. A spirit who shares a Zodiacal affiliation with a mage will be more receptive to the mage’s presence, taking a personal interest even to the point of treating the mage like a long-lost family member. On the other hand, a mage whose birth sign is astrologically opposed to a spirit’s own alignment may get a negative reaction whenever he interacts with that spirit, regardless of what he does. Naturally, mages who use their lore to bind and command spirits against their will are considered thieves or betrayers of trust exploiting the spirits’ private weaknesses, and are avoided by the rest of the spirit community. Knowledge is power in Astral Space, to be wielded with care. Even a mundane simplicity like which horoscope one habitually glances at in the morning paper translates as magical knowledge that can be used as a weapon by vengeful Umbrood.

The Vulgate is not populated entirely by these lesser stereotypical spirits, however. More powerful archetypes sometimes walk its streets in disguise in pursuit of their incomprehensible errands. Demons and Banes cloaked in less alarming forms also frequent the Vulgate, spying on the gods and digging up information they can use in their plans for the material world. Young djinn who left their own Invisible World often passed through here on their way to the physical plane, and many opted to stay for reasons of their own. The more academically inclined among them often take up residence in the Vulgate to enroll in its universities, peruse its libraries and marvel at its museums. These resident djinn are especially proud of their lineage and will resent being mistaken for a local stereotype. (For more information on djinns, see **Lost Paths: Ahl-i-Batin & Taftani**.)

Another segment of the Vulgate’s demography is comprised of mages, both from Masters in hiding and those who spent too much time in the Umbra and lost the ability to return to their own world. While a few have lived long and grown powerful as spirits, most are not fortunate enough to share this destiny; they live out their lives as mere ephemeral shadows of their former selves, easily lost in the faceless crowds. Before the Avatar Storm, some began to speculate that these human-born spirits could mate and reproduce in the Umbra just as they did on Earth, over the ages contributing to a small but substantial segment of the astral population. Recent experiences suggest that native Umbrood resent the presence of these ephemeral humans, even to the point where they might hide their true ancestry from their offspring, who

grow up believing themselves to be, and thus behaving like, other Umbrood.

According to the rank system suggested by Balt and Machado (*The Book of Madness*, p. 113) the bulk of the Vulgate's populace consists of Monsignors, Technicians and Accountants. Some stereotypical individuals may have grown in power to qualify as Lower Managers. Whether a stereotype can

grow or rise in power to become a true archetype is doubtful; stereotypical spirits seem to emerge directly from the human worldview, while archetypes by their nature transcend human consciousness, as though their origins lay in some greater source. Archetypal spirits can be likened to an individual who wears many masks, while stereotypical spirits are like many individuals who all wear a single mask.

## THE VULGATE



The astral region adjacent to the Penumbra is known as the Vulgate, or common area, where the most widely held notions of reality directly reflect the physical realm. Medieval Hermetics knew it as the *Mundus Imaginalis*, or "world of images." To students of the Qabala, this is Yesod, the ninth sephira on the Tree of Life; the Ahl-i-Batin call it the "alam al-mithal," or Realm of Similitudes, in which the transcendent

Unity becomes immanent in phenomenal diversity and takes on the forms that ultimately manifest in physical reality. The Vulgate looks and feels much like the physical world, with the same sense of solidity and immediacy.

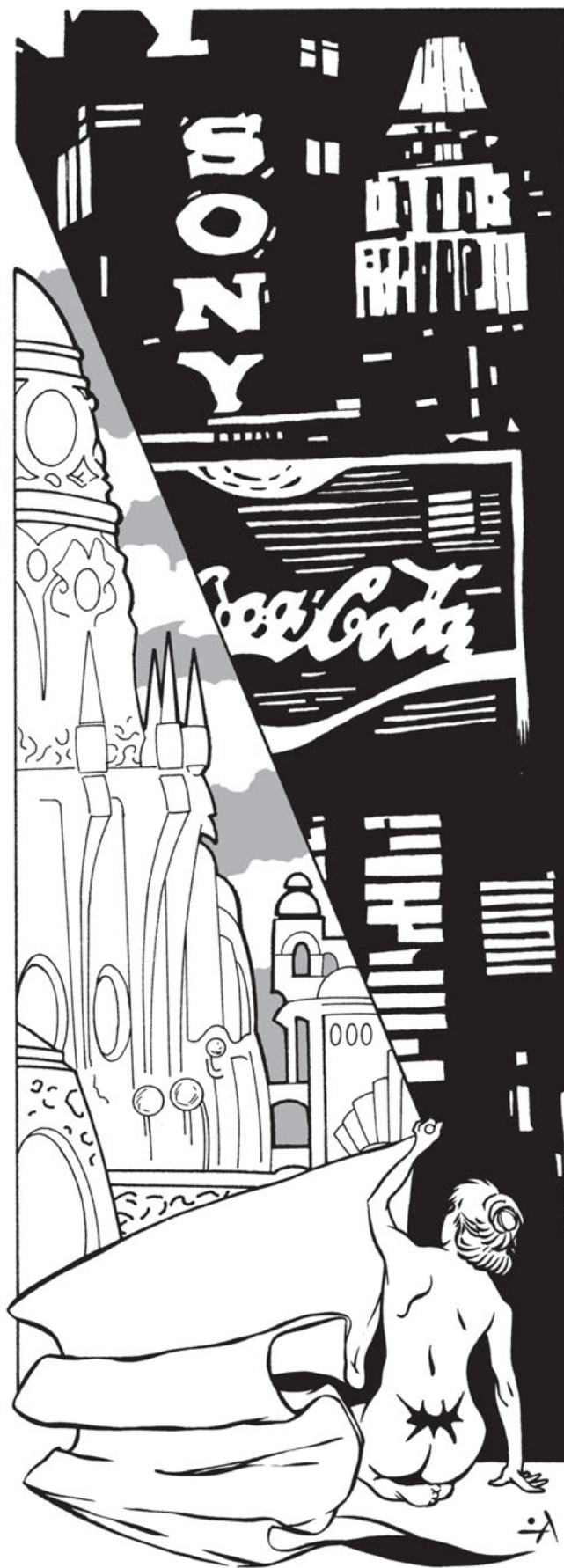
The Vulgate is comprised of the collective thoughts of humanity, not only the rational intellectual constructs of the intelligentsia, but the gossip of housewives, the prejudices of barroom philosophers, the daydreams of children and every passing whimsy that does not actually belong in the Dream Realms themselves. Whether human thought creates the Vulgate (and, by extension, all of Astral Space) or the thoughts of humans are simply the result of ideas that filter down through the Vulgate has long been a key point of conflict in the Ascension War. The Technocratic paradigm favors the former view, treating Astral Space as simply a consensual hallucination shared by interacting intellects, enjoying an illusion of permanence as ideas are handed down through the ages to successive generations. Traditional paradigms tend toward something closer to the latter view, sometimes even granting the Vulgate and the Epiphamies respectively lower and higher places in the hierarchical tiers of their ontological philosophies. Regardless of which view one takes, it is clear that actions in the Vulgate closely mirror the mental life of the physical world. Most of the Vulgate's economy is based upon the flow of information rather than actual resources, but this is not always apparent to the casual observer since information can usually appear as an object or substance in Astral Space. However, even a newcomer can easily see that Vulgatic cities are clearly dominated by their libraries, universities, bookstores and temples.

When approaching the Vulgate from the Penumbra, there no clear boundary marking the transition; the mists feel the same, and spirits that emerge from them or landmarks seen through them must be recognized or identified on their own

merits. Navigating through the Vulgate without a guide is a matter of discerning recognizable landmarks through the mists — city skylines, tall buildings, Spires and other large geographical formations. For instance, the top of the Fortress of Government (see *Epiphamies*, below) can be seen from anywhere in the Vulgate (but not the Penumbra) rising above the mists and into the Epiphamic clouds. Its precise appearance, however, varies depending on where in the Vulgate it is viewed from, and, because of the non-Euclidean geography of the Vulgate, it cannot be used to determine any direction other than that which leads directly to the Fortress itself. Most places in the Vulgate appear deserted when initially approached, and it is possible to wander through a Vulgatic city without ever seeing another living entity. While random encounters are not unknown, the rule seems to be that visitors usually only make contact with spirits that they are looking for — or that are looking for them. It is only when arriving at a specific destination that the "general populace" becomes visible and resident spirits can be seen in large groups.

In ancient times, early visitors often mistook the Vulgate for a realm of idealized archetypes, where every object was realized in its Platonically perfect form, all people willfully behaved according to law and etiquette, and societies strove together in strict practice of their Utopian mores. This is true for much of the Vulgate, but only half the time. The procession of day and night changes the more visible aspects of the astral lands, as daylight shows everything in its most positive way, while the dark of night causes the flawed and unbalanced nature of things to emerge.

At noon, a modern High Umbral city can look like a gleaming metropolis of polished steel and glass where polite, cheerful pedestrians throng clean sidewalks while alert, safety-conscious drivers maintain a smooth flow of uncompetitive traffic. As the sun sets, the buildings take on a grimy, unkempt look, and vehicles hurtle recklessly down garbage-strewn streets where shady characters scurry about on nefarious errands. In rural regions, desolate shacks on barren stubble fields transform into quaint cottages nestled in bucolic vistas of ripening crops when dawn arrives. Even individuals of the Vulgate's populace can be affected by this change: an earnest, hard-working young Umbral professional that one meets at lunch may be rumbling with biker gangs amid the urban blight at midnight.



Understand, however, that the difference between day and night in the Vulgate is not simply one of good and evil, or even strictly of positive and negative. In the light of day, rhyme and reason are in ascendance and govern the tone of reality; everyone is rational and considerate, everything looks the way everyone wants it to look and everything works the way it's supposed to work. As the light of order gives way to night, unfounded speculation replaces logic, and suspicion overtakes compassion as the world becomes populated by figments of rumor, bigotry and widespread delusion. By night the Vulgate thinks with fallacious logic and acts in accordance with Murphy's Law. It has been remarked that the Vulgate by day represents the way humanity hopes the world can be, while by night it represents how humanity fears the world actually is.

The geography of the Vulgate organizes itself in domains of cultural influence arrayed in stages of historical progression. A few days of hard riding could carry an astral voyager from a place corresponding to modern America back through regions that resemble Victorian Britain, Medieval Europe, Imperial Rome and Dynastic Egypt. Storytellers should remain aware, however, that this example does not constitute true time travel, since the regions of the Vulgate reflect only current ideas about past history combined with the echoes of the mental life of bygone eras. Actions taken in the Medieval Vulgate will not reshape the present day, or cause changes in the recorded history of the material world, although it may be possible to learn things not found in history books or to recover lost knowledge — if the Storyteller decides that is appropriate.

This is not to say that every earthly city and country has its own distinct equivalent in the Vulgate; this is, in fact, part of what distinguishes the Vulgate from the Penumbra. Major cultures are each represented by a single city along with its outskirts, but one that contains all of the most widely recognized landmarks important to that culture. The urban United States, for instance, is collectively represented by a city that shares elements from the skylines of New York, Chicago, Seattle and Los Angeles, where the Statue of Liberty overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge beneath the St. Louis Arch. This superimposed all-American city can be reached through the Penumbra of most major urban centers in the U.S.

(The cultural roots of Traditional magical paradigms can take on profound importance during a Vulgatic journey, as the local Umbral inhabitants tend to react favorably to mages who can tailor their Effects to conform to the beliefs that prevail in each society. While all magic in the Vulgate is considered coincidental with respect to Paradox, local Umbrood can fear and resent the intrusion of foreign strangeness and unfamiliar wonders into their cozy little reality just as much as Sleepers, but can look with favor upon a mage who looks and acts as they feel a worker of wonders should.)

# THE RIVER OF LANGUAGE (OR, CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE VULGATE IOI)

*The power of religion has been sorely underestimated by our scientists. No other force in history has been so effective at compelling human beings to say things in languages they don't understand. — from Mauve'Bib's Introduction to The New Improved Testament of the Orange County Bible, edited by the Princess Serutan*

— National Lampoon's *Doon* by Ellis Weiner

In the Umbra, it is not uncommon to hear intelligible speech coming from the mouths of animals, in the rustle of wind through leaves and grass, and in the gurgling and babbling of streams and rivers. This is especially common in the Spirit Wilds, of course, but the sounds of water in particular take on a specific significance when one enters the Vulgate. Here the rivers swell into broad waterways that provide both sustenance and transport for the locals, and it is said that a mage who can pick apart each trickle and splash that combines to produce the deafening torrent will be able to hear everything that has ever been said, or ever will be said.

Once believed to be an Epiphany, the River of Language is now understood to be the most accessible and inclusive map available to mages attempting to navigate the Vulgate. Just as the spoken word is the primary medium of human discourse, the River is the main medium through which the inhabitants of the Vulgate conduct their travel and commerce. Just as human speech divides into all the different languages and dialects of the race, so the River splits into a vast delta plain, where each separate course represents a particular language. Along the banks of each branch of the river delta reside the Vulgate's reflections of each human culture and history, the collective stereotypical spirit representatives of all who share a common tongue in the material world. Modern cultures, those nearest to the Penumbra and thus most familiar to the 21st century mage, occupy the delta's coastal regions, where each river mouth empties into a vast, seldom-explored ocean (often capitalized as The Great Ocean). As one travels back to the source of the delta, the local cultures tend to resemble those of the periods and places where the earlier form of the language was originally spoken. For instance, following the English branch back to its source, old Germanic, one finds oneself in a place very much like northern Europe in the early Dark Ages.

Upstream, the muddy riverbed of Proto-Indo-European (the posited root language of the Indo-European family) joins those of other linguistic families and eventually carries the traveler into the mists of prehistory, with its simplistic grammar and small object-oriented vocabulary, until the River itself narrows into a stream of Pleistocene hunting commands and pre-human warning calls. Where the local populace begins to resemble the earliest anthropoid apes (or Stanislaus Szulkalski's

yeti) some explorers, mainly technomancers and those who cleave to the more scientifically based paradigms, claim to have found that the River of Language is but one branch of another, older larger delta of animal sounds. At this point the voyager has left true Astral Space far behind and wandered into one of the fringes of the Spirit Wilds. But others who have ventured this far back declare that the River's source is an impossibly tall waterfall, the top of which is lost in the clouds — possibly that very Epiphany originally known to the Mercurian Cosmologists as the River of Language.

Waterways connect various branches of the delta, while some branches are completely separate from the rest. Isolated dialects occupy ox-bow lakes that lie parallel to their parent streams, and even twin languages are represented by secluded pools hidden in less traveled areas. "Dead" tongues like ancient Greek or Latin, which are still studied and find limited use in modern times, are narrow streams running between their once broad banks; only truly extinct languages, those completely lost to history, are represented by dried riverbeds. Shallow ditches of pidgin connect widely separated branches like English and Chinese. Between many of the modern branches are cultivated fields, irrigated by aqueducts and qanats of dense technical jargon. A thin canal of Esperanto cuts across the Italic, Germanic and Balto-Slavic regions of the past century, and other canals of artificial international languages — Volapük, Interlingua, Loglan, and Lojban — link those and other areas. Popular and counter-cultural slang flow in underground streams, while secret languages can be found in urban sewer systems. The plumbing of modern Vulgate cities resounds with the high-speed pulses of computer programming languages, and some Virtual Adepts claim to have found a way into the Digital Web through these convoluted waterworks.

On a largerscale, even the "water cycle" of Vulgatic ecology reflects the primary kinds of media through which knowledge can be transmitted in the material world. Rainfall from the Epiphanies, representing the emergence of novel ideas in the material world, causes the River of Language to swell and flood in some areas, as new terminology is coined to help define the new ideas. Just as liquid water represents the spoken word, frozen ice seems to embody the written word; libraries, bookshops and other repositories of text tend to be found adjacent to icy glaciers of various size usually clustered about the base of the most frequently traveled Spires. Some believe that the wisest spirits who work in such places acquire their books and documents by actually mining them from the ice mass and somehow transmuting them into printed or handwritten pages by a secretive process known only to local initiates.

No one can agree on what the Great Ocean symbolizes; for this very reason it is generally assumed to embody The Unknown itself. Distant Spires wreathed with incomprehensible Epiphanies jut from the misty horizon, and Umbral sailors sometimes tell tales of faraway lands where strange, inhuman thoughts took form. Some claim to have reached

the Shard Realms by crossing the Great Ocean, but few believe them. One Akashic Brother, considered mad by the rest of his Tradition, avers that the Akashic Records can be read on a massive polar icecap at the antipode of the Vulgate. An old description discarded from the Mercurian Cosmology states that the River's delta shoreline is one continuous coast, like a single island or continent. The author of this account claimed to have followed the coastline all the way around and arrived at his starting point, having encountered every extant language and culture along the way. The main reason this account was rejected from the Cosmology is that it seemed to violate geometry (as geometry was understood at that time, anyway); even late medieval mages had difficulty conceiving that all past history — and possibly the entire Spirit Wilds as well — could fit inside a perimeter that seemed to represent the current era, or indeed the present moment. Modern mages familiar with hyperdimensional theory, however, have less trouble with this concept. They also note that the Vulgatic coastline seems to be constantly extending into the future, as if the River of Language were depositing sediment at its mouths to form new land, upon which the most current sectors of the modern Vulgate will be built. With this geographic metaphor in mind, they have thus come to think of the Great Ocean as the Future — which, being uncertain, retains much of its identity as the Unknown as well.

Occasionally fog will enshroud the landscape, causing all speech to slur and become incoherent and all written or printed text to blur illegibly. At such times a party of travelers can lose their bearings and wander into a distant, unrelated delta region without realizing they have strayed or comprehending the relative astral distance they have crossed. When the fog arises from the River itself, it consists of seemingly meaningless nonsense that makes it impossible for one character to understand what her friend next to her is saying. If the fog descends from the Epiphanyes or sweeps in from the Great Ocean, however, it may be composed of complex polyglottal, Joycean wordplay in which a strangely transformed word or phrase can inspire an intellectual revelation or a vision of the future, respectively. In either case, the Storyteller may require a roll of Wits + Linguistics — or even Wits + Enigmas — simply to understand any words the characters hear or read.

Remember that Astral Space does not play by the same rules as physical space, so just because a party of mages tore the language-family page out of the encyclopedia to take on their Umbral adventure does not mean they can find their way around with ease. The landscape is fraught with strange twists that violate normal geometry, such as the many aqueducts of medical, scientific and technical jargon that connect classical Latin and ancient Greek to modern English without ever crossing the stream of Medieval French where other Latin-derived vocabulary flowed into Old English. No ocean divides the British, American and Australian portions of the modern coastline from each other, but a vast desert of old antagonism separates the closely related regions of Arabic and

Hebrew. Other “physical anomalies” present themselves, like raging torrents of modern speech flowing from the slim trickle of their seldom-spoken parent tongues or even from the dry riverbeds of dead languages. Again, Storytellers are encouraged to make any journey or task their players undertake as easy or as difficult as their plot requires, rather than adhering too literally to any rigid academic schema. (See the sidebar on *Linguistic Navigation*.)

**Boon:** Drinking the water of the River of Language enables the drinker to speak and understand whatever tongue corresponds to the branch of the delta that it came from. Chewing or sucking on a piece of ice has the same effect for reading and writing that language. This effect does not negate any languages the imbiber already knows, and the ability to translate one language into another is limited only by his native intelligence. Multiple sips from different branches of the delta can make the drinker as multilingual as she cares to be. (A really pedantic Storyteller might even allow for translating an unfamiliar but related language with an Intelligence + Linguistics roll, the difficulty being, say, 3 plus however many forks of the family tree must be crossed to reach the unknown tongue. However, by this example, it would be harder for an English speaker to translate Russian — from the western branch of Germanic to the eastern Slavic branch of Balto-Slavic for a difficulty of 9 — than to translate Hittite, a direct descendant of Proto-Indo-European with a difficulty of 6. A little knowledge can screw up your day but good, especially in the Vulgate....)

If the water is taken from the River during the daytime, the drinker learns the exact literal connotations of the language, but may not understand certain native figures of speech or colloquial usage. If the water is drawn from the River at night, the drinker gains an awareness of the tongue's subtle nuances, such as those found in poetry and other stylized writing (like mystical treatises), along with innuendo, double entendre and puns, but may have trouble with straightforward exposition or precisely worded technical text. Water drawn during sunrise or sunset confers both properties. In some areas of the delta, water should be filtered or distilled so that impurities and pollutants will not result in solecism, malaprops, bad grammar or a heavy accent. Dead languages may be retrieved from beneath dry riverbeds by using a sip-straw and rolling more than one success on an Intelligence + Survival roll, with the Storyteller determining the difficulty based upon how obscure the language is.

The effect lasts for one scene, but the Storyteller may allow a character to prolong the effect by using appropriate Time, Mind and Prime magics, or through the expenditure of Willpower. It may be safely assumed that eating or drinking any local food or beverage while in the Vulgate renders one fluent in the regional dialect for the duration of one's stay in the area. When transporting River water across the Gauntlet, the water must be Enchanted (Prime 2) or it will lose its efficacy in the material world. It might be a good idea



to carry it in an extra-strong container as well. River water can be stored for later use in the material world, but must be re-Enchanted every new moon to retain its magical quality. There is no specific dosage measurement, but the imbiber must consume enough to wet his entire tongue and throat. (In other words, no fair using the eyedropper to make your stash last longer or to stretch it out among the cabal.)

## SPIRITS OF THE RIVER

These spirits are the veritable dregs of Vulgate society. They may not be chosen as Totems or Patrons. (See the sidebar on Patronage in *Courts of the High Umbrood*.) Through careful observation, visiting mages can learn the respective Abilities of these spirits up to the level given, but the spirits themselves use Willpower, Rage or Gnosis for their own Dice Pools when rolling for actions.

## VULGATE BOATTMEN (TECHNICIANS)

These spirits travel along the River of Language, acting as freighters, fishers or ferrymen. They carry information between regions, both in the form of hard commodity and idle gossip. They also act as informants for both the Fortress of Government and the Bibliotheca Iskandrina. In fact, they embody James Joyce's notion of "gossipocracy," and anything told to or witnessed by a boatman tends to be common knowledge throughout the Vulgate within a few days. Their

sign is Pisces or the Ox, and their collective personality is that of the Conformist.

Willpower 2, Rage 4, Gnosis 1, Essence 7

**Charms:** Rumor-mongering (More of a collective effect than an individual power, boatmen can transmit, as if by telepathy, one fact per successful Gnosis roll to all other boatmen along the branch of the River delta that they currently occupy. Each successful roll can only transmit a short sentence: "The willworker wearing purple is hiding a scroll;" "A French-speaking lady asked me how to find the Nihil." Essence points must be spent to transmit more information, like "Zeus is going to kick someone's ass in the alley behind the Four Winds Tavern later tonight.")

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Streetwise 3, Drive (watercraft) 5, Linguistics 4

**Image:** Usually — but not always — male, stocky and strong, with leathery skin, wearing simple, patched clothing.

**Boon:** To purchase the services of a boatman for transport and navigation, the traveler must pay by telling the boatman something he or she has never heard before: an interesting story, a curious fact, a joke or even an obscure or coined word. The value of new words is proportional to their usefulness in everyday life; the word should make sense and refer to something most people know about or have experienced (in other words, bringing a book of Sniglets™ on an Umbral journey

will only get you but so far). Because of the Rumor-mongering Charm, travelers can seldom use the same payment more than once per astral voyage; longer stories tend to be forgotten in between Umbral visits, however. One useful tactic for those who plan extensive tours of the Vulgate is to memorize a long story that is divided into short segments with cliffhanger endings, after the fashion of the Arabian Nights. Boatmen love to compare notes over grog at the Tavern of the Four Winds, and clients who can give them something interesting to talk about, like puzzle pieces to share, will definitely win their favor. Maybe enough for a free ride. Maybe even enough to keep a secret. Maybe.

(Storytellers should have their players make payments to boatmen in character, but if this gets too tiresome or unwieldy,

they could roll Wits plus Expression or some Knowledge Ability. The difficulty should gradually increase for players who keep using the same Knowledge over and over.)

## THE WORD HORDE (TECHNICIANS)

These pirates prowl the River of Language under cover of the glossolaliac fog, raiding the boatmen's crafts and occasionally staging forays onto the riverbank. Violent and uncouth, they plunder whatever information they can and sell it to the highest bidder. (Buying black market information is the only illegal activity — forbidden by law of the Fortress of Government — that the Bibliotheca Iskandrina engages in. Only Callimachus is aware that lesser employees of the Library do this, and hides the fact from Aristarchus to protect

## LINGUISTIC NAVIGATION

The River delta is where a mage's conventional academic education can come into play, as the study of linguistics and cultural anthropology is used to reckon the otherwise nonsensical geographical layout of the Vulgate. Storytellers who wish to capitalize on this are encouraged to have a copy of the family tree of Indo-European languages handy, such as can be found in some large illustrated dictionaries, encyclopedias, or textbooks on linguistics. The branching lines of this diagram (which might vary depending on one's source) correspond closely to the branching waterways of the broad delta that comprises the River of Language. Travelers who do not automatically recognize the tongue spoken by local spirits can roll Perception + Linguistics to determine which branch of the delta they are on, with additional successes enabling them to guess at the closest adjacent branches. To find the way to a specific region, roll Intelligence + Linguistics to ascertain direction and estimate travel time, or else hire a boatman. Either way there is an average of one day and one night between each branch juncture.

Note that most copies of the Indo-European family tree are, as the name indicates, Eurocentric, with the Indo-Iranian subfamily — which includes Sanskrit and Persian, among others — as the only Asian languages represented. Other theoretical families besides Indo-European are Finno-Ugric, which includes Hungarian and Estonian; Hamito-Semitic, which includes Egyptian, Hebrew and Arabic; Sino-Tibetan, which includes Chinese, Tibetan and many tribal tongues of Burma and northeastern India; Altaic, which includes Korean and Japanese; Malayo-Polynesian, and Native American. The late Joseph H. Greenberg of Stanford grouped all but the last two into a super-family called Eurasiatic, divided Native American into three super-families, pre-colonial Sub-Saharan African languages into four super-families, and posited an Indo-Pacific super-family to cover Papuan New Guinea, some of Melanesia, Andaman Islander and the extinct Tasmanian

tongue. Furthermore, he related all to a prehistoric Proto-World tongue, which would serve as the single source for all the waterways of the River delta. Mages familiar with his schema would theoretically be able to find their way to any part of the Vulgate without having to pay the fees of professional guides.

However, these families are largely the hypothetical constructs of Western scholars and may not necessarily hold true in all parts of the Vulgate, where the beliefs a culture holds about itself are reflected more strongly than beliefs held by outsiders. This is especially true of the African and Native American "families," each of which encompasses a greater diversity of tongues with less direct relationship to each other than any other geographic-linguistic groupings. Storytellers who wish to use the River of Language to explore the richness of African, Middle Eastern, Far Eastern, Native American or Pacific Island cultures may want to treat them as completely separate regions that can only be reached by a difficult land crossing, or simply make up whatever astral arrangement that would best suit the purposes of their chronicle. In any case, characters who try to shortcut directly from one branch to another have no assurance of where they will arrive, unless they have some well-defined theory or paradigm to guide them.

Some arcane story hooks or subplots could be generated from such theories, like, for instance, the need to crack a Nephandi code based on Cretan Linear A. Technocratic clean-up teams, hampered by their dependence upon academically accepted paradigms, have been unable to track down some hidden Masters who disappeared into a region that corresponds to Howard Barraclough Fell's much-discounted theory that many major Polynesian languages are descended from late demotic Egyptian. Learned but open-minded explorers of post-Reckoning Astral Space can discover many such things that could radically alter worldwide academic and scientific thinking.

his social status.) The Horde's sign is Scorpio or the Tiger, and their collective personality is the Rebel.

Willpower 4, Rage 6, Gnosis 1, Essence 11

**Charms:** S'word (The long-bladed weapons of the Word Horde remove one word from the target's active vocabulary for each Essence point spent instead of damage. This effect is permanent, affecting mages even after they return to the material world, and must be enforced when speaking in character. The Storyteller decides which words are stolen, either choosing from whatever thoughts were at the forefront of the target's mind at the time the attack started, or just taking commonly used articles, pronouns and prepositions — “the,” “I,” “in” — or both, whichever she feels would add interest to the story or be most fun to roleplay. Stolen words can only be recovered by inflicting damage on the pirate who took them — while they are stereotypical spirits, members of the Horde do retain their individual identities and appearances — or else by spending one experience point per word to “re-learn” it.)

**Abilities:** Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Melee 4, Stealth 2

**Image:** Usually — but not always — male, of any age or body type but generally agile, dressed like typical pirates straight out of the movies: bandanas, eye-patches, wide belts and baggy trousers, mostly shirtless and barefoot. (Parrots are not uncommon, and usually turn out to be sentient spirits themselves.)

**Boon:** The Word Horde cannot be hired or reasoned with, and so are not good for much except trouble. However, prying their weapons from their cold dead fingers transfers the S'word Charm to the new wielder, enabling him to steal words from his own opponents. A mage using a S'word must spend a Willpower point and declare that he is striking for words rather than damage, but still makes a damage roll and chooses one word per success. A S'word taken to the higher levels of Astral Space does not do ephemeral damage; it just steals words.

## BIBLIOTHECA ISKANDRINA

*There are temples nowadays, which we have seen, whose bookcases have been emptied by our men. And this is a matter that admits no doubt.*

— Christian historian Orosius, 6.15.32

The fabled Library of Alexandria has occupied an area adjacent to the old Semitic, Greek, Latin and Egyptian branches of the delta ever since it — or rather, its original earthly incarnation — was destroyed by Bishop Theophilus around the turn of the 5th century CE. Once the greatest collection of books and center of learning in the ancient world, it has since carried on that function as one of the most respected and cherished institutions in the Vulgate. Although situated in its historically appropriate region, it can be reached through its “daughter branches,” called Serapea

(sing. Serapeum), found throughout the civilized areas of the River delta. While the historical ambience of the Library has been preserved, some accommodations have been made to keep this store of knowledge fluent in the modern information age. As the library that no longer exists in the physical world, it specializes in keeping books that have likewise departed the material plane. This is where one goes to look up those writings or other recorded matter that has been lost to the material world.

Its exterior is a sprawling, multilevel affair, many-columned in the early Greco-Egyptian style, with one main entrance, three large entrances at each quarter and broad, covered walkways leading outward to additional subsidiary wings. (One such wing covers nearly as much ground as the Bibliotheca itself, surmounted by a taller, even more stately, domed structure known as the Mouseion, described below.) Inside, the public portions of the Library are comprised of seemingly endless rows of shelves and racks averaging about three meters tall apiece, with ladders and wheeled staircases placed to service each section. The circular central gallery, to which each entrance leads directly, is five stories high, with skylights and clerestory windows allowing daylight to spill in and bounce from one plain white or mirrored surface to the next, filling the huge edifice with light.

On either side of the main entrance hang two gigantic portraits: to the right, as one faces the entrance from inside, is Serapis, the patron deity of the Library synthesizing Greek and Egyptian attributes; to the left, Alexander the Great, enthroned in the garb of a pharaoh, holding crook and flail. A small fountain, surmounted by a four-faced statue of Hermes, Thoth, Ganesha and Odin, is the centerpiece of the ground floor, surrounded with curved benches. Around this are long reading tables in a radial formation, amply supplied with inkwells and quills, paperweights and magnifying glasses; each table is lined with drawers kept full of reams of paper — blank, graph or college-ruled. While an obvious effort has been made to maintain the archaic atmosphere of the place, the glow of computer terminals can be detected around the corners of concealed niches, and sometimes even the faint clacking of a manual typewriter can be heard echoing from distant cubicles.

Moving away from the central gallery, the shelves crowd more closely together, with labyrinthine aisles so narrow that even two slender men cannot squeeze past each other. In corners and at odd junctures are comfy chairs furnished with side tables and oil lanterns or electric lamps, but their wicks are usually dry or else the bulb is burnt out. Here light seldom penetrates and the shelves are crammed so tightly and haphazardly that removing a single book or scroll could trigger an avalanche of crumbling parchment. (It is not uncommon to hear that librarians have discovered the desiccated skeleton of some scholar or another, long lost in the seldom-traveled stretches of this outer maze.) Seekers of arcane lore would be well advised to bring their own light

source, but flame of any sort is to be strongly discouraged for obvious reasons.

All the resources of the Bibliotheca are free to the public, but the spirits of the place are unyielding when it comes to protecting their store of knowledge. Books may be copied (generally by hand, although librarians may provide xerographic or digital scanning facilities if they can be convinced of truly urgent need) but are not allowed to leave the Library under any circumstances. Defacing Library property is countered with creatively sadistic punishments, and destroying even a single letter of any book is grounds for summary execution. Most of the inhabitants of the Vulgate depend upon the Bibliotheca for their livelihood, using it as a kind of information marketplace, and will report any known offender of Library law immediately, or even take it upon themselves to enforce such laws.

The main law of the Bibliotheca dates back to its days in the physical plane; all ships that visited the port of Alexandria were searched, all books and scrolls were confiscated, sent to the Library to be copied, and returned to their owners. This same rule is still in effect, and extends throughout nearly all of the civilized Vulgate. Most of the inhabitants of the Vulgate will keep an eye out for any sort of written information, be it text, diagram or map (and even other media like film, video, audio or computer disk) that a visitor might bring with them, and report its presence to the nearest Serapeum.

The local librarians will soon approach the visitor, politely request to borrow the book (or whatever it may be) for the Library, and offer their own services in return. If the owner refuses to yield it for whatever reason, the librarians inform him of the law and warn that if he does not consent, it will be taken by whatever means necessary. If the owner still refuses, acquisition enforcement specialists are dispatched from the Serapeum; these may be armed police or, if the visitor and his party are armed themselves, highly trained burglars or pickpockets. These enforcers will stop at nothing to add any new information to the Library's catalogue, but will avoid harming the visitors and offer every opportunity for the transaction to be made as peacefully as possible. Those who consent will invariably have the book or other item returned within a day or two, often sooner, and always in exactly the same condition as when it left their possession. Those who have secrets to be guarded at all costs (like most mages) are in for a fight; all acquisition efforts will escalate until the information is obtained or the owner flees from the Bibliotheca's influential reach.

This is not to say that the librarians of the Bibliotheca are a bunch of literary fascists hoarding texts which they refuse to share, but they are intensely dedicated to both preserving and making accessible knowledge which could otherwise be lost forever. The staff is comprised of spirits that have the names and personae of historic Alexandrian



scholars; perhaps they are the ghosts of the original librarians, or former mages who have found immortality as Umbral spirits, or simply Umbrood masquerading as famous personalities from the ancient world. Whatever the case, they seem to remember the various disasters that befell the Library in the material world with a high degree of personal involvement, and pursue their self-avowed mission with a kind of religious zeal. While they can be fierce and unyielding toward those who would steal or destroy their texts, they can also show unending gratitude to any who bring them new books or who assist the Bibliotheca in any way. They especially welcome all men and women of letters — scholars, historians, scientists, translators and writers of all types.

**Boon:** The Storyteller may choose to reduce the time spent or even the experience point cost for learning Knowledge Abilities while in the Bibliotheca. The main benefit to be gained from a visit to the Bibliotheca is the same as that of any library — access to a wide variety of literature — but this Library exceeds all others in immensity and historical scope. Removing a book from the Library is not allowed, but copies and translations can be obtained for a price, usually the offering of some previously unknown work or translation, or rendering some service to the institution. Additional charges may be incurred when translation into or from some obscure language is required and a text must be transported to a Serapeum in a remote part of the River delta.

The Bibliotheca Iskandrina is a veritable treasure trove of ancient knowledge, for its incarnation in the Astral Umbra contains all of the texts that were ever included in its earthly catalogue — the original collection of founders Ptolemy I (“The Preserver”) and Demetrius of Phaleron; the remnants of Aristotle’s library, acquired by Ptolemy II Philadelphus; the 200,000 scrolls from the Pergamum (another great library in Asia Minor), given to Cleopatra VII by Marc Antony to compensate for the losses during her war with Ptolemy XIII, and all texts destroyed by the Christians in the 5th century — both in their original languages and the obligatory Greek translations. Important works from subsequent centuries, especially magical and religious texts, have also been added to the shelves. There is even rumored to exist a Special Collection Room containing books that never existed in the material world: the Necronomicon as described by Lovecraft (as opposed to the Sumerian-Crowleyan synthesis of Simon or the “John Dee translation” of Colin Wilson), the play “The King in Yellow” (as opposed to Robert Chambers’ collection of short stories in which the play is quoted), and even the complete works of Kilgore Trout and Hagbard Celine. Of course, one can only gain access to this Special Collection by making an appointment with the Head Librarian and doing him a really big favor....

## THE MOUSEION

*Dare to match wits with god-like geeks!*

— Comedy Central’s “Beat the Geeks” game show

The largest wing of the Bibliotheca Iskandrina is the Mouseion, or in Latin, the Museum. Once a state-supported research institute that was part of the historical Library of Alexandria on the physical plane, the Mouseion was dedicated to the study, preservation and practice of the arts and sciences. Since becoming part of the Vulgate in the late 3rd century CE, it has grown as much, if not more than, the Library, expanding its array of galleries, classrooms and laboratories to accommodate Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modern studies. Its communal grounds seem to be built according to some hyperdimensional plan that contains even more room on the inside than the already sprawling exterior would suggest. The interior of the building includes apartments, cloisters, meditation chambers, dining halls, lecture halls and an astronomical observatory incorporating ancient and modern technology. Outside, an elaborate hedge maze of exotic topiary leads to botanical gardens and zoological parks representing nearly all physical — and many Umbral — environments.

The relationship between the Bibliotheca and the Mouseion is analogous to that between theoretical and applied knowledge, or between research and development; mages who show the respect due to both institutions can practice techniques here that they have learned from reading in the Library. As part of the Bibliotheca, the Mouseion functions in much the same way, allowing the use of its facilities to any visitors who have knowledge or some skilled service to offer in return. However, guests are required to let the institute display any work of art or performance created with its facilities, or to let the staff supervise any scientific experiment conducted on its grounds — for safety purposes, of course. The Mouseion also reserves the right to retain copies of all literary and philosophical works, as well as scientific findings and experimental results, for inclusion in the Bibliotheca. Failure to comply with these rules results in a dismissal from the institute and the confiscation of the results of any work done on the premises. The administrators recognize the need for secrecy, however, especially in certain matters of occult or scientific study where there is a potential for the misuse or abuse of powerful knowledge, and can show flexibility if approached directly and honestly.

The Mouseion was originally a temple to the ancient Greek Muses, and these High Umbral entities, since relegated to the status of a mere poetic conceit on the material plane, can still be encountered directly within its halls (see *The Court of the Muses*, pp. 70-80). The number of Muses that are currently known has doubled

since Hellenic times, and those with a more direct interest in the works of humanity have taken up residence here in the Vulgate. These are now known as the Medial Muses, for their purview is that of work done in the artistic (and scientific) media as it manifests in the physical world. While their influence upon the majority of human hearts and minds has waned, they may still come when called properly and sometimes even extend themselves to inspire mortals who show promise in communicating or expressing important ideas. Astral travelers with some significant message to convey to the world at large are encouraged to visit the Mouseion and petition one or more of the Medial Muses for Patronage (see p. 71-74). The other Muses of the High Umbral Courts visit the Mouseion frequently for prolonged periods of time, and even the more powerful archetypal Umbrood lords have been known to manifest here on rare occasions.

**Boon:** While the Mouseion is not the right place to practice large-scale Forces Effects or severe warpages of space and time, mages who wish to develop magic designed to express ideas or inspire wonder in Sleepers may be offered much in the way of guidance and assistance. Medial Muses can be found here at almost any time to teach their respective specialties in Expression or Crafts. Other inspirational and tutelary spirits can be contacted from the Mouseion, with a reduction in difficulty for the **Call Spirit** Effect (Spirit 2) to be determined by the Storyteller.

## BIBLIOTHECA AND MOUSEION STAFF

Although they are, strictly speaking, stereotypical spirits, those who run the Alexandrian Library and Museum have retained their distinct individual identities for centuries — over 2000 years, in some cases. They speak of ancient history as though they lived it, but tend to be reticent when discussing the various tragedies that befell their institution in Alexandria. Some astral tourists claim that they might be ghosts, granted leave from the Low Umbra to continue their work, while others speculate that they were mages in life who somehow achieved immortality after fleeing to the lands-without-substance and suffering Disembodiment. However, their many (often nameless) employees seem to be reflections of their own personalities, which would suggest that they are a special class of stereotypical entity with a specifically focused identity.

While the staff of these Vulgatic institutions can provide information concerning the High Umbrood and even a little about the Epiphamies, they are not powerful enough to act as Patrons or Totems. They may teach their respective Abilities up to the level given, but use Willpower, Rage or Gnosis for their own Dice Pools like any other spirit.

## CHIEF LIBRARIAN ARISTARCHUS OF SAINTOTHRACE (UPPER BISHOP)

Historically, Aristarchus was the fifth Librarian at Alexandria, his tenure stretching from 175 to 145 BCE. An intellectual giant of his day, he proposed a heliocentric model of the solar system over a thousand years before Khayyam, Copernicus or Zonker. Because of this, he might be extremely grateful to anyone who could change the big knife switch in the Continuum Orrery (see *Epiphamies*) to read “Aristarchan” rather than “Copernican.” Unfortunately, this kind of permanent Epiphamic alteration can only be done by amending millions of texts in the material world and making his name far more prominent in the popular collective mentality of western civilization — so good luck with that.

Aristarchus embodies the mission of the Bibliotheca — the quest for knowledge — and his influence throughout the Vulgate puts his status above that of many local rulers; a patient listener who considers all sides of any problem or issue, he is often invited to the Fortress of Government to act as advisor and consultant. His many duties and private studies leave him little time to meet with Library visitors in person, and his stern manner makes him seem unapproachable, but if shown courtesy and respect he can be quite gracious, and if his intellectual curiosity is piqued he becomes downright friendly. For mages using an astrological paradigm to identify spirits, he is associated with the sign of Libra in the occidental system, and with the Year of the Dog in the oriental system. His personality Archetype (the game term, not the High Umbrood category) is the Architect.

Willpower 6, Rage 2, Gnosis 7, Essence 15

**Charms:** Adventures in Reading (When Aristarchus reads aloud, or personally recommends a particular book, the text seems to come alive, as though the scenes and situations described on the page were actually happening to the reader or listener. This effect, a mindscape that is distinct and separate from the rest of Idea Space, lasts for one Scene and requires a Gnosis roll and the expenditure of 1 Essence.)

**Abilities:** Awareness 4, Leadership 4, Meditation 3, Technology 1, Academics 5, Computer 2, Cosmology 5, Enigmas 2, Linguistics 3, Occult 3, Science (any) 5

**Image:** An elderly bearded man with a piercing gaze and shaven head, wearing scholarly robes and holding a staff with an ank at the top (like the one in the portrait of Serapis).

**Boon:** Aristarchus controls all library access, and can deny it to anyone he chooses, effectively placing a ward against them on all entrances. He can supply introductions to all major leaders in the Vulgate, and knows the names

of most major Umbrood lords. He can describe most major Epiphames and can direct travelers to the one called the Continuum Orrery, but he has no time to visit them himself.

### KYDAS THE SPEARTIAN (LOWER BISHOP)

Kydas was Aristarchus's successor at Alexandria, from 145 to 116 BCE, and now serves his former mentor as security director of the Bibliotheca. As the embodiment of the institution's rules, he polices the Library grounds, tracks down stolen books and is in charge of forcibly confiscating any text not willingly surrendered by visitors for copying. Tough, smart and dedicated, he is identified with the sign of Taurus or the Year of the Rooster, and his personality is that of the Director.

Willpower 6, Rage 7, Gnosis 4, Essence 17

**Charms:** The Transfixer (The spear for which Kydas is known has long been feared throughout the Vulgate, though he rarely uses it outside the Bibliotheca, and only when there is real trouble. Although he can use it to do spiritual damage as an ephemeral weapon, if he scores three or more successes on his Rage attack roll, he can opt to spend 1 Essence to Transfix the target, which has the effect of freezing them in their tracks. Transfixed targets are like statues, staying in position, unaware of their surroundings or the passage of time, while Kydas and his men carry them out of the Library, usually depositing them in some unpleasant part of the Vulgate. Once the spear is removed, the target returns to normal, suffering no injury, other than what was inflicted through normal means.)

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Streetwise 1, Firearms 3, Melee 5, Stealth 3, Academics 3, Investigation 4, Law 3, Linguistics 2, Medicine 3

**Image:** An older man, but large and solidly built, with hair and beard cut short, wearing Greek armor and carrying a large spear (the Transfixer).

**Boon:** Visitors to the Bibliotheca who abide by its rules can count on the protection of Kydas while on Library grounds, and those who do not will at least get a verbal warning before they are Transfixed and removed. Those who gain the favor of Aristarchus by proving their honesty, integrity and dedication may be entrusted to carry out missions for the Library, and will usually be accompanied by Kydas, who supplies an additional degree of authority, tactical savvy and muscle.

### CALLIMACHUS (MIONSIGNOR)

Once a poet, grammarian and Library employee during the 3rd century BCE, Callimachus maintained the Library's catalog, known as the *Pinakes*. Originally 120 volumes, grouped into 10 subject categories, this catalog listed all authors alphabetically by first name; since being translated to the Umbra, the *Pinakes* has grown over 10 times this size

and is now cross-indexed by full names, pseudonyms, dates and subject matter or literary genre. It requires several shelf units of its own to house, but can be accessed through the Bibliotheca's computers, and Callimachus keeps it scrupulously up to date. He also keeps it in his head, and can automatically find, or direct visitors to, any text anywhere in the Library. He also acts as curator for the Mouseion's Pinakothek, or art gallery, and has an equally encyclopedic knowledge of all artwork kept there. His signs are Virgo and the Cat, and his personality is the Traditionalist.

Willpower 4, Rage 1, Gnosis 8, Essence 13

**Charms:** Produce Copy (Callimachus can replicate any text or artwork within one full astral day at a cost of 1 Essence. His copies are perfect reproductions, complete with margin notes, artistic flaws and the effects of aging. Shorter texts or simpler pieces of art cost the same, but only take one Scene to create.)

**Abilities:** Awareness 2, Expression 4, Crafts 3, Technology 3, Academics 5, Computer 5, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 3, Investigation 2, Law 4, Linguistics 4, Occult 3, Science 3

**Image:** A small, slender, middle-aged man with a slightly hunched back, wearing Franklin bifocals and a tunic with Greco-Egyptian embroidery; a bent quill is always tucked behind one ear, some obscure tome in the crook of one arm, and permanent ink-stains on his fingers. His care-worn face is usually pinched in preoccupation, but brightens immeasurably with the prospect of some new intellectual or artistic endeavor.

**Boon:** Though Callimachus has no time to compose poetry of his own, he still appreciates new work, and, if presented with a well-crafted poem he has not already read, may be induced to do extensive research or reproduce some text or artwork as a personal favor. This is an activity that he truly loves, and, while not the fastest, he is incredibly thorough.

### HYPATIA OF ALEXANDRIA (UPPER BISHOP)

If the spirits of the Library are indeed the ghosts of people from ancient history, then Hypatia has the most tragic story of all. Despite her accomplishments in mathematics, astronomy, physics and Neoplatonic philosophy, rare enough for anyone — especially a woman — of that era, her friendship with the Roman governor of Alexandria brought down the wrath of Archbishop Cyril, who was consolidating the power of the early Christian church and denouncing the intellectual accomplishments of the pagans. In 415 CE, a mob of Cyril's fanatical followers dragged Hypatia from her chariot while she was on her way to work, tore off her clothes and flayed her with abalone shells. Her remains were burned and her works destroyed; her death marked the end of Alexandrian scholarship, and Cyril was canonized as a saint. Hypatia is now head of the Umbral Mouseion, a distinction she was born too late in the physical world to achieve, and has continued her scientific

endeavors for the last 15 centuries. A stunning beauty, she rejects all invitations to dalliance, caring only about her work, and tends to be wary of members of the Celestial Chorus and other monotheists. Though seemingly cold and distant, Hypatia, like everyone else associated with the Bibliotheca, becomes quite personable at the prospect of intellectual adventure of any sort. Her signs are Leo or the Snake, and her personality is the Perfectionist.

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 7, Essence 17

**Charms:** Looking into the Heart (Hypatia's personal history has made her especially sensitive to the true intentions of others; with a Gnosis roll she can divine anyone's actual plans regarding the Mouseion or her personally. She will dismiss anyone who plans to do harm to another, and does not waste time on would-be suitors pretending to be interested in her work.)

**Abilities:** Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Meditation 2, Technology 4, Academics 5, Computer 3, Cosmology 4, Enigmas 3, Linguistics 2, Medicine 2, Occult 4, Science 5

**Image:** A very beautiful woman in her mid-forties with Mediterranean features and penetrating eyes, wearing her hair and dress in the style of late Roman Egypt.

**Boon:** Hypatia holds the same authority over Mouseion resources as Aristarchus does in the Library, and her social influence in the Vulgate is even greater, as most male leaders (and some female as well) are overcome by her looks. She is keen on practical experimentation as opposed to pure research, and will personally help anyone seeking to test a theory that intrigues her.

## THE THEATRE OF THE MIND

TONIGHT AT THE MAGIC THEATER

FOR MADMEN ONLY

PRICE OF ADMITTANCE YOUR MIND

NOT FOR EVERYBODY

— Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*

In one sense, every theater in the Vulgate can be considered a "theater of the mind," as the thoughts, dreams, psychodramas and mythoi of humanity are enacted at any number of places along the River delta — by the masked choruses in classical amphitheaters, by the acrobatics of Chinese opera, through the stylizations of Noh and Kabuki troupes, in the exotic shadow-plays of Southeast Asia. But modern astral travelers tell of one specific place, in the slums found just a few blocks off of the Vulgatic reflection of Broadway in the city at the mouth of the American English branch. From the outside, one would never guess its true nature, its boarded-up windows offering no clue as to the dramas unfolding within, just a ramshackle building sandwiched within a row of condemned tenements and dilapidated warehouses that all look the same. Those who wander closer to the entrance may notice the yellow,

crumbling playbill posted beside the unadorned door, and might even recognize the name of someone they know, or perhaps even their own, in the fading print.

There is no admission; a bored and elderly-looking spirit wearing an ill-fitting usher's uniform and slumped on a wobbling stool simply hands a ticket to anyone who enters, then promptly snatches it back, tears it in half and returns the stub. The sparse concession stand is unattended, and patrons who decide to serve themselves find the drinks watered down beyond any flavor whatsoever, the popcorn stale and the candy inedibly ossified. Beyond a threadbare curtain is the theater proper, which seats perhaps a hundred at best. The floor is sticky and those few wooden seats that remain unbroken are hard and uncomfortably narrow. The audience consists of a dozen scattered, shapeless forms reeking of cheap liquor and snoring fitfully in the dark, with one young couple loudly necking in the back row; if any member of this audience is approached or addressed directly, they will get up and leave in annoyed silence (except when they turn out to be someone already known or have some story-related purpose for being there).

The play is usually in progress when the visitors enter, unless the Storyteller has some reason to show the visitors the beginning. The production is singularly uninspired and uninspiring; the set pieces are obviously plywood, painted in a hurry; the sound effects are always out of synch, and any music used in the show is hackneyed and overloud. The actors are astoundingly bad, unable to project themselves or emote with any degree of conviction; viewers may get the distinct impression that they were only handed their scripts an hour ago. (No self-respecting Umbrood of any rank attends the Theatre's presentations; even the Muses must be coerced into going near it. The Muse of Drama denies that it even exists. For this reason, it is one of the few places in the Vulgate where the influence of the Bibliotheca Iskandrina or the Fortress of Government [see *Epiphamies*] does not extend, and thus is often chosen as a safe place to pass along secrets kept from those venerable institutions.) It is only the content of the play that might elicit any interest whatsoever in viewers, for this theater exclusively acts out events that have actually occurred, or are most likely to occur, whether in the physical world or in the Umbra.

The events of the play are usually — but not always — things that have happened to the visiting viewers, or that happened in their presence, and invariably involve them and the reasons for their current astral journey. Scenes presented in the Theatre of the Mind are played out just as an uninvolved observer would have seen them, with all spoken lines and physical actions occurring exactly as they happened, regardless of how ineptly they may be depicted. The depiction may be distorted with the overemphasis

or downplay of certain aspects of the events, but there is always a recognizable basis in objective reality. Sometimes relevant events occurring in the material world at that time are dramatized, and on rare occasions scenes from the foreseeable future may be shown.

**Boon:** There is no particular spiritual benefit associated with the Theatre of the Mind, but Storytellers may use its content to suit their purposes. Scenes set in the future are not revelatory prophecies, but highly likely scenarios that can be predicted by most anyone. Scenes from the present, however, can let visitors know what is going on in materiality while they tarry in the spirit world, and scenes from the past can reveal back history and information otherwise unavailable. Storytellers who use the Theatre in this way and find their players becoming dependent on it and abusing its availability have a few options to rectify the situation. The usher at the door may refuse to give them tickets and instead demand the stubs from previous visits; if the theatergoers refuse and try to force their way in, he can whistle for a suitably burly bouncer to eject them. If the bouncer is overcome, the resulting commotion can disrupt the performance; this or any other interruption will cause the actors to break character permanently and complain loudly and abusively until the visitors leave. Also, the offended actors will be only too glad to report any illegal activity that they see from the stage to the authorities.

Alternatively, the content of the plays can be geared toward embarrassing disclosures — like revealing secrets that the members of a traveling cabal have been keeping from one another — or constantly rehashing a viewer's failures or most depressing occasions (pretend they are supposed to be "growth experiences" until the players get the message). As a final resort, the Theatre can be shut down permanently — every play only runs for one night anyway — and if it is to be brought back into the Chronicle, it takes some less accessible form, like ancient Greek drama, Chinese opera, Noh, Kabuki or Sumatran shadow puppetry.

## THE TAVERN OF THE FOUR WINDS

*It's the nexus of crisis and the origin of storms...*

—Blue Oyster Cult, "Astronomy"

At the corner of the alley leading to the Theatre of the Mind sits an invitingly warm and comfortable bar known as the Tavern of the Four Winds. Inside can be found a cross-section of nearly every stereotypical demographic group in the Vulgate, most of whom sound a chorus of friendly greeting every time a new visitor enters. (If the visitor has traveled the Vulgate before, or has even been in the vicinity for more than a whole Scene, and has identified herself to any of the locals and not changed her appearance drastically, she will undoubtedly be greeted by name.) There

are boatmen from the River, scholars and researchers from the Bibliotheca and Mouseion, agents from the Fortress of Government (both off-duty and pursuing covert missions) and actors from the Theatre basking in the afterglow of their latest imagined triumph. Very special events can result when the Muses visit to inspire a band, singer or comedian. Even the raucous pirates of the Word Horde can be found here, their ephemeral weapons set aside for the moment — but well within reach.

Spirits who seem distant, uncooperative and even combative when found elsewhere are much more approachable if encountered in the Tavern, and, if one has the time to wait, eventually everyone seems to show up and unwind. By day, everyone is in a pleasant mood — "out of character," one might say — and remains so unless provoked in some way. As night falls, the cheerful atmosphere becomes louder, the conversations more energetic, the jokes raunchier, the impromptu dancing more vigorous, and there is a sense of things about to careen out of control. New acquaintances start to seem anxious and overfriendly, clinging to visitors with a casual rudeness of which they seem unaware. But unless the visitors themselves start something, real trouble seldom breaks out.

The Tavern is actually an astral co-locale, existing simultaneously in cities and at crossroads all along the River delta; other examples of such places include the Fortress of Government (described in *Epiphamies*) and the Library's Serapea. The façade presented at each external location is architecturally appropriate to the region; the interior combines layouts, décor and technological apparatus from all cultures and periods. There is a long, curved bar with polished-brass rails and fittings, a row of antique taps, open booths and curtained alcoves, a dining area with tables and chairs (with Chinese décor reminiscent of where many of Jackie Chan's early fight scenes took place), and corners resembling cozy Irish pubs and modern sports bars. Most Tavern patrons seem unaware of any discontinuity, regarding the place as they would their own neighborhood watering hole.

The proprietor is a female spirit, full-figured, husky of voice, with a ready wit and earthy sense of humor, gregarious and outgoing, although her face is always veiled beneath her kohl-lined eyes. On her apron is embroidered "Eat, drink and be merry..." (ellipsis emphasized) in mock cuneiform letters; above the mirror behind the bar hangs a plaque bearing a similar motto: "Lusisti satis, edisti et bibisti, tempus abire tibi est." ("You have played enough, you have eaten and drunk enough, now it is time for you to go.") Visitors versed in Akkadian or Babylonian mythology may recognize her as the "divine barmaid" Siduri, goddess of brewing and wisdom, who reminded Gilgamesh that death comes inevitably to all mortals when he was mourning the loss of his friend Enkidu.

Those who fail to recognize her, thinking her only a common stereotypical spirit, may unwisely indulge overmuch in the heady draughts she brews, which are spiced with ephemeral herbs and fungi harvested from the Spirit Wilds and tend to cause visions. They may see the regular patrons as disguised archetypes: the comatose lush as Bacchus, the hooker turning tricks as Ishtar, the card sharp and pool hustler from the back room as Loki, that loud-mouthed womanizer at the end of the bar as Zeus. In point of fact, many Umbrood lords do frequent the Tavern in disguise, as it is the only place in the Vulgate where they can mix freely with the common rabble without their presence being taken as an omen (which it sometimes is anyway). Storytellers are invited to exploit the fact that drunken visions are not always true, and that visitors who remain sober might not recognize incognito gods for who they are.

**Boon:** Visiting mages may use the Tavern's co-locality effect to travel to distant reaches of the Vulgate, but must score three or more successes on their Perception + Cosmology roll against a difficulty of 8 in order to do so. (Those trained in the Sphere of Correspondence may reduce the difficulty by a factor of one for every success on a **Sense Connection** casting roll.) An easier method to accomplish this is to identify a patron associated with the region one wishes to visit, and leave in their company or follow them out without losing sight of them before fully exiting. (If the direct line of sight is broken between the time the spirit being tailed steps out the door and moment the follower leaves, the follower will find himself in the same exterior from which he entered.)

The Tavern also presents the possibility of meeting Umbrood lords without climbing a Spire or engaging in prolonged, exhausting rituals. There is no guarantee, though, as to who will show up or when.

## THE (FØRTIER) GRAND HALL

*Can't get there from here.*

— Firesign Theatre (via REM), *How Can You Be In Two Places At Once When You're Not Anywhere At All*

The Grand Hall of Endless Gates, also called the Great Hall, succumbed to the Avatar Storm. Its exterior does not exist in any part of Astral Space anymore. Many portals were destroyed, and those that were not are no longer connected to the single continuous astral structure that formed the Hall. This may not be apparent to those who have continued to visit it frequently since the Reckoning, as their presence and use may have kept sections of it intact; however, they will soon find that increasingly large quantities of Quintessence must be expended to maintain familiar pathways to known portals. This is not to say that the other parts of it have been destroyed completely, though; rather, sections of

the Hall with extant portals have separated from the whole and are now drifting and spinning through the Ideosphere, breaking apart, colliding and rejoining other sections to form small temporary junctures at truly random points in space and time. These junctures can be classified according to the number of portals connected to them.

**Closets:** Most common are single portals, with three walls (and ceiling and floor) enclosing a small space beyond, usually only two or three meters square. The ancient Mediterranean architecture and furnishings can still be recognized; some closets contain a chair or bench, or even a discarded tent or blanket from past campers. With portals that have been warded against outside entry, one sometimes finds a trapped camper or wanderer, usually half-mad from isolation and claustrophobia. (This raises the question of whether the Hall's sentinels still exist, and how they might react if trapped in a small juncture.)

**Foyers:** When two portals join, the space between them resembles a closet, but with another door on the opposite wall. These two portals are sometimes doors that faced each other across the original Hall, but not always. When not, the foyer may be triangular in shape; depending on its size and how the doors' hinges are placed, opening them can be problematic. (In such cases, using Correspondence or Matter to get through the foyer should be done with great care, for reasons described below.) Some travelers claim to have found glass-paned windows set in the blank walls of closets and foyers, through which strange Umbral Vistas can be seen. These windows may not be opened, and breaking the glass results in the destruction of the entire juncture.

**Intersections:** On rare occasions, three or more portals have been found together; the highest number of portals yet found in an intersection is 13, but that juncture only lasted a few seconds before dwindling down into a foyer, then a closet. Relatively stable intersections, those that last for longer periods of time, appear to be segments of the original Grand Hall, with doors facing each other across the long sides of a rectangular room and other portals or blank walls capping the ends. These are exceedingly rare, and are carefully guarded secrets. Appearing slightly more frequently, but with less duration, are polygonal rooms with portals on each wall.

It is not known if the fountain at the center of the Great Hall still exists; if anyone found it, he has not reported it. Portals connecting the physical world to the Umbra are not apparent without the use of magical senses, but those who pass through them still suffer damage from the Avatar Storm. Attempting to radically alter the shape or substance of any juncture — whether through magical or gross physical means — causes all portals to disconnect; if the structural integrity of the resulting closet is disrupted,

its substance crumbles away into the Epiphany known as the Nihil. When junctures disconnect, anything inside is trapped in a closet with the nearest portal. The destination to which any found portal leads is, of course, up to the Storyteller.

**Boon:** The incredible usefulness of the Grand Hall is no more, but junctures can be maintained by sacrificing one point of Quintessence per portal each time a portal is used. This insures that it will stay connected for one more usage, or until a full cycle of the moon has passed, whichever is shorter. (Note that, without the right wards, anyone can use a portal if it is left unguarded, and they may not care about its permanence, or know how to keep it in place for next time....)

## THE (FORGOTTEN) INVENTIUM

*Your puny intellects are no match for our superior technology!*

— Extraterrestrial Invaders from *The Simpsons*

Like the Grand Hall of Endless Gates, it was just too good to last. The Avatar Storm devastated the Inventium even worse than the Hall, smashing its toys and scattering all the parts across the Tellurian. New inventions no longer fall out of the sky, or, if they do, this is so rare that it has yet to be observed; scholars who note the ever-increasing proliferation of technological breakthroughs in the physical world believe there is some reciprocal relation between these two trends. The realm can still be reached through the footlocker, but in the chaos following the Reckoning, so many Technocratic and Traditional factions fought to retain possession of the portal that no one can now say who holds it, or where in Astral Space it will show up next. Witnesses assert that the footlocker's lid now sits cockeyed on its bent hinges, the locking mechanism no longer fits in place, and, of the inscription inside the lid, only the words "This passage prohibited" remain legible through the soot of multiple interior blasts. The staircase within is likewise blackened and damaged; many steps are bent, and loose enough to flip and drop any visitor incautious enough to put his full weight on one without testing it first. In some places whole landings are missing, leaving a drop of 10 feet or more to the next intact level.

Apparently, the Storm's turbulence jumbled the mountains of gadgetry and caused many devices to activate spontaneously; sparks flew, and combustible components ignited. The horizon all around is now composed of towering, twisted shapes, slagged by the detonation of nuclear and other unknown power sources. The ground crunches underfoot with tiny cogs, springs, levers, switches, valves and innumerable silicon chips that drift like sand dunes in the dry wind. The Storm smashed many inventions beyond recognition, while it

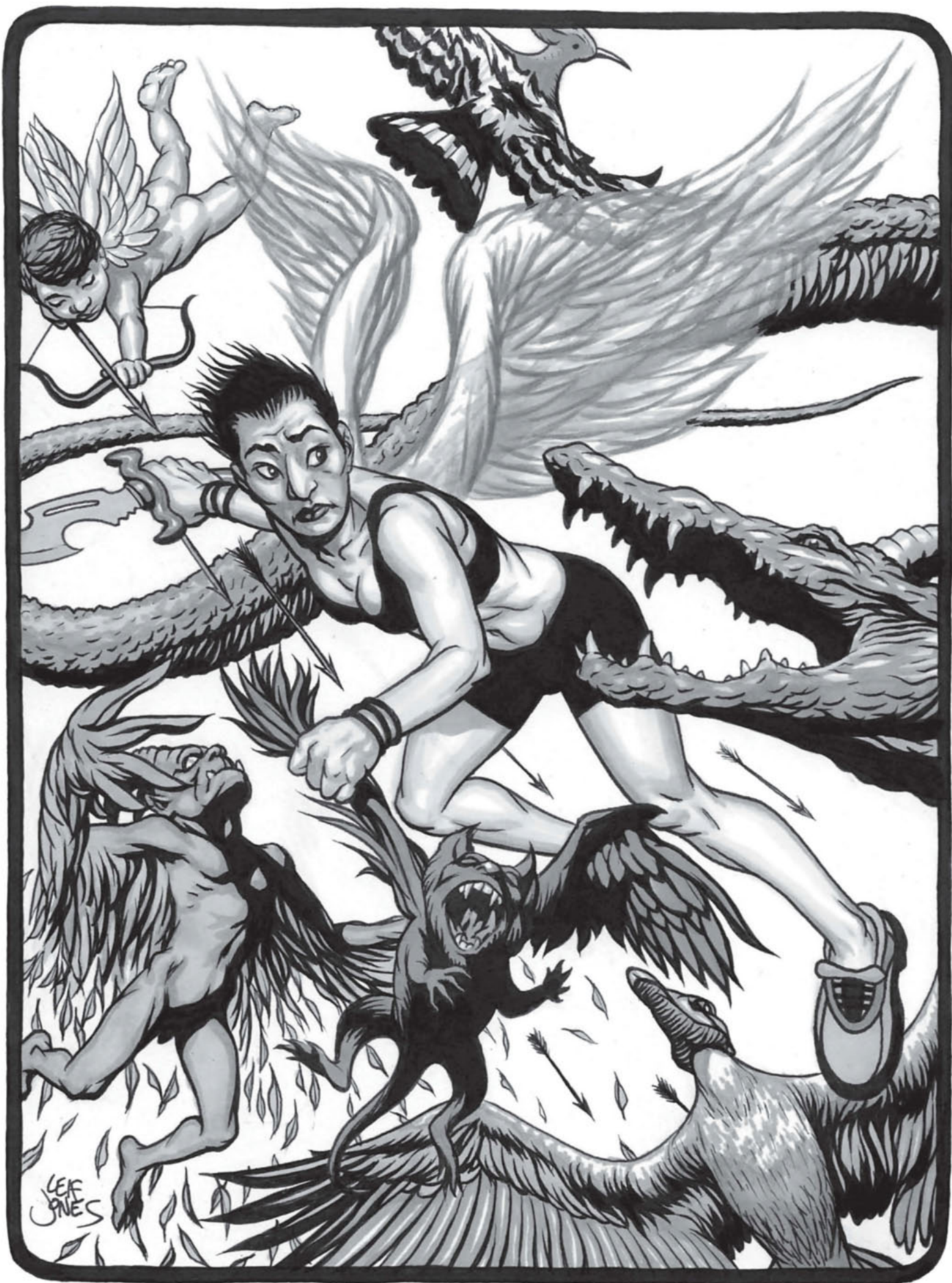
seems almost to have carefully stripped and dismantled others, scattering their parts at random across the Realm. Some speculate that some pieces flew completely out of the Inventium, appearing elsewhere in Idea Space and even embedding in far-flung regions of the physical space-time continuum; the Gurlt Cube and other apparently manufactured artifacts that have appeared anomalously in million- and even billion-year-old geological deposits may be components of devices from the Inventium.

Of the various factions that camped out in this realm, the survivors are long past Disembodiment and now exist only as spirits. The Scavengers, holed up in their deep subterranean refuge, fared the best, their families thriving, and conduct themselves as they always have, though their activities are now concerned with putting pieces back together, an endless and excruciating task. However, they do not seem to be aware that they are now spirits, no longer human in the physical sense. The Verbena Garden, so out of place to begin with, is untouched but enclosed and isolated in the molten and blasted landscape; Lady Autumn Rivers understands her spiritual predicament, and has become lonely over the last couple years. She will entreat any visitors to take her to a more populous part of the Vulgate, where she plans to turn over her own notes to the Mouseion and somehow re-establish contact with her Tradition. The Technocrats of the Hackworth Compilation Facility and the Etherites of Exington Hall have suffered the worst, driven stark, raving mad by the ravages of the Storm. They have completely lost all sense and no longer understand the technology they were investigating; they live as two warring tribes of primitive savages amidst the wreckage, hunting what few imported animals remain. The last Herodotus is in a similar state but lives apart from the others; in his more lucid moments he can remember what the Inventium once was, and will give his name as "Hairy Odditus."

**Boon:** Only the sturdiest and most primitive tools are left intact in the Inventium, but some notes, sketches, diagrams, blueprints, schematics and other descriptive material remains among the ruins. Lady Rivers can willingly share most of the information she has gathered over the years, except for weapons and other tech she feels would have a corrupting influence if released to the world at large. The Scavengers will not intentionally show themselves to outsiders; if encountered they tend to be suspicious but will respond to courtesy, and may even help those whom the savages have hurt. They are extremely reticent about sharing their knowledge with anyone, however. "Hackos" and "Exos," the savage tribes, possess the overwhelming bulk of recorded information, but do not understand its significance and make no attempt to keep it in usable

condition. They've used all paper to fuel campfires or to insulate their makeshift hovels, and they wear floppies and compact disks — badly scratched and often demagne-

tized — as jewelry. The tribes resent all intruders (and are especially brutal toward thieves), but one can sometimes bargain with them during the day.



# CHAPTER THREE: THE UPPER ASTRAL REACHES

## COURTS OF THE HIGH UMBROOD



As one leaves the Vulgate behind to explore the upper reaches of the High Umbra, the reality one perceives loses its immediacy and constancy, its tendency to be more or less what it is agreed to be, and takes on a more subjective quality, seeming to arrange itself around those who experience it. Masters of the Sphere of Mind have said that movement upward through Astral Space is the same as movement inward, and that

the entities one encounters on such a journey are all present in the individual's psyche at all times, though they do not all manifest at once. Masters of the Sphere of Spirit, however, warn against the fallacy of assuming that, simply because one may occupy the center of one's own universe, one is not necessarily the center of the Universe at large.

The commandment "Know thyself" is both the watchword of those who would venture into the Courts of the High Umbrood, and the lesson which these entities would ultimately teach.

### ASTRAL FLIGHT

*If I told you what it takes to reach the highest heights / You'd laugh and say nothing's that simple / But you've been told many*

*times before / Messiahs pointed to the door / No one had the guts to leave the temple...*

— The Who, *Tommy*

Once the wonders and complexities of the Vulgate have been reduced to tawdry spectacle and tedious intricacy by the overlong stay of the otherworld-weary mage, how does she move on to greater things? If she entered the Umbra via **Astral Projection** or **Untether**, or if she can levitate, grow wings, or obtain some manner of flying device, then she could launch herself out of the Vulgate and theoretically rise directly into the Epiphamies. The problems inherent in astral flight, however, are manifold, and older Traditions have come to refer to this method as the "Flight of Icarus," recounting the well-known story as a cautionary fable. The apparent lack of compassion and "soul-less-ness" that seems to characterize the modern Technocracy is seen as a direct result of its reliance upon this "Icarian method," which attempts to bypass the Courts of the High Umbrood. By discounting the time-honored myths as mere superstitions irrelevant to the present day, Technocrats (and some other rash technomancers) have lost touch with their own inner being, stifling the voices of their hearts, and thus lack the wisdom or compassion to sensibly or responsibly use the knowledge and power they stole from the Epiphamies.

The Avatar Storm still seethes across the Gauntlet, and echoes of its turbulence, called the Upper Avatar Storm or High Umbral Storm, fill the empty spaces of the astral sky with invisible etheric zones of danger or relative safety. During the Reckoning, the Avatar Storm blotted out the entire astral sky; some lesser Spires toppled and even the Epiphamic clouds seemed caught up in its turmoil. Etheric hurricanes lashed at the coast of the Vulgate, leaving some of the most profound intellectual structures of the modern world with their exposed foundations resting precariously on a beach of loose sand. Tornado funnels became visible with ephemeral detritus as they tore into the ground, exposing the factual bedrock beneath the lands-without-substance; these churned-up areas have since been re-covered, repopulated and rebuilt with unfounded fantasy and rumor, or with modernist revisionism.

For the most part, the High Umbral Storm now takes the form of diffuse dust clouds drifting along with the ephemeral breezes that drift along the ground in the Vulgate. Travelers feel the rising winds by the increasing frequency of Prime shard strikes, but experience a barrage of deadly etheric hail when a temporary decrease and dispersal in the “ambient” Avatar Storm precedes Storm fronts. For the most part, the Storm seldom touches the Vulgate now, and when it does, one may find refuge within buildings or underground. High Umbral Storms tend to cling to the upper slopes of the Spires, and experienced travelers say it is impossible to find an entrance to a High Umbrood Court or to enter an Epiphany from the outside without at some point passing through a flurry of this Upper Avatar Storm. Most Spires are marked with enough caves and crevices that climbers and fliers can find shelter against the Storm without too much searching, but travelers must be wary — a cave on a Spire is never just a cave, but the entrance to an Elemental realm, a High Umbrood Court or a monster’s lair. Narrow slipstreams swirl around Spires and up between the Epiphamies, but the Avatar Storm never enters any Epiphany and does not affect direct passages between Epiphamies.

Flying straight through the calmest space would result in as little as a single die of damage for the entire duration of the flight. The distribution is not even, though, and coalesces into buffeting winds that deliver two or three dice of damage every five turns, or massive storm fronts that pour down four or more dice of damage every other turn that a traveler is exposed to them. The amount of damage in a single turn can never exceed a mage’s permanent Paradox + Arete, of course. Fliers who come to the Umbra by **Stepping Sideways** suffer this damage to their Avatars just as if they were flying through thin veils of the Gauntlet, unless they are protected by the Stormwarden Merit or by the Patronage of a High Umbrood. Bodiless travelers do not suffer damage but are affected nonetheless; every successful die of Avatar damage subtracts one success from the traveler’s Perception + Cosmology roll to maintain his bearings as he flies through Astral Space. It is possible for a traveler caught in a strong enough Storm to

become so disoriented that she cannot tell when she is swept off one Spire and deposited on another, or dropped into any part of the Vulgate or catapulted through an Epiphany. The Stormwarden Merit does not prevent this particular effect, but High Umbral Patronage does.

Furthermore, the open space between the Vulgate and the Epiphamies is still ruled by the archetypal gods; although their influence is not what it once was, the “middle layer” of Astral Space is still their home turf, where no hubris will be tolerated. The modern Icarus can expect lightning and tornado, rain and hail, searing blasts of blinding light, swarms of flying vermin and unending pursuit by fiery chariots and hordes of winged beings too numerous and varied to describe. This is not to say that astral flight invariably results in a disastrous fall, but before one can sail the astral skies in safety, one must be learn the archetypal lessons by paying one’s respects to the Courts of the High Umbrood. And where are these? According to the majority of the world’s mythographers, they are atop some sacred mountain or other.

## THE SPIRES

### ROCK CLIMBING!!!

— Mystery Science Theatre 3000, Episode 208: *The Lost Continent*

A Spire is an unusually tall and steep mountain, usually craggy and forbidding, of the sort generally seen in cartoons and fantasy-genre illustrations. They dot the landscape of the Vulgate; nearly every branch of the River delta either contains one or shares one with its neighboring branches, and the older branches may have several apiece. This often gives the impression that any given cultural pantheon, or High Court, resides solely or primarily on the Spire nearest the branch representing the culture that worshipped them; this is usually the case, but not always, especially along the modern coastal regions. Here they may have more unnatural appearances: tall stacks of hewn rock, towers of polished machine-tooled metal and even pinnacles of cut or blown glass sometimes rise from amid the cities on the shoreline. To contact the old pagan gods, though, it is generally best to travel inland and listen for where the River sounds like the language in which the gods first found their names. Among literate cultures there will be an array of glaciers around the base of the Spire embodying the sacred texts — especially those lost to history — describing the pantheon. Those we best remember and study in the modern day may also lie among foothills where the echoes of their respective Mythic Ages still sound, and where spirits act out the well-known legends. Let the astral traveler beware, for the monsters of these myths may yet live on in the caves and crevasses of many a Spire.

Bodiless travelers may simply rise up the side of a Spire, but this does not protect them from being disoriented or even blown away from the Spire by the High Umbral Storm, unless they can take cover in a cave or cleft in

the rock. For bodied travelers, climbing a Spire is treated as it would be in the physical world, with a Dexterity + Athletics roll. The difficulty is up to the Storyteller, but should be adjusted down for a Spire where a well-known pantheon is believed to abide. Mount Olympus on the Hellenic branch, for example, would be the easiest, say difficulty 4, with a narrow path and numerous broad ledges on which to rest. Coastal Spires are more like difficulty 8, with widely spaced finger- and toeholds on steeper faces. Those Spires that jut straight out of the Great Ocean are the worst of all: sheer vertical shafts slick with water spray and slime for a difficulty of 10. The Storyteller may allow a roll of Perception + Awareness to look for gripping features and ledges; Awareness is used instead of Alertness since this is the Umbra. For this reason, the Storyteller may also allow Willpower points to be spent in lieu of Stamina checks. Falling due to a botched climbing roll need not be fatal; if the climber had not yet reached the level of the High Courts or Epiphamies, the Storyteller may just let him tumble into the mythic foothills or glaciers with only bashing damage. (Falling from a greater height can be dire, however. See the following section on the Epiphamies.)

The one thing common to all these great astral journeys is not simply the distance involved, it is the actual effort required to get to the higher reality. Not every Spire takes the form of a mountain. Some High Umbrood reside in deep caverns where the seeker must climb down rather than up, feeling his way in darkness. Some are on islands far across the Great Ocean, requiring the building and use of a metaphoric ship, or the heroic effort of a long-distance swim. Some Epiphamies even connect these vastly divergent regions, so that the way out is entirely different than the way in. Spires have been represented in allegorical literature as ladders and stairs as well, so that some Courts and Epiphamies might be reached without even going outside of a building in the Vulgate. A symbolic motif frequently associated with both Spires and Epiphamic thresholds in texts accessible to Sleepers is the rainbow, or the spectrum of visible light. “Graduated” Spires like ladders and stairs are often depicted with steps of varying colors, usually starting with red (the color of light with the lowest vibratory frequency, most closely associated with the physical world) and going up through orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and finally arriving at violet (the highest rate of vibration corresponding to the highest spiritual states).

This brings up an interesting point that Storytellers may wish to consider. A number of traditions also use the color spectrum (not capitalized, for this lore is available to Sleepers too) to symbolize the chakras of the yogic paradigm and, in a different order, the Sephiroth of the Qabalistic Tree of Life. While the Tree can symbolize the Spire — a system of hierarchic orders of spiritual reality — it also, like the chakra system, represents a hierarchy within the human individual. By making an effort, by doing the necessary work, the mystic

can raise her own inner state to attain an experience of the archetypes and the highest truths, just like climbing a mountain to find the High Umbrood and the Epiphamies. Even if the Storyteller chooses not to use the Spires as presented here, it is important to avoid just handing the player characters their desired level of enlightenment on a silver platter. Make them work for it in some way that emphasizes the importance of the reward they receive for their effort.

Furthermore, the hierarchical scheme is not the only way to go about this. Many members of the Celestial Chorus, Hindu Euthanatos, pretty much all Hermetics and Batini insist on the hierarchical scale, going from the lowest spiritual station to the highest in a specific order. Sons of Ether can relate this scale to the energy levels of colored light, and Virtual Adepts to the hierarchy of operational commands within their computer tools. But humans are also capable of seeing the visible colors as a circle, with violet fading back into red. Akashics, Dreamspeakers, Ecstatics and Verbena tend to think in the round, in interdependent relationships that can be termed the “holarchic scale.” A holarchy does not place greater importance on one component than another but shows how each leads to the next, with all being equally necessary to the whole. Virtual Adepts can relate this to their spreads of data or the sprawl of the Digital Web itself, while Etherites understand it in terms of interpenetrating force fields. For the astral voyager, the journey to the farthest stretches of the mind can lead right back to the mundane, ordinary reality where their quest began.

## THEOGONY AND THE ECSTASY

*I went out looking for God the other day and I couldn't pin him. So I figured if I couldn't find him I'd look for his stash: his Great Lake of Love that holds the whole world in gear. And when I finally found it I had the pleasure of finding that people were the guardians of it. Dig that. So, with my two-times-two-is-four, I figured that if people were guarding the stash of love known as God then, when people swing in beauty, they become little Gods and Goddesses. And I know a couple of them myself personally and I know you do too.*

— Lord Buckley

If the Vulgate can be said to be comprised of an interpersonal mental space, those thoughts which humans (and others) have shared with one another, then what lies between the Vulgate and the Epiphamies can be said to be comprised of a personal space, those thoughts which pass from one part of an individual's mind to another. A visit to a High Umbral Court can seem like a tour through the machinery of one's own brain; everywhere one turns, one sees a partial reflection of one's Self. Some ancient mages developed the techniques of ecstatic trance (from *ex stasis*, literally to “stand outside” of oneself) in order to commune with their gods. Their personal power came from this ability to dissociate themselves from their ego-identity and become part of the universe at large. Since the microcosm reflects the macrocosm, they were

thus able to control the actions of the external world as they controlled their own actions.

Because of this, the High Umbrood who inhabit this personal space may easily be mistaken for mere extensions, exteriorized reflections, of the ideas and emotions with which they are most closely associated, but it should never be forgotten that each is an independent individual, and when encountered is most likely to react in its own way according to how it is treated. Such is the nature of archetypal spirits, the distinct personalities that collectively compose the psychic makeup of creatures of the material world: components of individual minds, they exist beyond any individual's specific understanding of them.

Some Masters have declared that one never meets a god unless it is truly necessary to one's purpose, and for them it may be true. The presence of the divine has always been characterized by a *wyrd*, inextricably bound to notions of fate and destiny. But many individuals, especially modern mages and mystics, have rejected potential encounters with godhood in their efforts to free themselves from predetermination, to create their own destiny. This is the aforementioned Flight of Icarus, and those who would bypass the Courts of the High Umbrood are labeled Icarites and treated as enemies. (Here it might be noted that the ancient world had no concept of "mere chance," the idea of randomness being a modern invention. What we regard as games of chance — throwing dice, shuffling cards, casting lots, etc. — originated as methods of divination, since the gods determined the outcome of any event. Even the Roman goddess Fortuna, whose Wheel can still be found in tarot decks and television game shows, was a directing and determining force rather than a personification of dumb happenstance. Thus Umbrood Lords who identify with the old gods do not understand this aspect of the Sphere of Entropy, and may be shocked or enraged to see it used in this way.)

Not only Technocrats fall into the fallacy of Icarus; self-important Traditional mages, along with ignorant Orphans, exceptionally talented sorcerers, monomaniacal Marauders and power-hungry Nephandi, have all made the mistake of thinking that the archetypal gods could be ignored — or, worse yet, subjugated to the willworker's will. It is true that many archetypal spirits are not as all-powerful as they would like to appear, and that they can be tricked or manipulated by clever mortals. But in so doing these mortals neglect the very important function of this particular level of the Astral Umbra, that of psychic integration, of getting one's Self together, as it were. By circumventing the High Courts or cheating one's way through the tests and ordeals the High Umbrood would impose, one risks approaching the Epiphamies in a state of hubris that could lead to deep misunderstandings of the higher abstractions and result in a disastrous fall, not only in the High Umbra but in the material world as well.



The Courts are as varied as all the belief systems of mankind, ranging from embodiments of the metaphysical elements and the pantheons of classical mythology, to the angelic ranks of monotheism or the operating theaters of flying saucers where bug-eyed, gray-skinned extraterrestrials torture abductees from the modern world. The examples provided in this section are in no way complete, but are intended as models for Storytellers to use when creating whatever High Umbral Court(s) their own chronicle requires. Every Court should have its own unique flavor and ambience, but certain aspects and components can apply to all of them. The Storyteller who wishes to reinforce the idea of the High Court as a personal space, an arena of individuation, can use the idea of the Five Gates In and the Two Gates Out. (The Epiphamic Boons in the next section are delineated with this scheme in mind.) The Five Gates correspond to the five senses, and are the only ways to enter a particular High Umbral Court or pantheon; even bodiless travelers cannot pass through the walls and wards surrounding a Court except by these means. One or more of the Five may be barred and warded against intrusion, but at least one is always open to those clever and diligent enough to find it.

The Gate of Sight is the most obvious, found along the direct line of approach as one ascends a Spire, and always takes some plainly visible form: a massive arch of stone, wood or wrought iron, elaborately carved with sigils, runes, hieroglyphs or pictorial reliefs, with single or twin doors made of a similar material or of some precious substance — gold, gems or pearls. The Gate of Sound may be equally apparent, often forming along with Sight one half of a large double gate, as seeing and hearing tend to be the predominant senses among the majority of humans. This is not always the case, though; sometimes the Gate of Sound takes some searching to find, as it may be hidden in a rocky cleft or niche, or else concealed by vegetation or some other visual obstacle. In either instance, this Gate can be found and identified by the sounds coming out of it — heavenly music, or the voices of the gods within. These Gates are generally the first to be barred when gods choose to withdraw from mortal affairs, but, even when left wide open, will always be guarded by a sentry of some sort who will challenge all who approach and demand to know why they should be let in. This sentry is usually a lesser Umbrood lord, although common elementals can sometimes be found on guard duty. Entering through either of these Gates immediately attracts the attention of the High Umbrood who dwell therein, as each leads directly to the public areas of the Court.

The other three Gates can be even more difficult to access, and are never plainly visible. The Gate of Scent is marked by the enticing aromas or offensive odors that emanate from inside: exotic perfumes and incenses, appetizing ambrosia and nectar, or malodorous sulfur and brimstone, fumes from strange engines, animal musk or ozone from a casually hurled bolt of lightning. As the bird says, “Follow

your nose.” The Gate of Touch usually takes the form of a long subterranean passage where visitors must feel their way along in pitch darkness; sometimes the cave entrance may be farther down the Spire than expected, and climbers may pass it unknowingly on the way up. The approach to the Gate of Touch can take other forms, like a thick fog that limits visibility, distorts sounds and disperses smells, or a deep night when heavy Epiphamies hide the astral moon and the tiny lights of the Vulgate are out of sight far below. Whichever the case, travelers who bring their own light source or who use some kind of heightened sense other than physical contact will not find this Gate until they douse their torch or switch off their ether goggles. But, like the first two Gates, Scent and Touch can sometimes be fused into a common means of ingress, like a dark tunnel with the smells of the gods wafting out of it, or an aromatic breeze that can be felt against the skin. Both of these Gates are kind of like back doors to heaven; passing through them does not automatically alert the High Umbrood to the intruders’ presence, leading to private quarters, unoccupied rooms, hidden corridors and sections where only servants work.

The Gate of Taste is the subtlest Gate of all; while it may occasionally be fused with the Gate of Scent, when found alone it does not take the form of a concrete opening on the side of a Spire or the outer wall of a High Court. To pass through this Gate, the mage must ingest something: a golden apple, the Peaches of Immortality, a seed from the Alder Bole, sacramental wine, certain substances favored by some among the Cult of Ecstasy, or the heady brews served in the Tavern of the Four Winds (see pp. 56-57). Entering via the Gate of Taste may or may not draw the attention of the High Umbrood; visitors can find themselves in either a public or private area of a High Court — the Storyteller should decide the result of accessing the Gate of Taste according to circumstances and the needs of the story. All five Gates are accessible to bodiless travelers, but the Storyteller may require an additional Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) for them to find the Gates of Scent, Touch and Taste, because these senses are not normally engaged in this mode of Umbral travel. (To taste ephemeral food or drink, a bodiless mage must move his point of consciousness into the substance itself.)

Once inside a High Umbral Court, there are only two exits to the Epiphamies (other than going back out the Five Gates and attempting some form of astral flight, assuming the High Umbrood do not prevent this); like the Five Gates In, these Two Gates out may be fused into one, but this is extremely rare as most High Umbrood tend to favor one particular Gate far more than the other, and may even try to hide the existence of the one they don’t like. These Two Gates are called Rhyme and Reason; when both can be found, the former is always to the right, and is very obvious — perhaps built up like the Gate of Sight — while the latter is on the left and may be in a state of disrepair or even partial collapse. This is not to say that the Two Gates will always be found side

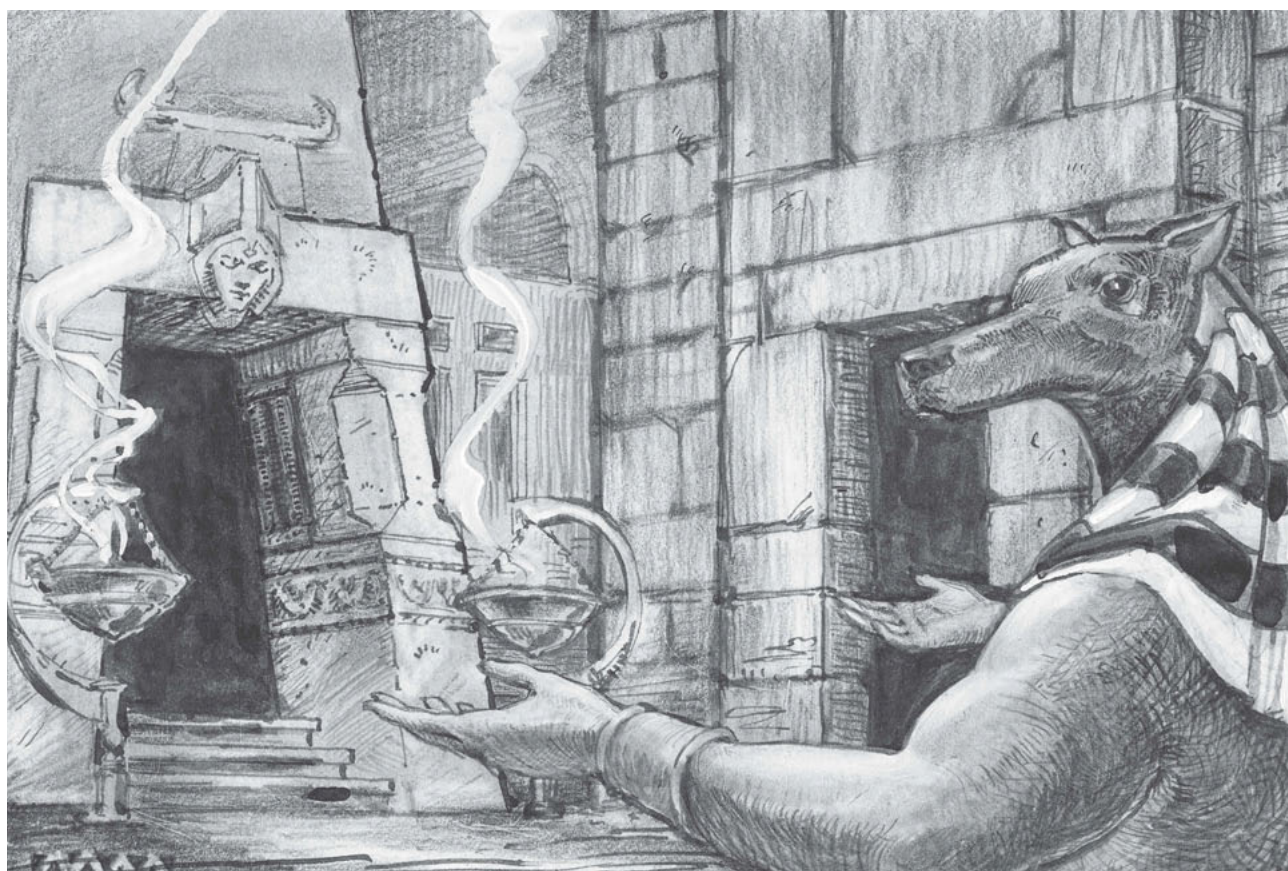
by side — in fact, they are seldom within sight of each other. But at some point during their visit to a High Court, visitors will be given a bilateral choice — between the “dexterous” right hand and the “sinister” left — usually in the form of a T-shaped corridor intersection — that will affect which Gate they approach. The Two Gates can even be on diametrically opposite sides of the Court, but the right-left relationship will still be the same relative to whichever of the Five Gates the visitors entered through. (That’s right, retrace your steps and pull out the graph paper....)

Umbrood lords, as the masters of their respective domains, can affect the topography of their realms and alter the appearance of the Two Gates, or even make the bilateral choice take some entirely different form. Some lords, if they realize that their guests understand the difference between the Two Gates and wish to use the despised Gate of Reason, may give them some kind of allegorical choice between two representative objects held in the lord’s hands — say, a sword in his left hand and a ball in his right. By facing the chooser directly, the lord hopes to confuse the issue — i.e., the sword often represents Reason in occult symbolism, but is the choice actually determined by my left hand or your left hand? In a situation like this, the Storyteller should be fair; the Umbrood lord has already decided how the actual choice is to be presented and must abide by the mage’s decision whether it is made unwittingly or not. In other words, no fair changing your mind to force

the game one way or another. Play nice, but don’t let the players push you around just because they’ve already read this book on their own....

Most High Umbrood prefer that visitors — those that they allow to pass through at all — exit through the Gate of Rhyme, which sensitizes those who use it to the subtle and intangible aspects of existence, to emotion, nuance, ambience, attitude, inflection and style. The Gate of Rhyme is concerned with context, holism, goal-oriented activities and pattern recognition; it encourages the kind of psychic mindset in which the old gods thrived, that of irrationality and suggestibility. The Gate of Reason is the opposite, dealing with rationality, tangibility, linearity, hierarchical structures, task-oriented activities and things that can be proven with logic. Most High Umbrood know that they gain power through human belief, power that was lost when mankind (under the influence of the Order of, ahem, Reason) began to place rational thinking above all else, and try to encourage irrationality from their remote mountaintops. They cannot change the fact that mortals have free will to think as they choose to, but they can smell a potential Technocrat when they’re faced with one and will do their level best to fuck with ’em.

In point of fact, the Two Gates are not exclusive opposites, but complementary halves, mere mindsets or frames of reference that can work together synergistically. It is possible to pass through both Gates simultaneously, and thus



claim both types of Boons from the Epiphamies. Certain rare Umbrood lords, who embody and can manifest both principles, can teach the secret of fusing the Two Gates into one; it involves consciously balancing both principles within oneself, requiring the accumulation of 10 successes on an extended Intelligence + Meditation roll with a difficulty of 8. Each mage passing through the Two Gates must achieve this balance individually; those who do not only gain the benefits of the particular Gate they find themselves at. Most High Umbrood have important business to attend to, however, and will not wait around while mages prepare themselves in this way.

Once the visitors have stepped through either (or both) of the Two Gates, they will all find exactly the same thing on the other side: a small ledge, just large enough to accommodate their party and any High Umbrood who has chosen to accompany them to the Epiphamies. Beyond the ledge, a sheer drop straight down to the base of the Spire, with the Vulgate like a toy village far below; the ledge itself provides shelter from the Upper Avatar Storm, but its invisible winds may rage just past the edge. Above and all around, the Epiphamic clouds rear their vast heads in awesome grandeur. This is the point of no return. The High Umbrood will not, under any circumstances, allow a mage who has gained this precipitous vantage to turn back. Bodiless visitors, or those who have somehow retained the ability of astral flight, may simply soar away into the higher abstractions as they will. Those others who want to abandon their quest and climb back down the Spire might conceivably do so, depending on how things went in Court, but the difficulty for climbing the face of this precipice is 10. Those who have gained the companionship of a High Umbrood lord may receive some spiritually profound verbal exhortation to step off the ledge, or perhaps simply an enigmatically encouraging smile. Or a helpful nudge forward. Or, if things did not go so well in Court, a swift and massive boot in the backside. Howsoever they managed to get this far, they're going over the edge no matter what....

## ELEMENTAL COURTS

*There's a magnificent pylon in this, there's a torch for the world: that life cannot be as beautiful as it should be. We have the blocks to make up the mosaic of life: the dream — a beautiful, wonderful, warm, unendingly delightful schematic of living. This is the truth. We have all these things to put them together.*

— Lord Buckley

The Courts of the Elements are found midway up a Spire, before a traveler actually reaches the Five Gates, with each Element represented by a realm that expresses its intrinsic nature. (Individual Elemental realms, however, may be located almost anywhere in Astral Space and can even overlap other parts of the Umbra. The realms and spirits are too numerous to be detailed here, so only their particular function in the Ideospheric ecology will be explained.)

## PATRONAGE

*Stick with me, kid, and you'll go far...*

— Show-biz cliché

While it is not impossible for a mage to learn his way around the Vulgate, sneak past the High Umbrood, fly up through a calm spot in the Upper Avatar Storm and gain access to the Epiphamies, the odds against achieving this *and* finding the Epiphamy he seeks, much less understanding it and coming back with something worthwhile, all before Disembodiment sets in, are astronomical. For this reason it is prudent to make friends with the lords of the High Umbrood who guard the way up and the way down. The best way to do this is to already have chosen an Umbrood lord as part of one's Totem Background, but only the Dreamspeakers remember the art of wooing the old gods, and their expertise is primarily concerned with the Incarnae of the Spirit Wilds. For those who did not prepare for an astral voyage by spending their lives worshipping some ancient archetype, there is Patronage.

A Patron is a High Umbral archetype who guides and protects an astral traveler, and Patronage may be gained in exchange for some big favor, through an act of devotion on the part of the traveler, by prearrangement through rituals conducted on the material plane or even by deception and trickery. (This last method is not recommended, as the High Umbrood have ways of discovering the truth and may enlist the aid of vast sectors of the Umbral populace in acts of vengeance.) Theoretically, the Storyteller may allow a mage to have multiple Patrons, but this tends to stir up conflict and resentment among Umbrood lords; only the Muses seem willing to share Patronage with other High Umbrood. On rare occasions an Umbrood lord may choose to become someone's Patron entirely on his own, but this can be trouble depending on the Patron's motivation — pity, amusement, or the desire to teach a cocky willworker a lesson in hubris. An astral visitor who has a Patron is called that Patron's "filial."

Although it is capitalized, Patronage is not a new Background or other Trait. Patronage is temporary, lasting only as long as a single Umbral voyage, although it may be possible to get the same Patron on subsequent journeys into the spirit world, provided the filial has shown the Patron proper respect during previous encounters. Ideally, Patronage should result purely from roleplaying on the part of the mages during encounters with the High Umbrood, but the Storyteller may let them make rolls using Social Attributes and/or Occult lore to contact, recognize and befriend specific Umbrood lords, if he deems it suitable to the story.

Patrons benefit their filials by staving off Disembodiment. The Patron must spend 5 Essence points to grant the filial an extra lunar cycle before Disembodiment sets in.

Many new elemental realms have been discovered in the past few centuries — glass, electricity, etc. — but only the most ancient configurations that have embedded themselves in the human psyche can truly be considered “Courts” in the High Umbral sense. While each element can be visited and dealt with separately, collectively they can represent the basic functions of the psyche as expressed within Idea Space. Elemental spirits may try to draw visiting mages into the various doings of their respective realms, to involve visitors in their schemes, intrigues, romances and open conflicts, but by visiting all the realms of an Elemental Court and paying respects to their rulers, the mage attains an equilibrium of consciousness that can be useful in dealing with Higher Umbrood and the Epiphamies.

Balancing oneself in this way can be both time consuming and dangerous, since elemental spirits tend to be either slow to respond to visitors or else have violent tempers and far-ranging powers. Furthermore, the rituals of many Traditions metaphorically re-enact a complete circuit of an Elemental Court, such as calling the quarters when casting a magic circle, so many mages already consider themselves balanced enough to bypass the Elemental Courts during astral journeys. (Some shamanic rites stem from such primal roots that even the “proto-scientific” schema of the Elements is replaced with an experience of personal death, decay, dissolution and reassembly in a new improved form.) There are, of course, benefits to be had from excursions into each realm individually — enlisting elemental spirits as servitors, or the Patronage of elemental lords — but the true Boon lies in a full circuit of one of the known and established Courts.

The Elemental Courts are usually aligned with the cardinal directions, although there is some disagreement both between and within Traditions as to which directions correspond with which Element. The alignments given here are the most commonly used, and the directions are as determined by the movements of the sun and moon through the astral sky.

**Boon:** Mages who can gain the favor of a lord from each element in a Court get an additional die to their Dice Pool when rolling Willpower. (When groups are making an astral journey together, it is not necessary that each individual make the entire circuit; sending emissaries to each realm secures this Boon for all members of the party once they regroup, but they only get the benefit when all members are present together.) Normally this Boon lasts only for the rest of the Umbral voyage, or until the end of the current Story, whichever comes first. If visitors pay their respects to the same Elemental Courts on their return trip down from the Epiphamies, and if the Storyteller is willing, this may be made a permanent Willpower point. (The Storyteller may choose to reduce the experience point cost or even waive it, depending on how the elemental intrigue was played.)

Additionally, elemental spirits of high rank always know how to find the Five Gates on the Spire where they reside.

## ELEMENTAL COURT OF THE OCCIDENT

Perhaps the most well-traveled and influential Elemental Court is that of the four-fold Occidental paradigm found throughout Europe and the Middle East, appearing in the Tarot, astrology, alchemy, and the Qabala. (Players with access to the Mage Tarot may note the attributions of the four suits of its Minor Arcana; how they correspond to the four types of Avatars bears enough relevance to be mentioned here. Mages with appropriate Avatars have the difficulty of Social rolls reduced by one when dealing with corresponding elemental lords.) The schema of this Court is so deeply ingrained in the Western psyche that it can be related to modern scientific thought, especially the psychology of Carl Jung and the quantum interpretations of Fred Alan Wolf. This Court can participate in the individuation process of a mage or even of an entire traveling party by asking them questions that elucidate the concerns and motivations of the visitors regarding their personal state of mind or the reasons they are undertaking the current astral journey.

**Air:** Generally found on the eastern face of a Spire, the realms of Air might be mistaken for Epiphamic clouds by the uninitiated, except that their nature becomes apparent by studying the forms and activities of the spirits that move in and around them. Their ephemeral tangibility corresponds to the gaseous state of matter, expanding and permeating to fill the space they occupy. In addition to their aerial powers and qualities, the lords of this realm are most receptive to mages with Dynamic Avatars, and express the Jungian function of thought; thus, their questions to visitors usually address the intellect and concern the rational associative processes that motivate the visit, i.e., “What do you *think* about that?” In the quantum terms of Wolf, this corresponds to the experience of time through the orderly progress of concepts in the mind.

**Water:** Usually found on a Spire’s western slopes, the realms of Water may appear as mountain springs, waterfalls, or even a lake on a broad ledge. The ephemeral tangibility of these realms and their inhabitants corresponds to the liquid state of matter, flowing into the shape of the space they occupy but remaining constant in volume. The lords of this realm welcome mages with Primordial Avatars, and express the Jungian function of feeling, concerning themselves with the emotional content of a visitor’s mind or his general situation by asking, “How do you *feel* about that?” In Wolfian terms this corresponds to the experience of energy through the internal and external movements of forces that contribute to the overall energy state of an entity or situation.

**Earth:** Found mainly on a Spire’s northern face, the realms of Earth are not always immediately distinguishable from the substance of the Spire itself until they present themselves or are examined with magical senses, appearing as caves or strange rock formations. The ephemeral tangibility of these realms and their residents corresponds to matter in its solid state, maintaining a distinct shape and volume unless acted

upon by external forces. The lords of this realm tend to accept Pattern Avatars, and express the Jungian function of sensation, exhibiting an unusual interest in the physical situation that prompted an astral journey by asking, "What circumstances bring you here?" In quantum terms this corresponds to the experience of space, of the shapes, distances and motions that comprise the sensorium.

**Fire:** Climbing up the southern slope of a Spire, the astral voyager may come upon the realms of Fire, open flames and burning zones that can seem distinctly out of place except when appearing as geothermal vents or volcanic apertures. Even if the spirits that live here are recognized and understood for what they are, they can still be as dangerous as they appear because their ephemeral tangibility corresponds to matter in its plasmatic state, a sort of transitional phase wherein specific forms and qualitative properties break down in the course of organizing into a new state. The lords of this realm express the Jungian function of intuition, deriving the contents of consciousness from unconscious processes; as such, they have little patience with visitors (although they are more tolerant of those with Questing Avatars), expecting them to immediately state their business and purposes and get on with it. The best prompt a hesitant visitor can expect would be an irritable expostulation like, "Well? Say something!" If the visitor cannot explain his presence straightaway, he will be expelled with some flashy pyrotechnic display. According to Wolf, intuition is experiencing wavelength, jumping from crest to crest—from idea to idea—without plodding through the valleys of conscious association in between.

Having elemental spirits as companions can be beneficial, as many hands can lighten workloads and make sure backs are covered in a fight. The limited intelligence of lower-ranking elementals can be a drawback, though. Higher-ranking elementals seldom leave their realms, but if they can be convinced to accompany travelers they may prove useful in understanding certain aspects of some Epiphamies. For instance, elementals of Air and Earth who accompany a mage through the Gate of Reason might, acting together, explain the transformations of Time and Correspondence that can be learned in the Continuum Orrery, or Water and Fire in tandem can elucidate the Forces and Matter transformations of the Einsteinian Epiphany. (See *Epiphamies*, below.) A smart elemental who accompanies a mage through the Gate of Rhyme can pick up on the deeper psychological content of the more personal Epiphamies. Of course, the Muses (below) are far better suited for this purpose.

## ELEMENTAL COURT OF THE ORIENT

Scholars currently know of only one other full Elemental Court: the subtle and mysterious Court of the Orient, whose workings are not well understood outside of the Akashic Brotherhood. As a consequence, travelers who are not versed in the esoteric internal alchemy practiced by masters of Do will have difficulty understanding these spirits and their

realms. Those who understand the Oriental Court insist that disharmony results if one does not pay respects to the elements both when climbing a Spire and when descending. The rulers of each realm have the identity of mythic Chinese emperors; if they can be reached at all, they will not deal with visitors directly, but will converse through their assistants. Even though three of the elements appear to be the same as in the Occidental Court, their occult significance is different and spirits from one Court do not relate well with their counterparts from the other Court. The Elemental Court of the Orient is found almost exclusively on Spires that rise from between the Asiatic branches of the River of Language.

**Wood:** On the eastern slopes of a Spire will be a dense forest with a windy climate, verdant as though in the throes of spring. The winds carry rancid odors, and anything you eat here will have a sour taste. The spirits here shout a lot, as though in anger, but show benevolence when treated courteously. Then they may bring visitors before Emperor Fu Hsi, who appears clad in blue riding a dragon. When visitors are ascending the Spire, the Imperial Assistant Chu Mang will speak of a quarrel with Huang-ti, Emperor of the Earth realms, and enlist them in foiling his plans or doing some harm to those realms. If the visitors are descending the Spire, Chu Mang will tell them that the Emperor wishes them to render aid of some sort to his brother Shen Nung, Emperor of the Fire realms.

**Fire:** On the southern face of a Spire, a volcanic rift spews fire, scorching the air and coating everything with bitter ash. The spirits of this realm laugh joyously as they burn and blast, but show propriety in response to a polite approach. Then they will lead the way to Emperor Shen Nung, who appears clad in red, astride a burning phoenix. If the visitors are ascending the Spire, his Assistant Chu Jung will try to involve visitors in a war upon Emperor Shao-hao of the Metal realms. If they are descending, Chu Jung will express his master's concern after the health of Earth Emperor Huang-ti, and ask the visitors to go see how he is doing.

**Earth:** Following a natural tunnel into the center of a Spire, visitors will enter the fragrant but humid cavern where spirits of Earth sing praises to Emperor Huang-ti, clad in yellow and mounted upon an ox. His Assistant Hou-t'u will express his sympathy for travelers stopping here and offer them sweets. If the visitors have been climbing upward, Hou-t'u will express his master's contempt for Chuan-hsu, Emperor of the realms of Water, and entreat them to do him some harm. If the visitors are engaged in climbing down the Spire, Hou-t'u will request they deliver gifts of goodwill to Shao-hao, the Metal Emperor.

**Metal:** An exposed vein of ore on a Spire's western face causes the autumnal air to seem rotten to the nose and pungent to the tongue. The spirits here weep as though grieving, but respond well when visitors appeal to their sense of righteousness. They may lead guests to Emperor Shao-hao,

who wears white and rides a tiger; his Assistant Ju-shou will ask them to help exact retribution upon Emperor Fu Hsi of Wood if they are ascending, or to help Emperor Chuan-hsu of Water if they are descending.

**Water:** On a Spire's snowy northern slope, a scenic fall of salty water marks a realm where spirits groan as if in fear, giving off a putrid stench, but who are capable of imparting elementary wisdom to those who prove worthy. Such ones are granted audience with Emperor Chuan-hsu, clad in black and sitting upon a giant tortoise. His Imperial Assistant Hsuan-ming will ensnare visitors in a plot against the Fire Emperor Shen Nung if they are going up, or ask them to help Emperor Fu Hsi if they are going down.

As you can see, the doings of the Elemental Court of the Orient are convoluted and can be especially baffling to the uninitiated. Storytellers may have little need to explore its intricacies unless they are running a Chronicle that focuses primarily on the Akashic Brotherhood.

## GRAY ⊕ OPERATING ROOM ⊕

For a relatively brief period during the last century, those few who believed in them viewed extraterrestrial visitors as benefactors from beyond; the visitors even took on the appearances and names of the classical gods. Over subsequent decades, however, this belief was twisted with darkness and paranoia, as contactees became abductees, gifts of hope and wisdom became horrifically invasive surgical procedures, and the court of shining ones from the sky became an operating theatre where strange experiments were performed upon seemingly random victims. While any Storyteller who uses the idea of alien abduction and invasion undoubtedly has Chronicle-spanning elaborations of her own in mind, the initiatic quality of the experience, especially in relation to the shamanic idea of dissolution/deconstruction and reassembly, warrants a passing mention in this section. This Court is mobile, appearing out of the Great Ocean anywhere along the Vulgatic coast, in the form of a silvery disk. The "Spire" that leads up to its central aperture is a shaft of rainbow-hued light; those who pass through it are drawn upwards and within.

## THE COURT ⊕ OF THE MUSES

*Information is not knowledge. / Knowledge is not wisdom. / Wisdom is not truth. / Truth is not beauty. / Beauty is not love. / Love is not music. / Music is the best.*

— Frank Zappa, *Joe's Garage*, Act III

Since the Reckoning, an old Court has re-emerged from the collective unconscious with new members and a renewed vigor and purpose in the modern realm of high ideas. These are the Muses, who were also known as *apsaras* in India or the Valkyrie in Nordic myth, but whose individual names and purviews were best divined by the ancient Greeks. The Muses

## SPIRIT TRAITS

Spirits do not have normal physical, social or mental Attributes, nor do they have Abilities. Instead, they have the following four Traits: Willpower, Rage, Gnosis and Essence. When certain supernatural creatures try to manipulate spirits, those four traits often set the benchmark for difficulties. The first three are ranked from 1 to 10; the last one serves as a measure of Health Levels and power.

**Willpower** reflects a spirit's ability to strike in combat, its initiative, and its overall will.

**Rage** determines how much damage a spirit does.

**Gnosis** reflects a spirit's ability to deal with puzzles and enigmas, and with magic.

**Essence** (also called Power) is the number of Health Levels a spirit has, but also the pool of points he can spend to cast certain Charms. Note that Essence for a spirit is not the same thing as Avatar Essence.

Spirits also have supernatural abilities known as **Charms**. Some Charms require a successful Gnosis roll to cast, while others may require the expenditure of Essence.

**Note:** Similar rules for Spirits are detailed in the **Mage Storytellers Companion**; simply substitute "Power" for "Essence."

have expanded upon their role as intermediaries between the sacred and the profane, and have taken to crossing cultural boundaries in the High Umbra, appearing in any number of Umbrood Courts to act as messengers, ambassadors and, for mortal travelers, as guides to the astral world. Also, the Muses have a Court of their own upon a Spire whose base lies near the Mouseion in the Vulgate; this Spire resembles Mount Helicon in Greece, believed to be the home of the Muses in ancient times.

Originally there were nine Muses, in addition to the Elder Muses and their Leader; this number has doubled, but the original nine are still in existence, though their specialties and areas of influence have changed slightly. As the modes and means of human expression grew, so too did the variety of Muse. The original daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne have modernized their appearance and purviews somewhat, and new Muses have come into being — some recruited from the ranks of men in ancient times, others emerging fully formed from the categories of human activity. Recent accounts suggest that at least two distinct "species" now exist, one concerned primarily with the material world and its manifestations, the other embodying more abstract notions, either derived from, or causing, shaping and informing, physical events. Each type has its own particular usefulness for mages engaged in astral voyages, so Patronage shared between the two types is common.

## MUSES OF MEDIA

*Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.*

— Frank Zappa

Sometimes regarded as the lowest rank of the Musal Court, Muses of Media embody the means by which the high ideals and abstractions of the Astral Umbra can be communicated to the physical world in a tangible and concrete form. They are known in differing forms the world over as culture-bringers and culture-bearers who teach humanity the arts and crafts that enrich life. Mages who use some form of art as the Focus for their magic are particularly favored. Some modern art forms employ several distinct types of media, like film and video or performances and installations, so Storytellers may restrict mages to a single Medial Muse as Totem, to reflect the mage's specialty. (An ambitious auteur might write, direct and star in his own film, but can he be equally involved in the choreography, set and costume design, as well as building the theater where it is to be shown?) One nearly always can find Medial Muses at the Mouseion in the Vulgate.

Because they teach the specific techniques of creation, both magical and mundane, the Medial Muses make excellent Totem spirits for mages (especially those who don't want to be bossed around by power-mad gods). The Muses of Media can also act as Patrons, granting two Innate Abilities to astral voyagers, but their knowledge of the uppermost levels of the High Umbra is limited, so they are not especially useful as guides. Their Boons tend to be of a more practical, utilitarian sort, and they may encourage their filials to seek out a second Patron, such as a Muse of Mode (below) — although other High Umbrood may be appropriate as well. Medial Muses can be accorded the rank of Low Cardinals in the ranking system of Balt and Machado.

**Ban:** All the Muses of Media have essentially the same Ban. Mages must practice the art form that their Totem personifies on a regular basis — at least once a week, if not daily — and present some finished work or performance at least once a year. Also, the mage may not deface or destroy any work of the same type, or interrupt or heckle a performance of the same type. (This last part of the Ban is negotiable, though, since it may constitute a work of art in itself if done properly. While the Medial Muse may be angered, the mage may be granted a chance to ask at least one Muse of Mode, and/or an Elder Muse, to intercede on his behalf.)

## CALLIOPE, MUSE OF VOICE

Originally the Muse of Epic Song, Calliope's purview has expanded to include all uses of the voice — singing, announcing, lecturing, storytelling, stand-up comedy and any sort of acting where only the voice is heard, like film narration or the vocal component for characters in animation.

Willpower 5, Rage 3, Gnosis 4, Essence 24

**Charms:** True Ventriloquism (Calliope can cause her voice to emanate from any direction or source in sensory

range with a successful Gnosis roll. Note that this is not simply misdirection through holding the lips immobile during speech — the sound actually originates from the targeted point. Her thrown voice can speak for any length of time, but separate pronouncements, like responses to questions or continuing after an interruption, cost 1 Essence point apiece.)

**Image:** Like all Medial Muses, Calliope generally appears as a young woman of pleasing aspect in a flowing gown (although the Muses may actually take a form of any age, gender, ethnicity or other disposition). Originally pictured holding a wax tablet and a pencil, she now usually appears with a microphone in her hands.

**Boon:** Calliope provides her filial one dot of Wits. In addition, she grants the use of True Ventriloquism (roll Wits + Expression, substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Prime.

## CLIO, MUSE OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Originally the Muse of History, Clio now inspires all forms of writing, whatever the style, subject matter or intent. She also favors those whose work directly involves the written word, such as printers, typesetters, file clerks, data entry personnel, etc.

Willpower 4, Rage 2, Gnosis 6, Essence 24

**Charms:** Translate Writing (Clio can, with a successful Gnosis roll, divine the meaning of any sort of written text, whether in phonetic alphabets, hieroglyphs, pictographic characters or computer codes. This does not extend to the interpretation of spoken language or pictorial representations without verbal content. She may translate any amount of text, but she must spend re-roll for separate documents or changes of language within a document.)

**Image:** Clio may appear holding a scroll, book or dedicated word processor.

**Boon:** Clio provides her filial one dot of Intelligence. In addition, she grants the use of Translate Writing (roll Intelligence + Academics or relevant Knowledge Ability) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Mind.

## EUTERPE, MUSE OF MUSIC

Originally the Muse of Lyric Song, Euterpe has changed her purview to include all music save that produced by the human voice, which is Calliope's domain. Euterpe also governs the use of any rhythmic or significantly meaningful non-verbal sounds, like warning sirens, train whistles, car horns, alarms, beeps, pings, or even the transmission of data through phone lines and electrical pulses of various sorts — except for any content that falls under another Medial Muse's category.



Willpower 6, Rage 2, Gnosis 4, Essence 24

**Charms:** Groove (For 1 Essence, Euterpe may alter the emotional state of almost any sort of being — man, god or beast — generating a mood of her choosing. Only one creature is targeted, but additional targets cost her but 1 more point. Targets may try to resist the effects of this Charm with a contested Willpower roll.)

**Image:** Originally pictured playing a double flute, Euterpe may appear holding any sort of musical instrument, ancient or modern.

**Boon:** Euterpe provides her filial one dot of Charisma. In addition, she grants the use of Groove (substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Time.

## TERPSICHORE, MUSE OF THE DANCE

Terpsichore is, as she always has been, the Muse of Dancing, but has expanded her domain to include all those for whom the movement of the body is the central fact of their craft — athletes (and in some cases their referees), martial artists, soldiers and bodyguards, traffic cops, stunt doubles and the like.

Willpower 4, Rage 6, Gnosis 2, Essence 24

**Charms:** Swing (Terpsichore's dancing can affect the movements of others, redirecting their actions, causing

stationary people to get up and move or people in action to be still. She can make travelers veer off course, and combat actions miss their targets or strike more effectively. It costs 1 Essence per target to activate, plus 1 point per additional specific motion to be redirected.)

**Image:** Originally shown with a lyre, Terpsichore may appear with any sort of dancing prop — hat and cane, banner, scarves or even light melee weapons.

**Boon:** Terpsichore provides her filial one dot of Dexterity. In addition, she grants the use of Swing (substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Forces.

## ARCHIOPE, MUSE OF ARCHITECTURE

A new Muse, Archiophe's purview is that of spatial enclosure and demarcation (usually permanent shelters, although tents and lean-tos also fall within her jurisdiction). Her constructions are occupied or inhabited, and thus defined by such aspects as solidity, comfort, degree of shelter and visibility (when desired) and ease of access. Besides surrounding the place where people stay, she also determines the flow of their traffic, and may thus also be considered the Muse of city planning and highways. She favors not only architectural designers and builders, but interior decorators and feng-shui consultants as well.

Willpower 4, Rage 4, Gnosis 4, Essence 24

**Charms:** Erect (Archiope can cause a building of nearly any sort to spring from the ground, or enclose an area of open space with a solid structure, in a matter of moments. The basic cost is 2 Essence for an area large enough for a dozen human-sized forms to lay comfortably or move past each other with ease, pleasingly modeled in some basic, known architectural style, that lasts for one Scene. More elaborate visual details, an additional 10 square feet of floor space or an extra Scene's duration costs 1 point apiece.)

**Image:** Archiope generally appears with a pencil behind one ear, holding rolled blueprints, a clipboard, a ruler, measuring-stick or tape measure.

**Boon:** Archiope provides her filial one dot of Stamina. In addition, she grants the use of Erect (substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Correspondence.

## TAMARAPONME, MUSE OF DRESS

Another new Muse is Tamaraponme, whose domain includes all outward aspects of individual appearance and personal presentation — clothing, hairstyle, makeup, headgear, footwear and accessories. Usually associated with the world of high fashion, Tamaraponme is also involved with any item worn to signal status, affiliation or job.

Willpower 7, Rage 3, Gnosis 2, Essence 24

**Charms:** Fashion Statement (With a successful Gnosis roll, and the expenditure of 1 Essence per additional target, Tamaraponme may clothe anyone in any way whatever, altering their general appearance with haute couture, uniforms, gang colors, elaborate displays or innocuous disguises. The target's actual physique is not changed and garments that incorporate some particularly important physical effect — like armor, weaponry or protection against biochemical agents or radiation — are beyond her power. She can, however, perfectly reproduce signifying details like badges, insignia and other emblems of identification. With additional successes on the Gnosis roll she can enhance special comfort factors like orthopedic support or insulation against cold, all without disrupting the overall visual effect she intends to produce.)

**Image:** Usually equipped with needle and thread, Tamaraponme's appearance is always striking, but always changing, as she tends to be wearing something noticeably different every time someone looks at her.

**Boon:** Tamaraponme provides her filial one dot of Appearance. In addition, she grants the use of Fashion Statement (roll Willpower, substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Life.

## EUDORE, MUSE OF DRAMA

Another new Muse, whose domain is in constant danger of encroaching on those of other Medial Muses, is Eudore, the Muse of Drama. Her purview is the physical projection of an intended character, whether one's own, someone else's or that of an entirely fictional person. Her expressions of speech, mannerism and appearance often conflict with those of Calliope, Terpsichore and Tamaraponme, causing conflict when she and they are present together.

Willpower 6, Rage 3, Gnosis 3, Essence 24

**Charms:** Portray (With a successful Gnosis roll, Eudore can take on the role of any character — physical, Umbral or fictional — and dramatize any situation by acting it out, indicating aspects of the environment through narration and exposition, verbal and facial “reactions,” or pantomime. She can also jump back and forth between multiple roles at a cost of 1 Essence per role; while she does not actually co-locate to appear in several places at once, her jumping from role to role takes place at the speed of thought, disappearing from one position and reappearing in another instantaneously. Eudore cannot perfectly mimic the voice, mannerisms or outward appearance of known persons, nor can she produce props or cause scenery to manifest, unless other Medial Muses — Calliope, Terpsichore, Tamaraponme, Phidia and Archiope, respectively — are also present and they can be convinced to work together.)

**Image:** Of all the Medial Muses, Eudore is just as likely to appear in a masculine form as in a feminine one. She is usually flamboyantly dressed (though never to the degree that Tamaraponme is), carrying a dog-eared script of some sort.

**Boon:** Eudore provides her filial one dot of Manipulation. In addition, she grants the use of Portray (roll Manipulation + Performance, substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Spirit.

## PHIDIA, MUSE OF SCULPTURE

Once a mortal — and a male at that — Phidias's skill at shaping stone so impressed the gods that he was invited to become the Muse of Sculpture. As such, her domain includes the crafting of all material forms, not only three-dimensional pieces of art both representational and abstract, but the precise shaping of tools and machine parts as well.

Willpower 3, Rage 5, Gnosis 4, Power 24

**Charms:** Mold (Phidia can shape and reshape any sort of inert or non-living substance into any form desired. The cost is 1 Essence per five cubic feet of volume, or 1 point per separate moving part when crafting a mechanical device, plus another point when changing the shape of something already crafted.)

**Image:** Phidia always has her sleeves rolled up and her skirts tucked in her sash, exposing strong well-muscled limbs, usually holding a mallet and chisel, or sometimes a carving knife or welding torch. She still appears as a man on occasion, but not that often.

**Boon:** Phidia provides her filial one dot of Strength. In addition, she grants the use of Mold (substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Matter.

## XEROPS, MUSE OF PAINTING

Xerops is the new Muse of two-dimensional images both representational and abstract, and governs not only painting and drawing in the classical sense, but photography, projected images like film or television, diagrams and blueprints as well (sharing the latter with Archiope, to some degree).

Willpower 2, Rage 3, Gnosis 7, Essence 24

**Charms:** Depict (For 1 Essence per five square feet of surface area, Xerops may create a two-dimensional image that can be emotionally expressive or mathematically precise. Her naturalistic, representational images are so realistic that they can easily be mistaken for three-dimensional scenes unless some magical sense is directed toward them.)

**Image:** Xerops's hands, face and gown are always marked with spatters of ink or colored paint; she always has a pen, pencil or brush behind her ear, if not in her hand, and possibly a palette of paint dabs or a drawing-board in the other hand.

**Boon:** Xerops provides her filial one dot of Perception. In addition, she grants the use of Depict (substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey, or, if she is the mage's Totem, once per Story. She may also tell where to find secret lore of the Sphere of Entropy.

## MUSES OF MODE

Though some believe them to be of higher rank than the Medial Muses, the Muses of Mode are actually the same — Low Cardinals, according to the Balt-Machado system. This confusion stems from the tendency of Modal Muses to avoid the “lower” regions like the physical world or the Vulgate, and instead concentrate on more abstract matters. It is not that these Muses are uninterested in the material, but that their concerns lie in the overall generalities of existence rather than its particulars. Thus, Buddhists know them as the Paramitas — the philosophical and analytical goddesses. One could say that while Medial Muses are concerned with *how* the stories of reality are told, Modal Muses are concerned with what *type* of stories are being told. Consequently, they are also sometimes called the “Muses of Genre.”

They frequent the High Umbral Courts and even the Epiphamies, taking the larger view and acting somewhat like critics at the plays that the Medial Muses help put on. Modal Muses thus have a special affinity for specific types

of character and story, favoring mages with certain Natures and involving themselves in particular kinds of conflicts. (The types of conflicts given here are defined in the **Mage** rulebook, p. 268-270, and are offered only as suggestions, since some fit quite well and others do not. The Storyteller should not feel any need to force a Muse into a Story that is not appropriate, or to exclude a Muse from a Story simply because the conflict is not the type given here.) All Muses of Mode are able to find the Epiphany called the World Stage with ease.

The Muses of Mode tend to choose their filials as or more often than they are chosen as Patrons, guiding Umbral travelers in ways that they feel would best facilitate the sorts of events they specialize in. In theory, a mage could choose a Modal Muse as a Totem, but the permanence of this relationship would severely limit the variety of the mage's life, acting more like a curse than a blessing. As Patrons, on the other hand, the Muses of Mode can be extremely good guides to the High Courts and the Epiphamies, where specific feelings, ways of thinking and the general tone of events take on increased significance. When traveling in the company of a Medial Muse, the two can sometimes fuse into a single composite entity, reflecting the union of form and content that the original Greek Muses embodied. (When the Modal Boon Attribute dot matches that of a Medial Muse also present, they add together for a two-dot bonus.)

## ERATO, MUSE OF ROMANCE

*When you make love, MAKE IT! Oh, some of you brothers and sisters... HOLDOUTS!*

— Lord Buckley

Originally the Muse of erotic poetry, Erato is concerned with the overwhelming passions of life, especially those that draw people together, like love and desire. She prefers happy endings, but may drive her filials through unending tribulations to get them there. She is especially attracted to Bon Vivants, Perfectionists and Thrill-Seekers, and tends to involve herself in “Mage versus Mage” conflicts.

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 2, Essence 30

**Charms:** Pleasure (For 1 Essence, Erato can put a target into a state of orgasmic bliss, causing them to swoon with delight and raising the difficulty of all their rolls by 2. How individual targets may react to this is up to the player or Storyteller, but most do not seem to object unless they were trying to accomplish something at the time. The effect only lasts for three turns, but can be extended at a cost of 1 Essence per turn. Erato can affect multiple targets simultaneously, but the initial Essence cost must still be paid for each.)

**Image:** Erato is exceptionally beautiful, with full sensuous features and an inviting smile. She still carries her small lyre around to grace a scene with romantic theme music.

**Boon:** Erato provides her filial one dot of Appearance. In addition, she grants the use of Pleasure (in the form of

her lyre; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find Epiphamies of love, desire and passion (including that of Motherhood), as well as the Shard Realm of Life.

### MELPOMENE, MUSE OF TRAGEDY

*The bad jazz that a cat blows wails long after he's cut out / The groovy is often stashed with their frames.*

— Lord Buckley, “Marc Antony’s Funeral Oration”

Melpomene remains the Muse of Tragedy, for the pain that mortals inflict upon one another has changed but little over the last few thousand years. She does not delight in this pain, but tries to guide people through it into an understanding of why it has come about and what might be done to prevent it in the future. She tends to accompany Caregivers, Masochists and Penitents, and shows especial concern for Stories of the “Mage versus Family” type.

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 6, Essence 30

**Charms:** Sympathos (Melpomene can cause a target to experience any pain, physical or emotional, that the target inflicts upon another, whether it was intentional or not. Physical pain results in the same wound penalties, but no actual health levels are lost. The cost is 1 Essence per target and the effect lasts for five turns, but can be extended for 1 Essence per turn. Using this Charm in tandem with some form of Mind control or other stimulation of the memory — like catching the target just after he has drunk from the Well of Remembrance Epiphany — can cause the target to feel pain he has caused to others in the past.)

**Image:** Melpomene appears older than the other Modal Muses, with a face lined with care but showing a comforting smile to those who need her help. She wears an ivy wreath and carries the classical mask of tragedy.

**Boon:** Melpomene provides her filial one dot of Stamina. In addition, she grants the use of Sympathos (in the form of her tragedy mask; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find Epiphamies of pain, grief and loss (including the Well of Remembrance), as well as the Shard Realm of Spirit.

### POLYHMNIA, MUSE OF RELIGION

*And the Nazz said, “Dig Infinity!” And they DUG IT!*

— Lord Buckley, “The Nazz”

Polymnia, also called Polyhymnia (“She that is rich in hymns”), was the Muse of sacred songs, and now lends her guidance to those on a spiritual path, who seek understanding of the mysteries of the soul. She is drawn to Celebrants, Martyrs and Visionaries, and appears in Stories of the “Mage versus the Supernatural” type.

Willpower 6, Rage 2, Gnosis 7, Essence 30

**Charms:** Illuminate (By singing a hymn, Polymnia can send targets into a transport of divine rapture, granting them visions of heavenly glory, sending them into mystic trance

states or causing them to suffer the torments of hell, whichever the Storyteller feels they most deserve at the moment. The actual game effect is the same as Erato’s Charm: Pleasure, increasing the difficulty of all rolls by 2; the cost is the same as well — 1 Essence per target for three turns, extended for 1 Essence per turn.)

**Image:** Polymnia is plain of face and dress, and usually wears a veil across her face, which maintains a piously pensive expression.

**Boon:** Polymnia provides her filial one dot of Charisma. In addition, she grants the use of Illuminate (her veil; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find Epiphamies of eternity and transcendence (including the Apex of History and the Well of Souls), as well as the Shard Realm of Prime.

### THALIA, MUSE OF COMEDY

*It is the duty of the humor of any given nation in times of high crisis to attack the catastrophe that faces it in such a manner as to cause the people to laugh at it in such a manner that they do not die before they get killed.*

— Lord Buckley, “H-Bomb”

Thalia was and remains the Muse of Comedy, always sensitive to the inherent absurdities of life, pointing out the humor of any situation (sometimes to the shock of those who accompany her). She likes to play with Connivers, Curmudgeons and Tricksters, laughing at them as often as with them, and takes special delight in “Mage versus Self” conflicts.

Willpower 3, Rage 5, Gnosis 7, Essence 30

**Charms:** Crack Up (By making a funny face, uttering a one-line zinger, or just cutting a fart at the right moment, Thalia can cause a target to double over with such intense laughter that the difficulty for all his rolls is increased by 2 for a duration of two turns. The cost is 1 Essence to activate for a single target, and more targets can be added for 1 Essence each, but the duration of the effect may not be extended. The Charm may be cast again immediately, but a cumulative additional cost of 1 Essence is added every time it is used again during a single Scene. Whether non-targets find any of this funny is up to their players or the Storyteller.)

**Image:** Thalia is always bright-eyed and laughing, except when wearing a mock frown or pout. Like her sister Melpomene, she has an ivy wreath on her head, and carries the classical mask of comedy.

**Boon:** Thalia provides her filial one dot of Wits. In addition, she grants the use of Crack Up (her comedy mask; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find the Shard Realm of Time, but her knowledge of specific Epiphamies is limited. Thalia can, however, get anyone ejected from any Epiphany she accompanies them to, and guide their subsequent fall to a harmless — if not particularly dignified, comfortable, hospitable or even safe — place to land.

## URANIA, MUSE OF SCIENCE

*He delegated his household duties to the third frame of his subconscious mind and proceeded to lay back into the longest goof in the history of that far out wig stretch. He became the King of All Spaceheads.*

— Lord Buckley, “The Hip Einie”

Urania was the Muse of astronomy, and now extends her domain to all Science, ever on hand for those who seek to discover and comprehend the most fundamental mechanisms of creation and existence. She keeps company with Directors, Pedagogues and Traditionalists, and generally appears during conflicts of “Mage versus Nature.”

Willpower 6, Rage 2, Gnosis 7, Essence 30

**Charms:** Dissect (Urania’s keen eyes are legendary for the ability to see through anything — and anyone. For 1 Essence, the outermost layer of an inanimate concrete object becomes invisible to her; underlying layers can be “peeled back” for another 1 point each. She can do the same with living bodies, diagnosing organic disease, internal injury or other tissue damage. For 2 Essence, she can peer into the mind of any sentient entity to examine the course of its thought processes or the structure of its personality. In doing this, she cannot read the actual content of the mind — what it is thinking about, its memories, etc. — in detail, but can see its general workings and patterns — its personality type, certain forms of mental illness, etc.)

**Image:** Urania has a sharp, penetrating gaze and usually holds a celestial globe, although she may carry any sort of scientific instrument.

**Boon:** Urania provides her filial one dot of Intelligence. In addition, she grants the use of Dissect (usually in the form of a magnifying glass or some other optical device; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find Epiphamies of reason and cosmic order (including the Continuum Orrery, Newtonian Mechanics and Einsteinian Relativity), as well as the Shard Realm of Matter.

## ARCHILOCHOS, MUSE OF ACTION

*Is it hipper for the wig to dig / The flips and drags of the wheel of fortune / Or to come on like Kinsey / Against this mass mess / And by this stance cover the action?*

— Lord Buckley, “To Swing or Not to Swing”

Credited with being one of the first satiric poets on earth (around the 8th century BCE), Archilochos’s wit was wielded with such unyielding belligerence that he often had to defend his verse with actual combat. He has thus become the Muse of Action, favoring Bravos, Competitors and Gallants; his love of both verbal and physical conflict draws him to clashes of “Mage versus Technocracy.”

Willpower 6, Rage 7, Gnosis 2, Power 30

**Charms:** Sharp Tongue (Archilochos can wound with words, causing 1 die of bashing damage per 1 Essence he

spends, up to 6 Essence, or 6 dice, per turn. His invective ranking can be directed at up to six targets per turn. Targets can soak the damage by spending a Willpower point and uttering a good comeback, but this must be played in character and the gaming group as a whole gets to vote on whether the comeback was witty enough to turn aside the barb.)

**Image:** Archilochos retains the form of his youth, a lean, wiry fighting man, brandishing a large, steel-tipped pen sharp enough to be used as a weapon.

**Boon:** Archilochos provides his filial one dot of Dexterity. In addition, he grants the use of Sharp Tongue (his pen; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. He knows how to find Epiphamies of conflict and struggle (including the Apex of History), as well as the Shard Realm of Forces.

## SOLON, MUSE OF JUSTICE

*You should always try to swing with a policeman / And never ring-a-ding a policeman / And you can bet your life / He’s hip to Mack the Knife*

— Lord Buckley, “His Majesty, The Policeman”

Solon of Athens (640-559 BCE) was identified with the moral conscience of the human race, emphasizing equality and fair play in the execution of the law, and so is now the Muse of Justice. His ethical wisdom and devotion to equitable social order make him a favorite of Architects, Conformists and Judges, as well as drawing him to “Mage versus Hunter” conflicts.

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 5, Essence 30

**Charms:** Sense Guilt (With a successful Gnosis roll, Solon can detect a guilty conscience in a target, even if the target is not consciously aware of her guilt. For 1 Essence, he can tell approximately how long ago the guilty act was committed. For 2 Essence, he can tell who was victimized by the act, or what it was directed against if there was no particular victim. For 3 Essence, he can figure out what the act itself was.)

**Image:** Elderly but upright and alert, Solon has a keen eye and a stern expression that softens for those who have been wronged. He is often seen holding the scales of justice.

**Boon:** Solon provides his filial one dot of Strength. In addition, he grants the use of Sense Guilt (the scales; roll Willpower, substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. He knows how to find Epiphamies of law, judgement and social order (including the Fortress of Government), as well as the Shard Realm of Mind.

## PSEUDOS, MUSE OF INTRIGUE

*I’m the baddest cat in this whole world! There ain’t nothin’ I ain’t done... I’ve done in my brother. I’ve done in my sister. I’ve done in my done-ins. I been all over this here world studying scientifically how to be a bad cat!*

— Lord Buckley, “The Bad-Rapping of the Marquis de Sade”

Actually a fictional character from the works of Plautus, Pseudolos was given Umbral life as the Muse of Intrigue by all the scheming, plotting and dirty dealing that goes on in the world. His love of keeping secrets — and of exposing them at critical moments — draws him to Autocrats, Fanatics and Rebels, and into Stories that involve a “Mage versus Mortal” type of conflict.

Willpower 7, Rage 5, Gnosis 3, Essence 30

**Charms:** Shared Breath (Pseudolos has ways of finding out who has been talking to whom, and when and where, but not about what. With a successful Gnosis roll, he can see a kind of vapor trail connecting conspirators — literally, “those who breathe together” — back to the cloudy mist where their conversation took place. Essence must be spent to follow the trail of a conspiracy, at a rate of 1 Essence per additional target, 1 per day since the conversation and 1 per room or direct-line-of-sight area through which the conspirators have passed since conferring. With the help of Medial Muses, Pseudolos can trace the flow of information through written, electronic or visual means. Of course, he must first suspect that something is going on in order to want to use this Charm in the first place, but then he always does.)

**Image:** Physically resembling his most outstanding dramatic portrayal, that of Zero Mostel in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Pseudolos usually appears with a much darker and more sinister look and demeanor, and often consults a small black book with a knowing leer.

**Boon:** Pseudolos provides his filial one dots of Manipulation. In addition, he grants the use of Shared Breath (his little black book; roll Perception + Subterfuge, substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. He knows how to find Epiphamies of deception and conspiracy (including the Fortress of Government), as well as the Shard Realm of Correspondence.

## LENORE, MUSE OF HORROR

*...That sweet and square — yet swinging — maiden / Whom the fly chicks tagged Lenore...*

— Lord Buckley, “Po’ Eddie and the Bugbird”

The Muse of Horror is believed by some to have been with mankind since the first stirrings of consciousness, although it was not until the 19th century that one of the most gifted poets of the western world gave her a name. Lenore signifies the dreaded anticipation of all that we fear, and so finds herself often in the company of Deviants, Loners and Monsters, as well as in Stories of the “Mage versus the Unknown” variety.

Willpower 7, Rage 4, Gnosis 4, Essence 30

**Charms:** Frighten (By shrieking hideously, and spending 2 Essence, Lenore can paralyze a target with fright, effectively preventing him from making any rolls at all for the next three turns. Additional targets can be added for 1 Essence each, and by spending another 1 Essence on a single target before



the three turns have passed, she can cause a target to flee in blind terror. Targets may resist by spending a Willpower point and making a contested Willpower roll.)

**Image:** Lenore is pale and thin, sunken eyes perpetually aghast at what she sees, wearing a tattered and soiled gown that billows in a chilling wind.

**Boon:** Lenore provides her filial one dot of Perception. In addition, she grants the use of Frighten (by giving a shred of her gown; substitute Quintessence for Essence expenditures) once per astral journey. She knows how to find Epiphamies of fear and loathing (including the Nihil, although she cannot follow visitors inside and will try to warn them off if they approach it), as well as the Shard Realm of Entropy.

## THE ELDER MUSES

The oldest of all the Muses were nearly forgotten even in ancient times, yet are so deeply ingrained in the bedrock of the human soul that they outrank the Muses of Media and Mode, as spirits are reckoned (High Cardinals). For the most part they associate only with the gods, involving themselves in worldly affairs only when events that shape the entire Telurian are in play. Thus, they cannot be chosen as Totems and seldom present themselves at all for Patronage. Mages who are aware of their existence can always try to find them at the High Courts, but they will not be seen unless they wish to be seen....

Properly speaking, it is the three sisters — Melete, Aoidae and Mneme — who are traditionally referred to as the Elder Muses. They are known in nearly all High Courts and throughout the Umbra in various guises: the Graces, the Fates, the Norns, and even as aspects of the Triple Goddess. In times of great worldly tribulation, such as the current post-Reckoning period, they may deign to appear disguised as common hags, singly or together, to travelers in the Vulgate. Also included here is the Leader of the Muses and the winged steed Pegasus, who sprung from the severed neck of Medusa when Perseus slew the Gorgons (themselves another primordial aspect of the three sisters).

## MELETE, ELDER MUSE OF MEDITATION

Melete teaches the arts of introspection and self-knowledge; her domain is the present moment, the world as it exists right now, immediate and concrete. In relation to the Metaphysic Trinity, she is associated with Stasis and is thus most likely to contact mages whose Essence is that of Pattern.

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Essence 36

**Charms:** Things Near and Far (For 3 Essence, Melete may grant a vision of anything happening at the present moment, whether in the physical world or any part of the Umbra. Some believe her vision extends even to the Deep Umbra, though few can make sense of scenes from that far away. The vision can unfold before all spectators present, or may be directed toward a single person, as Melete chooses.)



**Image:** Melete, like her sisters, nearly always appears as an older woman, either fair of features or a shriveled hag. In her Triple Goddess aspect, however, she takes the role of the Mother. She carries an orb of purest crystal, through which she invokes her visions.

**Boon:** Melete can direct a traveler to anywhere in the Near Umbra, and may lend her Charm in the form of the crystal orb to those she deems worthy. (Once used, however, it vanishes to reappear in her hands.)

### AΘIDAE, ELDER MUSE OF SONG

Aoidae sings of events that have not yet happened, inspiring those who meet her to go forth boldly and embrace the destiny that awaits them; her domain is the future, of possibility and potentiality. In relation to the Metaphysic Trinity, she is associated with Dynamism and will thus sing to mages of Dynamic Essence.

Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 5, Essence 36

**Charms:** Things to Come (For 3 Essence, Aoidae can sing of any possible future event, bringing the scene to life around her audience or a single listener. The future of which she sings is not an immutable prediction but follows the paths of likelihood and high probability, usually leaving the listener with the question of what role their choices will play in coming events.)

**Image:** Aoidae carries a small drum used to keep time with her singing. In her Triple Goddess aspect, she plays the part of the Maiden.

**Boon:** Aoidae can direct a traveler to anywhere in the Near Umbra, and may lend her drum-Charm to those she deems worthy. (Once used, however, it vanishes to reappear in her hands.)

### ΜΝΕΜΗ, ELDER MUSE OF REMEMBRANCE

Mneme whispers of things long past, revealing the sequence of events that lead to the present moment, uncovering the origins of the world and the roots of all living things. Her association in the Metaphysic Trinity is that of Entropy, and she is given to revealing herself to mages with a Primordial Essence.

Willpower 5, Rage 8, Gnosis 5, Essence 36

**Charms:** Things Gone By (At a cost of 3 Essence, Mneme can read the past of any individual or group, disclosing their personal history and genetic or cultural antecedents, showing how their current situation grew from chains of events stretching back to the dawn of time.)

**Image:** Mneme bears a long scroll on which is written the history of all things. Her part of the Triple Goddess aspect is that of the Crone.

**Boon:** Mneme can direct a traveler to anywhere in the Near Umbra, and may tear off a portion of her scroll to let those she deems worthy read of Things Gone By. (Once used, however, it vanishes to re-attach itself to the scroll in her hands.)

### ΜΥΣΑΓΕΤΗΣ, LEADER OF THE ΜΥΣΕΣ

At some point during a visit to a High Umbrood Court, mages may make the acquaintance of either or both of two distinct and seemingly opposed male archetypal spirits. One will have a solar or celestial aspect and espouse the principles of order and logical thought; if the Court has a Greco-Roman esthetic ambience, he may be recognized as the god Apollo. If a visitor wins his favor through rational and courteous behavior, he may show them the location of the Gate of Reason. The other has an earthy, vegetal aspect and will act in a wild, chaotic and disorderly manner; in Hellenic Courts he can be identified as Dionysus or Bacchus. Those who participate in his drunken revels and pranks will be shown to the Gate of Rhyme (which they probably could have found on their own anyway). Both will definitely make a point of addressing themselves to any visiting mages with Questioning Avatars.

It is possible, however, that either of these god-forms may resemble, down to the smallest detail, other High Umbrood of similar aspect already present, suggesting that some kind of mythic masquerade is underway to dupe the visitors. Those who examine each of the two spirits by rolling Perception + Awareness can, with five successes, see through the disguise to distinguish the face of an entirely different spirit, one they will probably not have met before (unless they have visited this or other Courts and performed the same examination on like spirits). By comparing what they have learned about these "two," the visitors can identify him as one and the same individual. To those who confront him about this charade, he will reveal himself as Musagetes, the Leader of the Muses and lord of the Two Gates Out. Musagetes will not leave the Courts of the High Umbrood, and thus cannot be a Patron, but he does have a Boon to bestow upon those who pierce his deceptions....

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 7, Essence 40

**Charms:** Dual Identity (Musagetes's charade can be adapted to any High Umbral Court as long as there is a distinct dichotomy between two resident Umbrood of order and chaos, logic and illogic, heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, particle and wave, etc. Musagetes will go to great lengths to keep up his Apollonian/Dionysian charade, and can change instantly from one form to the other by spending 2 Essence. For an additional 1 Essence, he can, while changing disguises, instantaneously teleport from one part of a Court to another. Musagetes does not bilocate, however, and so cannot appear in both forms simultaneously. Of course, he can still arrange to be seen with either of the two real gods he is impersonating, and in all probability has tried to enlist their aid in keeping up his play. The real Apollonian and Dionysian Umbrood may or may not agree, or might simply tire of the game, and so drop hints and clues to visitors about what is really going on.)

**Image:** Musagetes's dual aspects may be respectively well groomed or disheveled, but in his natural state he

actually favors his Apollonian side — young and handsome, clean-shaven, with bright eyes and a radiant smile that shows only a hint of puckish Dionysian twist to his full lips.

**Boon:** For those who see through his disguises, Musagetes will teach the secret meditative technique of merging the Two Gates Out into a single Gate, enabling those who pass through it to claim both types of Boons from the Epiphamies — provided they manage to understand the meaning of the Epiphany, of course.

## PEGASUS, MOUNT OF THE MUSES

*The function of the wing is to take what is heavy and raise it up to the region above, where the gods dwell; of all things connected with the body, it has the greatest affinity with the divine.*

— Plato, *Phaedrus*

Pegasus is spirit-beast born of the blood of the Elder Muses in their most monstrous aspect, and regularly carries the Medial Muses between their Court and the Mouseion. While heeding the call of the Musal Court, it sometimes roams freely across Astral Space and even the Spirit Wilds, instinctively exploring for the pure joy of it, or looking for travelers in need. On occasion it may be sent to the material world to perform an errand for the Muses or other High Umbrood. Being a mere beast, Pegasus cannot reveal esoteric knowledge or grant special abilities, and so is unsuitable as a Patron or Totem (at least for mages, anyway). Pegasus may be “tamed” and ridden with five successes on a Wits + Meditation roll; it may choose to resist, though, throwing off bodied riders with Rage or dissuading the bodiless with Willpower.

Willpower 4, Rage 8, Gnosis 1, Essence 26

**Charms:** Heal (When appearing as Garuda, Pegasus may heal bodily wounds — or lost temporary Willpower for the bodiless — by spending 3 points per bashing wound level or temporary Willpower point and 5 points per lethal wound level. Garuda cannot heal aggravated damage or loss of permanent Willpower.), Thunderous Hooves (Pegasus is no stranger to fighting monsters, and can disperse any spirit for 7 points, after defeating it by kicking and trampling with Rage. Dispersed spirits may not Re-Form for the remainder of the Scene.)

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3

**Materialized Health Levels:** 10

**Image:** Normally Pegasus appears as a snowy white horse with large birdlike wings, but it can take on other forms depending on how it is encountered. When in the company of a Muse, Pegasus and the Muse can merge into a single spirit-entity with the horse’s body, bird’s wings, and the Muse’s head; this form is known to the Ahl-i-Batin and Islamic lore as al-Buraq (literally, “lightning”). When appearing to Umbral travelers in distress, it takes

the form of Garuda from Hindu mythology, with the body and limbs of a man and the head and wings of an eagle (or sometimes a vulture). Sometimes it swoops down to pick up a traveler against their will, delivering them from danger and/or carrying them off to some fated destination (usually a momentous meeting with some Umbrood lord...); when transporting someone involuntarily, Pegasus may have a dark and ominous aspect — its visits to West Virginia in the mid-60’s, as recorded by John Keel, earned it the name “Mothman” from a local newspaper.

**Boon:** Bodied Umbral travelers without wings of their own may try to employ Pegasus as a means of astral flight; the bodiless may choose to do the same, since Pegasus flies faster than most spirits and instinctively avoids High Umbral Storm fronts.

## WHAT A LOAD OF BULFINCH...

The High Umbrood may take nearly any shape, but the forms most accessible to them are those defined by millennia of human belief, the gods and goddesses of old pre-monotheistic lore. Some tend to think that it is belief that shapes and sustains them, but others suspect that the ontologically precedent abstractions of the Epiphamies fashion the gods as a kind of lens through which to focus pure idea into the human mind by giving it a quasi-tangible form. The intellect is more receptive to a notion with a face on it, they argue, and this explains why the old religions fell by the wayside as mankind evolved a greater capacity for abstract thought. In either case, it is easier to refer to the High Umbrood as gods since they have for the most part retained some degree of their ancient identities. Furthermore, Umbral explorers have noted the emergence of new god-forms in Idea Space, perhaps indicating that the abstract has not yet surpassed the need for faces.

Some masters have theorized that when a god looks at a mage, he does not see the finite mortal form, but the infinite immortal spirit within — the mage’s Avatar. The god may recall the Avatar from previous incarnations, and start reminiscing about ancient events that the mage does not consciously remember. Older gods might reawaken in the mage memories of past lives and explain why a mage might be fated for certain things in this life, or they might simply come off as a kind of senile relative who mistakes the mage for someone else.

## TRADITIONAL ARCHETYPES

A few Umbrood lords have maintained their distinct form and character for thousands of years, presumably thanks to the power of earthly mages who have continuously honored them and espoused the archetypal principles they embody. They may be petitioned to act as Totems for mages, but will only bestow this honor on those who truly personify the best of their respective Traditions.

## HERITIES (2 INNATE ABILITIES)

*All your children are poor unfortunate victims of lies you believe / A plague upon your ignorance that keeps the young from the truth they deserve.*

— Frank Zappa, “What’s the Ugliest Part of Your Body?”

Though known by many names and identities — Trismegistus, Thoth, Mercury, Odin — the God Who Teaches Magic has been preserved as “Hermes” both by a particular Awakened Tradition and in Sleeper lore, even living on in the more general adjective “hermetic.” One of the most ubiquitous Umbrood lords, Hermes can be found in a number of High Courts in this guise and others, and roams the Astral Umbra in search of esoteric knowledge. Besides being the classic Totem for mages from the Order of Hermes, he will gladly act as Patron for any Umbral traveler whose quest for knowledge is sincere. (He still has a soft spot for thieves and pranksters as well.)

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 9, Essence 44

**Charms:** Caduceus (Using his winged serpent-entwined staff — the symbol of the medical profession to this day — Hermes may heal lost health levels and Willpower. The cost is 1 Essence per bashing wound or temporary Willpower point, 2 Essence per lethal wound and 3 Essence per aggravated wound or permanent Willpower dot.)

**Image:** When in motion, Hermes still resembles his classical Greco-Roman form, a lithe youth with winged cap and sandals. When at rest or engaged in some esoteric activity, he takes on the appearance of a traditional hermetic magus, older, with a long beard and robe, surrounded by the four instruments of occidental magic — wand, knife, cup and disk.

**Boon:** Hermes grants his filial one dot of Intelligence. He knows his way around most Epiphamies and most of the rest of Astral Space. For those he regards as worthy, he may loan the use of his winged sandals (which are the equivalent of the **Astral Wings** rote; see pp. 180-181) or even, if the need is great, the Caduceus.

**Ban:** Hermes forbids the destruction or loss of magical knowledge in any form, and insists that his charges practice and perfect their magical craft constantly.

## METATHEITIC ARCHETYPES

As the worship of the old pagan gods was supplanted with monotheistic doctrine, and later by a scientific-materialist worldview that had no use for them, many of the older archetypal spirits began to “let themselves go,” so to speak. These Umbrood lords were once praised in many languages under a variety of names, but no longer take the effort to put on the various masks by which they were known. These gods with “collapsed” identities are thus known as “metatheitic” archetypes.

Their continued existence and rank may be supported only by the persistent but highly marginalized place they

hold in the modern imagination, but the theory of Epiphamic ontological precedence suggests that their function in the evolution of the human mind is still necessary. In either case, many may seem quite bitter toward the world at large and even toward those mages who seek them out. They can still be convinced to act as Totems or Patrons, however. (In actual fact, they are just waiting to jump at the chance to re-involve themselves in the human affairs....)

## DZYAUS BRONTHOR (2 INNATE ABILITIES)

*I’m the God of Thunder... and Rock and Roll!*

— Kiss, “God of Thunder”

Zeus, Jupiter, Thor, Indra — his names resound across the sky like a rolling thunderclap. Even many actual words for “god” are variations — *deus*, *dios*, *theos* — going back to the Sanskrit *dyaus*. The Lord of the Skies, Hurler of Lightning, All-Father, is not pleased at being relegated to the status of bad parental stereotype in the minds of bored schoolchildren, and vents his wrath freely and fluently upon all who cross his astral domain. (But still, a good Patron to have watching your back when the Upper Avatar Storm kicks up...) Dzyaus spends a lot of time at the Four Winds Tavern, hitting on feminine spirits or visitors, giving them the name “Joss Shurdi” (Shurdi being the name by which he was most recently worshipped in Albania).

Willpower 6, Rage 9, Gnosis 3, Essence 36

**Charms:** Lightning Lance (An all-time favorite, Dzyaus likes hurling lightning bolts that do a die of damage per 1 Essence spent.), Avert Avatar Storm (Dzyaus can actually influence the course of High Umbral Storm fronts, turning aside one die of Prime damage per Essence spent.)

**Image:** Usually at least twice as tall as whomever he is with, Dzyaus is muscular and barrel-chested, amazingly hirsute, in late middle age, with a full beard and long hair whipping about in the wind.

**Boon:** Dzyaus grants his filial one dot in Strength. He does not know his way around the Epiphamies that well, but can find the most violent and energetic ones. To those who demonstrate great personal strength and force of will, he may loan the use of his Lightning Lance.

**Ban:** Bronthor despises weaklings, and will wreak spectacular vengeance upon those who show cowardice or who do not indulge their will to power in any way. He also wants to hear his name — any of them — shouted with gusto during every thunderstorm.

## UMITTAUGH DAANAU (2 INNATE ABILITIES)

*What have they done to the Earth? ... / Ravaged and plundered and ripped her and bit her / Stuck her with knives in the side of the dawn / And tied her with fences and dragged her down.*

— The Doors, “When the Music’s Over”

Although Gaia — Mother Earth or Mother Nature — may still appear in the Spirit Wilds as a loving, caring,

nurturing bringer-forth-of-abundance, her identity in the Astral Umbra is markedly shaped as a conscious resentment of the injuries and indignities heaped upon her by her prodigal son, Man the Toolmaker. Here she shows her darker primeval aspect, the all-devouring Kali, bitter and mistrustful of humans and their works, telling all who approach her, "I gave you everything in the world, and just look at what you've done to me in return!" Even the most ardent eco-guerilla would have trouble winning her over, as she regards their efforts to be too little, too late. For those whose presence she tolerates, she prefers to be addressed as She Who Is Not To Be Fucked With.

Willpower 7, Rage 10, Gnosis 6, Essence 46

**Charms:** Devour (For 4 Essence per target, Ummaugh Daanau can unhinge her jaw and expand her throat to engulf and swallow any being of any size, even sucking in the bodiless with the force of an ethereal tornado. Those whom she eats with this Charm suffer no injuries — save those they may incur in fighting against it — but will find themselves in the Nihil for an extended period and ultimately emerge in the Epiphany of Motherhood.)

**Image:** Short and squat, with a tangled bird's-nest of white hair, skin the texture of parched clay and breath that smells like fresh dung, Ummaugh Daanau's face has a noticeably Neanderthal cast. She may bear a partially unraveled cornucopia, the fruits of which are dry, shriveled and malformed, smelling of the poisons dumped into the soil that they grew from, and which may crack open like eggshells to disgorge the larval forms of primordial chthonic monsters.

**Boon:** Ummaugh Daanau grants her filial one dot of Stamina. In addition to sending travelers into the Nihil or Motherhood (voluntarily or not), Ummaugh Daanau can show the way to ecologically oriented Epiphanies that teach how to live in harmony with the earth and its creatures (granting one dot of Survival), or lead one to the Spirit Wilds, where she might show a somewhat gentler face. She can also teach all levels of the Sphere of Life.

**Ban:** Ummaugh Daanau demands that those who would follow her must fight as fiercely as any werewolf the corruption and destruction of the ecosystem, even at the cost of their own health and well-being.

## NEOTHEITIC ARCHETYPES

New god-forms have been seen in the Umbra since the Reckoning; some appear in the High Umbral Courts while others create realms of their own. While the archetypal ideals they embody may be quite old, their identities and presentations tend to be distinctly modern, prompting cosmologists to coin the term "neotheitic" by which to designate them. It is clear that their presence embodies the impingement of new abstractions upon the material plane, and their specific concerns are very worldly, though their motivations differ widely. They are only too glad to act as Totems or Patrons to whomever espouses the principles of their existence.

## DONNA MATRIX (2 INNATE ABILITIES)

*Hello, fun-fun boyz! Boot me up! Turn me on! Touch my screen!... Push my "ENTER" button and I'll download all over you!*

— Pyxy Styx, from *The Bride of Firesign*

It has been speculated for almost two decades now that the escalating interconnection of mankind's information media might ultimately result in a new collective intelligence, a kind of global electronic brain whose consciousness manifests as the Digital Web and whose subconscious might possibly be the Internet itself. The Virtual Adepts can point to numerous phenomena that illustrate this, compiling descriptions of many spirits that reside in the digital environment, and chief among them is Donna Matrix. She seems to embody William Gibson's pronouncement, "Information desires to be free," yet her voracious need to insinuate herself into every single hut in the electronic village troubles some. Her self-bestowed titles include Most Downloaded Girl Ever and Gold Medalist of the Olympic Swimsuit Competition.

Willpower 8, Rage 4, Gnosis 6, Essence 36

**Charms:** Save Self to Disk (For 4 Essence, Donna can replicate herself onto any computerized information medium, allowing her to be present in any computer that reads the disk whether it is linked to the Net or not, like a sentient virus. For every 100 kilobytes of disk space, she can spend an additional 2 Essence for a level of spirit Trait, up to the maximum of her own Traits given above. She can charge her copy with any mission or motivation given above, but cannot communicate with her copy unless the computer in which the copy resides becomes linked to the Internet.)

**Image:** Donna's visual appearance corresponds to her Most Downloaded title — young, slender, blond, tanned, Caucasian, slightly over-inflated, dressed in a bikini, lingerie or other revealing outfit. When encountered in the Digital Web or Astral Space, her skin is covered with an ever-shifting phosphorescent tattoo of flowing circuitry patterns.

**Boon:** Donna grants her filial one dot of Technology and Computers. She knows her way around the Digital Web and any Epiphany concerned with the flow of information, including many departments of the Fortress of Government.

**Ban:** Accepting Donna Matrix as Totem means that one must never keep secrets unless divulging them would lead directly to the harm of innocents. She also insists on honesty in most affairs but understands the value of a well-directed lie in the cause of informational liberty.

## ⊕ATIS-RA (2 INNATE ABILITIES)

*Those dirty, lousy, miserable, rotten politicians! Those thieving monsters. Those greedheads. Look what they've done to this beautiful city! Look at these streets! Those rotten, foul-headed freaks! Death to them...*

— Lord Buckley

Ever since the dawn of civilization, those who hold power have understood that there is no human aspiration, no dream or hope or altruistic urge so strong and true that it cannot be crushed out of existence by forcing people to live in substandard shelter, to eat no more than they absolutely need to subsist and to compete viciously simply for the opportunity to spend every day in back-breaking labor just to earn these necessities. In the vast abyss between *have* and *have not* dwells Oatis-Ra, the Slum-Lord of Lower West Egypt, spawn of Amon-Ptui, Slayer of the Sunrise. Those who have encountered him are not entirely certain just what he represents, but whatever it is, it should probably be stamped out

Willpower 7, Rage 5, Gnosis 2, Essence 28

**Charms:** Swarm of Vermin (Oatis-Ra can call up hordes of the most disgusting small scavengers around; each Essence summons one rat, a dozen roaches, or a cubic-yard-sized cloud of gnats, midges or houseflies. For another 1 Essence apiece, the vermin may bite or sting for die of damage. Oatis-Ra may direct them toward any place — or anyone — he indicates.)

**Image:** Flabby, sweaty and pot-bellied, with the head of a cockroach, Oatis-Ra may be an Umbrood lord of great power, but everything about him reeks of cheap imitation and tawdry high camp, from his bad cologne and gold lamé Egyptian-style kilt to the stank-ass cigarillo clutched in his mandibles.

**Boon:** Oatis-Ra can always find the Fortress of Government, or the Gate of Scent to any High Umbral Court, and knows much of the Vulgate like the back of his pudgy hand. Those sleazy enough to have him as a Totem can gain worldly power and friends in high places, in the form of two dots to spread between Allies, Influence and/or Resources.

**Ban:** Oatis-Ra's adherents must horde everything within reach, guard it with their lives (or, better yet, the lives of others), and make everyone pay through the nose to partake in any of it. Furthermore, they must never pass up a chance to insult a social inferior.

## THE BLUE LADY (I INNATE ABILITY)

*Balance killing with the support of life... Female spirits of earth and sea, "maidens of wisdom and sense," will come to protect the land and the people. The life-maintaining, earth-preserving feminine wisdom embodied in the ancient goddess religions is needed to play a central role in the restoration of the community of all beings on this planet.*

— Ralph Metzner, *The Well of Remembrance*

Adults dismiss it as infantile fantasy, but the children know better: word on the street has it that a spirit queen has arisen from her kingdom at the bottom of the sea to set the world aright, washing away poverty, inequity and injustice. Sworn enemy of Oatis-Ra, the Blue Lady protects orphans and homeless children, and will lend her aid to the poor and downtrodden.



Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 7, Essence 40

**Charms:** Shield of Innocence (By swirling her translucent blue cloak around, the Blue Lady can cast a sphere of protective force around an area large enough to hold a dozen small children or seven adults; this sphere protects not only against physical damage but also magical effects and spirit Charms. The cost to activate is 6 points, plus 2 points per die against physical damage or 3 points per die against magic.), Create Food and Water (For 2 points per person, the Blue Lady can bring forth from the folds her cloak a simple but nourishing and tasty meal — taking into account all necessary dietary needs — and a large silvery chalice of pure fresh water.)

**Image:** The Blue Lady rises up from the ground (or water) in a swell of diaphanous blue which parts to reveal her blurry and indistinct — but recognizably feminine and beautiful — form; the split mound of blue then settles about her shoulders like a cloak.

**Boon:** The Blue Lady grants her filial one dot of Survival. In addition to protecting deprived children, she can lead the way to safe and peaceful areas anywhere within the Umbra or materiality.

**Ban:** Devotees of the Blue Lady must never harm a child and always do their best to provide shelter and sustenance to those who need it.

## EPIPHAMIES



*Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to his life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced that they make sense; he is crushed when, on top of all his misfortunes, he has to admit that he is taking part in a "tale told by an idiot."*

— Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols*

An Epiphamy is the most difficult aspect of the High Umbra to understand, as well as the most fundamental. If the Vulgate can be thought of as interpersonal Astral Space and the High Courts as personal Astral Space, then the Epiphamies are transpersonal Astral Space. Scholars in the Order of Hermes and Celestial Chorus called it the "Mundus Intelligibilis" and the Realm of Divine Names; qabalistically, it is known as the Macroprosopus, or "Greater Countenance" comprised of the upper sephiroth on the Tree of Life. To the Ahl-i-Batin, it is "Alam al-Lahut," the Presence of the Divine Attributes; to many technomancers it is the Pandimensional Metaverse. Some teach that, like so much else in Astral Space, an Epiphamy is formed as a result of human belief and tends to present itself in whatever shape is expected. They explain that the Epiphamies as a whole can be conceived as the culmination of human mental activity, all the highest-level abstractions and most intense feelings superimposed to form a semi-continuous landscape of excruciatingly significant imagery.

This may be true up to a point, but the experiences of those who have visited them suggests that an Epiphamy exists independently of human conception, abiding outside of the space-time continuum in a way that the Vulgate and High Umbral Courts do not. The view from above, as they call it, shows the material world as a mere epiphenomenon, an emergent form caused by the simultaneous intersection of all Epiphamies at once. Traditional histories contain accounts of many Epiphamies embodying what are generally referred to as "laws of nature" that were not understood until the Order of Reason incorporated these laws into their technologically progressive paradigm. Likewise, many Epiphamies of religious

revelation or philosophical truth, long thought lost when the ideas associated with them fell out of use in the mundane world, have been rediscovered in modern times, their appearance and symbolic imagery changed but their inherent ideas still intact. The Epiphamies may thus be considered as the cause rather than the effect of human thought and feeling. Those who travel to the Epiphamies sometimes find their adventures there appearing as fictional narratives — novels, movies, television, comics, etc. — after they return to materiality.

While individual Epiphamies often refuse to be identified until one has actually crossed their threshold, all collectively appear in the sky of the Vulgate as clouds of varying size, color and movement. The common lore of the Vulgate claims that specific Epiphamies can be recognized among the clouds by their symbolically suggestive shapes, but actual experience shows no basis for this. The Epiphamy does not exist "on" or "in" a cloud the way that a place corresponds to the surface of a landmass, but the constantly shifting positions and shapes of clouds — how they break apart and seemingly dissipate into thin air, how they grow and spread to blanket the sky — does in some way reflect how Epiphamies can phase in and out of existence (or, rather, in and out of our experience) and how one can lead directly into another at times while having no connection at others. All Traditions can agree that the substance of the astral clouds seen from the Vulgate must be ephemera in its most rarified state, broken down into infinitesimal particles of raw experiential processes and highly reactive to observation and interpretation. This ephemeral "vapor" forms itself into shapes and scenes that are meaningful to the observer, in a deliberate effort to convey the concept that the Epiphamy embodies, not simply as a place to pass through but as a state of mind to be experienced. Ephemeral material as refined as this is extremely reactive to magic, but can nullify magical effects that conflict with the experience it seeks to impart, prompting one neo-Mercurian wag to dub the figures of astral meteorology "cumulonuminous clouds."

Let it not be thought that an Epiphamy is some sort of "place" floating high above the Vulgate, for an Epiphamic

revelation can occur anywhere in the Tellurian, whether Umbral realm or even the material world. The purely transcendental nature of the Epiphany allows it to intersect any other level or type of reality — dreamscape, Seeking, spirit glen, Horizon Realm or another Epiphany — in a way that Dimensional technomancers describe as “perpendicular to the local space-time axes.” Experiencing an Epiphany, even when on the physical plane, may seem to take days, even a lifetime, but once one emerges from the experience one may find that no time has passed at all. One of the best examples of this comes from Batini lore, the Night Journey wherein the Prophet Muhammad is borne upon al-Buraq to tour the various heavens of Islamic cosmology. Just as al-Buraq was taking flight, a pitcher of water sitting nearby was knocked over. After spending an evening traveling to the furthest

knowable ends of the universe, Muhammad is deposited at his dwelling just in time to see the pitcher fall over and spill across the dry ground.

Some Epiphanies can be experienced through advanced meditative states, lucid dreaming, ecstatic trances and other means of consciousness alteration, but these methods only result in incomplete fleeting glimpses that impart the “gist” of the Epiphany without offering the enrichment of a sustained exploration. Flying through the High Umbra from cloud to cloud at random will certainly deliver one to an Epiphany, but the odds against finding the Epiphany one is searching for are, in theory, infinite. The best way to reach a specific Epiphany, and the best way to understand what it has to offer, is by climbing a Spire from the Vulgate and, if possible, enlisting the aid of one

## AETHERIAL BRIDGES

*BEDEVERE: Look! It's the old man from Scene 24 — What's he doing here?*

— *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

To walk to an Epiphany from the top of a Spire, one need only step off of the Spire's precipice, out into empty space. For the novice who entered the Umbra by **Stepping Sideways** or **Astral Sojourn**, this is a supreme act of faith, since she has nothing but the tales of those who have gone before — and perhaps of any High Umbrood who deign to accompany her — to tell her that she will not just drop to a painful death. (Even experienced astral travelers sometimes taunt each other with the speculation that an Epiphany of Hubris manifests as a tortuously prolonged plummet down a steep jagged cliff face....) Once she takes this leap, though, an aetherial bridge automatically appears beneath her feet, providing as much level footing as she may require, even expanding to keep her from falling if the vertiginous high-altitude view causes her to lose balance. The bridge will extend forward, enabling her to walk among the clouds and, hopefully, leading her to the Epiphany she seeks.

In essence, traveling via aetherial bridge is not unlike the ability to breathe the ether in outer space; because the mage understands that such a thing is possible, it can become real. Accidentally falling from an aetherial bridge — apart from being forced or flung off by the High Umbral Storm or during combat — is unheard of. Falling from the Epiphany level carries its own significance, that of a failure to increase one's understanding, and the aetherial bridge is only a path connecting Epiphanies and Spires, with nothing in particular to be learned by crossing it. Bridges form themselves to accommodate any traveling party, as wide or flat, as inclined or graduated, as is required to provide a safe medium for travel. In some cases, portions of the bridge often do not actually materialize until the moment a traveler's foot steps forward, as

if activated by touch, and usually dematerialize after the individual or party has passed over it. Some of the most frequently traversed bridges appear all at once, staying visibly connected to the Spire behind and stretching out toward an Epiphany ahead.

The exact visual details of any given bridge vary widely, but some types can be categorized. For voyagers passing through the Gate of Reason, the aetherial bridge will usually have a man-made look, like a normal bridge or an architecturally ornamented staircase, or else be composed of rectangular planes of shimmering light, connected to each other with geometric precision. For those who passed through the Gate of Rhyme, archaic or unstable-looking structures predominate, like rope bridges or rickety catwalks, or else natural formations like the limbs of a tree (which some claim are branches of the Alder Bole) or levitating chunks of stone, flat and smooth on top with uncut rock or stalactites dangling from the bottom. Mages who have not passed through one of the two exit Gates from a High Umbral Court may nevertheless step off of a Spire in the same way; for these, the aetherial bridge may appear as a thin wisp of cloud or, in rare cases, as a rainbow, both seemingly insubstantial but nevertheless providing firm footing and a path to follow into the Epiphanies.

While aetherial bridges provide a means of travel to and from Epiphanies, they do not conceal the traveler's presence from flying enemies or the High Umbrood. In fact, anyone journeying among the Epiphanies with some kind of aerial nemesis on their tail will definitely feel exposed and vulnerable while on the bridge, which does not form any sort of cover or fortification. This is yet another reason to have the favor of the gods when voyaging this far into Astral Space. Also, most Epiphanies intersect each other directly, so that it is usually possible to pass from one to another without requiring an aetherial bridge between them.

of the High Umbrood who knows how to find the way to it and who may be of help in interpreting its surreal imagery. Moreover, once an Epiphany is entered, one might only be able to leave on that Epiphany's terms. (Some seem to have no exit whatsoever, along with an appetite for visionary souls like Amelia Earhart or Ambrose Bierce.) Bodiless travelers using **Astral Projection** or **Untether** may find themselves inexplicably saddled with the body they thought they had left behind (or even a completely different one), subjected to all the same "physical" limitations as bodied travelers using **Astral Sojourn** or **Stepping Sideways**. In such cases, if the mage takes corporeal damage while in an Epiphany, the wounds are not transferred to her physical form in any way, but the corresponding health level penalties still apply to all Social and Mental Attributes, and may take just as long to heal.

An Epiphany can eject any visitor who acts too dense or unreachable when it comes to understanding the Epiphany's essential idea, or those who abuse or plan to abuse the Epiphany's awesome power in some way. Mages who attempt to use Spheres to change the basic meaning of an Epiphany, or who try to dispel some aspect of the Epiphany or deny its existence entirely, can also be ejected. (This does not mean magic cannot be used here, just that it must be used with care.) Ejection can take many forms, from an imperceptibly seamless cross-fade phasing into another Epiphany, to a simple, abrupt trapdoor-style drop through the "ground" and out of the bottom of a cloud thousands of feet above the Vulgate. Guides and companions from among the High Umbrood may be ejected along with the visitor, but sometimes they can be trapped in the Epiphany and must find their own way out.

For the Storyteller who hasn't the heart to calculate several thousand feet of falling damage compounded by the Avatar Storm, some options are available at this point. If the ejected mage realizes her mistake on the way down, she may only impact the ground with the damage from a short drop like 10 or 15 feet, or may land in a body of water or a soft spot like a hay-wagon. It is also possible to fall onto an aetherial bridge (see below), or into a "lower" Epiphany, from which a path to the previous Epiphany may or may not be found. (It is said that one always passes briefly through the Epiphanies of Motherhood or the Nihil or both before hitting the ground from falling out of an Epiphany, or when one actually dies while inside an Epiphany.) Most common, though, is for the plummeting willworker to land in a High Umbral Court (falling damage and the Avatar Storm may or may not apply), usually one that the mage disembarked from for the Epiphanies, or has visited in the past. The High Umbrood keep a sharp lookout for falling Icarites who — in their view — trespass upon the Epiphanies without paying their respects to the old gods, just so they can pluck him from the skies and have a word with him about that.

An Epiphany can take any form imaginable in order to get its meaning across, drawing from all human (and

inhuman) thought, including the minds of its visitors. The descriptions given below may be considered "default settings" or what the Epiphany looks like when not tailoring itself to play with (or against) the expectations and preconceptions of those experiencing it. Epiphanies of extreme emotion can reproduce important moments from the visitor's life when he was overcome by that emotion; purely tutelary Epiphanies can present a figure like a respected schoolteacher or mentor to explain its ideas. Such scenes and figures need not be confined to the character's past, as visions of the future are almost commonplace at this level of the High Umbra. Dreams, revelatory visions, past incarnations and disordered fantasies can also manifest. Storytellers should not feel constrained in any way when describing an Epiphany, and are encouraged to customize all Epiphanies to suit the needs of their chronicle.

## THE WORLD STAGE

*It's show-time!*

— Bob Fosse, *All That Jazz*

Frequently the first Epiphany to be encountered on a mage's first High Umbral voyage, the World Stage is also sometimes the last, and has occasionally interposed itself at unexpected junctures between Epiphanies. **Astral Projectionists** and **Untethered** minds, once they enter, take on their normal physical forms, with all attendant constraints and complaints, and may not escape this state for the duration of their visit. The initial approach to the Epiphany is usually a long, slow glide into increasing darkness toward a distant pinpoint of light and sound that resolves into a slit between two curtains with a large crowd of many voices beyond. At this point unseen hands from the darkness begin ushering, urging and openly pushing the travelers forward as nearby voices whisper "It's time!" "You're on!" and various vague encouragements to propel them along. If they refuse to move forward, or turn back the way they approached, they return to wherever they disembarked on their Epiphanic sojourn, perhaps never to make another. Any attempt to use violence or magic against the unseen hands and voices will result in immediate ejection from the Epiphany. If the characters proceed through the curtain, the light beyond it will blind them for at least a few seconds (or one combat turn). The floor beneath their feet is polished hardwood; the echoes around them suggest a vast but enclosed space. The light resolves itself into a spotlight directed straight at the characters, with footlights ahead and stage lighting above. As they enter, a thunderous wave of applause breaks forth — or not, as the Storyteller sees fit. The travelers have just made their entrance upon the World Stage.

In nearly all cases, they are inexplicably stripped of possessions and clothing as soon as they have entered this Epiphany, usually dressed in a skimpy leotard. On rare occasions, mages have entered wearing an unfamiliar costume, a mask or make-up that they cannot see unless some reflective

surface can be found, as if they were set to play some role they have not rehearsed. The stage itself may be bare, filled with elaborate set pieces or starkly equipped with a lone prop or two. Other “actors” may be present as well, familiar faces from everyday life or exotic Umbrood types, already engaged in the play or simply waiting with varying degrees of patience for the visitors to arrive. Usually they will address the new arrivals directly as soon as they enter, immediately engaging them and involving them in whatever scene is being played out. Unlike the inept personnel of the Vulgate’s Theatre of the Mind, the “World Stage Players” appear to be well-trained in every form of expression, acting, singing, dancing, improvising and flawlessly executing any trick the play requires, even imparting great spiritual wisdom or using Sphere magic as necessary to fulfill their roles. Despite this, they may be as authentic or unconvincing as the Storyteller feels is appropriate, incorporating the spitting image of a known person or some abstract mask and costume to represent a recognizable entity. (Player characters may try to dislodge a mask or wipe away the make-up from these “actors,” in which instance the face of some even more significant person is revealed.)

Naturally, Storytellers should always have a specific scene in mind when using this Epiphany, one that is important to the current plotline or stresses the significance of whatever astral quest the players are pursuing. It is not necessary to have the act scripted out line by line, since the players will never stick to any script anyway. The World Stage is the Storyteller’s chance to disclose information that cannot be gained any other way, or to replay a past scene that could have gone differently, or to foreshadow, or to present the current story situation in some abstracted or symbolic form. The play could be clearly fabricated, with cardboard sets and garish costumes that only broadly represent some real-life situation, or may become so detailed and realistic that the theatrical trappings disappear, to be replaced by the actual landscape of a new Epiphany.

Although every attempt should be made to involve the visiting mages in the scene at hand, they should still be free to improvise their own lines, or even to “break character” and leave the Stage entirely. The Storyteller may allow them to interact with the audience, who could be an anonymous crowd or full of familiar faces; if Patrons and Totems are not in the play, they will be watching either here or from the wings. While it is theoretically possible for certain Umbrood and hidden Masters to be in the World Stage’s audience, more often than not these are simply figures created by the Epiphany to populate its landscape, just like the players onstage. Alternately, there may be no audience at all, just a lone janitor (a la Carol Burnett) or a director who cannot be approached but only barks out whatever encouragement or criticism the Storyteller deems appropriate. Other possibilities to explore include the players recovering their lost equipment and possessions by miming their use, or finding a script concealed behind the scenery or lying around somewhere offstage.

It has long been debated just what, exactly, this Epiphany is intended to express, since the play in progress is seldom the same. Perhaps it embodies the well-known Shakespeare quote, elucidating real life through the metaphor of show biz. Indeed, most scenes encountered on the World Stage are biographical, drawn from the lives of the astral voyagers themselves. Many are intensely personal, wherein the dark secrets that cabal members keep from each other are revealed. Often, it is the situation that brought about the astral journey in the first place that is being dramatized, forcing the mages to reflect upon the purpose of their quest. Sometimes the play may not appear to involve the players’ characters at all, but concerns the lives of people they don’t even know — but may learn of in the future.

Many Masters in the past have speculated that the World Stage is not a true Epiphany at all, but a transitional phase, a threshold of the Epiphanies as a whole or marking the change from one Epiphany to another. Most other Epiphanies seem to connect to the World Stage in some way, either reached through the wings or the audience exits, or by superimposing themselves on the play itself, as mentioned above. Former visitors who were ejected from this Epiphany, or who abuse a Boon gained here, often find that people, places and situations in the material world begin to appear phony and staged, as though their real lives had been replaced with conventional theatrics. Those who have also visited the Theatre of the Mind in the Vulgate might even recognize its bad actors beneath the “disguises” of their friends and family. In a way, the Theatre of the Mind can be seen as a dim reflection of the World Stage, and Storytellers may use the relationship between the two to underscore the point of any astral quest where both are visited. In doing so, however, they should stay mindful of the difference between each. The Theatre of the Mind is objective, showing outside observers only the bare facts of what happens in the experiential world; the World Stage is subjective, forcing visitors to participate in whatever real or imagined events it presents. Mages familiar with both places have remarked their names seem to be reversed, each being more appropriate for the other. Some suspect that the denizens of the High Umbra are playing some kind of cruel practical joke on them, while a few contend that the confusion is intentional and meaningful, perhaps providing, in the breakdown of the subject/object duality, some clue as to the mysteries of Ascension.

**Boon:** There is no particular Boon associated with the World Stage, beyond whatever information or feeling the Storyteller chooses to impart through dramatization. The access this Epiphany provides to other Epiphanies can be Boon enough in itself. Of course, the Stage can represent an excellent opportunity to increase through practice any Social Attributes, as well as Abilities like Expression, Subterfuge and Performance. Some Backgrounds can be introduced or increased, like a player character learning of his Destiny or revisiting the World Stage through Dream. If visitors abuse

the various benefits this Epiphany offers, they may return to the Vulgate to find their own performances on the Stage being aped as farce by that troupe of hams at the Theatre of the Mind.

The Storyteller might use this Epiphany to extend the individuation process of the High Umbral Courts in cases where Courtly business was left unfinished or the Courts were circumvented somehow. For one way to do this, the World Stage can be presented in a “rehearsal” mode, with no audience, no scenery or props and no supporting “actors,” just a barren stage with the director’s voice from behind the spotlight asking “Why are you here? What are you going to do?” Alternatively, the “actors” might take the roles of Totems, Patrons and other Umbrood, either in their preferred forms or in disguise.

## THE CONTINUUM ORRERY

*To be astonished that the laws of nature are everywhere the same is to be amazed that, even in the outer reaches of infinite space, there are three feet in a yard.*

— Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, *The Philosophy of Physical Science*

One enters this Epiphany through a trapdoor that can be reached by climbing the ladders and catwalks of the World Stage to find the roof access, or by aetherial stairway, astral flight — assuming the flyer has a means to locate it — or any sort of upward-facing portal the Storyteller chooses to place in other Epiphanies. (Many archetypal spirits strongly associated with things celestial may have their own portal as well.) Bodied visitors enter the Epiphany with their usual form and appearance intact, with whatever physical/ephemeral equipment they brought; bodiless minds remain in, or resume, their incorporeal state, and may thus pass through the trapdoor without opening it. The trapdoor opens upon a flat gray plain, smooth and cool like polished marble, circular in shape and some 10 meters in diameter. Beyond and around lies the astral sky in all its glory, unobscured by Spires or Epiphamic clouds, with visibility so clear that the planets look close enough to touch.

Visitors who step to the edge of this platform can see the Vulgate filmed by cloud, far below and surrounded by the Great Ocean fading away into the sky itself, looking remarkably like the physical planet Earth as seen from high orbit. Any Spire and/or aetherial bridge used to reach this Epiphany can also be seen, though highly distorted, stretching away from beneath the platform like a thin tether line disappearing into the Earth. Stepping off the edge of the platform results in an extremely long plummet with a predictably messy end for those not equipped for some manner of astral flight, although one can aim for Spire or bridge by jumping off the right point on the platform’s circumference. Searing, biting winds from the



uppermost strata of the Avatar Storm are undetectable from the platform, but immediately affect anything that drops below its surface level.

The platform itself is featureless when the Epiphany is first entered, its marble-like substance reacting normally to any physical or magical efforts to change or mark it; in most cases, any such changes are repaired or disappear when the Epiphany is exited, or if no effort is made to control its structure and appearance during the next several minutes. If nothing is done to change the platform at all, its surface will soon begin to exhibit details, either flat images, incised relief textures or even three-dimensional structures growing up out of it. All such details take the form of known cosmological mandalas or astronomical diagrams, filling the circle with some schematic of the universe. Flat images include Tibetan mandalas, illuminated drawings showing the Ptolemaic planetary system and/or images of the Zodiac or the heliocentric diagrams of Kepler or Copernicus; raised reliefs may show similar images, clock faces, Arabic or Chinese astrolabe faces, or the Mayan calendar; upraised structures can take the form of any style of sundial or scale models of ancient observatory sites like Stonehenge. One will note that all such details appear on the platform in perfect alignment with the current positions of all corresponding celestial bodies.

Visitors who concentrate on visual examination of the astral heavens will also notice subtle visual details in the sky. Thin gray lines, faint at first but waxing brighter when focused on, crisscross the celestial dome, dividing the sky into quadrants like outward projections of terrestrial latitude and longitude. The poles of the earth's rotational axes are clearly marked, as are the plane of the ecliptic, the tropics, planetary orbital paths and the galactic equator. Tiny hash marks measure out the degrees of each great circle and important angles of intersection, along with points of aphelion and perihelion, labeled with symbols, brief annotations and numbers that appear in whatever language any observer can recognize. Directly overhead, a small crossed circle indicates the zenith and cardinal directions; this point, and indeed the entire visible sky, reflects that of whatever point in space and time (usually — but not necessarily always — on the surface of the planet Earth) that the visiting party, or at least their leader, left materiality for the Umbra (except for the astral moon, of course, which always shows whatever phase is current in the physical plane).

Visitors who concentrate on observing the sky may well remark that the planets appear close enough to reach out and touch; anyone who tries to do so (without wandering off the edge of the platform) will find to their surprise that this is in fact the case. The planets are hollow orbs of stone or metal, crafted in such perfect detail that they are indistinguishable from the actual celestial bodies until one makes physical contact with them. Once this happens, it can also be seen that they are held in place by thin, rusted metal rods — one a circular ring representing the orbit that encompasses the

platform, the other a straight radius that leads to the center of the platform. Anyone who traces a radial strut back to this center finds it connected to a large contraption, some two meters in diameter, of interlocking gears and flywheels that stands hitherto unnoticed in the middle of the platform. (The trapdoor opens away from it — not that that makes a difference in Astral Space....) This is the Orrery proper, a complex astral depiction of a type of machine once used to model the movements of the heavens. Various levers and cranks jut out from its base, with pivots, swivels, gyros and gears of all sizes ticking away the moments of sidereal time. The radial rods that connect the model planets to the mechanical Orrery pass ethereally through the platform and all persons standing on it, but anyone who wishes to grab one or block its movement with their body — assuming they brought one — can do so without using magic. (This is the aforementioned “pure intentionality effect” of astral ephemera.)

Visitors who try working the controls of the Orrery will find levers that make the entire thing run forward or backward at varying speeds, and cranks that adjust the relative positions of individual planets. One large electric-type knife switch is labeled “Copernican” and “Ptolemaic”; reversing the switch causes the entire Orrery mechanism to fold in on itself and reconfigure to show a geocentric model of the planetary system, with the universe revolving around the Earth. (Ever since the Order of Reason became dominant, the Orrery has always been set for “Copernican” or heliocentric mode when the Epiphany is first entered.) A series of concentric crystal-line spheres enclose the platform, causing echoes to ring back and forth, while any light source on the platform generates a series of distorted reflections in the spheres. Each sphere corresponds to the orbit of a planet, which is embedded on a smaller glassy sphere pivoting along the surface of the larger one to show apparent retrograde motion. The Ptolemaic mode may be decorated with the cosmological trappings associated with that particular astronomic paradigm; images of pagan gods can appear on the planets with which they were associated, and quaint drawings of mythic figures are superimposed over their respective constellations.

(For those who look closely enough, there is a tiny silver toggle switch set deep in the innards of the machine that converts the Orrery to a lunacentric, or moon-centered mode, which shows all the convoluted movements of the solar system as they would appear to an observer on the surface of the moon. This switch also causes the Orrery to synchronize with actual sidereal time current in the physical world. It takes five successes on a Perception + Technology roll to notice it.)

If visitors persist in working the mechanical controls they can find new — that is, hitherto unnoticed — ones appearing; these will take the form of electrical switches, buttons, slides or dials, and even computer keyboards with video monitors. Some visitors may even recognize the control panel of a modern planetarium. These new controls can set the Orrery in any number of modes, depicting more obscure

ancient astronomical models or other cosmological paradigms, including those of cutting-edge physics. The Orrery can “zoom in” to show the surface features of any planet as seen from low orbit, or “zoom out” to show the local intergalactic community. Astronomic models can even be dispensed with entirely, replaced by grandiose visions of archaic creation myths or abstract mathematical models of the space-time continuum. Visitors may “rewind” to view the Big Bang, or “fast-forward” to explore such hypothetical possibilities as the “Big Crunch” or the thermodynamic heat-death of the universe. They may view both the origin and fate of the cosmos simultaneously as the opposite poles of an egg-shaped time-space continuum, as described by Stephen Hawking and others. The surface of such a continuum can be viewed as a Minkowski diagram, with space represented as the horizontal axis and time as the vertical; these diagrams can be rotated and expanded to examine the intersecting past-and-future light cones of quantum theory, or stretched and distorted to simulate time-warps, singularities and wormholes.

Every aspect of these cosmic simulations is customizable, allowing visitors to translate the unseen ends of the electromagnetic spectrum into the colors of visible light, or to convert images to a “photographic negative” mode that could illuminate dark matter. Natural law and universal constants can also be altered, changing the speed of light, the inverse square property of gravity, Planck’s constant and other aspects of any simulation; entering Mordehai Milgrom’s adjustments to Isaac Newton’s gravitational equations, for instance, renders the notion of dark matter unnecessary. The Orrery has a seemingly infinite “memory bank” of cosmological paradigms that includes everything from crackpot pseudoscience to primitive creation myths, along with all the most recent advances of modern astronomy and even more incomprehensible strangeness that has yet to be explored or classified. Some visitors have claimed to find detailed simulations of alien planets and star systems, for example. Excessive usage of the Orrery (as determined by the Storyteller) can have unexpected and even disastrous consequences, however. As the controls are manipulated more and more, they tend to grow stranger and increasingly difficult; projected holograms that must be spoken to or sung to, perplexing arrays of colored crystalline cylinders, plates, cones, spheres and polyhedra that must be rearranged precisely, and even organic consoles with flexible limbs, quivering knobs, nodules and orifices that are exceptionally sensitive to the slightest touch have all been reported, confounding all efforts to control the simulations. Furthermore, the simulations are sometimes projected upon the actual astral sky as seen from the Vulgate, causing widespread panic among the lands-without-substance and intellectual turmoil in the material world. The observatory at the Mouseion keeps detailed records of such instances, and its astronomers have learned to distinguish wild Epiphamic simulations from actual celestial upheavals.

**Boon:** Besides being the wet dream of everyone who ever enjoyed going to the planetarium, the Continuum Orrery is the perfect classroom and virtual playground for mages seeking to explore, understand and manipulate the universe at large. The Storyteller may reduce the learning time or even experience point cost for mages who use this Epiphany to increase their Cosmology, Occult or Science Abilities where specialties like astrology or astronomy are concerned. It is also a relatively safe environment for experimenting with Correspondence and Time magics; some mages have even learned to interchange the effects of these two Spheres, by understanding how distance can be defined as the amount of time it takes to cross, or how time can be defined as the durational space through which actions are played out. This interchange can be applied in limited circumstances (limited by the Storyteller, of course) to creating conjunctional effects where the mage knows one Sphere but not the other.

Another benefit of using the Continuum Orrery is the means to navigate many other Epiphamies through specific simulations. For instance, one can reach the Newtonian Epiphany by investigating the gravitational relationships of the planets, or by playing with the speed of light and space-time curvatures one can reach the Einsteinian Epiphany. Those attempting this must make a roll to represent the appropriate train of thought (in this instance, Intelligence + Science) that makes the connection. Also, Intelligence + Occult can be used to open a threshold to, say, the Fortress of Government in the constellation of Aries (associated with the Emperor trump of the Tarot), or the Well of Souls in Scorpio (corresponding to the Death card). Visitors who have passed through the Gate of Reason have the difficulty of Science rolls reduced by two, while those who passed through the Gate of Rhyme get the same modifier on Occult rolls used for this purpose.

Repeated visits to the Continuum Orrery can cause visitors to have a veridical (or “true”) hallucination upon their return to materiality, wherein they see the projected lines showing orbits and celestial coordinates in the night sky of the physical world. This can reduce the difficulty of making astronomical or astrological observations by four. These hallucinatory coordinates can become skewed during episodes of Quiet, however, and the sufferer may feel that the sky is a solid dome growing smaller and closing in around him. This is common enough to have become known as the “Chicken Little Syndrome.”

## NEWTONIAN MECHANICS AND EINSTEINIAN RELATIVITY

*“If you push something hard enough, it will fall over!” Fudd’s First Law of Opposition. How can we best illustrate the stubborn consistency of this eternal principle? By walking down this shady New England lane on Wednesday, 1875...*

— Firesign Theatre, *We’re All Bozos On This Bus*

These two closely related Epiphamies are described together here to show how certain Epiphamies can be “stacked” in Idea Space, with the “higher” one representing the completion of the intellectual work begun in the “lower” one. This is commonly found in Epiphamies heavily exploited by the Technocracy, whose scientific method demands a thorough understanding of basic fundamental principles before one may derive a higher order of theories from them. It can also be seen here how certain much-visited and widely known Epiphamies bear the imprint of the manner by which their concepts are usually explained to the world at large, taking the form of scenes, characters and actions that may or may not have existed and occurred in the history of the physical world. They can both be reached by activating their respective simulations in the Continuum Orrery. They can also be found cloaking the upper slopes of a cold, gray Spire whose base sits somewhere between the English and German branches of the River delta. (No High Umbral Court resides on this Spire, having abandoned it to the influence of the Technocracy long ago, but the collapsed shambles of oversized Viking structures can be seen near the summit. Most mages take these ruins to represent the loss of Asgard in a kind of Ragnarok — the replacement of the Nordic mythic age by the modern scientific-materialist paradigm. Some wags refer to it as the “Hangover After Valhalla.”)

The Epiphamy identified with and defined by Sir Isaac Newton always appears initially as a pleasantly bucolic apple orchard on a balmy spring afternoon. The figure of Newton himself appears as a young man dressed in 17th century garb sitting under one of the apple trees, scribbling in a large notebook. He will normally ignore the visitors, who seem to be invisible and immaterial to him, and eventually get up, go to his laboratory workshop not far from the orchard, and proceed to live out the major scenes of his life in a kind of time-accelerated or compressed documentary way. Visitors may look over his shoulder, both literally and figuratively, as he enacts all the major scientific discoveries and theoretical work attributed to him: purchasing a book on astrology just to see what it contains, buying a book on trigonometry to understand the celestial mathematics involved, acquiring Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* to understand the trigonometry, inventing differential calculus two years later, conducting experiments in physics and optics, meeting or corresponding with the other great minds of his day and writing all his classic scientific texts. Bodiless visitors may actually enter Newton's head and experience his thoughts as he lays the foundations of modern science. (Note that all events witnessed concern his scientific work exclusively; outside interests and personal details of his historical life do not appear.)

It is possible, however, to directly engage this Epiphamic Isaac Newton, causing him to see and interact with visitors, greeting them and conversing with them as though they were his university students or fellow scientists. When in this mode, he will respond to questions, explaining and demonstrating

his theories both by using the objects in his laboratory as he would have in life, and by altering the scenery and reality of the Epiphamy after the fashion of the Continuum Orrery. The way to engage Sir Isaac, to put him in the interactive mode, is both simple and terribly clichéd; it requires the impact of one of the apples from the orchard upon his head. The Storyteller may choose to do this automatically, dropping the apple from a tree when the visitors first enter the Epiphamy, and leaving them to figure out how to “activate” Newton on subsequent visits.

While beaming a revered intellectual authority with an apple might appeal to certain irreverent personalities, it is more difficult than it appears. The apples are props used by this Epiphamy to illustrate Newton's principles regarding motion and inertia, and thus do not behave as they would in the physical world. They are initially unaffected by gravity once they have been picked up, and their trajectory is not impeded by atmospheric resistance; when thrown, they travel in a straight line at a constant speed, until they collide with something else and ricochet in the same manner. Thus the difficulty for throwing one accurately starts at 10, but can quickly be reduced with practice. Furthermore, this property of the Epiphamic apples can change according to expectation, experiment and simple play; they may attract each other with a gravitational force specific only to themselves, rolling together on the ground or orbiting each other in mid-air, or colliding and rebounding with the mathematical precision of billiard balls. If already engaged, Newton can use the apples to demonstrate his laws of motion and gravity; otherwise, the Storyteller should let visitors figure out what is happening on their own, through experimental trial and error.

If the visitors allow Sir Isaac to live out his compressed professional life, they finally find themselves on a beach with him as an old man, while he picks up and examines various pebbles found among the sand. Some he tosses aside, others he puts in his pocket with a satisfied smile. If he is in interactive mode, he may present one pebble to the visitors, remarking on how smooth or pretty it is. At a suitably climactic moment, Newton skips a stone out across the waves. All visitors to the Epiphamy suddenly see the figure of Newton on the seashore zoom away from them and shrink into the distance as they find themselves standing (or mentally present) on top of the flat pebble as it bounces along the water's surface. Everything in Newton's Epiphamy is briefly visible as it all contracts into a shrinking reddish sphere that quickly disappears far behind the travelers. The sky and sea all around are dark; the skipping of the stone soon becomes less frequent and its motion harder to feel, as though it were hanging motionless in dark empty space. For a brief moment even the stone disappears from beneath the travelers' feet (or minds), and they find themselves in the Epiphamy called the Nihil for no more than three turns; then it reappears. (During these moments before and after the Nihil, the surface of the stone temporarily coexists with both the platform of the Continuum

Orrery and a darkened and silent World Stage; archetypal spirit guides and past experience can alert voyagers to the possibility of abandoning this passage between the Newtonian and Einsteinian Epiphamies and just staying in either Stage or Orrery.) Soon a new, bluish sphere of reality grows in the distance ahead and the stone plummets into it at a dizzying speed. Travelers may recognize it as a German country road before they drop out of the sky toward a longhaired boy riding a bicycle. The pebble bounces harmlessly but painfully off his head, causing him to stop, rub his head, drop the copy of Bernstein's *People's Book of Natural Science* he had under one arm, and avoid being run over by a speeding horse-drawn cart at the crossroads he had been approaching.

The visitors find themselves in the company of a young Albert Einstein, who gets back on his bike, pedals to school (where a teacher he pesters with questions yells at him), drops out of school, runs away to Italy, publishes the Special Theory of Relativity in 1905 and permanently changes the face of science forever afterward. Unless the visitors magically altered the path of the pebble before it struck the young Albert, or entered the Epiphany by some other route, Einstein will address them directly and respond to them in interactive mode, usually placing them in the roles of students in a German classroom and later in the lecture hall of a major European or American university. Here he writes formulae and diagrams on a blackboard that can expand surrealistically to encompass all of space and time, becoming a vast empty space occupied only by the visual representations of Einstein's lessons (along with Einstein himself and the visitors), but rendered with more clarity, precision and depth — not unlike the graphics used in modern science documentaries, and the simulations of the Continuum Orrery. Visitors may go completely outside of space-time to see its curvature and how it distorts around massive bodies like stars and planets, or they may shrink to subatomic size to examine the incredible energies contained in the smallest building blocks of nature. They may even ride on a photon and watch the classroom, countryside and surrounding universe contract into a tiny dot before their eyes, as it did in the passage from the Newtonian Epiphany.

The professor can also take the visiting students out of the classrooms and laboratories to demonstrate his theories using everyday scenes and objects to illustrate his points, altering certain aspects of reality to illustrate his points. He can reduce the effective velocity of light in these scenes to more easily imaginable speeds, like 40 kph, to show how the apparent movements and positions of passing bicycles and horse-drawn carts can change according to the inertial frame of reference of the observing visitors. Visitors may experience an increase in mass and find objects falling toward them if they get in a car and accelerate to 40 kph, or whatever light-speed has been established; they can also see how other cars approaching this speed seem to flatten into what may look like cardboard cutouts once they achieve this velocity.

Einstein can modify anything to make his demonstrations clearer, and can produce yardsticks, stopwatches and scales out of thin air, with admonitions that the visitors take their own measurements and do their own calculations to better understand his work.

The narrative thread of the Einsteinian Epiphany does not come to a clear end, as did Newton's, but branches out into other Epiphamies that represent aspects of the modern nuclear age; heavily weighted toward those scenes that grip the popular imagination, these can be quite grim, as visitors find themselves at or near ground zero in Alamogordo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or witness the causes and consequences of Three Mile Island or Chernobyl, or pass through the Apex of History (below) to wind up in a desolate wasteland gripped in global nuclear winter. While most visitors immediately try to find some way to exit these Epiphamies, those who have stayed claim that there are important lessons to be learned here about power and responsibility, lessons that can apply directly to any mage that has ever lived.

Like many other Epiphamies that use historical and cultural settings to express their concepts, these two bear the recognizable influence of the educational documentaries used to disseminate scientific knowledge among the public. Newton and Einstein as encountered here are not ghosts, or spirits that have taken on their personalities, but are pure Epiphamic representations of how these personages are most often portrayed to the majority of people. They always appear to be speaking in whatever language a visitor best understands, and can always find a suitable analogy or metaphor to best explain the most difficult concepts. Neither one will discuss personal autobiographical details, nor will they react emotionally to dumb questions, smartass comments or found objects pelted at them. Both can, however, with a snap of their fingers or the toss of a pebble, eject visitors who become particularly disruptive to the general documentary-narrative flow, or who voice some intent to abuse the Epiphany's knowledge for harmful or exploitive ends, as the Storyteller sees fit. Newton will not talk about his hermetic interests in alchemy or qabala, and Einstein will not expound upon his thoughts concerning religion and morality (except when "activated" and asked about these particular subjects by visitors who have passed through the Gate of Rhyme on their way to the Epiphamies). It is also possible to enter the Einsteinian Epiphany without the vehicle of the tossed pebble, by questioning Newton closely on subjects that connect the two, such as the actual speed of light or how gravity can act across empty space. One can return to Newton's Epiphany by asking Einstein to talk about Newton.

**Boon:** By their very nature, these "educational documentary" Epiphamies seek to instruct visitors in the fundamental principles they embody, so Storytellers can consider granting first-time visitors one dot of Science (specialty Physics, in

this case) free of experience point cost, providing they paid attention and participated in the educational process. Mages can gain insight into certain Spheres: Einstein can explain the relationship between Time and Correspondence, and how their magical effects can be interchanged, as described in the Continuum Orrery; both he and Newton can teach a similar relation between Forces and Matter, enabling a mage to change the properties of physical substances by manipulating the energies contained within them (electromagnetic charge, kinetic energy or inertia, etc.), or to alter the energies expressed through material objects by changing their physical properties (e.g., decreasing the mass of a bullet to lessen the force of its impact).

One may reach other Epiphamies regarding related subjects from these two, either by reading the personal journals found in Newton's laboratory or Einstein's classroom, or by traveling "off the map" — that is, away from the laboratory or the classroom — with the specific intention of finding contemporary scientists elsewhere in the world. (It is important to have a specific destination in mind, or you may "drop off the edge" of the Epiphany and fall into the astral sky over the Vulgate.) Epiphamies dealing with concepts that the general public is aware of usually have some kind of expository "mouthpiece," like the scientist who discovered or invented a concept explaining everything in plain talk. Those that have only ever been discussed among experts, or published only in technical periodicals, do not exhibit this "interactive educational" mode, however, and visitors must figure out for themselves, through experience and experiment, what the Epiphany represents. For instance, imagine dealing with Newton's apples or Einstein's surreal road traffic without having Newton or Einstein there to explain everything; this is actually often the case with return visits.

Visitors who passed through the Gate of Reason may reach other scientifically accepted Epiphamies, like those of Euclid, Kepler, Leibniz, Descartes or Huygens from among Newton's predecessors and contemporaries, for instance. Those who passed through the Gate of Rhyme can gain access to the scientists' "softer side," like Newton's occultism or Einstein's religion, as well as finding their way to obscure and seldom-visited Epiphamies of rejected and discounted scientific notions. These include, in Newton's case, the idea that gravity acts through helical or spring-shaped rays that "screw into" physical objects and pull them together with their rotary corkscrew motion, or that sight is accomplished by the eye internally generating and projecting its own invisible light rays that become visible when they bounce back to the eye. In Einstein's case, one such notion is that of the luminiferous ether, the history of which is already well documented by a certain Tradition, or quantum theory and its manifold interpretations and applications, which have since become an integral part of the prevailing scientific world-view even though Einstein himself found them intellectually and esthetically unsatisfying.

## MOTHERHOOD

*From the Bible to the popular song / there is one theme that we find all along: / of all ideals they hail as good, / the most sublime is motherhood.*

— Tom Lehrer, "Oedipus Rex"

Motherhood can be an Epiphany in itself, or a transition into another Epiphany, where all visitors have bodies whether they brought them or not. The threshold is always the same in either case; visitors find themselves curled up in a confined, dark, soft, wet space. (This can be especially uncomfortable and embarrassing for parties traveling together.) Patrons and Totems do not appear in this space, but may soon rejoin visitors on the outside. Immediately, the walls of this enclosure begin tightening and contracting in a rhythm that increases until they are forced through a narrow passage and out into a space that is too cold and bright by comparison. The visitors have the bodies of newborn infants and the experience recapitulates the details of their own birth(s) — along with whatever joys or traumas are attendant thereunto.... (A group of visitors may thus experience aspects of this Epiphany differently, but all have certain things in common and are "born" together as twins, triplets, etc.)

Naturally, the visitors are naked and wet, and it shall be left to the Storyteller to decide how graphically visceral to get during this "natal" phase. In cases where this is only the transition to another Epiphany, the visitors may grow into their adult bodies in mere seconds, and be clothed and re-equipped by Patrons or Totems acting as doctors, nurses or midwives. When Motherhood is an Epiphany unto itself, the actual experiential contents may vary, as visitors may grow more slowly, in spurts as it were, to recapitulate specific scenes from their childhood (or perhaps even someone else's childhood). Groups may experience these scenes individually, as non-interactive observers of each other's lives, or collectively as siblings whose recapitulations are a kind of amalgam of everyone's lives simultaneously. The one Epiphamic content common to everyone's experience would of course be the mother figure.

She is the focal point of the Epiphany, which reflects not only the purely biological relationship, but the entire psychological complex of the visitor, whatever it may be. The "physical" umbilical cord may be cut at birth, but the *Umbilicus Argentus* always leads back through the mother figure for the duration of the Epiphamic voyage. She always appears visually to each individual visitor as that individual's actual biological mother as she looked at the time of his or her birth. (This in itself can be a Boon of sorts to those who were orphaned or adopted or otherwise separated from their mothers at an early age, depending on the circumstances.) Her speech, mannerisms and behavior, however, will always reflect the strongest mother figure in the visitor's psyche — his biological mother, stepmother, adopted or foster mother, a nanny or frequent babysitter, that special kindergarten teacher,

or just the lady who ran the orphanage. (Psychologically, the mother complex need not be limited to older females; the figure may act like an older sibling, a single father, an especially beneficent employer, television characters, a drill sergeant or even an entire social institution like a church or government agency. Such cases are rare, though.)

The overall content of this Epiphany cannot be specified, since it reflects some of the most intimate details of each individual's life; the Storyteller must tailor the visit to the visitor. It may be comprised of warm fuzzy reminiscences of a happy childhood, a blandly pleasant but emotionally distanced upbringing, unending guilt over things that were never allowed to be forgotten, a torturous maze of neglect and abuse, or pure joy at the prospect of simply being alive. Whatever the case, few pass through this Epiphany unmoved or unchanged; sweet, bittersweet or sour, it embodies the very essence of the lives of everybody who was ever born. Visiting alone can be unbearable; visiting with a group can bind a cabal together in a way that no other shared experience can match. Accepting what the Epiphany of Motherhood has to offer can lead to the deepest catharsis ever, and usually leaves the visitor with an overwhelming desire to create — a child of one's own, a work of art, a profound social change, or the reintroduction of magic into the mundane world.

Rejecting this Epiphany leads to ejection, which takes a singular form: the entire perceived reality of the Epiphany contracts all around one and coalesces into a sharp bright point in the heart, leaving one alone on the World Stage, or in the Nihil, or somewhere up in the astral sky. The point moves from the heart down to the belly, causing it to swell. Labor pains set in with mounting intensity until, after what seems like hours, the Epiphany — now about the size of a cantaloupe — is expelled from the groin and disappears into Astral Space. All attendant bodily sensations are real and immediate and inescapable — the visitor is not fully ejected from the Epiphany until the Epiphany is ejected from the visitor. Some visitors may have had firsthand experience with this sort of thing; others, particularly those of a certain gender, may not take it very well.

**Boon:** The Boons of the Epiphany of Motherhood are cathartic, more concerned with roleplaying than game statistics (especially if the visitor's mother is still alive when he returns from the Umbra). An adventurous Storyteller might allow a visitor to change their Nature into something else, to reflect the profundity of the experience. For those who don't want to leave empty-handed, who gotta have a new dot on their sheet, there are some tenuous possibilities. Experience points may be spent to increase Attributes during the "birth" process. Those who passed through the Gate of Reason may learn the Science of genetics, as well as Medicine, by reading the surface of the birth caul; passing through the Gate of Rhyme enables mages to keep their cauls to use as a protective Talisman, giving them three extra dice to be used in any dice pools when their lives are in immediate danger. It is said that

passing through the Two Gates simultaneously and eating one's placenta while in the Epiphany of Motherhood grants Mastery of the Sphere of Life, but nobody has managed this. An adventurous Storyteller might allow a mage to change their Demeanor or even Nature, if story and roleplay warrant it.

Most of the other Epiphanies that can normally be reached through Motherhood are equally personal and intense, embodying relationships with other family members, friends, enemies and anyone else especially important to the traveler's life, or embodying significant life stages or trends like growing up, learning, rites of passage, major transformations of lifestyle or personality, traumas, triumphs, etc. Although individually personalized, they all represent things that everyone has to deal with in some way at some point in their lives. From this fact, some have speculated that Motherhood is the center of one half of an inclusive Epiphanic complex known in patriarchal terminology as the Universal Man, called Pan Gu by the Akashic Brotherhood and Adam Cadmon by qabalists. Despite the masculine appellations, qabalistic lore relates that Adam Cadmon was a sort of cosmic hermaphrodite, being female on one side and male on the other. The Epiphany of Motherhood is thus seen as the center of the female half. Studying the mythic anatomy of the Universal Man is part of the cosmological knowledge mages use when navigating the High Umbra; the parts of "his" body correspond to commonly shared aspects of the human experience.

## THE APEX OF HISTORY

*We will all go together when we go.*

— Tom Lehrer

Nearly every culture has its own version of the "End Times," the completion of the current temporal cycle in a scheme that usually involves the destruction and rebirth of the world. The various sentient species inhabiting the World of Darkness share this myth: vampires have Gehenna, werewolves the Apocalypse, wraiths Doomsday and changelings have the Long Winter. While mages may seek Ascension for all, their own individual quests may blind them to the paths that others may find, and conflict between them may bring about Ascension's opposite, a collective descent or fall that signals the end of the world (or, at least, of history as we know it). Throughout the Tellurian there is a general sense of a headlong rush toward some inescapable and unknowable climax, and even the most self-absorbed Sleeper can feel its approach. Some religions have passed their due dates and must amend their timetables. Political systems are reaching the limits of their power, economic systems are reaching the limits of resource distribution, and the planetary ecosystem is reaching the limit of how many people it can hold and still remain a going concern.

This Epiphany embodies all of that, in excruciating detail and vivid immediacy, placing visitors in the center of the action. Those who pass it tangentially receive only glimpses, broad visions of what the future holds in store. (These are,

of course, possibilities and probabilities, not fixed and immutable.) Those who enter directly may simply watch from the sidelines as bodiless observers, but only for a short while. Storytellers should present scenes familiar to the visitors — their cabal, their families and friends, their community — to draw them into the action and get them personally involved. As they start to take part in events, the visitors soon find themselves bodied, tangibly affected by what is going on around them and unable to leave the Epiphany even if they desire to disentangle themselves from the unfolding drama. From there the scope can broaden while time jumps ahead through scenes where the visitors find themselves embroiled in the fray of world events.

The apparent time frame is always the very near future, and the experiential world in which events take place is always recognizable as the same physical one that visitors left behind when they entered the Umbra. For the sake of convenience, this Epiphany may condense the entire world into a single central locale, normally a major population center that is representative of the whole planet earth in the same way that the cities of the Vulgate are representative of an entire culture. This “world city” can appear in other Epiphanies as well, an Epiphanic complex signifying that the visitors are always, in some sense, at the center of their universe insofar as they and the events surrounding them interrelate. It can be called the Universal City, and some try to identify it as the City of God, or Utopia — although it can have a Dystopian or purely mundane overall character, too — or even the New Jerusalem. (One school of thought suggests that, if Adam Cadmon can be identified and located at the center of the New Jerusalem, those who accomplish this may be gifted with a vision and understanding of how the One relates to the All, of how metaphysical unity exists at the center of phenomenal diversity, which the Ahl-i-Batin call the Iln Talaqin, or the Entelechy.)

While the end of the world can be condensed into a comprehensible form this way, everyone views it differently, with different expectations and reactions. The Traditions each have their own beliefs, and how the Apex of History manifests itself will conform to some degree to the general paradigms of every visitor, whether they have actually studied their Traditional eschatology or not. This Epiphany comes to its conclusion in a way that definitely invites a judgment of success or failure from the visitors, showing them how the Ascension or fall of the human race is a direct result of their actions in the physical world. What follows are brief descriptions of how each Tradition views the Apex of History and the positive or negative outcomes of involvement in it. The images may be applied as literally or metaphorically as the Storyteller feels is appropriate to the overall tone of his Chronicle. Every visitor will experience the Epiphany as it relates to his or her philosophy and to others present simultaneously; while

focusing on the visitors’ own particular versions, Storytellers may feel free to include elements from any Traditional views, superimposed together, on any given visit to this Epiphany. In other words, everything below all happens at once, but the magical training of each visitor enables him or her to act upon some aspect of the overall problem in a way that affects the collective outcome.

## AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

As materialist values pervade human culture, all human activity becomes a struggle to seize and secure material resources and comforts, causing violence to erupt on every possible scale — family members turn against one another, neighbors fight over petty issues, communities become warring mobs, cities isolate themselves from the surrounding country and nations engage in full-scale wars of conquest and retaliation. Rampant violence in the streets forces everyone into the fray on some level, to defend their own homes or simply themselves. Only those who have truly mastered their own hearts may be at peace with those around them, fighting only as necessary and in such a way as to cause a minimum of injury or death. The visitors must teach the methods of self-mastery and inner peace to those closest to them, while at the same time maintaining the vigilance and discipline to protect themselves and those who they can convince to follow their example against those who do not.

Success is achieved when others begin to see the harmony possible between individuals as a thing to be emulated, and spreads by example to the rest of the world. Humanity learns to live in accord with the true rhythms of life and conflicts may be settled without spreading violence to innocents or passing it on to the next generation. Deliberate cultivation of mental tranquility breaks down the egotistic barriers that prevented full cooperation between people, and the synergetic effect of all humanity acting together results in a truly harmonious and fruitful world society. Failure results in increasing escalation of violence as weapons of global destruction are deployed, culminating with the extinction of the human race.

## CELESTIAL CHORUS

The dogmatic disagreements of religions that share a common goal but are unable to pursue it in mutual tolerance has repercussions in the human soul. The rift between individual truth and collective truth opens a gateway to the darkness that underlies the light of divine consciousness, and the power of hatred hardens hearts against each other. In effect, the hordes of hell possess humanity and establish their domain on earth as everyone gives in to their suppressed fears and hatreds. Torment and insanity reign, save for those who can still perceive the inner light of the One.

Salvation is dependent on those whose souls are pure and free from hatred, giving them the spiritual strength to combat the darkness. The demons must be confronted and



shown for what they are, the denial of unity and the turning away from the light. People who are too far gone in their possession might need to be destroyed to prevent them from harming those who are not, but anyone who still desires the light may be given strength by the faith of the visitors. Miracles and displays of awesome magical power are not the primary weapon in this conflict, but when used in love and devotion they can certainly help. Ultimately, everyone can be united in communion, singing the Song of Creation in the Sacred City. Just casting the demons out of the world is not enough, though; the visitors must instill the virtues of brotherly love in those they save, so that their names cannot be used to restart an exclusionist religion of hate that will begin the cycle anew.

### CULT OF ECSTASY

Lame music, bad drugs and denial of pleasure lead to a stagnation of culture and prevent people from evolving into their full potential. The powers of social control seek to destroy the innate ability of humanity to step outside itself and shake off the woes of the world. By withholding the right to feel good even for a moment, they erode the soul with worry and boredom, turning the world into a hive of mindless robots. The conspiracy of bleakness must be identified, its conspirators exposed, the lockstep of soldiers interrupted with raw unbridled funk and a monkey wrench thrown into the gears of the machine that grinds the world into dust. It is up to the visitors to show the world the inherent value of letting go.

Success is achieved through loosening the constraints that propriety, respectability and dull necessity cast upon the soul, kindling the creative spark within the individual and inspiring to create alternative solutions to worldly problems. A garden of earthly paradise can be built and maintained with nourishment of the creative spirit, a flowerbed from which humanity might bloom into the worlds beyond the physical. The fall here is not just the failure to keep the population from being turned into automatons, however, but can also result when the party gains too much momentum and nobody wants to leave and re-enter the real world. Either way it is an end to progress in a world of zombies.

### DREAMSPEAKERS

Injury to the ecosystem and insults to the spirits of the old wilderness provoke violent reactions — natural disasters like storms, floods and earthquakes. Volcanoes erupt in defiance of those who make the earth their slave, while the polar ice caps weep, causing the seas to rise and reclaim the land, home of the exploiters and violators. Some may take action against those who pollute and plunder the bounty of the living earth, but the global society that indulges in this unrepentant excess casts them in the role of criminals. More is needed: the spirits must be approached in supplication, pleaded with for the opportunity that was wasted, and

human nature itself must be realigned to act in harmony with non-human nature.

Success here depends on a deep reprogramming of the human tendency to want to master nature rather than understand what it has to offer. Man must learn again how to listen to the wisdom of stone, tree and cloud, to treat the spirits of the earth as family rather than foe, so that the gash between the material and immaterial can heal. Harmony can be achieved even without a return to the pasture and the great hunt, but those who run the voracious machine eating the earth need to be shown the alternative to their suicidal appetites. Failure means ever-mounting cataclysms until the planet crushes and smothers the parasite called humanity in a massive elemental conflagration.

## EUTHANATOS

Everyone must die eventually, and as the current Yuga or cosmic cycle completes its revolution, everyone will die, one way or another. This cannot be prevented, but those who understand what it means to die can make the passage less painful. Famine, drought and disease not only cause the body to waste away, they drain the soul of the energy it requires to work at refining itself. Hungry and sick people are deprived of the chance to progress to a higher incarnation, and so have less chance of improving themselves in the next life. The great wheel always turns, but it must roll forward to have any meaning. Those who can ease the transition of suffering souls may help to usher in a bright new age, but failing to help the dying move on leaves the great wheel spinning in an endless cycle of despair and misery.

## ORDER OF HERITIES

Hiding in secrecy has always been the trademark of those who understand the use and manipulation of signs and symbols, but when secrets pile up even the most elaborate ciphers cannot hide them. The sins of the past return to claim the present as the leaders of the world turn to diabolism and vampirism to enforce their fading authority and enslave the populace they profess to serve. Kings become monsters and those who once taught them the secrets of power must now entrust their esoteric lore to the folk who shunned and despised them or become engulfed in the horror themselves. By revealing the tools and techniques of the highest magic to the world at large, new allies are gained and some balance can be restored. Success depends on making sure that the spread of occult power is accompanied by a moral caution to govern its use, lest the entire race fall to the lure of infernal power.

## SONS OF ETHER

The giant super-comet Mirzabah, the iron hammer, is returning from its 2000-year orbit, as prophesied in the *Kitab al-Alacir*, and is calculated to make its closest approach to Earth ever. A direct impact is a distinct possibility. The tools of the Technocracy, largely geared toward destruction

or social control, are of little help since blowing Mirzabah to pieces only increases the likelihood of planetary impacts. It is up to the practitioners of forbidden science to save the day; anti-gravitational engines and the transformation of the inherent properties of matter are needed. Even the raw substance of space's "empty vacuum" must be called back into existence in order to avert annihilation. Ascension in this case requires a wide-scale Consensual acceptance of marginalized paradigms and the backing of those with influence and resources. Failure means, at best, a global deluge as Mirzabah's tail sweeps across the atmosphere or, at worst, planetary obliteration.

## VERBENA

Disruption of the ecosystem is attended by an equally unbalanced deformation of the interior pulse of human life; genetic manipulation of food species and tampering with human DNA brings forth monsters. Within a single generation, the human race degenerates into weak and twisted mutants ruled by a eugenic elite that requires constant care and nourishment to maintain its physical superiority. Failure to restore the natural balance of life, both in the species and in the individual, leads to a world of H.G. Wells's Morlocks and Elohim, feeding off each other in an environment where biological diversity has been replaced by an incestuous polarity: a single type of predator feeding upon a single type of prey until the two closely related species devolve back into the primordial ooze. Success must come through diverting the dual trend of biological deprivation and genetic overstimulation, even if the current generation has to sacrifice its very lifeblood to divert the tide.

## VIRTUAL ADEPTS

The upward curve of technological progress reaches its asymptotic conclusion, as the sum total of information flow on the planet interconnects in complete media fusion and an intelligent nanovirus is released into the world at large, linking brain to brain in an involuntary world-wide web of the soul. Only those who understand the processes of the emergent synthetic consciousness can affect the shape it will take, leading it to a sane global Awakening. Failure stems from allowing the Technocratic control freaks to police the media web and program the workings of the nanovirus; the world then becomes their pet market of mind-controlled consumers to direct or erase as they will. Success lies in alerting individuals to their possible roles in the synthetic mental fusion to come, thus enabling them to protect their individuality within the virtual mass-mind. Ascension takes the form of physical and spiritual synergy wherein the principle of ecological diversity is mirrored in intellectual and creative diversity mediated by the instantaneous communication of thought, making it possible for humanity to exist on the planet with a minimal drain of its resources, the culmination of what Buckminster Fuller

called “ephemeralization,” or “doing more with less.” The zero-mass virtual environment ultimately merges with the forgotten spirit worlds, bypassing the Avatar Storm and enabling the human race to cross the Gauntlet by changing its mind with the flick of a mental switch.

## HOLLOW ONES

In this version of the Apex, the fall seems inevitable, as the accumulated cataclysms and psychosocial degeneration of the other versions come to pass without hope of prevention. Failure here is not the unsuccessful attempt at salvation, but the failure to act in any way at all. Ascension is not the ability to transform the world into a paradise of harmonious coexistence, but an acceptance of the fact of the fall without true hopelessness. Only those who have learned to dance amid the ruins of a once-proud race can keep any vestige of the human spirit alive. The Hollow Ones actually come full circle in this Epiphany, emerging as the culture-bearers in whatever is left of the human race after the end of history.

**Boon:** This Epiphany might be considered a true premonition of the future, but in truth it does not reveal anything that is not already foreseeable by anyone who has studied the past or simply thought about what awaits the world. For the most part, the lesson to be learned at the Apex of History is one of tolerance, communal harmony and social synergy, as the many-faceted Armageddon just around the corner must be dealt with by the entire human race acting in unity. The Technocracy and Marauders have their parts to play, not necessarily as villains, supplying necessary elements of order and chaos; even the Nephandi provide obstacles that ultimately strengthen the visitors who can overcome them. The many paths to Ascension all converge at this point, but must merge seamlessly to come out the other side. Any number of Epiphanies can intersect this one, but it is impossible to leave the Apex of History until it is completely played out. The Storyteller can mitigate degrees of failure; contributing to the fall by discord and strife can lead to a literal fall from the astral sky, but if a sufficient gleaning of the lesson of survival was gained amid the fall, the players in this eschatological drama might simply remove their masks and take their bows while the visitors are booed and hissed off the World Stage.

## THE NIHIL

*It's hard to imagine "nothing." Nothing. No thing. No me. No you. No world. Nothing! And that frightens me. I can't stand things that frighten me....*

— Ken Nordine, “Looks Like It’s Going To Rain”

This Epiphany, also called Nothingness, the Void, the Nether Zone and a host of other names, is feared by most mages, regarded as a necessary evil by some, and actually embraced by a rare few. It consists of empty, starless space, devoid of matter or any sort of boundary that can be determined. Bodied visitors find themselves floating, weightless as if in freefall, in whatever positions they were in whenever

they entered the Nihil. They can see and hear each other at first, although there is no apparent light source or air in which sound can travel. No atmosphere or even ether can be detected, although the decompression of being in a vacuum does not occur, and any trouble breathing would only be caused by the visitor’s own panic. Movement is only possible insofar as visitors are able to physically reach each other and pull themselves together or push each other away. Visitors who drift out of reach soon lose sight of each other and cannot hear each other, unless some kind of connection can be established first, whether physical, like a length of rope, or metaphysical, like a telepathic bond or some other Sphere usage. Once contact has been lost, however, it cannot be re-established until the traveling party emerges into another Epiphany or out of the Epiphanies altogether, into the astral sky.

The duration of a visit to the Nihil depends on the circumstances under which it was entered. Often it forms only a brief transition phase between other Epiphanies, as in the passage from the Newtonian to the Einsteinian Epiphany. When one falls into the Nihil after being ejected from another Epiphany, it can seem to last much longer, although even external astral time appears not to pass while one is in the Nihil, until one drops out of the astral sky. When questioned on these matters, spirit Patrons and masters of old usually skirt the issue by declaring “The Nihil lasts exactly as long as the Nihil lasts.” Umbral Patrons and Totems do not appear in the Nihil and cannot be contacted from within it, although they may rejoin their companions “on the other side” of it.

Whenever a visit to the Nihil lasts more than a few moments (subjectively speaking), a terrifying effect begins to set in. Simply put, the visitors start to disappear, from the outside inward. Companions gradually fade from view, even if they have not pushed away from each other; voices and other sounds fade as well, and even physical contact dissolves away. Visitors who have embraced each other find their partners disappearing from between their arms. For the traveler who has entered the Nihil alone, the next phase comes on more quickly: ephemeral equipment and carried items fade away in the same manner, followed by clothing, then any bodily alterations — piercings, tattoos, makeup, bionic limbs or organs, etc. Then the body itself starts to disappear, beginning with fingers and toes, then legs and arms, torso, and finally all sensations of the head and face are lost.

For bodiless visitors, all these bodily phenomena are a moot point, except when they are traveling with a party of companions. The sensations of the earliest phase of the Nihil are the same, in that embodied companions can be seen and heard, etc. Sphere magic can be used, however, to establish mental contact or otherwise affect each other in some way. There is little for Spheres to act upon in the Nihil, though, so magic can only affect that which the visitors brought into this Epiphany with them. Correspondence can only change the relative distance between visitors; Forces,

Life and Matter can only affect the visitors until their bodies disappear. Mind, Prime and Spirit can be used to sense or contact one's companions for a few moments after the bodies are gone, but fizzle shortly afterwards. **Telepathy** (Mind 3), for instance, can be used to maintain contact for a few moments after a companion drifts out of sight or fades into nothingness, but must have been established beforehand and cannot be re-established thereafter. Time might be used to shorten the subjective experience of passing through the Nihil, but for the most part the use of magic only serves to lengthen the Nihil's duration.

As to what happens next, accounts differ. Some claim to experience a loss of mental faculties — memories cannot be accessed, learned knowledge and skills cannot be used, the passage of time cannot be determined (even with Time 1 or the Time Sense Merit) and the ability to think about the future is lost. Others claim to have visions or hear voices; whether these are merely hallucinations or the intersection of other Epiphamies cannot be determined. Some few claim to have contacted — or been contacted by — permanently disembodied mages or even entities that do not appear to answer to descriptions of any known Umbrud or Epiphamic manifestations. Lore relates that one can escape this phase of the Nihil by creating a new Epiphany of one's own thought and reaching other Epiphamies by thinking about them. It is noted, however, that those who are known to have done this always find themselves back in the Nihil at some point later in their lives, whether on a subsequent Umbral voyage or as a dream, hallucination or manifestation of Quiet.

Sphere magic may be used to do this, but to make one's own Epiphany real enough to connect to others, it is necessary to accumulate at least 20 successes on a roll of Intelligence + any Knowledge Ability — provided one can explain to the Storyteller — briefly — how that particular Knowledge is supposed to make the new Epiphany intellectually coherent in relation to another known Epiphany that one has not been ejected from already. The Storyteller bases the difficulty on how much sense the explanation makes, if any. Anything that was lost to the Nihil — equipment, clothing, limbs — is not regained except by returning to the Nihil and completing one's original trajectory through it. All traveling companions eventually reach the new Epiphany, however, even if they did not participate in its creation and were lost to the Void. Totems can always find their way to the new Epiphany, but Patrons may not know where to look for their filials.

Fortunately for those who are just passing through, the entire process of disappearance reverses itself eventually, although at the same pace of its onset. Everything that was lost is gradually regained, with the possible exception of things like faith, sanity, peace of mind, etc. Those who have sought out the Nihil as a destination in and of itself have never been heard from again.

**Boon:** If there is any real Boon to be gained from the Nihil, it has yet to be determined with certainty. Some

may acquire or increase the Arcane Background after prolonged or repeated visits; others might get a reduction of certain types of Resonance, or even of permanent Paradox without suffering a Paradox Flaw. As always, it is up to the Storyteller.

## THE WELL OF REMEMBRANCE

*He knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on the 30th of April, 1882, and could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks on a book in Spanish binding he had only seen once and with the outlines of the foam raised by an oar in the Rio Negro the night before the Quebracho uprising... He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day. He told me: "I alone have more memories than all mankind has probably had since the world has been the world."*

— Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes the Memorios"

The Well of Remembrance appears as a small stone-walled well with a crude wooden winch built over it to raise a rusty bucket on a length of frayed twine. Visitors may hear echoes from within, sounds and voices that they may recognize from their personal past. The winch must be operated with great care, as its wooden frame is rotting away and the twine seems barely able to hold the weight of a full bucket. The bucket itself leaks, and may only contain enough water for a single sip by the time it has been drawn within reach. The bucket may be repaired with magic, but every other aspect of the Well cannot be changed, although the winch can still break from stress. It may be situated atop a deserted hill (usually for those who have passed through the Gate of Reason) or at the center of a secluded glade (usually for those who passed through the Gate of Rhyme), depending on how and by what paths it has been approached. The Well can also appear, in a "portable" form, in other Epiphamies, as a big iron cauldron or other large container, always looking very old and solid, like something crafted in ancient times; its true Epiphamic nature may not be apparent in such instances, however.

Drinking the water from the Well of Remembrance suffuses the present moment with an overwhelming sense of déjà vu and endows the imbiber with a perfect total recall of her entire life up to that moment. Every event, every conversation, every stray thought and forgotten dream can be remembered with absolute clarity. Each moment of childhood and even prenatal memories back to the moment of conception can be recalled in detail. Blocked or suppressed memories also emerge, driven by all the psychic force that was used in their suppression; this alone can unhinge the sanity of many, and so spirit guides usually advise caution when bringing astral voyagers to the Well. The effect only lasts as long as the water is inside the body, fading soon after being urinated out. Bodiless visitors can get the same effect

by immersing their mind-point in the water; the effect then lasts for the rest of the current Scene.

By immersing herself in the Well, a mage can gain access to the memory of the entire world, the sum total of everything experienced by everyone who ever lived. Once submerged, the visitor is barraged with variations of her own memories showing events she witnessed or participated in, but seen from different viewpoints as others would remember them. (The Storyteller may require a Wits + Meditation roll at this point, just for the submersed mage to orient herself and grasp what it is that she is experiencing.) The mage can see herself as others have seen her, which can be a life-changing experience in itself. The memories of family, friends, brief acquaintances and even passing strangers might be identified by their point of view, and the mage can experience the memories of anyone she recognizes by swimming in their direction. In essence, every point underwater represents the accumulated recollections of everyone that has ever lived, with those still living occupying the surface of the water and the dead stretching away beneath; everyone is connected by shared memories, those things they did or saw together and time spent in each other's company. Everything in the Well is seen through a purely subjective lens, as it appears in the memory of one person, but shared memories can be viewed through a number of different individual perspectives.

By swimming slowly and carefully, the mage can follow the web of shared memories from person to person into the past; moving laterally along the surface can, if the Storyteller permits, grant the swimmer glimpses into recent events of the material world. (Perception + Meditation, difficulty 8, to identify memory impressions and follow connections between shared memories.) Moving too suddenly or swimming too fast can completely disorient the swimmer, as she moves recklessly into the memories of people she has never met, composed of events she does not recognize in places she has never been. In theory, it is possible to see and hear the entire history of the world while in the Well, although each viewpoint is skewed slightly, with details perceived differently and personal concerns coloring everything. Diving into the depths takes one further into the past, until the water becomes muddy with pre-human animal memories that can only be made sense of by animal spirit guides, or someone who has recently drunk from the source of the River of Language. Plunging down past this level causes the swimmer to emerge in the Epiphany called the Well of Souls.

**Boon:** A sip of water from the Well of Remembrance grants the drinker complete and perfect recollection of all his memories, including those that were suppressed or otherwise lost to the unconscious. Memories that were blocked or removed through cerebral injury, drugs, brainwashing or Mind magic cannot automatically be recovered, but the gap that they occupied in remembered time will be plain, as are the side effects and incidental psychic mechanisms left

over by whatever caused the memory loss. Drinking from the Well repeatedly may, if the Storyteller allows, endow the drinker with the Merit: Eidetic Memory; abuse of this property, however, can affect the mind's ability to function properly in the present moment, as massive associative networks crowd in upon the consciousness, wherein everything that comes to one's attention reminds one of everything that has ever occupied the attention. Borges's short story "Funes the Memorious" illustrates in detail how this state can manifest itself.

For bodied visitors who wish to go into the Well, the mouth of the Well is less than three feet across, and the stones of its walls are irregular and rough-hewn, so climbing down into it is fairly easy — only a difficulty of 4 on a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Only one person can fit inside the Well shaft at a time, however, and at least 10 successes must be accumulated before the water level is reached, some 30-40 feet down. Diving straight in is not recommended, as this is likely to result in numerous fractures and loss of consciousness from concussion before hitting the water. Once submerged in the Well, divers who did not pass through the Two Gates can only access the sensory content of the individual memories within — what was actually seen, heard, felt, etc. Those who passed through the Gate of Reason may access the remembered thoughts of individuals as well as perceptions; those who passed through the Gate of Rhyme can access remembered feelings and emotional content in addition to perceptions.

## THE WELL OF SOULS

*Here Comes Everybody...*

— James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*

This Epiphany appears as it always has, strangely unaffected by the Reckoning or the ever-changing fashions of Consensual belief. Its threshold is a long underground passage, the walls marked with signs left by previous visitors — sigils, runes, graffiti in every language ever written, all dating back to earliest antiquity; as one nears the Well, the more elaborate markings give way to cave paintings and simple handprints. The light at the end of this passage comes from the Well of Souls itself, an immense swirling column of raw Prime with the true faces of every being that has ever achieved consciousness flowing across its surface, rising from broad subterranean ocean at the center of a cavern vast beyond imagining. Voices fill the air with utterances made during moments of self-realization, and ambient magical energy crackles and drifts all around, sometimes forcing bodied visitors to their knees from the sheer, overwhelming shock of just being present, causing their throats to tighten, their hearts to skip a beat and their hair to stand on end. Bodiless visitors can be swept up in the overall flow of Prime, separating them from their companions, making them lose their bearings and leaving them unable to distinguish the cave mouth through which they entered from the innumerable other openings to the cavern.



A prolonged visit to this Epiphany can cause all visitors, bodied and bodiless alike, to begin taking on the appearance of their Avatars (baring their naked souls, so to speak), an effect which does not always wear off by the time they travel from here to other Epiphanies. Dark secrets can be revealed in this way, as even cabal mates may not necessarily know each other's true forms, and mages may learn more about themselves as their inner Essences are disclosed. Within the Well, the Avatars of those who have passed from life may recognize friends or rivals among the currently incarnate visitors, and call out for them to enter the Well to strike up old relationships or rejoin old conflicts. It is said that one must never actually enter the Well of Souls, however, for to do so would automatically end one's present incarnation and set one to restart the cycle of life as an entirely new creature, probably without any memory at all of this life.

**Boon:** When it can be reached at all, the Well of Souls can serve as a virtually inexhaustible Node during Epiphanic excursions, but meditating to channel its ambient Quintessence can accelerate the manifestation of the Avatar and attract the attention of un-incarnate Avatars within the Well. The waters of the subterranean ocean at the base of the Well is said to be highly potent Tass, but getting to them can be difficult; the visitors' own entrance may be far from the actual shoreline, which is usually at the bottom of a steep, wet cliff with waves crashing violently at the bottom. Conversing

with those inside the Well itself can lead to the recovery of memories from a Past Life (see sidebar). A daring Storyteller might actually allow a mage to change her Essence while visiting the Well of Souls, reflecting a profound transformation of the Avatar itself, but this is very extreme, and should only be used as the climax of a major Story integral to the entire Chronicle.

The various caves that open into the Well's cavern can be used to reach other Epiphanies (and may even contain portals to other parts of the Umbra), but they are many, the distances between them are vast, and it is impossible to tell where they lead except by reading the markings found within each. (Storytellers should remember that the most primitive markings are closest to the Well, so it may be necessary to go deep into any given cave tunnel before a traveler can even guess where it leads.)

## THE FORTRESS OF GOVERNMENT

*Politics is the entertainment branch of Business.*

— Frank Zappa

Considered by some to be another “fallen Epiphany,” like the River of Language, the Fortress of Government now seems to be situated in the Vulgate, though occupying many places simultaneously. Once widely acknowledged as the

## NEW BACKGROUND: PAST LIFE

*Now you take one look at my television face, and you got to know I didn't get all these miles on my puss in one lifetime. So you got to get hip to the fact that I'm a reincarnated cat...*

— Lord Buckley

This is the same as the **Werewolf** Background: Past Life, but represents the influence from previous incarnations of a mage's Avatar rather than ancestral memory. Its game effect is essentially the same: once per game session (or per Story), the mage can roll her Past Life Background (difficulty 8, or 10 if trying to contact a specific incarnation). Each success adds one die to the Dice Pool of any Ability or can create a Dice Pool for an Ability the mage does not possess. The Storyteller may impose some limits, however, if he chooses to treat the cycle of reincarnation as a chronologically historical progression; i.e., the mage may not add to an Ability to do something that was discovered or developed during her present lifetime. Computer usage and most current Science or Technology, which came into fruition during the current generation in modern times, are the most obvious examples; those who lived in older historical periods would have no working knowledge of such things. To balance this, the Storyteller might reduce the difficulty for mages trying to boost a more "primitive" Ability like Alertness, Brawl or Survival. This Background might even provide access to Occult lore that has been lost to the modern era.

Through repeated exercise of the Past Life Background during meditation, a mage can distinguish between and learn to recognize individual incarnations, possibly even gaining specific historical, social and geographical information regarding faraway places and times long past. Some

cabals whose members share this Background have found that their Avatars were associated with each other during previous incarnations — not always as friends. Having a gaming group with this Background in common opens up possibilities for roleplaying troupes in historical settings as subplot material.

A botch on the Past Life roll may indicate that the mage was unable to understand the memories being accessed or was overwhelmed by the sheer mass of old information, culture shock or experiences that do not translate well into modern terms. Worse yet, it may mean that the mage has been possessed by the personality of a previous incarnation who does not have the same motivations, values or moral codes as the current mage. In general, the effects of this Background last only for one Scene, but the Storyteller may decide otherwise. (Possession, for instance, can give the Storyteller something to do with characters when their players do not show up for the game....)

Successes	Effect
1	You get hazy flashes of scenes from the past.
2	Faces, places and things appear long enough or often enough to be studied or recognized.
3	You can identify individual incarnations — who they were, when and where they lived.
4	You can access thoughts and memories from several past lives.
5	You remember details from a large number of previous incarnations; their personae may speak to you when triggered by something in your present-day experiences.

virtual paragon of civilization, the force that solidifies and stabilizes society, government has come to be viewed by many as a figurehead propped up by self-interested power-mongers to divert the collective will of the populace, an outright conspiracy of control for its own sake. In their eyes, the Fortress no longer stands for protection of the people, but to protect those within *from* the people. Modern notions of leadership and rule have been tinged with paranoia and cynicism, and this, like all notions, is explicitly and graphically reflected in Astral Space. But the traditional exemplars of wise and just administration on a large scale are not yet completely absent; like most other things in the High Umbra, it is simply a matter of how (and, with regard to the Vulgate, when) it is approached.

It might be more correct to describe the Fortress as an Epiphany with its roots in the Vulgate; government as an abstraction can be a vehicle for the noblest of ideals, but it cannot exist without being grounded in concrete reality. The Fortress can be seen from nearly every branch of the River

of Language, upon whose flow it depends for the exercise of power. It presents a culturally and historically appropriate face to each branch, like elaborate façades arrayed around a common center. Though usually first seen from a distance, it is actually seldom more than a day's walk away, unless one ventures inland into primitive or lawless territories, and cannot be seen at all from the Spirit Wilds. Its oldest face resembles a massive ziggurat overlooking the early Hamito-Semitic branch of the delta; its newest face is a domed structure built in a Greco-Roman Revivalist style not far from the modern American coast. Elsewhere, it may appear as a sprawling, ornate palace amid lush gardens, a crude stone keep on a lonesome hilltop, or stately town hall of understated provincial architecture. The older faces are often indistinguishable from ancient temples. In every instance its tallest point — be it a dome, tower, minaret, architectural spire or even just a lightning rod — will be lost in the clouds above. It is this point that is seen when the Fortress is approached from the Epiphamic clouds, its exact appearance to be determined by

the predominant cultural bias of the one seeking it (or of a traveling group's leader).

If entering from above via the Fortress's Epiphamic point, the visitor has a special perspective on everything to be seen within, as though she were walking on an upper-story floor made of glass, able to look down into the halls and rooms without actually entering them — unless she specifically chooses to do so. If entered from the Vulgate, however, this higher level cannot be reached, even by magical means, and nothing can be seen overhead but a conventional ceiling. Because of this, the Fortress can be used as a quick and dirty way to re-enter the Vulgate from the Epiphamies, provided its highest point can be found. But it only works one way; climbing to the top of the Fortress does not bring one to the level of the Epiphamies, the way climbing a Spire would. There is no easy access from the Vulgate to the Epiphamies here.

Beyond the Vulgatic entrance of each face lies a reception area of corresponding size and style, with a number of corridors stretching away into the interior. Following any one of these corridors will quickly get one lost in the labyrinthine bowels of the Fortress, as the local architectural style gives way to undecorated halls built of a smooth, gray indeterminate substance. Some sections may have doors placed at regular or irregular intervals while others may be completely featureless. Occasionally a window may afford a view of a small, well-manicured, enclosed courtyard, but no door leads out to it.

Some of the doors along the corridors are labeled, usually in print too small to read unless one gets close enough to open them. Many simply lead to other corridors that connect to entrances elsewhere on the River delta; these can be guessed at according to the language of the door's label. Most are offices or office suites of widely varying sizes and styles, giving the impression of a vast, intricate and highly compartmentalized bureaucracy. Not all offices follow the modern bureaucratic model, however; as one nears the entrances to older areas of the delta, more archaic forms tend to take over. Certain offices may have a distinctly monarchic air to them, like a long, tapestried hall with an official occupying an elevated throne at the far end. A few others have a religious tone, with high, vaulted arches where air rich and milky from incense vibrates with echoes of choirs and bells as slanted shafts of light illuminate the official behind the altar. (These would be the stations of Vulgatic Managers and Bishops from the Left and Right Branches, respectively, of Umbrood Society as delineated by Balt and Machado in **The Book of Madness**.) In the modern regions, however, it is the business-like atmosphere that prevails, with governing spirits — mostly Monsignors, Technicians and Accountants, as spirit ranks are reckoned — working in bland cubicles amid a vast swamp of paperwork not yet replaced with computers and electronic media. Points of contact with the Digital Web do actually

exist, but they are very few, with access heavily restricted and closely supervised.

Navigating these Corridors of Power is nigh impossible using conventional means like taking notes, drawing maps or consulting etheric compasses. The Fortress works on its own internal logic, and once one has entered at the Vulgatic level there is very little to do but play out the game of bureaucratic runaround on its own terms. This is not to say that the maze is impossible to run, though. Knowledges like Law, Investigation and even Academics can help make sense of the endless interconnecting offices, and Talents like Leadership, Intimidation and Subterfuge can be employed to secure the service of some functionary spirit to act as guide.

Ultimately, a successful navigation of the Fortress can lead one to the great meeting room at its center. Built like a gigantic circular theater with concentric rows of large leather chairs and fine wood-paneled walls in an Anglo-European style, it seats up to a thousand but only a tenth of these are ever in use at any given time. Here the Managers and Bishops confer and argue over how the lands of the Vulgate are to be administered. The powerful archetypes of the upper realms seldom manifest to take part in such "worldly" affairs; the rare occasion on which they do appear usually signals some overwhelming societal upheaval with catastrophic consequences in both the Vulgate and the material world. (A mage who "drops in" from the Epiphamic level could well be mistaken for such and will be received accordingly — usually with panic and hostility.)

Relations between the linguistically defined delta regions closely mirror how the corresponding nations relate in the material world, even to the point where the spirits involved take on the faces, voices and mannerisms of current (and past) leaders of the physical world. Because of the numinous nature of astral reality, the deceptive veneer of respectability that coats politics on the material plane is all but gone; hidden agendas are openly — but discreetly — discussed, conspiratorial activity is tacitly acknowledged, and the underlying assumptions and prejudices of those in power are plain to all who would scrutinize them. This is not the cynic's view of power as an inherently corrupt activity, but simply the tools of statecraft seen without the usual whitewash. They can be likened to the carpenter's hammer and surgeon's scalpel, whose potential to help or harm depends on the user. This doesn't mean that there is any less intrigue afoot in the Vulgate, but that with it all being closer to the surface, an outsider is more likely to get caught up in it.

Aside from the echoes of current affairs from the material plane, most political activity in the Fortress concerns rebuilding damage from the Avatar Storm, which destroyed a great deal of Vulgatic property during the Reckoning. The work has been hampered by a lack of ephemeral building materials, and the modern coastal regions have taken to plundering the older inland areas (and less-developed modern

areas) for resources. The ancient spirits of the delta sources, embodiments of living history, have seen their ancestral lands despoiled by the voracious appetites of the present day and are banding together in protest. Tempers flare regularly as the archaic elders are driven to histrionics by the more numerous smooth-talking moderns, who claim that the “inland primitives” are using their crude technologies and magics to combat the “rebuilders” (i.e., loggers and miners who are invading the old lands). The Vulgate stands on the brink of open warfare between the past and the present, with the inland regions seeking alliances with the Spirit Wilds and calling upon the old gods for aid. Visiting mages will be watched, questioned about their allegiances, and courted or challenged by each faction depending on their response. The governing spirits will show no interest in the material world, and refuse to accept neutrality as an answer.

If approached from the Vulgate during the day, the Fortress is bustling with activity, receptionists are polite and helpful, bureaucratic procedures are explained fully by those who facilitate them, access to working officials can be gained with relative ease, and the officials themselves speak directly and honestly, as if they genuinely expect to be held accountable for their words and deeds. Remember that all this is not just a front; this is Government acting in the best interests of its constituents, to the best of its ability, as people generally believe it should act. In the light of day, that is. By night, on the other hand, the entrances are closed, even barred against forcible entry, and the corridors are deserted save for furtively slinking functionaries who try their best to avoid outsiders rather than deal with anyone directly. If cornered and confronted, these lesser spirits are shifty and evasive, telling people whatever they seem to want to hear and then scurrying away at the first chance they get. The higher officials, if they can be reached at all, are arrogant, callous and duplicitous, gathering in inaccessible back rooms to plot and scheme. They will tell lies boldly and eloquently, cheat and steal to acquire whatever wealth or items of power the visiting characters might be carrying, and then have the visitors ejected or arrested for trespassing on Government property at night. (Because there are so few windows in the Fortress, those who have entered from the Vulgate may not be aware if and when the Government has switched from one mode to the other....)

“What possible use could such a place be?” the visiting mage may well ask. Because every style of actual world government is represented among the various departmental offices of the Fortress, with governing spirits who act just as current (and historical) world leaders would, any sort of political action can be simulated and tested before being employed on the material plane, where the consequences of any action are irrevocable. This can, of course, be a time-consuming process that requires constant monitoring and interpretation. Results that manifest by day may be considered best-case scenarios; those observed at night are worst-case examples.

**Boon (Vulgatic):** If the political game is played successfully, if a suitable governor can be found and dealt with, if proper respect is shown to Low Managers and true piety displayed before Bishops, the supplicant may be granted possession of a special Talisman known as a “Writ of Authority.” This Talisman is activated by spending a Willpower point and casts a Mind 2 **Mental Impulse** effect, causing all who see it to regard the bearer as if she were a duly authorized or higher-ranking member of whatever organization the viewer is most strongly affiliated with, or as a member of a more highly placed group that can exercise control over the viewer’s own. The Writ only works within the context of hierarchical organizations with well-defined rules of authority, like governments, enforcement agencies, large businesses and organized religious establishments. The effect can be used any number of times within a single chapter once it has been shown — not necessarily the same chapter during which it was granted — and only with respect to one single organization or type of jurisdiction at a time. In other words, the bearer cannot claim to be a government inspector, an undercover police officer AND the chairman of the board’s assistant to the same group of people at once, or to hold different such positions to the same individual at different times. Once used, it loses its power at the end of the chapter.

The Writ of Authority usually takes the form of a scroll when first granted in the Fortress; afterwards it may appear in whatever form is appropriate — an ID card, a badge, or a legal document. Being an effect of the Mind Sphere, it only works on thinking creatures, and will not act as an electronic key or swipe-card or affect any sort of automated security system. (Storytellers may require an additional Correspondence 2 Effect to show the Writ to a live observer on the other end of a security camera, or to get someone on a telephone or intercom to accept a fictitious ID or badge number.) In some circumstances, the bearer may need to say something to activate the Writ’s Effect; this may be explicit (“I outrank you!”) or implied (“You don’t want to piss off your boss by refusing me, do you...?”). In other cases this may not be necessary; flashing the Writ at a gate-keeping guard is enough to get the bearer a wave-through, provided that is standard procedure.

Storytellers should note that the Mind Effect is not one of absolute behavioral control. If it is shown to rebellious types, traitors, moles and disgruntled employees, they will believe the bearer to be whoever she claims to be, but will still act according to their true nature, and disobey, betray or harangue the bearer as they normally would.

**Boon (Epiphamic):** When approached via the Gate of Reason, the Fortress offers an excellent opportunity to learn through observation such Abilities as Leadership and Law, or the means to build up one’s Influence background on the physical plane. Those who approached through the Gate of Rhyme may learn Intimidation, Etiquette and Subterfuge in

the same manner, or can find unexpected Allies of high rank when they re-enter the physical world. All trait increases should be determined by the Storyteller to reflect what actually happened in the Epiphany. Goddesses, Muses and gods of Justice, Intrigue or Thieves that can be convinced of the justness of a mage's cause may show her how to obtain a Wonder called the Key to the City, which acts like an immaterial Writ of Authority (see above), deluxe version. This Key has no physical component in the material world,

but can materialize whatever form is required with an Arete roll from the wielder. Matter, Forces and Correspondence Effects are incorporated, enabling the Key to operate on automated and electronic identification devices. Visitors to the Epiphany who did not encounter the High Umbral Courts and pass through the Two Gates cannot learn Abilities as those who did, but have the same opportunity to increase their Background traits and may be able to find the Key to the City if they are aware of its existence.



# CHAPTER FOUR: BEYOND THE HORIZON

## INFINITE RAPTURE, INFINITE DANGER



Earth is vibrant with life. Billions of humans inhabit its surface in the physical world. Beyond the Gauntlet, dozens of dimensions exist outside human perception, populated with countless spirits, concepts, and ephemera. Each of the other planets in our solar system casts a shadow into the spirit world, but not one of them has a presence as extensive as the extradimensional hierarchy surrounding our own. Earth's spirit worlds reflect mankind's hopes, dreams, and nightmares. Yet as more mages travel beyond the Horizon, the number of realms on other worlds steadily increases. Anything you seek can be found there — and once you find it, you may never come back.

### CROSSING THE FIRST HORIZON

A sphere of spiritual energy surrounds the Earth, dividing its relatively predictable reality from the mysteries of deep space. Historians know that the Cloudships of the Dark Fantastic Age couldn't cross this boundary without opposing powerful paradoxical forces. To some, it's a mystical barrier barring acolytes who aspire to leave the Earth. From

the First Horizon to the Asteroid Belt, seas of roiling ether carry light, heat, and souls. Travel through this dimension is remarkably like travel through the Near Umbra, but with a few significant changes.

### CELESTIAL MECHANICS: GENERAL RULES

**Magic in Etherspace:** In Etherspace, all magic is coincidental; the standard difficulty is Arete + 3. In general, you cannot accumulate Paradox in space. Botched rolls, on the other hand, can still cause an Effect to backfire.

**Flaws:** Old Paradox Flaws disappear when you enter the Horizon, then reappear when you return to Earth.

**Optional Rule:** When a mage is hit with a Paradox Backlash in the Horizon, taking a Paradox Flaw shouldn't be a viable option. Most are written to be relative to Earthly reality, after all. When you're surrounded by a kingdom of telepathic dinosaurs, who cares if your skin is blue, or if your watch is running backwards? To adjust for this, picking up Quiet outside Earth's reality should be as easy as picking up Flaws within it.

The most insidious types of Quiet correspond to the local reality of the realm. These either force the mage to

conform to or believe in the local reality (“I must make a sacrifice to the volcano god,”) or make him insane enough to defy local reality (“I am Bob Smith, Prophet of Kansas, and I have arrived to destroy your volcano god!”). The easiest way to introduce this mechanic is to write each delusion from Quiet on an index card; the Storyteller can then give out one card for each point of Paradox Backlash. Failing to carry out the delusion may result in not earning experience for the session, or even worse, retaining the Paradox when the mage leaves the realm.

## THE ETHER

The sea of ether drifting between worlds doesn’t just conduct light and heat — it’s a medium for magic. Miniscule quantities of raw Quintessence waft on etheric currents, allowing magical creatures and creations to soar through it. In centuries past, Bygone creatures could actually sustain themselves by breathing ether, creating fantastic ecosystems in the spiritual reflection of space. Awakened mages can also adapt to this rarefied environment, but only with practice.

Many Tradition mages can actually “breathe” ether after performing a few simple rituals. Most Technocrats can’t without proper equipment or genetic modifications. Decades ago, forcing a mage outside an ethership’s “airlock” was considered a test of whether a mage was a Traditionalist or Technocrat. Now it’s about as effective a technique as testing a woman for witchcraft by throwing her in a lake to see if she drowns. The boundary between the two philosophies isn’t as strictly defined anymore, if it was ever true to begin with. Breathing ether takes some practice; unprepared travelers usually only have one chance to discover whether they have a talent for it.

**System:** Surviving in ether doesn’t require any one particular Sphere; instead, it requires an Arete roll (difficulty 6). The first time a mage is cast into the etheric sea, if he thinks he can breathe ether, he can attempt this feat. (Some hidebound Technocrats found the idea ridiculous, and thus never tried it.) With three successes, the mage can breathe for one scene; with two successes, he breathes for one minute; with one success, he breathes for one round; on a botch, he immediately begins to suffocate. After this time, he can attempt to hold his breath, using the Suffocation rules in the core rulebook. A mage who makes five successes on this Arete roll never has to attempt to breathe in ether again; he can do it for the duration of a story by rolling one success on an Arete roll.

## CELESTIAL MECHANICS: NAVIGATING ETHERSPACE

The nine planets once had portals linking them to the “real world,” or at least corresponding to places along the First Horizon. In the last millennium, crossing over to one of these dimensions required complex rituals, particular circumstances, or a simple willingness to enter. The Avatar

Storm has eliminated this last option, as the shortcuts to other dimensions have been lost.

Instead, a mage can reach Mercury, Venus, or Mars by traveling through Etherspace (that is, the ether that permeates the True Horizon). The simplest approach begins with crossing the First Horizon. If a cabal is assisted by a powerful Spirit mage (Spirit 5, usually with the **Break the Dreamshell** Effect), it can enter the mists of luminiferous ether that drift between these “inferior” planets. The Arete roll that follows is called an *anchorhead roll*; normally, it’s against difficulty 8. Crossing the First Horizon at an anchorhead requires five successes; crossing without an anchorhead requires 10 (usually an extended or communal attempt) or more.

Fewer than five successes on an anchorhead roll ensures that passage through the First Horizon either takes longer (a month or two), attracts the interest of powerful spirits (like Lunes), or hurls the mage back into the Near Umbra, towards a destination corresponding to his mindset. For instance, an Akashic Brother wanting to find the Shade Realm of Forces on Mars to perfect his martial skills may be cast down into a realm where the ghosts of wrathful mages perpetually fight the Ascension War, or where ancient mages dabble in certámen wizards’ duels. On a botch, this new destination might actually be a Paradox Realm.

At the conclusion of a successful ritual and anchorhead roll, the mages must set a course for their destination with a *navigation roll* (usually Wits + Cosmology). When seeking a Shade Realm, a mage who knows its corresponding Sphere can make an Arete roll instead. Three successes are required, plus one for each additional traveler; communal or extended rolls are allowed. A roll with one or two successes hurls the spiritual travelers at a hazard or encounter (see the *Etheric Hazards* sidebar for examples).

At the Storyteller’s option, a mage may attempt an Arete roll to reach one of the “inferior planets” instead; three successes are required. As a general guideline, reaching Luna is difficulty 6; Mars or Venus is difficulty 7; Mercury is difficulty 8. If you’re using Wits + Cosmology, the same difficulties apply.

A mage traveling through Etherspace soars in a straight line at a constant speed unless acted upon by something else.

## THE MOONLESS NIGHT

Perhaps the greatest danger of extensive travel beyond the Horizon comes from the absence of the moon — it can no longer be seen (or, when it can, its phases relative to Earth are no longer clear), and hence, its cycles can no longer be used to keep accurate count of how much time passes in the material world.

A conjunctional Correspondence 1, Spirit 1 perception Effect may allow the mage to plant a magical eye just within the Horizon, focused on the moon, but he better get a lot of successes to apply to distance and duration.

Changing your velocity requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower, which is immediately followed by another navigation roll. Losing all your Willpower in the ether may make it much easier for something else to find *you*.

## GREAT RISKS, GREAT REWARDS

Crossing the First Horizon requires a command of Spirit 5, but even then, the dangers on distant worlds may challenge the mightiest mages. If a hero wants to quest to the furthest reaches of the cosmos, the Storyteller should reward such idealism. In bygone ages, mages dwelling on the Horizon created powerful Wonders to aid their ambitions; in the modern age, legends may launch epic quests to find them. Although the greatest Masters and Oracles have disappeared, some have become ephemeral. These still have knowledge to impart, whether it's forgotten lore, ancient rituals, or even rites that can only be practiced outside of terrestrial reality.

Mages who confirm the survival of legendary people and places also gain a reputation within their Tradition. Some contemporaries offer aid, or even boons, for heroes

who prove themselves on such quests. And for Spirit mages enlightened enough to walk between worlds, there are spirits just as powerful as they are. Some can be coerced to act as familiars, companions, or allies, if only temporarily. Many have Spirit Charms that allow them to materialize in the physical world for an hour, a day, or even a year. Danger is only one part of a quest to the Horizon; remembering to reward heroes who survive it with more than mere experience points is a hallmark of good Storytelling.

The sorts of Boons that might be awarded Beyond the Horizon differ from those in Astral Space or other parts of the Umbra in that they tend to be more metaphysical in nature — insightful clues into the workings of one or more Spheres are usually the most common. Delving deeply into these distant Realms, however, is far more dangerous than places within the shell of the Horizon, for their laws are often unfathomable to even the most learned and wise Masters and Oracles — indeed, one of the reasons Oracles are said to roam these spaces is because no other region still offers them the same degree of unsolved mysteries.

# OTHER WORLDS



Outside the astral reaches, beyond the First Horizon, a few realms exist that only mages can enter. More elaborate dimensions are isolated within the True Horizon. More mythical realms are located on the inner planets (that is, Mercury, Venus, and Mars); deadlier realms are hidden within the spiritual reflection of the Asteroid Belt, the Far Horizon. Once, traveling to these alternate realities was easy, even routine, but the Reckoning has destroyed or redirected all paths, shortcuts, portals, and escape routes. Such worlds are once again capricious, mysterious and deadly.

Throughout the last century, the Horizon Realms served as an escape from reality. Ancient Masters found refuge in dimensions created in epic rituals or encountered far from Earth. Now many of those places are dying, dead, or completely forgotten. Most lay in ruins, or are fading away. Even in places that once served to inspire great joy, a taint of sadness prevails. Shadows lengthen as the crimson light of Anthelios permeates the Otherworlds.

There's a good reason why Earth doesn't look the same as it did centuries ago: magic has been steadily fading from the world. In ages when mythical creatures existed (like dragons and sea serpents), their survival depended on a steady flow of Quintessence. As the rift between the realms of spirit and flesh increased, and the wellsprings of magical energy dried up, those impossible creatures were starved for primal energy. In the wake of the Avatar Storm, the slow death of Horizon Realms is remarkably similar. Impossible places are fading away. Attribute it to mankind's apathy, if you will,

or blame it on the Technocrats, if you must — either way, their degeneration cannot be denied.

In the last century, dozens of Horizon Realms served as relatively permanent places in the Umbra. To build one, a master magus would need a massive amount of Quintessence, a link to a Node on Earth that could supply even more, and usually a portal for bringing more materials up from Earth. Without that portal, Node, or influx of Quintessence, isolation in a Realm dependent on the creator's ego was a sure route to insanity or magical Quiet. Modern Horizon Realms have become lost civilizations: they may be encountered fleetingly, usually by accident, before fading away again. Finding the Balador Pleasure Dome, or Verbena Seasonal Realms, doesn't depend on fixed geography or predictable methods. Times have changed, and the very nature of time has changed.

Which Horizon Realms remain depends entirely on the opinion of the Storyteller. Brace yourself for a shocking concept: The Horizon Realms that exist in one chronicle do not need to be the same as the realms encountered in another. *They are now entirely optional*, like the "house rules" you may choose to use for your own home campaign. Add in phenomena like Paradox Backlashes, Quiet, and Mirror Zones, and the concept is a bit more palatable. A mage may *think* he's been to the Balador Pleasure Dome, but there's no way to prove it outside his own tales and experience.

Two Horizon Realms are presented below to serve as examples of what lies in wait. A few explorers have reported sightings of Victoria Station and the Hollow Worlds, but no one has found a permanent route to either one. Both

can act as way stations to farther Umbral journeys, but there's no reason for any two mages to encounter them in quite the same way — or encounter them at all.

**Reality Theses:** When the Void Engineers explore these kinds of worlds, they often attempt to assign a Reality Thesis to the local variants of magic, clarifying the boundary between what is commonplace (or coincidental) and what is impossible (or vulgar). In the same spirit, each Horizon Realm should at least have a Reality Thesis of its own, acting as the guiding principle of willworking in that domain. Interpreting it is at the discretion of the Storyteller; it's a guideline defining the difference between coincidental and vulgar magic there.

## VICTORIA STATION

Before the Avatar Storm, a chunk of marble orbited Luna on the Horizon. On one side, a surface as cratered as the moon harbored numerous etherships awaiting refueling and departure. On the other, a 19th-century railway terminal feted the ship's crews and passengers with Victorian gentility. A neo-baroque edifice of marble, glass, and steel stood as a refuge for spiritual travelers, a way station for all points beyond. Its copper dome gleamed a brilliant shade of turquoise, a shining landmark set

amidst a neatly manicured landscape of pruned trees and elaborate topiary sculptures.

Twentieth-century mages learning to traverse the etheric seas typically reached Victoria Station by powerful spirit magic or Umbral craft. Enough spacecraft had traveled there over the last century that the routes were quite established. Sons of Ether would brave a tame gauntlet of Void Engineer satellites to rub shoulders with others headed for the Deep Umbra. Now its location is peripatetic at best, serving more as a destination for the historically curious than a point of departure. The local spirits have heard that the Technocracy has won the Ascension War, but steadfastly refuse to believe it. Most live in the past, denying that the Victorian Age ever really ended. After all, if Lord Ruthven's Union had really succeeded, one would at least expect the trains and etherships scheduled for departure to leave on time.

**Thesis:** In Victoria Station, Victorian technomagic and ethership technology is coincidental. The cutting edge of technology roughly corresponds to the science of the 1930s; anything beyond that point is vulgar. Magic that is considered vulgar on Victorian Earth is also vulgar in this realm — magic is best performed as though the mage was surrounded by the Britishers of London in the 1890s.



## BACKGROUND

In 1871, the Etheric Engineers found a paragon of entrepreneurial spirit. An Englishman named Steven Lawrence Robertson sank a fortune into the creation of his Trans-Spatial Railroad, a monumental effort to link the world by tunnels and spirit gates. Awakened conductors operated the first trains to depart from the station. Robertson hoped that if they traveled the route enough times, making the impossible a little more possible each time, world travel would become commonplace.

In the physical world, the land for the station was kept in a London warehouse. On the other side of the Gauntlet, an elaborate brick-and-spider-web building isolated spirit travelers from the hazards of the surrounding Penumbra. With each journey, the wards around the building thickened — perhaps inviting the chaos that followed.

Victoria Station's first spirit train, *The Spirit of DaVinci*, met with misfortune on its 13th voyage. Perhaps it took a wrong turn, or maybe one of the spirit gates shepherded it into another dimension. Some say portions of the train are now trapped within the Dark Umbra, as part of a ghost train doomed to travel through entropic realms forever. After this catastrophe, the warehouse containing the physical land for the station was sealed under lock and key, kept by the executors of Robertson's will.

Yet in the true spirit of the Victorian Age, a temporary setback of defeat was answered with a resounding and effervescent burst of renewed enthusiasm. Within a month of the train's disappearance, an eccentric Etherite living in New York City established a foundation for the pursuit of Lunar travel, the documenting of such voyages, and the quest to find the remains of *The Spirit of DaVinci*. The self-appointed president of this society was none other than Captain Horatio Savage, a legend in his own mind and a visionary ahead of his time.

In 1893, Captain Savage was ready to hurl himself into the heavens in a patented "Vernwell" rocket constructed from scrap iron and aluminum. Under cloak of secrecy (and Arcane countermeasures), Savage conquered the Lunar surface for the first time... but at a terrible price. His spacecraft was torn asunder by "etheric stresses," barely managing a miraculous landing in the Gobi Desert. Upon his return, he fabricated a story of an "etheric Charybdis and Scylla tearing the very moon apart and casting our poor vessel down to Earth." A probe named *Raptus* was swiftly dispatched to confirm this tale, but it immediately suffered a similar fate, shredded by etheric winds before spiraling into a fiery cataclysm in the remote taiga of Russia.

For many years, Savage said nothing of how he managed to survive this journey and return to his drawing room in Victorian Gotham. Every account he gave ended with his crash landing on the moon and the fanciful creatures he saw there, failing to explain how he ever returned. Because of

this mystery, Electrodyne Engineers refused to fund further expeditions organized by Savage's society over the next year. Savage responded by conclusively proving through the sighting mechanism of an etheric interferometer that a huge chunk of the Lunar surface was now orbiting the moon. A noted Etheric Theosophical society attempted to blame the event on "Lunar faeries," but various technomagical societies quickly suppressed such rumors.

In the pages of an obscure publication named *Paradigma*, Savage announced a second expedition, this time to the "island of the moon" trapped in the Lunar ether. Although he had become a subject of ridicule, his reputation was salvaged by his collaboration with a man named Professor Dubrius, the inventor of a marvelous new contraption called the Oxygen Engine. In one of the most curious social affairs known to the magical and para-scientific world, Savage offered a safe haven to any inventor who could devise a method of following him. This was swiftly followed by the promise of an honorary membership in the Savage Society to any Electrodyne Engineer who could achieve this challenge before the end of the century.

When Big Ben tolled midnight at the dawn of the 20th century, 42 men and women toasted him on the Lunar fragment. They were amazed to see what he had seen: a simulacrum of Robertson's Victoria Station adrift in space. The Savage Society immediately dedicated itself to the station's reconstruction. When the Electrodyne Engineers first "defected" to the Traditions, the Savage Society became an exclusive order. Anyone who accomplished Savage's challenge was welcomed with honorary membership, but in later years, anyone Savage recognized as one of the "Sons of Ether" was also welcome.

The traditions of Victorian gentility and enthusiasm remained on the Lunar fragment for years, like an explorer's society cast adrift in time. In fact, many of its most esteemed members came to consider the quaint environs of this "Victoria Station" to be their real home, following the tales of travelers passing through with an interest that far exceeded the tame scandals of war and suffering related from the so-called "real world" below.

After the Reckoning, many of the inhabitants became ephemeral remnants of the Victorian Age. These ghosts of the station's happier days are thoroughly Victorian in dress and attitude, and completely oblivious to recent events on Earth. On any given "day," newspapers are for sale at the station, but they concern historical events of the past, untroubled by the complexities of the modern age. Over the massive doors of the station's entryway, four words have been chiseled for Umbral eternity: *Pax Brittania Ad Infinitum*.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

Surrounded by a roiling sea of ether, cloaked in mist and steam, a Victorian train station rests in pristine condition on a massive chunk of Lunar terrain. The underside

of this etheric island looks suspiciously like the surface of the moon, or more precisely, like a plaster cast of a moon crater. Up to 13 etherships are docked there at any given time, with more drifting through the misty “skies” above.

On both sides of this cosmological curiosity, mists cast a perpetual gray pall. A beautiful sunset is visible in the “west” (if such a term may be used), while in the “east,” the eternal sunrise of Anthelios casts a crimson glare across the landscape. The station is surrounded with an artificial atmosphere. Bubbles of smoke and steam occasionally drift into Etherspace. A spirit gauntlet further separates the atmosphere of the station from the surrounding sea of ether. (Crossing it requires Spirit 3, usually three successes on an Arete roll against difficulty 4.)

The landscape surrounding the station looks as pristine as the terrain of a child’s railway set, complete with manicured lawns and trees. A few farm animals wander the grounds, although an astute observer may notice the more cultivated spirits enact the exact same behaviors from day to day. Along the outer boundary of this Umbral train set, one can see a ring of warehouses, presumably filled with “lost luggage” and rusty replacement parts. Now forgotten, they are slowly becoming less luminous.

In a curiously mixed metaphor, the front steps of the train station lead to a long walkway resembling a wooden pier. Small craft and large etherships can dock at this jetty, allowing passengers to disembark. Wanderers using Spirit magic or flight may alight on the landing as well. At the end of the pier, massive marble steps lead up to a titanic set of 10-foot-tall doors bound in brass, with grotesque gargoyle knockers.

As the doors open, a departure gong resounds throughout the station. Beyond the doors, fabulous works of Victorian architecture extend in rococo excess. A massive empty hall awaits Awakened guests. Its two-story-tall atrium resembles a church nave, but has served as a ballroom on many occasions. When Horatio Savage toasted the first members of his exploration society here on the dawn of the 20th century, he ensured its place in magical history.

The dozens of doors nearby once led to restaurants, kitchens, and libraries, but the corridors are now choked with misty apparitions. An etheric fog is inexorably encroaching on the asteroid, and it has since drifted into the building. In any of these corridors, one can hear the laborious churning of the station’s largest Oxygen Engine. When it too disappears into the Mists, a sea of ether will presumably overwhelm everything within this little bubble. A swirling spiral staircase is one of the few areas unaffected by the encroaching “fog of war.” It leads to an observation dome through which one can view Earth, Luna, and Etherspace. The gradual influx of Paradox in this realm has distorted the telescope’s view: when one turns it upon Earth’s landscape, the surface resembles the geopolitical terrain of the Victorian Age.

Wherever visitors may wander, a beautiful, barefoot woman in a flowing dress greets them, appearing as an anachronistic vision worthy of Maxfield Parrish. She usually offers to lead her guests a spacious lounge with plush chairs and a massive fireplace. Here one may find oil paintings of famous Etherites, a billiard table, humidors of cigars, percolators of coffee, a massive Indian rug, a library of Victorian fact and fiction, and a gigantic stuffed tiger. If any of these items are removed from the realm, they fade away like cigar smoke.

In this drawing room, Savage’s secret society conducted its esteemed meetings. Nine spirits still inhabit this room, appearing as shades of Victorian travelers. Each one represents a different nationality. They tell stories like the inhabitants of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, as if waiting for the arrival of a train that will never come. Outside this room, the few remaining acolytes and attendants scurry to speed the passengers on their way. They don’t want to hear about “recent” developments on Earth; instead, they act as though the “wind could pick up at any minute,” a local euphemism for another assault from roving Avatar Storms. Many fear that guests who stay for too long will summon Umbral storms against the station — and the fear has some basis in fact.

Travelers don’t so much board a train here as summon it, with the help of the three current inhabitants of the platform and the visitors in the lounge. The most effective method is telling a story of an Umbral journey one of the mages present has undertaken. Failing that, a tale of travels on Earth will suffice, although the inhabitants will be thoroughly dense in understanding any bit of technology, politics, or similar temporal references since 1893. The oldest passenger here was once a Master of Spirit, and he is still capable of performing the rote required to summon one of 13 etherships to the station.

A network of walkways leads to the terminus where etherships and railway engines arrive and depart. Noisy Oxygen Engines are visible at various points, chugging away to drive back smoke with gusts of fresh air. Robotic porters endlessly ferry luggage, sometimes (it would seem) to give the illusion that the station is busier than it actually is. The platform has four points of departure, each ending in cast-iron girders, wooden planks, and railroad ties stretching off into the mists. Someday, perhaps, the inhabitants of Victoria station will board the last departing train here, never to return. The oldest inhabitant, Professor Dubrius, fears that one day *The Spirit of DaVinci* will return, heralding the final dissolution of Victoria Station.

## ECOLOGY

Nothing lives in Victoria Station, save for a few mice and pigeons (or more precisely, Mouse Gafflings and Pigeon Jagglings). The inhabitants are all ephemeral or mechanical, reenacting the events of previous eras like clockwork. Three of the most notable inhabitants have become permanent

## CONVERTING DISEMBODED IMAGES TO SPIRITS

Any mage who remains in physical form in the Umbra — including the Horizon — for three months risks Disembodiment (see Chapter One). The same fate has befallen mages who have remained in the Horizon for years before the Reckoning. Many Storytellers will no doubt prefer to make a mage's ephemeral Traits the same as his material Traits. For most stories, this should work just fine.

If you're crossing over this book with other World of Darkness games, however, you'll want to convert to Spirit Traits. See the *Spirit Traits* sidebar in Chapter Three, p. 70 Use the following hints when converting:

**Willpower:** Depending on the style of story you tell, you can total the number of dice in the character's best attack, or add his Dexterity to his Wits (his base modifier for initiative), or simply list the character's permanent Willpower.

**Rage:** Figure the number of damage dice used in the character's deadliest attack. For instance, if a mage with Strength 3 commonly uses a broadsword that inflicts Strength +2 damage, his Rage is 5. Note that if a character's best attack involved a firearm, that attack may not work in his new realm.

**Gnosis:** Choose one dice pool that best summarizes the character's capacity to deal with mysteries in the spirit world, then total the number of dice in that pool. Perception + Cosmology and Wits + Enigmas are two common choices. Optionally, you may decide to list the character's Arete rating instead.

**Essence:** As with most spirits, total Willpower, Rage and Gnosis to get the mage's Essence rating. Ancient, unaging mages may have slightly more. By the way, one of the worst effects of becoming ephemeral is an inability to soak damage with Stamina. The distinction between bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage becomes irrelevant.

Here's the bad news: A mage who becomes a spirit loses much of his ability to perform dynamic magic. Instead, he can cast a limited number of rites from one of his Spheres as **Sphere Charms**. When converting a mage to a spirit, write down the "rites" the character uses most often for his most useful Sphere. The rating for that Sphere becomes the rating for the spirit's "Sphere Charms." The number of rites he can convert to Sphere Charms is the same as that Sphere rating; thus, a character with Mind

2 could have two "Mind Charms." If the character had a favorite Effect he used repeatedly, his conversion would be a good time to give that "rote" a name and write it down.

### USING SPHERE CHARMS

More precisely, Sphere Charms are spiritual abilities usable by mages who have become disembodied and are now spirits. Disembodied mages no longer have Arete or proper Spheres, but the knowledge of these Spheres is incorporated into their natures. As spirits, they must now work within their natures — they are not as mutable or have as much free will as mages. For ease of rules use, Sphere Charms are given a level roughly conversant with actual Sphere level, and they allow the spirit to mimic many of the Effects possible with real Spheres. They work like rites, however — preset rituals performed by the spirit to evoke magic. The mage is no longer manipulating the base reality of the universe so much as tapping into a deep resonance with the Spheres.

Disembodied mages who have permanently become spirits no longer have Avatars, but it is unclear whether the Avatar is loosed to incarnate in different material bodies or merges with the new spirit such that its Essence is no longer detectable.

Sphere Charms have a few additional limitations. The spirit cannot directly affect things outside its current Realm (although it can observe them). It cannot perform vulgar magic (at least as it is defined by that Realm's reality), and it cannot use Spirit magic to permanently alter his own Traits or those of other spirits in the Realm (thus, it cannot use magic to change back into a mage).

**Example:** A Cultist of Ecstasy named Cheshire is now trapped in the Balador Pleasure Dome (after hearing last call at the bar, he decided to stay). His traits convert like this (including the three optional traits described above):

*Willpower* 5: He never put extra points into Willpower (which may explain why he's trapped in Balador).

*Rage* 4: The sword cane he carries inflicted 4 dice of damage.

*Gnosis* 7: He had seven dice in Perception + Cosmology.

*Essence* 7: A typical mage has seven Health Levels.

*Time Charms* 3: The spirit can perform three rites, so the Storyteller decides to choose three Time Effects from the core rulebook. None can have a rating higher than 3.

residents. 13 gentlemen greet them each morning from the Society's drawing room. 33 acolytes scurry about on errands requested by what's left of the realm's Awakened inhabitants.

### Professor Dubrius

Professor Dubrius perpetually wanders the corridors, directing consors and acolytes on various errands. He's known

as the inventor of the Oxygen Engine, and he may be able to repair or even equip an ethership in need of "life support." The crews of visiting etherships may consult with Dubrius about various destinations across the Horizon, but much of his information is woefully out of date. He claims he can leave at any time, but does not want to, since he has "retired" from

his tiresome conflict with “Lord Ruthven’s Union.” He will not allow any ethership to remain with crew for more than a month. Ships here for more than three months are cast adrift, where they wander the mists within the asteroid’s protective bubble of atmosphere.

Willpower 7, Rage 3, Gnosis 8, Essence 18

**Charms:** Matter Charms 3 (Fragments of Dream, Straw into Gold, Sculpture)

### **Margrave Luftwelle III**

Margrave Karl-Werner Luftwelle III is a masterful card player, but possibly insane. He dresses as an Old World hussar. A master of transdimensional communications, he sometimes receives distress calls and dispatches etherships. Although his command of magic isn’t what it used to be, he was almost a master of Correspondence when he was trapped here forever. He can contact any ethership in the Near Umbra by radiophone (as one of his Correspondence Charms); his remaining magical feats involve his skill at cards and love of his telescope.

Willpower 6, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Essence 19

**Charms:** Correspondence Charms 4 (Contact Ethership, Correspondence Sensing, Chain, Bubble of Reality)

### **UrrRe’ok**

UrrRe’ok is an expert in the history of etherships. She has an office with many fanciful drawings of such craft, and she remembers all of the ships that have been abandoned here. No one looks askance at her, despite the fact that she is a sentient, bipedal protoceratops (complete with three horns) who communicates telepathically in English, German, and French. She dines every night on ephemeral pigeon.

Rage 6, Gnosis 5, Willpower 5, Essence 8

**Charms:** Mind Charms 3 (Mind Empowerment, Psychic Impression, Probe Thoughts)

## THE HOLLOW WORLDS

Atlantis, Lemuria, Shangri-la, the Lost World — Earth’s history is filled with legends of lost civilizations, places buried under the sea, hidden under the Earth, or lurking just beyond lost horizons. When a legend is repeated long enough, it comes alive. In the Horizon, these legends have taken form, crafted from ephemera and shaped by imagination. If these places were merely concepts, some scholars muse, they would be represented in astral space, but within the Horizon, they are actually living, thriving testimonies to lost civilizations. One extensive Otherworld connects them all through an elaborate network of subterranean tunnels: the Hollow Worlds.

According some Sons of Ether, the Hollow Worlds are like a second Penumbra, not above the Earth, but below it. The easiest way to reach this dimension is by accident, like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. In the wake of great storms, most of the reliable entrances leading to subterranean kingdoms are now sealed. Etherites are quick to blame the Void Engineers for actively closing many of them, but the

only proof they can provide is that Technocrats still seem to patrol these areas. Stranger entrances exist: the calderas of remote volcanoes, thermal vents in the ocean, and even a few (heavily guarded) elevators in the world’s largest cities. Unknown to most cosmologists, the tunnels of Innerspace actually lead to outer space, forming unstable pockets of reality along the First Horizon.

Networks of subterranean tunnels and caverns connect disparate realms, forming an area of “Innerspace” accessible only to masters of Matter, Spirit, and Dimensional Science. A few scant decades ago, Etherites documented that a traveler could burrow from one side of the planet to the other — from Chicago to China, or Berlin to Bolivia — by spelunking, caving, and crawling through Innerspace. Countless tunnels have since collapsed, and Innerspace is no longer the subterranean spiritual shortcut it used to be. Haunting evidence suggests that the former inhabitants of certain lost civilizations are attempting to escape to the surface world, perhaps prodded by an inhuman menace that threatens all mankind. Would you dare descend into such an abyss? Seekers after horror would risk all they hold dear to unearth such secrets....

**Thesis:** Reality here is based in the pulp science of 1930s fiction. Wondrous feats of technology are possible, and psychic abilities run rampant. Occasionally, a lost civilization will have its own approach to obvious magic, but these feats are based on Sphere Charms, not dynamic magic.

## BACKGROUND

Behold the two-fisted, hot-blooded world of the 1930s! Bursting with action and adventure, the Thirties were a golden age for the Sons of Ether. In an era of heroes, the acme of adventure was Doc Eon, the charismatic leader of the Terrific Trio. Together, they would go anywhere, fight anyone, and do anything in the all-important pursuit of science. Eon garnished a fortune from extensive archeological discoveries in South America, where gold was abundant and danger lurked in every occulted corridor. For years, he failed to understand the origin of his propensity for discovering precious metals: a latent command of magic (including Correspondence, Matter, and Time). In later years, Doc Eon demonstrated a remarkable talent for unearthing the impossible. Until his final showdown with Nephandic forces in World War II, Doc Eon would oppose many manifestations of evil, including those hidden in lost worlds.

Throughout millennia, the Awakened and the Aware have stumbled upon subterranean civilizations, briefly encountering evidence of their existence before spiritual mists roiled in to obscure them again. Yet Eon is credited with discovering the network of Innerspace that extends beneath the Earth’s surface. While questing for the mythical realm of Agartha, he became the first outsider to explore its surrounding Umbrascape. Diligently, he chronicled an ever-evolving geography as his mastery of the Spirit Sphere grew. With the help of Joe “Lucky Skunk” Ross, Frank “Bull” Barrett,

and Simon “Sesquipedalian” Smith, he later constructed the *Malfean*, a behemoth cast-iron subterranean digging apparatus that allowed him to explore darkness beneath the Earth.

The torpid world of ordinary men and women was unprepared for the spectacular discoveries that followed. Doc Eon wanted to liberate mankind from its conventional interpretations of geography, but Joe “Lucky Skunk” Ross, as his personal lawyer and adventuring companion, rewrote Eon’s journals as a serialized narrative published in the cheap dime-novel format of the day. Little did Doc realize that a small society of Sons of Ether suspected that the tales were true — and aspired to follow in his tank-tracks. After using their Awakened insight to deduce the subtle clues Ross had hidden within the document for the Enlightened, the race was on to explore Innerspace. Etherites and kindred thrillseekers began conquering a new frontier!

Through countless expeditions, the Sons of Ether reinforced the supernatural pathways beneath the Earth’s surface, but a curious phenomenon plagued them. Although the entrances they found to Innerspace were reliable, the lost civilizations Doc Eon wrote about were never encountered in the same way twice. “Subumbral” mists constantly shifted to obfuscate their true locations, a subterfuge only the most adept spiritualists and scientists could conquer. By the mid-1930s, scientists had only discovered two reliable entrances into the Innerworld. These, the largest means of entrance and egress, lay at the North and South Pole: the “holes at the poles.” Visionaries like Poe and Lovecraft had composed tales of lost civilizations in Antarctic realms. Had they glimpsed the future, or had the zeal of the Etherite societies brought them to life? Regardless, the clearest escape from the poverty and suffering of a world wracked by the Great Depression lay beneath mankind’s very feet.

Then, in 1938, a most remarkable realm of Innerspace revealed itself: the Hollow Earth. Ordinary men live on the outer circumference of the Earth, but unknown to human history, another *innerworld* was thriving on the *inner circumference of the Earth*! And at the heart of Innerspace, in the center of the planet, *another sun casts its perpetual light on a perfectly spherical universe*! Teams of Etherite explorers delving in this “Inner Earth” made contact with a primitive tribe of degenerate half-men who worshiped a star at the heart of their universe — an inner sun called the “Smoking God” — as the bringer of life. Imagine! Here was one of the most momentous discoveries in the history of Awakened exploration!

But as World War loomed on the horizon, high weirdness claimed the innocent realm. Throughout its untold supernatural history, emissaries of mankind had survived brief encounters with subterranean refugees: Atlantean exiles, Agarthan monks, cast-outs from Shangri-la, and stranger para-evolutionary specimens. Within days of mankind’s discovery of this Inner Earth, another degenerate tribe declared war on the surface dwellers. The sinister tribe’s weapons of war were



not mere spears and stones, but formidable psychic powers developed after millennia of parallel evolution. Dwarflike creatures had hidden from the surface world since the dawn of time, using their mastery of Mind to erase all traces of their existence.

The much-neglected visionary writer, Richard Shaver, had chronicled his encounters with a race of this kind in the pages of another pulp magazine: *Amazing Stories*. The educated reader (or at least, the educated Etherite) is no doubt familiar with his tales of Titans in the Earth, the Atlans, whose empires rose and fell beneath the surface. Beneath our very feet, detrimental robots, known as the *dero*, schemed against mankind. Set against them were humanity's allies, the integrative robots called *tero* who worked to occult the sinister subterranean society's schemes from the societies of the surface. Woe! Had Shaver known the truth all along? Or had the collective imagination of the Etherites once again shaped unsullied realms with their collective nightmares and empowered willworking?

The story grows even stranger. Some Sons of Ether believed that their ahistorical exploratory societies delved too greedily and too deep, like the dwarves of fantasy legends. A pervasive theory holds that the *dero* and *tero* are actually hobgoblins of the mind, anomalous phenomena created by a tremendous Paradox Backlash. Some posit that the Etherites actually created these realms as they delved, and that their ambition and hubris summoned the very spirits that would destroy them. None can confirm or deny this fanciful theory — they can only deal with the consequences of the Atlans' existence. Is it truth or Paradox? The answer lies in Innerspace.

## ECOLOGY

The caves of Innerspace maintain a constant temperature of 65 degrees, and are suffused with a pale illumination of unknown source. As a traveler continues down a corridor, plant life accumulates on the walls, and the substance of the rock changes. If you're seeking Atlantis, look for seaweed and coral; if you're stalking the Goro monks of Agartha, it helps to know about obscure Tibetan flora. The caves are relatively devoid of higher lifeforms — unless you stumble upon a trap set by the *dero*, of course.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

*Agartha*: Legend holds that the Nazis sent "occult specialists" into the depths of the Earth to find this lost kingdom, based on an artifact Hitler held in his personal collection. This subterranean monastery is easiest to reach from the mountains of Tibet, although some believe your chances improve if you're suffering from extreme oxygen deprivation while climbing the highest peaks. Immortal masters of meditative martial arts, the Goro are a peaceful people said to have developed powerful psychic techniques for repelling *dero* invasions.

*Atlantis*: Numerous subaquatic civilizations now bear this sobriquet, each one having vague resemblance to facts submitted by Plato. One Atlantean Realm requires the traveler to use Matter magic to breathe the water; a second is defended by telepathic dolphin magi empowered by sacred alien crystals; a third is guarded by the ancestors of Atlantean kings, who sustain the ancient populace by magical jewelry worn by the nobility. No one has been to Atlantis twice, however, so verifying such stories is nearly impossible. Perhaps these tales are merely the result of insanity, Quiet, or waterlogged Paradox Realms.

*Biotopia*: Dinosaurs run rampant in this Lost Kingdom, where the many stages of evolution are preserved in pocket dimensions. Some reports suggest that portals and gateways here once led to Venus, but that's sheer poppycock, of course. Here a traveler can find Modassai, the mother of all jungles, or an entire ecosystem adapted on the slopes of a 6000-foot-high volcano that hungers for sacrifices. Explorers still quest for the lost villages of the Wybassa, caretakers of the Great Serpent River, while avoiding the deadly encampments of the cannabalistic Pokotan, cliff-dwellers mutated into horrible monsters by an abundant supply of radioactive minerals in their homeland.

The complex, moisture-laden ecosystem of Biotopia combines with numerous thermal vents to create a hothouse environment where plant-life can attain massive proportions. The thickest concentrations of plants contain populations of herbivorous dinosaurs, which in turn feed the carnal appetites of more dangerous thunder lizards. Occasionally these titanic beasts wander into realms frequented by humans, showing visiting mages how accurate the films of Ray Harryhausen really were.

*The Shard Realm of Matter*: Several reports suggest that there are actually tunnels leading from the Hollow Worlds to the Shade Realm of Jupiter. Such claims are usually dismissed as utter bunk. Further speculation holds that Jupiter is large enough to contain portions of Hollow Earth, along with Hollow Venus and Hollow Mars. In theory, it may be possible for a traveler to find an anchorhead to one of Jupiter's Planetary Realms within the Hollow Worlds (crossing it would require 10 successes against a Matter Gauntlet, as described in the Alternate Gauntlets sidebar on p. 21). Cynics have suggested that all such sightings are the results of massive mindscapes crafted by the *dero* to mislead the unwary.

## SHARD REALTIS AND SHADE REALTIS

*In the beginning, there was the One, perfect and infinite, encompassing all creation. In one dynamic burst, it fragmented, forming the stars and planets of the universe. Shards of divinity lay in the structure of planets and the souls of the Awakened. The resonance of each of the Nine Spheres remains in the nine planets of our solar system. As above, so below.*

— Winston Teyvel, *Mercurial Cosmology*, 1553

This introduction from the cosmological documents of a noted Hermetic is typical of a common view of the cosmos. It's as good an explanation as anything else. No one can thoroughly document all the realms and extra dimensions beyond the First Horizon. If we need an anchor for our extra-dimensional epistemology, it might as well be the nine Shard Realms.

The Shard Realms reflect the sun, the moon, and the nine planets of our solar system. Experience verifies that in each realm, one of the Nine Spheres is dominant. It is as though the very character of the realm and the planet reflects the essence of that Sphere. Acts of magic associated with that Sphere are often easier to perform there, and usually remarkably coincidental. According to some accounts, simple acts of willworking hold great power in such realms. A breath of wind that lifts a feather in the physical world may move a mountain in a realm dominated by Forces, at least if the theorists are correct.

At one time, the Shard Realms were accessible from Shade Realms on the Horizon. Each Shard Realm cast a "reflection" on the Horizon in the form of a Shade Realm, which could act as a portal to that distant planet. Since the Avatar Storm, these former portals have become treacherous, dangerous, distant, or misleading. Each one resembles the "spiritual landscape" of its respective planet in some way, but the Umbral winds have altered them. Powerful spirits are needed to find them, and sometimes the spirits themselves must be sacrificed to the winds before a traveler can escape beyond the Horizon.

Old-fashioned loremasters have the disturbing habit of referring to the various planets by the names of their Shade Realms. For instance, a Hermetic referring to Jupiter may choose to call it the Shade Realm of Matter instead. Instead of speaking of the Shade Realm of Matter, it's much easier to simply describe it as the Matter Realm. Technocrats are vilified for just calling a planet a planet, but that's the easiest label to use.

As the spiritual and astral landscape surrounding Earth demonstrates, there's no limit to the number of Realms and dimensions surrounding a planet. The more mages look, the more they find. Theoretically, most of Earth's spirit worlds are in one of three places — one of the three Umbrae— but there are plenty of exceptions to the rule. After all, in a world of limitless possibilities, it's hard to have *rules* at all. On a distant world where there aren't six billion conscious minds thinking "*no, reality is like this!*" — well, anything's possible.

Here are the basics of what we know: Each planet has at least one Shade Realm, but some have many other types of realms. Venus and Mars, for instance, have their own Spirit Wilds, demonstrating at least a potential for life on the planet (a fact that delights the Sons of Ether no end).

Reality on worlds like Uranus and Neptune is exceptionally mutable — the spirits can craft individual mindscapes and dreamscapes almost instantly to accommodate seekers, explorers, psychonauts, and other extradimensional travelers. It is also possible that the correspondence between different worlds and Spheres may change as well. Jupiter holds the Shade Realm of Matter, for example, but one massive storm on its surface might spontaneously create a temporary Force Realm.

Don't look for one "canonical" list of Realms, because any list you could read would at best be a snapshot. By the time the film is developed, the subject has changed. If substance in the spirit worlds is, by its very nature, "ephemeral," then Realms may come and go at the whims of the cosmos. And a spirit like an Incarna or Celestine, far removed from "consensual reality," may easily entertain whims only gods can fathom. Lesser creatures, like mages, may create their own realms on other planets, but as on the Horizon, that can be a sure way to disconnect from the rest of the universe. Most willworkers should be content to explore the rest of reality first.

## FRAGMENT'S

Legends persist of bizarre and unique dimensions existing on these worlds, but in the 21st century, few witnesses can confirm their continued existence. With so much "revision" taking place in Earth's own spirit worlds, mages are far more likely to quest across the Horizon than brave the perils of the Void, especially when seeking near-mythical Shade Realms.

Technocratic archives speak of a handful of triumphant expeditions in which Void Engineers encountered "ghosts" of these previous realms. Since Technocrats mounting such expeditions were no doubt isolated from the Earthly realm as well, it is possible many of those explorers are now about as real as the manifestations they encountered. Cynical Traditionalists dismiss such tales as propaganda, but the Technocrats' stories do have origins in truth. In all of the Shade Realms, reflections of the past still linger on. Ghosts of the realms' previous inhabitants may still be visible to those who look for them, especially for disciples of Entropy and Time. Realms of Shade now hold shadows of legend, history, and myth. Apparitions of a Realm's legendary past are sometimes known as *fragments*, a name once applied to the Shard Realms themselves.

Of course, the Technocracy has its own particular reactions to these events. The dangers of Dimensional Storms are now considered too hazardous to Void Engineer expeditions; thus, high-ranking Syndicates and Ivory Tower representatives have cut their funding. At the height of the Reckoning, exploration of the Shard Realms was a very low priority, particularly after the Unions' Horizon constructs were isolated from the territories on Earth they

were assigned to monitor and protect. Some groups of rogue Technocrats, however, have decided to risk their lives to reclaim these lost lands. The crews of these Void ships must ultimately decide whether to eradicate the fragments they find — treating them as other ghostly manifestations — or create colonies of their own according to Technocratic visions and agenda.

If reality in a shard is mutable, as some scholars attest, it may theoretically be possible to shift the Realm's reality back to its former state. For instance, in the Shade Realm of Mercury, travelers may encounter the ghosts of the Batini explorers who tried to colonize that Realm centuries ago. Perhaps there is a way to return the colony to life. Whether that requires rebuilding the colony's defenses against great heat, the arrival of a true Batini hero, or a quest to confront the very spirit of Mercury is entirely a matter of speculation.

## CELESTIAL MECHANICS: SHADE REALM MAGIC

You may safely assume that on all planets and in their corresponding Shade Realms, all Effects that use that realm's Sphere have a -2 difficulty. Conjunctional Effects with that Sphere are at a -1 difficulty. The Storyteller may decide to use the "automatic success" rule for Effects using that Sphere. In other words, if your Arete rating is greater than the difficulty of the Effect, you may be able to perform it without rolling. If several characters want to use these abilities at once, roll initiative.

Note that spirits from these Realms almost always have Sphere Charms associated with their Realms' Spheres. If you're a spirit, finding your way on Mercury is damn near impossible without Correspondence, and nothing can exist on Pluto for long without Entropy.

## MYTH AND PARADOX

*Mythic Realms* reflect a planet's legends and tales, acceding to the desires of travelers who expect to see Greek gods, pulp monsters, or similar human inventions. Since reality in a Shard Realm is highly mutable, influenced by the traveler who perceives it, the spirits may choose to adapt to a form a spiritual traveler can understand. A Son of Ether fluent in pulp fiction may face a world like Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom. Conversely, Technocrats may face a harsh environment with sparse evidence of life—but just enough to merit further exploration. This theory has resulted in various attempts to shift reality in these distant realms, lending a whole new meaning to the term "Void Engineer."

Isolated planets are also ideal locations for *Paradox Realms*. Some planets have become prisons for the powerful mages who sought them, evolving an entire Realm around one Master's dream. A mage may be able to use magic to escape the local Master's Paradox Realm, but further backlashes can turn a heaven into a hell. Mages may find entering one all too easy,

## WHERE AM I?

All of this information and cosmological epistemology — data concerning imaginary realms on distant planets — means little in the real world. Anyone who's been beyond the Horizon for over a week is going to have trouble adjusting back to life on Earth. Aside from any dice pool penalties or game mechanics, once you've returned from another dimension, Earth looks like a different place.

Asking someone for the time of day is a routine occurrence all over the planet. But the simple act of approaching someone to ask, "What month is it?" — or even worse, "What year is it?" — can be met with skepticism. Zones, anchorheads, and Paradox Realms have a habit of tricking mages into thinking they're back on Earth, so it's perfectly natural for a mage to be skeptical of his surroundings. Conversely, many of a mage's routine activities many appear insane to ordinary people, and in major cities, most people actively ignore the insane. A wild-eyed mage who talks to inanimate objects, has trouble adapting to Earth's gravity, or attempts to walk through solid objects elicits far more hostile reactions.

**System:** If a mage incurs Paradox on the Horizon, one of its subtler effects is tricking the mage into believing he is still in the Realm he just left. Each point of Paradox incurred on the journey grants a "spirit modifier" to the difficulty of all Perception rolls. Every two points bestows a cumulative +1 difficulty. If this pushes the difficulty past a threshold (that is, past difficulty 10), he will interpret most of what he sees in terms of his last dimension. When you've spent too much time in the Hyperion Realm, for instance, everything looks like a sci-fi movie. This Paradox can only disappear with time; it "straightens" at a rate of one point a week. If the mage incurs Paradox Backlash, however, that "permanent" Paradox still adds to the dice pool for the roll. Mark the Paradox incurred in the other dimension with an asterisk (\*) instead of an X to distinguish it from ordinary Paradox.

but leaving may require performing a specific task, solving a puzzle, resolving a story, or tricking the local ephemera. As you'd expect, this may launch additional adventures.

## REALITY DEPENDS ON PERCEPTION

Contrary to the desires of individuals who publish books on the spirit world, there is no absolute and irrefutable interpretation of a planet's spirit realms. A hundred mages may visit a planet and find a hundred different permutations of the same dimension. In the past, one powerful mage could expend a vast amount of Quintessence to create a Horizon Realm, fighting the collective imagination of the billions of minds on Earth who thought such places never existed. In

## MERCURIAN COSITOLOGY: THE NINE SPHERES

Historically, most Hermetic mages have published the following correspondences between Shard Realms and Shade Realms.

Planet	Shade Realm
Mercury	Correspondence
Venus	Life
Earth	Prime
Mars	Forces
Jupiter	Matter
Saturn	Time
Uranus	Spirit
Neptune	Mind
Pluto	Entropy

There are other versions of this list; many are conjectural. The most controversial one suggests that the Sun is Prime, and that the Earth does not represent a single Sphere, but is instead the axis mundi of all Spheres — it's where all Spheres meet and mingle. This may explain why only Earth has minds, spirits, and patterns all embodied by lifeforms. Of course, a spirit quest to the Sun to prove its connection to Prime would be an epic journey indeed.

a lifeless rock in space, there may be far more Quintessence and almost no resistance to such schemes. If anything, such attempts may work too well.

When Victorian mages set off into the Void to colonize the Otherworlds, they attempted to reshape them for their own particular philosophies. Some actually believed they could make Io into a Technocratic haven, or erect mankind's greatest chantry on Ganymede. In some cases, everybody won, and everybody lost. Five different expeditions to Venus may have led to five different Realms forming on the planet. When the inhabitants became Disembodied from Earthly reality, their Realms faded away, leaving only fragments of what was. Since the phenomenon of Disembodiment is stronger than ever now, ambitious Void travelers can find what they're looking for beyond the Horizon, but if they do, they might never return to tell anyone about it.

## MERCURY

In the physical world, Mercury is an airless, crater-pocked world with a slow rotation, no volcanic activity, and extreme temperatures. The side facing the sun can reach over 700 degrees Fahrenheit, while the other can plunge to almost 300 degrees below zero. The massive gravitational pull of the Sun has ripped away any atmosphere Mercury once had. As a result, the surface temperature is high enough during the day to melt many metals. Mercury's "sidereal period" for

circling the Earth is 88 days, while a complete rotation (a "Mercurial Day") is 58.6 days.

The few Ahl-i-Batini astronomers you might encounter in the modern day claim that 500 years ago, the planet's rotation took the exact same time as its revolution. The first Batini colony on Mercury rested on the "far side of the planet," close enough to the light side that the temperature was near zero degrees. Blaming the failure of this colony on the degeneration of the planet's rotational speed is a rather clever way to exonerate the Batini who once lived there.

## BACKGROUND

From Earth's perspective, Mercury is close enough to the Sun that it never shines brightly. Morning and evening are the best times to see it, when it hugs the horizon before it sets. During the Renaissance, some acolytes attempted to track its position during other times of the day as an exercise in Correspondence. This may have led to the Hermetic belief that Mercury was tied to the Correspondence Sphere.

In the 16th century, Masters and Oracles of the Batini Tradition allegedly found their way to this planet's Umbrascap, where they established a colony known as the City of Brass. The sun's brilliant light, filtered through the Umbral atmosphere and magical barriers, bathed the limestone buildings of this Mercurial landscape with a coppery sheen. According to an account called the *Record of Marcella Decia*, the Batini colony was eroded over centuries by overwhelming heat, and eventually perished in flames. The author of this book claimed to see these events in 1846, but it's possible they were reflections of events that had happened centuries ago, in the future, or never at all.

## DESCRIPTION

The surface of Mercury resembles that of our own moon. Meteorites shaped its cratered surface, and the lack of atmosphere helped preserve it. One of the largest craters, the Caloris Basin, shows the site of an impact so severe it sent seismic waves through the semi-molten core clear through to the other side.

Once the Mercurian Shade Realm held great cities, but they have long since fractured. Correspondence magic is powerful here, but it has twisted the orderly corridors of the Batini city into a Byzantine labyrinth worthy of Escher. The local spirits are intimately familiar with the shifting permutations of corridors and rooms, navigating them with shortcuts that defy all Earthly logic. A visitor may actually be present in several rooms at once. Gravity also depends on your point of view. Floors may warp into ceilings, and architecture may suddenly disregard gravity entirely. To understand events in the City of Brass, a traveler may have to watch events in several different locations at once. (Thus, mages may need to use a first-rank Effect called Polyperception to understand what's going on.)

An anonymous Virtual Adept claims to have seen fragments of the Mercurian Realm drifting on the Horizon, but

wisely decided to avoid all contact with it. Most manifestations of the City of Brass only appear in Mercury's Shard Realm, but since the entire palace rests at the "correspondence point," it could theoretically appear inside a Shade Realm, a Paradox Realm, or even a Mythic Realm. These shards threaten to ensnare unwary travelers, imprisoning those who cannot counter their effects with Correspondence. The portal behaves much like a Paradox Realm, perhaps because it shouldn't exist.

In private chatrooms, some Virtual Adepts have theorized that the Batini didn't really colonize the city, but were forced off Earth because of massive Paradox. Others counter that a Batini Oracle deduced a way through the portal, but because he used powerful magic to do it, he was trapped on Mercury and forced to endure his own Quiet — dooming any mage who entered his personal hell. If several Shard Realms may coexist on the same planet, both stories may be true, and the "colonists" may only be dimly aware of the mad Batini Oracle. Stranger things have happened, and will happen again.

## ECOLOGY

Most versions of *Mercurian Cosmology* report sightings of livestock used by Batini colonists (or perhaps their descendants) and little else. More modern accounts describe mathematical spirits that delight in the city's many impossible passageways. Some resemble the ill-fated Batini colonists. The Batini established many oases on Mercury, mostly by seizing small slices of space from isolated places on Earth. It is unlikely that any of them still exist in any form useable by Void travelers. Instead, doorways hidden throughout the dimension lead to rooms and hallways from the City of Brass. The doors and windows can change which rooms they connect to on a whim.

Ghosts of Batini colonists still wander the corridors, holding conversations with beings that are no longer there — or perhaps are present in other areas of the city. Because distance and speed are relative, the Batini fragments sometimes travel by flying carpet, wisps of cloud, or ropes leading to nowhere. It is rumored that a powerful Batini Oracle is also trapped within this dimension, perverting the geography to meet his insane whims. One historian has reported sightings of an inhumanly fast Oracle who travels quicker than any of the local spirits, delivering warnings and revelations to the beings trapped inside. Accordingly, he has named this winged messenger Mercury.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

**Mus:** Mercury has no satellites in the physical world, but legends describe an Umbral moon circling the planet. In the earliest days of the Council of Nine, the Batini invited the Order of Hermes to build a university on Mus, Mercury's spiritual moon. Despite the realm's remote location, the founders intended it to act as a fortress as well. Many historians suspect this was intended to keep Mercury from the Order of the Reason, but because only Masters of Correspondence could enter the heart of the City of Brass, the theory is often discredited. If they detected other threats nearby, no records remain.

## SPIRITS FROM MERCURY

### Pushmi-Pullyu (Escherian Anomaly)

The pushmi-pullyu is a spiral wormlike creature with a bulbous head on either extremity of its scaly body. Several pairs of segmented legs extend at regular intervals along its body. Its eyes are a dull-jet black, perceiving "front" and "rear" at the same time. It literally takes its form from a drawing by Escher, while its name has its origin in Hugh Lofting's *Dr. Doolittle*.

Willpower 9, Rage 3, Gnosis 6, Essence 18

**Charms:** Correspondence Charms 3

### Sentient Carpet (Parasitic Beast of Burden)

Elaborate carpets and tapestries decorate many rooms within the City of Brass. Some can be convinced (with Spirit 2) to carry travelers from room to room. Others act as portals (or traps) into less desirable areas. A Sentient Carpet can act as a temporary familiar to some travelers, consuming Quintessence in exchange for erasing Paradox.

Willpower 6, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 18

**Charms:** Correspondence Charms 4

### Batini Colonist (Refugee Cast Adrift in Time)

Most Batini colonists still behave as though they are living in the Renaissance age of the Sorcerers Crusade. Their dementia causes them to treat outsiders as apparitions, and many treat visitors as though they are manifestations of Quiet.

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 17

**Charms:** Correspondence Charms 4

The chantry's architecture was a curious mix of medieval, Romanesque, and Moorish design. Behind the shield walls, the five-square-mile campus included a mosque, two chapels, and a library of Alexandrian proportions. Here the first edition of *Mercurian Cosmology* saw print, the Circle of Seven found refuge for decades, and the Batini escaped the Traditions' acts of betrayal against them on Earth. The Technocracy invaded and decimated the chantry in 1995, leaving the buildings barren and abandoned.

The fragments of a once-great chantry are still visible on the Umbral moon, but most of it is in ruins. Any explorer foolish enough to arrive from Mercury's Shard Realm finds rubble cloaked in shadows. In dark corners, in moments of stillness, one can still hear the screams of mages killed on Mus. It is best not to dwell on such thoughts, for Mus has developed a shadow in the Dark Umbra, where Nephandi have created their own twisted variant of the chantry. Batini *barabbi* have developed another fortress of knowledge there, but legends persist of "living tomes" of flesh and blood. It is said that anyone who meditates too long on the chantry's destruction may shallow into the "dark side of Mus," never to return.

## AUTOCHTHONIA

Although not strictly a Shade Realm, this celestial body follows the same orbit as Earth, staying exactly on the other side of the Sun. As a self-sustaining arcology 10 miles in diameter, Autochthonia appears as a visionary, mathematical utopia on the outside. Few outside of the Technocracy have witnessed this sight, however; in fact, most of its current denizens are Disembodied agents of Iteration X and ill-fated Void Engineers. Orderly polyhedral spirits called geomids patrol its exterior, monitoring acres of solar panels, delicate antennae, weapon ports, airlocks (now mostly non-functional), and viewports. Once these ephemera aggressively patrolled to keep intruders out. Driven mad by roving Avatar Storms, they now attempt to capture anomalous phenomena occurring outside and draw them in for processing.

The interior is a blend of sterile, futuristic architecture and vaguely organic nanotechnological creations. Interfaces and monitors pulse in every corridor, and countless energy conduits and translucent pipes surge with rerouted power. Walkways, slidewalks, and transways leading through iris doors connect everything from cavernous chambers to confining spartan cells. The ionized air is redolent with confusing scents, from machine oil to fresh rubber to overloaded circuitry, but it is nonetheless maintained at a constant 37 degrees Celsius.

One can no longer deliberately access Autochthonia from Earth; Autochthonia sends probes through surrounding space to process and assimilate captured spirits and creatures as it glides along Earth's alternate orbit. Of all the hazards of Near Umbral navigation, it is unquestionably one of the most severe. Whether captured in energy

fields, crippled with weapons fire, or lured to the surface with psychic trickery, inductees are led to reception areas where they are submitted to retina scans, genetic analysis, voice recognition, and epidermal scouring necessary to track the system's inhabitants. The first indoctrinations usually occur through a flat biomechanical device with vaguely humanoid features, a kiosk that supplies life-sustaining energy (or crude soylent, or derivatives thereof), addresses philosophical quandaries, and ensures personal security.

Because this is not a Shade Realm, spirits employ many different Sphere Charms. Most spirits here know a few Correspondence, Forces, or Mind Charms, working together to oppress outsiders with a synergistic strength greater than the sum of their parts. The station's less loyal inhabitants inhabit the outer corridors, which assorted robots patrol to ensure safety. As one proceeds to the center of the station, the standard of living increases, but so does the security. The air is as fresh as the strictest clean room, while the coloration of surfaces progressively intensifies, as whites become more antiseptic and chrome surfaces more polished.

Low-level psychic interference (including conditioning Mind Charms) prepares intruders for the innermost servitors of the structure, beings that are hard at work fusing the interface between man and machine. At the heart of the Construct, loyal ephemeral Iterators attend The Computer, the ultimate intelligence within the True Horizon. Life is effortless here, for resistance is useless. In a scant 90 days, the system can process any anomalous life form to become an idealized and utterly ergonomic cog in the perfect structure of Autochthonia.

## VENUS

As the brightest object in Earth's heavens, Venus has attracted its share of dreamers and spiritual travelers. Because the planet is nearly as large as Earth, scientists have entertained wild speculations of the possibility of life on the surface. In the early 18th century, the Russian astronomer Mikhail Lomonosov claimed the planet had a thick atmosphere of clouds, largely because his telescope wasn't powerful enough to make out further details. For centuries, scholars posited that moisture in the atmosphere could hide exotic life below this cloud cover. In the 1950's, the British astronomer Fred Hoyle theorized the existence of vast oceans of oil on the surface, which allegedly created massive drops of oil in the atmosphere. Dreamers responded by modifying their speculation to accommodate more exotic forms of life.

By radar, one can see that the surface is actually covered with sprawling ranges of active volcanoes. Roiling lava churns below an atmosphere composed of carbon dioxide and

sulfuric acid. A pronounced "greenhouse effect" allows light to penetrate these deadly clouds, but does not allow heat to escape. Venus isn't just uninhabitable — its atmosphere is toxic. The corrosive atmosphere's temperature is above 900 degrees Fahrenheit. Even masterworks of Matter cannot protect anyone foolish enough to travel on the physical surface.

### BACKGROUND

Hermetics have attempted to account for outrageous tales of life on Venus by claiming it is tied to the Life Sphere. Verbena historians add that every imaginable landscape on Earth can be found somewhere in Venusian Shade Realms. Before the Avatar Storm, Venusian Shade Realms on the Horizon led directly into this dimension. The four largest resembled the four seasons on Earth, resulting in dimensions known as the Verbena Seasonal Realms.

Like Mars, Venus also has its own Spirit Wilds, a fact that poses various magical and scientific mysteries. The Spirit Wilds on Earth reflect the diversity of living things on the

planet, including ecosystems throughout Earth's history. The Venusian Penumbra resembles Earth during the Coal Forest period, resembling the sorts of wild landscapes influenced by scientists like Lomonosov and Hoyle. The terrain is complete with jungles, swamps, and volcanoes. As in outrageous tales of science fiction, the planet has ferns, mosses, molds and fungi. Lizards spawn unchallenged save for the predations of distant reptilian relatives and the perils of predatory plants. The Sons of Ether claim to have incontrovertible proof that the dominant life form in the realm is a species of sentient telepathic dinosaur, but no evidence supports this claim.

Hopeful magical scientists take the presence of these Spirit Wilds as a sign that the planet at least has a "memory" of life. Realistic practitioners counter that life only exists here because the Shade Realm of Life is here. By another theory, its so-called Penumbra may actually be a Mythic Realm — instead of reflecting the planet's past, it reflects the collective myths of the explorers who went looking for it. Perhaps it's merely a matter of semantics, or perhaps the Etherites really, really, *really* want to meet telepathic dinosaurs. Both facts, and neither fact, are true.

## ECOLOGY

Ideally, the Shade Realm of Life should contain a perfect version of nearly any Earthly ecology you can name. Deserts and tundra, grassland and jungles, gas-giant ecologies and underwater thermal vents — if an ecosystem supports life, it should be in here somewhere in its own neatly contained dimension. In theory, if Venus reflected the visions of the Verbena, four little pocket dimensions would also represent the Four Seasons, each represented by a Shade Realm one could easily find on the Horizon. Theory and practice, unfortunately, are often at odds. In fact, in the Venusian ecosystem, theory and reality are often at war.

Life runs rampant on Venus, contaminating all imagined boundaries of season, species, or ecosystem. The dominant landscape here is a cross between a rainforest, a greenhouse, and a dinosaur movie dangerous enough to consume *Jurassic Park* in one rapacious feast. Nicknamed "Bygone Venus," this realm of Venusian reality has infected and spread across the planet's Umbrscape. Its lifeforms have become virulent. Nature can be beautiful, but when you can't identify the poisonous animal that just injected you with a paralytic poison, it can get nasty, too. The Venusian Umbrscape is more than a greenhouse — it's a green hell.

Mold spores and mildew creep into the unprotected equipment of Venusian visitors. Unprepared wanderers have drowned or gone mad from rainstorms that seem to (and perhaps do) last for eternity. For Void Engineers, Technocrat technology can mean the difference between life and death. A breathing mask may prevent a semi-Cretaceous mutant from growing in your lungs, and a firearm may protect you from semi-intelligent Bygones too impossible to live on Earth. By the same token, Masters of the Life Sphere claim

to have walked untouched through the worst deathtraps (or "lifetraps") this realm spawns. Whether you ally with Technocrats or Traditionalists, a mage proficient in the Life Sphere is essential for staying alive — or for preventing something parasitic and alien from living in you.

Time in Bygone Venus is a questionable concept at best. Living things grow, change, and evolve faster here than on Earth. Mutations and freaks follow evolutionary paths no one can predict. The only exception to this temporal fluctuation is when a spiritual traveler directly observes her surroundings. Time seems to pass at a "normal rate" in the area around a visitor to Venus, but all around, out of sight, the landscape changes in dramatic and outrageous ways.

Mages who are confident that their rites grant immunity are often deceived by this last phenomenon. Perhaps a quiet glen may make for an ideal locale for a brief picnic, complete with a panorama of unicorns to amuse you during your afternoon tea. By the time you finish your watercress sandwiches, however, the road you followed there will have changed. The geography, flora, and fauna will be unrecognizable. A wilderness may have burned down, turned to charcoal, and respawned new plants and animals that never existed on Earth. If you saw unicorns when you arrived, by the time you're leaving, they'll have teeth for eating virgins, and they may have grown antenna, extra legs, or tentacles. The impossible not only happens here three times before breakfast, but a dozen times during such luncheons.

Sadly, even the most robust applications of Time magic cannot predict such changes in the Shard Realm of Life. Entropy magic cannot predict a pattern in this evolution, for Life trumps all other Spheres here, as well as logic. Jungles exist in the middle of deserts, and frozen tundra harbors warm oceans. Sometimes the creatures stay in their natural habitats. At other times, they breed with animals from a vastly different terrain, or simply watch their mutated offspring colonize another evolving dimension. Countless permutations of living things exist here, if only for a short time.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

*Soft Rains:* Whether this is a locale, a phenomenon, or even a transient Zone, incipient rain heralds its arrival. Punishing and ceaseless rain pummels everything, battering down shelters and driving travelers insane with its endless and chaotic tattoo. No Force rote or Life Effect can hold this torrent at bay (at least, none that anyone has tried so far). Some consider this little pocket of hell to be a Paradox Realm meant to punish incautious or constant use of magic in overcoming the local terrain. Effects of the rain can range anywhere from gradual bashing damage to actual Matter attacks against equipment. Throughout the course of a story set here, mages may need to make Willpower or Arete rolls to avoid being driven mad by the relentless rains.

*The Amwell Expedition:* 13 Sons of Ether have found a fountain of youth in Bygone Venus, and all of them have stayed. The Amwell Expedition is actually a sampling of Etherites

throughout history who came to Venus and remained. They lead minor expeditions to various parts of the planet, but every time, they end up in the same encampment in which they began. A visitor lucky enough to encounter them will be catalogued with the same mania an entomologist would reserve for a previously undiscovered insect. All of them are confused enough to still consider themselves real, and regard their visitors as mere ephemera. One of them, secretly a Marauder, is pinning the bodies of his captives in an entomological album he hides in a distant cave.

*Dinosauria:* Witness the kingdoms of the dinosaurs! As Earthly science cripples fanciful ideas of tyrannical thunder lizards, the dinosaurs of Venus grow increasingly exotic. Etherites speculate that the lizard-like ephemera actually adapt to fit the conception of the mages who witness them. 30 years ago, most species had green skin, but 10 years ago, most had scales with a kaleidoscope of colors. A Tyrannosaurus here is capable of outrunning a Land Rover with ease, despite recent theories claiming they were slower than turkeys. True dinosaur freaks claim to have had conversations with the local lifeforms, discovered signs of their tool use, or to have performed epic quests resulting in a dinophile's ascension to the coveted title of Lizard King. Regardless of the explorer's accomplishments, if he doesn't leave in three cycles of the moon, it's a title he may hold for life.

*Seasonal Realms:* Pockets of the original Verbena Seasonal Realms are still here, hidden somewhere within the undergrowth. Each one corresponds to one of the four seasons. Once they served as pristine refuges of perfect ecologies. Legend holds that Lilith herself saved them from destruction during the Mythic Age. Historically, Verbena in the Spirit Wilds who wandered through the most tranquil and idealistic realms of natural wonder often found airts and trods to these locales, whether by traipsing across rainbow bridges, shallow-ing through rings of mushrooms, or swimming skylad into crystal pools of water.

Now the paths are all obscured, the four Realms are isolated, and the virulent lifeforms of hostile Venusian realms threaten to consume all living things surviving in the Seasonal Realms. If you can cross the lost Horizon that obfuscates these sacred locales, you can rest in the Winter Castle of Dragonlord Viouvre, cavort in the Spring Cottage of An Giblein Coille, explore the ruins of Prester John's kingdom in the Summer Grove, or observe the holiest of druidic traditions in the Autumn Circle. Verbena who tire of a banal existence on Earth sometimes quest for these lost paradises, each believing she can bolster the Realm's defenses against a dying universe. For some, dying in the Season Realms to become a nature spirit forever is a quest worthy of the word "Ascension."

## LUNA

Many worlds have moons, but humanity gets the very *concept* of "moon" from one celestial body. To Sleepers, she is simply called "the Moon," but many Western mages, mystics,

## CELESTIAL MECHANICS: SURVIVING HAZARDS

If a mage can work magic with the dominant Sphere in a Shade Realm, he can use his willworking to counter many of the local hazards. For instance, a mage in the Life Realm should be able to deal with environmental hazards by using Life magic. Consider adapting the following template for dealing with dangerous phenomena.

- **Detect It:** With the first rank of a Sphere, the mage may be able to sense dangers summoned by it. Trivial hazards require one success; insidious traps may require five. In some cases, the number of successes may represent the number of rounds one has with which to make preparations or muster defenses. If you can detect a "physical" danger approaching, you may be able to dodge (that is, use Dex + Dodge against it). Either way, Detect It requires an Arete roll (difficulty 4). Characters without the Sphere for this Realm may be able to detect danger with Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8).
- **Deflect It:** With the second rank of a Sphere, the mage be able to block or reduce a direct attack using the Sphere. An Arete roll (difficulty 5) can be used to soak bashing or lethal damage. Soaking aggravated damage adds three to the difficulty. The mage can only use this rote to defend himself.
- **Deceive It:** By using the third rank of a Sphere, the mage can alter the local conditions to hide, escape, or shelter himself from the phenomenon. Spirits use Gnosis to make an opposed roll against this deception.
- **Defend Others:** With the fourth rank of a Sphere, the mage can use Deflect It to protect one other person. Each additional person protected requires an additional success.
- **Defuse It:** Mastery of the fifth rank of a Sphere allows the mage to use countermagic against a Sphere Charm, including indirect attacks. Each success takes away one success from an opponent's Charm roll, but only if the opponent is using the same Sphere as the caster and the Realm. As you can see, countermagic is easier on Earth than in the Otherworlds.

and shapechangers know her as Luna. Madness holds court in the Lunar Umbrascape. For mages, the spiritual reflection holds no permanent geography — it is different every time it is encountered. Some Hermetics who insist on defining all creation claim it is a Mythic Realm; some Verbena maintain that the faerie kingdom of Arcadia is in there somewhere, and that fey magic is distorting its appearance. Cynics suggest that the realm immediately plunges the visitor into a state of Quiet, fabricating a dimension that reflects exactly what a deep and secret part of him wishes to see.

Whatever the reason, a thousand different reflections of lunar myths abound here. It's a barren wasteland where scientists can nurture life in the shadows of craters; a lost Egyptian kingdom where sentient cats guard temples to Bast; the domain of Phoebe, a lunar goddess of ultimate power who grows impossible flowers in a pool of pure silver; the spawning ground of Lunes, lunar spirits who have crafted entire civilizations out of moonbeams. The ghost of Horatio Savage is in there somewhere, along with a dozen different representations of the grim fate of the Dark Side Copernican Construct. Scraps of seaweed in the Mares suggest old oceans, where Renaissance cloudships rest in a vast Sargasso Sea. It is alive; it is dead; it is anything you most desire or absolutely fear.

## MARS

Mars glares red in the night sky. The Greeks, Romans, and Babylonians all named it after gods of war, while the Hermetics believed it influenced the most warlike Sphere: Forces. The red planet has inspired many myths, but cannot support any life more complex than lichen. There's water here, but it's either trapped in the red rock or sealed in frozen carbon dioxide in the polar ice caps. The thin atmosphere cannot filter out deadly ultraviolet rays, while extreme temperatures discourage anyone attempting to ex-

### SURVIVING THE VOID

Long-term exposure to the Void may be hazardous to your soul. For a start, any mage who has been past the Far Horizon for three phases of the moon becomes ephemeral: he can enter Etherspace and the Near Umbra, but cannot permanently return to Earth. The Storyteller may allow a mage trapped in the Penumbra to use Spirit 3 to "materialize" in the physical world, in the same way a spirit would with the Materialize Charm, but the duration for this effect can never be permanent. As a mage wanders the Void, her soul also begins to dissipate. Curiously, Marauders and Nephandi are immune to this effect. There are three ways to avoid this dissolution: casting the Spirit 5 **Deep Umbral Travel Effect**, using a Technocratic equivalent (with Dimensional Science), or remaining inside a sealed ethership.

The Void has other hazards, of course. At the end of World War II, the Technocracy and Traditions allied to drive some of the world's most powerful Nephandi off the planet. Most of the Nephandi died, but some were forced into the Deep Umbra. Some Marauders actually prefer the Void to Earthly reality, and may prey upon unsuspecting worldwalkers or etherships. The most terrifying manifestations of the Deep are the "Demon Hordes," entities that dwell so far from the world we know that even casual contact with them can drive a sane man mad.

plore its spiritual surface. While the physical manifestation is unpopular, its spiritual reflection offers one of the most diverse landscapes in the Otherworlds.

## BACKGROUND

In 1877, Giovanni Schiaparelli compiled the first detailed map of the Martian surface. Among his more unusual discoveries was a network of dark lines the astronomer termed *canali*. He theorized that they had been waterways at some point. Percival Lowell later agreed with him, theorizing that they were artificial structures carved by a sentient alien race. Closer inspection has led others to deduce they were something of an optical illusion, a misperception caused by looking through a telescope with the lens closed down too far.

The Martian Umbrscape reflects many of the wildest fantasies about Mars. Schiaparelli's findings launched dozens of etherships, with visionaries and dreamers who would give meaning and substance to the planet's etheric reflection. Mars is one of three planets in the solar system with its own Spirit Wilds. Its presence could reflect a potential for life in the planet's past, or it may be one of many Mythic Realms for a Mars that never was. In the Otherworlds, a lost Martian civilization might have survived for centuries, but whether it is the last remnant of life on Mars or the result of someone's vivid imagination is a matter of speculation.

Most mages who enter the Martian Umbra find dimensions where the *canali* pulse with energy. A network of ley lines carries meager amounts of Quintessence through the Spirit Wilds of Mars. Ephemeral Martian creatures representing a vast hierarchy of science fiction populate the landscape. Most are only semi-sentient, but evidence of ancient civilizations is hidden here as well.

Some believe that by extensively studying archaeological evidence in the Martian Umbra, one may find a gateway to places where these civilizations continue. Others counter that anything happening on Earth is far more important than the history of imaginary civilizations on Mars. Nonetheless, numerous Sons of Ether have spent months seeking such things, and many have stayed long enough to ensure they would never return. Several Etherite explorer societies have begun using the phrase "90-day expedition" in many of its announcements of Umbral explorations.

## ECOLOGY

The deserts of the Martian Penumbra often appear as extreme permutations of wastelands on our own world. The air is thinner, the temperature is warmer, and the flora and fauna are noticeably deadlier. Green oases are hidden from all but the most perceptive, save for those inhabited by deadly predators. Primitive wanderers find no shortage of beasts to hunt on this warlike world, and ephemeral representations of many of Earth's greatest warriors eternally stalk them (both the beasts and the wanderers). The longer a visitor stays on Mars, the more

## MARTIAN EPHEMERIA

### Slavering Bug-Eyed Beast

The average Martian BEM runs almost as fast as the average mage in a cabal, but is still capable of ranged attacks against anything it can see. Most inflict hellacious amounts of lethal damage, but fortunately, most are also imperceptive and easily tricked.

Willpower 4, Rage 7, Gnosis 3, Essence 14

**Charms:** Forces Charms 2

### Nubile Alien Princess

Hardy men who live for exploration have seen an inordinately large number of helpless and beautiful alien women in the Mythic Realms of Mars. Most eschew violence, but carry numerous insights into the workings of the local ecosystem. Nearly all of these women yearn for romantic interludes with adventurous spacemen, convincing them to stay on Mars for all eternity. Some have Charms resembling psychic powers to make such offers attractive. We lose more spacemen that way...

Willpower 5, Rage 3, Gnosis 9, Essence 17

**Charms:** Forces Charms 1

dangerous the ecology becomes. Mountain ranges become taller, beasts grow larger, and spiritual storms punish the unprepared with increasing frequency.

The most dangerous realms of the Martian Umbrascap border the Shard Realm of Forces. Any dangerous natural phenomenon is possible there. Impossible storms challenge or kill the unwary. Windows into the Shard Realm are as unpredictable as the path of a hurricane. Once a portal to the Forces Realm opens and travelers shallow through, the unprepared may face sudden outbursts of wind, water, radiation, etheric turbulence, meteor hailstorms, living predatory flame, or stranger things. Only a Master of Forces is capable of improvising proper defenses or erecting shelters against such attacks.

In the Umbra, dangerous Martian monster present more exotic difficulties. Akashics and Etherites alike find the bug-eyed monsters of Mars an exotic (and perhaps refreshing) change of pace from their normal training exercises and laboratory experiments. A regular column in *Paradigma* features sightings of these "BEMs," although some suspect they are merely invented as a way to bypass the journal's normal submission requirements. Because of Mars' connection to the Shard Realm of Forces, some warriors employ quasi-impossible Forces rites to capture or subdue their prey, leading to curious innovations in Etherite weapon technology.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

*Doissetep:* Mars is also a site of great tragedy. Two Tradition settlements offered refuge on Mars for mages who distanced themselves from the Ascension War. Doissetep was one of the largest Tradition strongholds ever devised. During the height of



the Ascension War, an elite team of Technocratic commandos and traitors to the Nine Traditions destroyed the chantry. In the wake of the Avatar Storm, it — along with everyone who was inside the ruins when the Storm began — became disconnected from reality. The original buildings were constructed in an overlap zone between the Shade Realm of Forces and the Martian Penumbra. This “pocket of reality” was effectively sealed by tempestuous Martian sandstorms. Isolated from its supply of Quintessence, Doissetep slowly became too impossible to exist.

All is not lost, however. Wanderers in the Martian Umbrascapae can still see the faint outlines of where the chantry once stood. Masters of Spirit may try to summon the shades of once-great mages here. Disciples of Entropy may deduce the sites where various people and places faded away. Willworkers can even use Time to see the chantry as it once was, but traveling back there is simply impossible. Rumor has it that there is also a “Legendary Realm” on Mars where the Masters of Doissetep — now ghosts of the past — still debate the issues of the Ascension War. In an act of supreme irony, they have been made completely ineffective at swaying events on Earth, and in some instances, completely oblivious that they will never again be a part of them.

*Marsbase One:* The Sons of Ether established a temporary base on Mars in 1996. Unofficially known as “Bradbury,” this

settlement actually succeeded in terraforming a small, physical area of Mars. Walls of Force kept the experiment contained, but they couldn’t prevent the Avatar Storm from isolating the community. A living community on a dead world was something of a Paradox, and thus, the realm faded into its own pocket dimension. The people, plants, and animals within are now entirely ephemeral, creatures of pure ether preserved for eternity. It is possible that a traveler wandering Mars for several months may actually be fooled into thinking it is real.

*Deimos and Phobos:* Mars’ two moons are airless and rather small, rather like asteroids caught in the planet’s orbit. Phobos is only 17 miles long, and its largest crater is six miles wide. It zooms around the planet twice per day. Deimos is 10 miles wide, and its orbit is less than 15,000 miles from the center of Mars. Calculations show that it is doomed to crash into the surface in 50 million years. Historically, the two moons served as prime pieces of real estate for various cabals of mages. As far as we can tell, the spiritual landscape of both worlds was decimated by Technocratic carpet bombing shortly before the Reckoning. Thus, the two moons make for popular locations for brief meetings on the way to the Far Horizon. No one is troubled by unwanted observation from Disembodied previous inhabitants, because no one was alive there when the Avatar Storm hit.

## BEYOND THE FAR HORIZON



After Copernicus informed the educated citizens of Western Europe that the Earth went around the sun, and not the reverse, it took almost 50 years for mages to cross the First Horizon and leave the Earth. Within a century, travel beyond that spiritual barrier became routine enough that travelers were no longer constantly beset by Paradox. Despite brief sojourns on Luna, Mars, and Venus, few were reckless enough to

reach the Asteroid Belt. Spiritual shadows of the spinning balls of rock plagued anyone foolish enough to enter it from any direction. Centuries later, travelers looked for pathways and gates through the hazards of asteroid fields. By then, a second Gauntlet separated the “inferior planets” from worlds beyond — effectively creating the Far Horizon. Technocrats called the vast expanse on the other side the Deep Universe. Tradition mages still prefer the term Deep Umbra.

By the end of the 20th century, various factions, Traditions, Conventions and chantries regarded celestial bodies in the Deep Umbra as a vast tract of real estate. Universal travelers would sometimes refer to moons and planets as “ours” or “theirs,” leading to absurd statements like “we control Ganymede” or “they’ve taken Io!” Ambitious willworkers routinely took credit for conquests achieved by other people who just happened to share the same approach to magic as they did.

Perhaps this is understandable. Maybe they wanted to find a place in space they could consider a refuge from the Ascension War, where they could be relatively sure they wouldn’t have to worry about capture from the Technocracy, the Nephandi, or alien invaders. Three months after the Avatar Storm began, they found it, and kept it, for eternity. In three phases of the moon, they became Disembodied from Earthly reality. Because they no longer needed to exist as creatures of matter, they became ephemeral, slowly changing into spirit. Most had forgotten about events on Earth, and never noticed the difference.

Most mages have very personal goals they pursue throughout their lives. Some seek knowledge, struggle to increase their understanding of magic, or wage war with those who would question their philosophies. Other mages claim to seek “Ascension,” whatever that may mean to them. Perhaps they believe that it literally involves an ascension to the Heavens, when they will leave Earthly reality behind and become one with the universe. During the Reckoning, travelers in the Deep Umbra who sought this type of “ascension” found it. By becoming one with another dimension, and assuming a purely spiritual form, they have left Earth’s concerns behind forever.

The Asteroid Belt contains a more elaborate spiritual barrier than the one surrounding Earth. If you must define the impossible, the Far Horizon divides the rest of the Horizon from the Deep Umbra. This barrier is impermeable unless a

traveler can find one of the gateways within it — a vortex of energy colloquially known as an anchorhead. Certain other supernatural creatures have found relatively permanent anchorheads, but such places are staunchly defended. The very force of reality seems to work in the defender's favor near such strongholds; in some cases, the defender's magic becomes coincidental, while disparately different invaders discover their magic is then vulgar. The whims of Incarna and Celestines, spirits of godlike power, may intervene as though they were defending worshippers.

Historically, mages attempted to build Horizon chantries near potential anchorheads, opening gates for mages not yet powerful enough to do so on their own. After the Reckoning, some mages have reported sightings of ghostly Oracles who assisted in such rituals — although others have described them as guardians barring the way.

### CELESTIAL MECHANICS: REACHING THE FAR HORIZON

Jupiter and Saturn lie beyond the Far Horizon, represented in the physical world by the Asteroid Belt. One method of reaching this barrier involves traveling through Etherspace with an asteroid as the destination. Use the same dice pool you would for Navigating Etherspace (Wits + Cosmology), but set the difficulty at 9. Once a mage reaches the Far Horizon, crossing it is always a daunting task. No two mages experience this in quite the same way: the barrier may appear as a river of ephemera, a roiling sea of creation's blood, a wall of iron, a field of cosmic radiation, or the shifting shadows of hundreds of asteroids.

**Crossing the Far Horizon:** Crossing at an anchorhead requires an extended Arete roll with 10 successes; the task requires Mind 5 (for bodiless travelers) or Spirit 5 (for embodied travelers), so the difficulty is 8. Crossing back requires a second roll. On either of these rolls, the mage can bring along other Awakened travelers; each additional success pulls one additional mage across the barrier. Crossing the Far Horizon without an anchorhead approaches the category of “nearly impossible.” (Requiring 20 successes would be kind.) In this case, a powerful mage or cabal of Spirit mages is actually “summoning” a temporary anchorhead — and probably summoning a guardian, bodhisattva, or Thing from Beyond along with it.

**The Dream Background:** Imaginative mages seeking the Far Horizon may follow a different path, one guided by their own perceptions. Each traveler rolls Perception + Cosmology (difficulty 9) or Perception + Dream (difficulty 8); take the highest result. With five successes, instead of an endless vacuum or churning sea of ether, the traveler may imagine a different landscape. An aborigine mystic, for instance, may picture an endless desert and simply walk across the Void. A classical alchemist may see the heavens as a nested series of concentric perfect solids, and thus walk toward the point where an icosahedron intersects with a dodecahedron.

Stranger things are possible, and weirder things may be encountered along the way. Sadly, this method does not help a mage actually cross the Far Horizon, and the journey may take years; thus, the practice has fallen out of favor over the last few centuries.

### PLACES OF INTEREST

Before the Reckoning, a wide array of realms near the Far Horizon promised escape from reality. The most famous, at least in magical circles, were the Horizon Chantries, but other dimensions attained their own degree of notoriety. The Horizon Realms still promise knowledge, but they can also lure mages into staying long enough that they can never leave. It is as though reality is attempting to put everything in its proper place.

*The Pleasure Dome* is an Ecstatic Cultist's heaven or hell, depending on how you define such things as pain and pleasure. The mages Disembodied here have become spirits trapped in an endless orgiastic fury, where their lusts, unions, and consummations are preserved for eternity. With a minor command of Spirit, one can watch. With slightly greater facility, one can even touch, feel, and experience the spirits' endless mergings. Those who surrender completely to the sensations of this realm can lose centuries in a blink of Brahma's eye. Ecstasy and eternity become one.

*The Gemsback Continuum* serves as a “scientification” haven for the Sons of Ether. A vast metropolis houses citizens firmly energized in the belief of a better tomorrow through science. Zeppelins and etherships soar above the cityscape, while laborsaving devices in the home create remarkable amounts of leisure time, making every day a dream. The boundary of magic strongly favors visionary technology, allowing the Tradition to maintain scientific laboratories where rampant research is conducted without fear of Paradox. With each impossible act of willworking, it drifts a bit farther from the Earth.

Dozens of other realms once existed, and have been published in various incarnations of *Mercurian Cosmology*. Deciding which of them remain is left as an exercise to the reader and Storyteller. Outside the game, some may prefer to keep a “Mercurian Journal” of such worlds, covering each page with a dimension for their troupes to explore. Just like the Hermetic versions, each one should be different.

### THE ASTEROID BELT

Between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, over 5000 massive chunks of rock collectively form the Asteroid Belt. Technocrats and Traditionalists claim to have found thousands more, either in the physical world or Otherworlds. Some rocks served as refuges, some offer excellent sites for refueling etherships and spacecraft, and all of them are now spiritually isolated from the Earth.

Twentieth-century astronomers speculated that the Asteroid Belt originated as one planet, possibly one capable

of supporting life. For some reason, they argue, it exploded, forming thousands of asteroids, the moons of Mars, and many of the gas giants' smaller satellites. Mystical astronomers have wondered what this planet's Shard and Shade Realms must have been like. Hermetics debate the Sphere to which they corresponded, and whether that link still exists. Theoreticians and suicidal explorers look for the answers. Despite their efforts, events on Earth continue unabated.

For Sleepers, the asteroids arbitrarily separate the "inner planets" from "outer planets." For many mages, they define the boundary between the True Horizon and Deep Umbra. A pervasive theory posits that many of the Horizon Realms that orbited Earth can now be found hidden among the asteroids. A few have been found, but all of these realms have been wracked, decimated, altered, or dismantled by the Avatar Storm. They are, at best, shadows of what they once were, figuratively or literally.

Swirling gates of energy randomly manifest within the asteroid belt. Whether they're found in the depths of space or on the surface of spinning rocks, they are the portals one must pass through to access Realms beyond, including Realms on Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. Accessing the gate may require a powerful rite or ritual, particularly if one wants to reach a particular destination. Some travelers call them anchorheads, despite the fact that such places are never really anchored to anything except the Far Horizon.

As a world-walker travels through an anchorhead, a whirling vortex of energies threatens to tear her apart. No magic works within; instead, the traveler is hurled through a cosmic corridor or wormhole until she emerges *somewhere* on the other side. The voyage can carry the traveler into a Shard Realm, the depths of space, or if the ritual is botched, a nightmarish Realm the traveler feared during the journey.

In recent years, there have been a few sightings of former Spirit Masters in the Void, trapped in ephemeral form outside the Near Umbra and Earth alike. Witnesses have described them by many names: bodhisattvas, ferrymen, or in some cases, Oracles. Although they cannot use Spirit magic to heal their condition, they can "manifest" in the Near Umbra from brief periods of time, appearing ghostly and ephemeral. (This is a Spirit 3 Effect, but the duration is rarely more than one scene.) A Spirit Oracle can help shepherd a traveler across the Gauntlet (using the rules for communal casting to assist). Unfortunately, this aid carries its own share of risk, since some ferrymen have gone insane from long-term exposure to the Void. A lone mind or spirit trapped in the Void is easy prey for madmen.

## JUPITER

Hydrogen and helium compose much of Jupiter's atmosphere. Below the clouds, extreme pressure compresses hydrogen into its liquid form, and further down, into metallic hydrogen. It's the largest mass in our solar system; four of its moons are as large as planets. If the planet had been any more massive when it was formed, the heat and gas would have



been dense enough to spawn nuclear fusion, transforming it into a star. Jupiter easily emits more radiation than it receives from the sun, wreaking havoc with electronic equipment that approaches it in physical space.

In the Deep Umbra, Anthelios follows the same orbit as Jupiter, circling the sun exactly opposite the planet's current position. Paranoid mages point out that this sort of thing has happened before. Autochthonia's orbit mirrored the Earth, serving as something of an object lesson concerning Earthly technology.

## THE HYPERION REALM

Throughout the 20th century, Jupiter and Saturn were heavily contested battle zones in the Ascension War. Both were large and stable enough to support massive fortresses and launch heavy assaults. Tales of etherships and Void Engineer spacecraft hurtling through the Deep Umbra are the stuff of legend. Technomagical strongholds sent raiding parties to newly discovered caches of Quintessence, hoping to tip the balance of power, whether real or imagined. After the Second World War, when Nephandi were driven from the Earth in large numbers, Deep Umbral chantries sent for reinforcements, bringing thousands of consors and acolytes into the fray.

Of course, these troops can't return to Earth. Somewhere in another dimension, thousands of sentient spirits are locked in an eternal struggle for quintessential resources, firmly believing their victories hold vital meaning for Earth's future. Circling Jupiter's Otherworlds, a gargantuan torus called the Hyperion Realm serves as the setting for epic battles where armadas of ethercraft ceaselessly battle. Some of the more imaginative inhabitants of this dimension believe that victories in this battle foreshadow victories for their respective factions back on Earth. For all we know, they may be right.

Earthly travelers may quest for this realm hoping to join the battle with additional waves of reinforcements, but any who can't get back home after 90 days are stuck there for good. This reckless behavior has become progressively less popular as signs of Armageddon become apparent.

The Hyperion Realm resembles a cross between a Flash Gordon serial and the Mythic Age rituals of certámen — a dimension where “wizards’ duels” are waged with spaceships and ray guns. Various factions maintain fortresses on assorted moons and spaceships. For instance, on New Year's Eve in the year 1999, the Traditions held Ganymede, the Technocracy had Europa, the Marauders had captured Callisto, and the Nephandi were camped out on Io. Reality on those four planets remained “stacked” in favor of the dominant faction, sometimes making invaders’ complex rotes vulgar (usually those beyond a certain Sphere rating) and the defenders’ magic coincidental. Spaceships still flit about from moon to moon like pieces on a chessboard, desperately trying to score a checkmate with the limited pieces on the board. The conflict, now called the “Hyperion War,” shows no signs of ending anytime soon, particularly since none of the big players can leave.

## THE MATTER REALM

The Shard Realm of Matter mirrors our universe, but where we have vast interplanetary space, it has vast interplanetary “solid.” The physical sphere of Jupiter acts as the spiritual boundary of the Realm. That is to say, when entering the Realm, a traveler steps sideways through mists of toxic gas into the planet's interior. The planet has more than enough room within to hold several of Earth's planets, so somewhere inside, there are mirror realms for each of our solar system's planets. Realms known as Hollow Earth and Hollow Mercury represent their physical counterparts.

Matter rotes are massively useful for digging tunnels into the surface, although they mysteriously collapse within a few weeks or months of use. Neither modern science nor refined alchemy can analyze the predominant substance of the Matter Realm, although Etherite explorers never tire of coming up with new names for substances they cannot understand.

## SATURN

During the Renaissance, Saturn was the most distant planet known. It is fitting then that the planet was named after the father of the gods. In 1610, Galileo discovered its most famous astronomical feature: the rings surrounding it. Before then, its most notable curiosity was that it took 29 years to circle the sun. Massive rotational speed forces its equator to bulge outwards — the planet makes a full rotation in less than 11 hours. Winds on the surface routinely exceed a thousand miles an hour. Astronomers have sighted 18 satellites, most of which are named for characters in the works of Shakespeare and Pope (most notably, *The Rape of the Lock*). Mystics insist that these same characters must exist somewhere in Mythic Realms hidden in the moons.

Before the Reckoning, various factions contested for control of Saturn's many moons. Psychic wars and Umbral raids continued for decades, until violent spiritual storms isolated many pocket Realms and dimensions. At the dawn of the Reckoning, as Anthelios shone its crimson light in the heavens, the barriers between worlds hardened. Spiritual travelers can visit any of Saturn's moons, but an attack from Saturnian spirits can trap a mage there in a heartbeat. (A Time attack here that scores four successes ages the victim three months, immediately reducing him to ephemera; fortunately, the victim can resist this direct attack with a Willpower roll.)

## THE TIME REALM

Saturn has always presented one of the most dangerous realms in the Deep Umbra, especially on its “spiritual surface.” Even astrologically, Saturn holds malefic influence. Chronos, a powerful Saturnian Incarna, acts as the world's guardian, and his domain is the Shard Realm of Time. Many of his spiritual servitors are capable of manipulating time (and the Time Sphere), making them some of the deadliest creatures of the spirit world after the Reckoning.

One cannot enter the Realm and pass through it without traveling in time. By historical accounts, Saturn's travelers know that space in the Time Realm seems normal, but wherever a mage moves in space in that dimension, one moves in time as well. All dimensions are time — even standing still is traveling in time. Two steps forward and one to the right might age you 10 years and hurtle you 20 years forward. Ecstatics call this effect “the blink of Brahma's eye.”

The Avatar Storm has fatally altered this effect. Mages who can avoid the servants of Chronos and enter the Realm are invariably swept away in the timestream. In the past, a lucky few would exit a year, or decades, or centuries in the future. Now Disembodiment has made the realm a one-way trip. A mage hurtled months or years into the future cannot leave, because by then, he has become a being of pure spirit.

Some hopeful cosmologists theorize that those lost souls must go *somewhere*. Perhaps they are hurled into dimensions that resemble the time period they seek. Maybe a historian may try to enter a Realm in the distant past — and actually create his own personal dimension that reflects his desires, if he survives. A Technocrat may seek a future in which the Technocracy has erased all other philosophies from existence, but in the process, he will ultimately isolate himself from all creation in a Realm of his own imagining. There are worse ways to die.

## PHILOSOPHICAL REALITY

Various philosophical and political factions have claimed nearly all the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. Because of this, the spiritual landscapes of these places reflect the ideals of the Traditions, Conventions, or chantries that have settled them. Technocratic colonies hold utopias (or dystopias) according to the local leadership. A moon colonized by Verbena may be a natural paradise, while a world with a predominantly Akashic chantry may be a haven for meditation and martial mastery.

Contrary to the possessive ambitions of soldiers in the Hyperion Wars, it is possible for *several groups* to possess a moon at the same time. At the end of the century, Marauders made a beachhead on Io, a moon held by the Technocracy, but in the 21st century, Io Collective #33 is a Realm unto itself, undisturbed by the “Marauder's Arctic Picnic” continually held on the same moon. A traveler can visit either realm — although the inhabitants may then try to capture him and keep him long enough to “convert” him to their point of view.

## URANUS AND NEPTUNE

Uranus serves as an enigma in many ways. It spins on an axis nearly 98 degrees from its plane of orbit. Compared to all the other planets, it spins on its side. All of its satellites

thus revolve at right angles to its axis. Circling the sun every 84 years, its north and south poles have pronounced and lengthy seasons. The north pole has a continuous summer for 42 years, while the south pole lingers in winter, waiting for a reversal of fortune.

Astronomers first conceived of the planet's existence because of Bode's Law, a formula predicting where the solar system's planets must lie. In the World of Darkness, mages could not reach either destination before Sleepers imagined it. Hermetics then wrote of the planets' correspondence to Mind and Spirit. Only masters of Mind and Spirit could reach them at first, making them destinations for many Seekings in later centuries.

## CELESTIAL MECHANICS: SEEKINGS

Uranus and Neptune are so far removed that a mage cannot travel to them physically; he must leave his body behind and send his mind (with Mind 5, Prime 2) or spirit (with Spirit 5, Prime 2) past the Far Horizon. This type of journey is called a Seeking. Masters and Oracles who are about to increase their Arete may take the journey to clarify their understand of magic. (Some Storytellers may actually require a seeking as a *prerequisite* for increasing Arete any higher.) The mechanic is the same as for Crossing the Horizon, but the second rank of Prime helps seal the mind or spirit in a shell of a body, protecting it from dissolution in the Void. Seeking requires three successes on an Arete roll; extended or communal castings are possible. Each additional success allows the mage to bring an additional Awakened seeker.

If the mage achieves less than three successes, he is cast into the Void, where he finds another Realm that corresponds to his mindset. Not surprisingly, the most common alternatives are Realms on Jupiter and Saturn. For instance, most willworkers obsessed with destroying their rivals among the Traditions/Technocracy/Marauders/Nephandi have a chance to act out their violent whims in the Hyperion Realm (described above).

Seeking distant Realms can cast a mage, or an entire cabal, into a destination very different than the one they were seeking. For this reason, these sorts of rituals are not to be attempted lightly. An Arete roll for navigation works best as a cliffhanger at the end of a game session; otherwise, the Storyteller should prepare more than one story, since he won't be able to predict where the characters will end up. A more devious alternative involves the Storyteller making the Arete rolls secretly, possibly before the game session actually takes place. It lacks drama, but it also allows a bit more depth in the story, since you'll only be preparing for one outcome of the roll.

## BACKGROUND

Beyond Saturn, the Planetary Realms become increasingly mystical, locales ideal for Seekings and Epiphanies. Uranus and Neptune hold realms of Mind and Spirit. The spirits of these realms have abilities to read your mind, mutate your philosophy, or plumb the depths of your spirit. A Realm does not exist on Uranus or Neptune unless a traveler is there to see it. Once the traveler leaves, he, she, or it is changed, and the Realm fades away like the mage's past.

Before Sleepers "discovered" Neptune, Uranus held both the Realms of Mind and Spirit. Some copies of *Mercurian Cosmology* from that time claimed that Neptune didn't exist until mages considered it as a concept, and once they theorized its existence in the next logical orbit, it was real enough for astronomers to detect it. Then again, old copies of this book are frequently theoretical, speculative, or just plain wrong. No evidence exists to confirm that mages realized the existence of this planet before its discovery. That is a mystery that has terrified many.

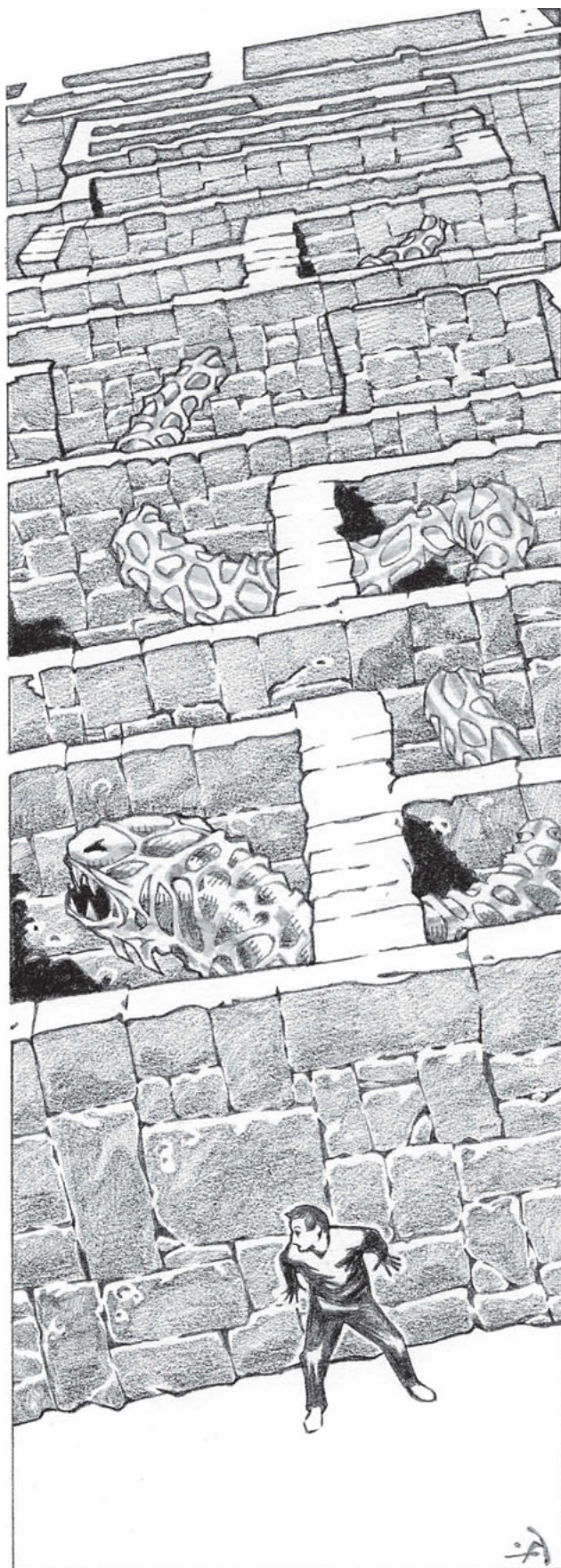
Seekings to one of these Realms invariably begins with a journey to the Far Horizon, where an anchorhead gateway opens for the traveler. A guardian spirit of Mind or Spirit always bars the way. A single mage may barter, plead, or struggle for passage, or an entire cabal may ally for the journey. When several mages undertake such a journey at once, they often uncover the darkest and deepest secrets of their companions.

## SEEKINGS

Travel to the Realm of Spirit begins with a "mirage of feeling." Travelers see the gate they expect to find, whether that's a dark cave illuminated by internal light or a misty castle with an armored guardian at the door. It may be a natural glade or wall of fire, depending entirely on the mage's temperament. Once past the gate, the mage's mystical journey begins.

In the Realm of Spirit, the landscape resembles the state of the traveler's soul. Nephandi walk through their version of hell; Technocrats stride through austere landscapes; Tradition mages may find a pristine natural refuge, the corridors of a Gothic castle, a labyrinth of flesh, or stranger things. Regardless, the moment a mage steps inside, the mage's Avatar becomes a separate entity, bound to the original body by a golden cord. When you travel to a Spirit Realm, your spiritual and physical selves divide, separating your identity. Bound spirits, such as those in fetishes, are likewise freed. If a soul or spirit is lost, it is nearly impossible to regain.

In the Realm of Mind, the landscape is beset by weather representing the traveler's emotional state. Anger unleashes storms, contentment brings sunshine, and confusion summons fog. The landscape reflects the traveler's mental state, whether that's an orderly labyrinth, a Kafkaesque castle, or a subterranean grotto. If a group of mages enters, the landscape is a composite of the respective personalities. It is a



disconcerting experience in a cabal that holds secrets, since it is nearly impossible to determine which mage originated the phenomenon.

Whether the Realm reflects Mind or Spirit, tests follow. Some are contemplative, others dangerous. A mystic may find the cracks in her psychological armor, the fallacies in her assumptions, revelations of her deepest secrets, or resolution to emotional trauma. (Whether these stories use simple puzzles, diceless dramas, or tricky dice rolls reflects the temperament of the Storyteller.) One troublesome fact has emerged: If the mages who experience these parallel Shard Realms created them through Mind and Spirit, then the Realms may collectively form a sentient entity. Perhaps at the dawn of Armageddon, it will undergo its own “seeking.”

## PLUTO

Neptune and Pluto weren’t discovered by observation, but by calculation. In the 19th century, astronomers realized that the orbit of Uranus was slightly irregular. Perturbations in its path through the heavens suggested that the gravity of another planet was altering its orbit. In 1845, an English astronomer named John Couch announced that he had calculated the orbit of this phantom planet, but without actual observation to support this deduction, his findings were promptly ignored. A year later, a French astronomer named La Verrier published evidence that the calculations might be correct, and astronomers throughout the world raced to find it. Johann Galle confirmed the data through observation from the Berlin Observatory in 1846.

Clyde Tombaugh used a similar combination of mathematics and astronomy to prove the existence of Pluto in 1930. Percival Lowell, the same man who fervently supported the theory of life on Mars, actually captured the image of Pluto in some of his photographs of the heavens, but because he was looking for a planet seven times heavier than Earth, he failed to realize what he had “accidentally” found. A schoolgirl at Oxford suggested the name “Pluto” for the new planet. Coincidentally enough, the first two letters just happened to be Percival Lowell’s initials.

As with so many supernatural societies, many are quick to claim that either Lowell or Tombaugh was a mage,

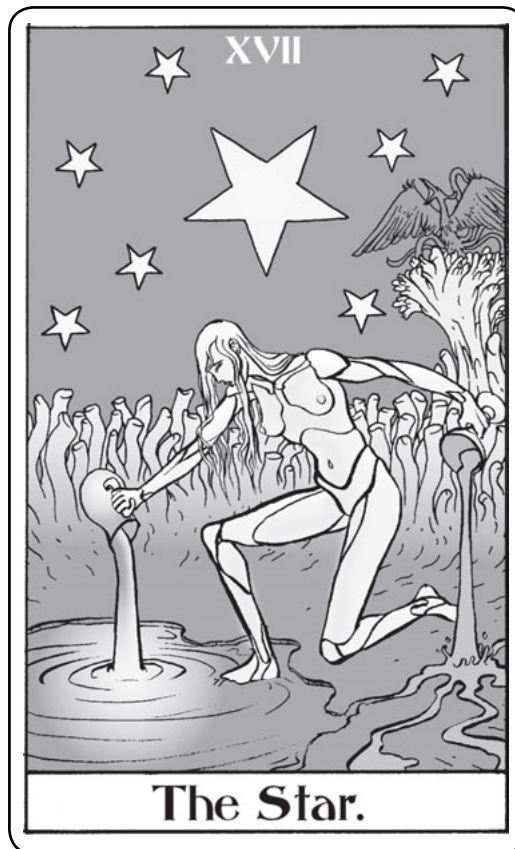
sorcerer, Awakened, Aware, Imbued, or somehow generally attuned to mystical reality. The only real evidence that supports this outrageous claim is that Tombaugh found the planet before anyone else did — including Earth’s mages. It’s as though something magical was obscuring all mystical attempts to find it.

## BACKGROUND

At the end of the 20th century, the Euthantos mystic Senex forbade access to Pluto’s Shard Realm. His passionate oratory regarding this topic is remembered fondly, mainly because Senex is now rarely seen after the Reckoning. All that is created near Pluto falls apart, and thus brings entropy to everything contemplated here. It is rumored there are paths to the demonic Realm of Malfeas or the ghostly Shadowlands on Pluto, but none have survived the journeys to find them. Senex used to say there was an Entropic Realm showing the destruction of anything you’d care to think about — although the Realm might also destroy any memory of your being there.

The only real question is *how* something falls apart. If you want to test something to destruction, bring it to Pluto’s Otherworld. You’ll be torn apart too, but at least you’ll find some small measure of cosmic understanding before you go. If you’re an idealist, you can console yourself with the knowledge that your Avatar will be reborn somewhere else. If you’re a pessimist, then you can take comfort in the belief that Realms of Pluto have permanently destroyed the souls of countless idealists.

The term “Entropy Realm” is as good as any other. Someone had another name for it once, but that person disappeared, and we can’t remember who he *was*. Theorists speculate that the many possible deaths of Earth, the Universe, and Everything can be witnessed in the Entropy Realms. Vistas for every possible Armageddon are here, along with Gaia’s Apocalypse, and political permutations based on the awakenings of various vampiric Methuselahs during Gehenna. The visions are so compelling — more so than those in the Apex of History Epiphany even — that they frequently draw the observer into the event. In fact, many of these scenarios begin with a foolish mage deciding to witness the end of the world on Pluto. Game over.





# CHAPTER FIVE: FROM BEYOND ALL BARRIERS

*We have no business calling in such things from outside, and only very wicked people and very wicked cults ever try to.*

— H. P. Lovecraft, “The Dunwich Horror”



Exploring the Umbral Realms can lead to cockiness, over time. Once she has encountered the mind-shattering strangeness of Astral Space, faced herself as a rotting corpse in a Death-Realm, been seduced by fae-like creatures while drifting off to sleep, and witnessed the Battle of Bouvines firsthand, the Umbral traveler is wont to forget the darkness beyond the Realms she’s seen. No matter how many odd or even terrifying places a mage visits, beyond her vision is the outer darkness.

The darkness isn’t empty. *Things* live in the Void beyond what even the most seasoned traveler knows. What exactly spawned these creatures is a matter of intense debate among the mages who know about them (and don’t actively serve them). Demons? Perhaps, but their behavior doesn’t exactly mesh with stories of fallen angels and servants of the Christian Adversary. Aliens? The Void Engineers think so in some cases, but many Tradition mages find that idea a bit far-fetched. Manifested fears of the human subconscious? Doubtful — that these beings predate humanity is one thing that the mages *don’t* debate.

Whatever their origins, a few supportable conclusions can be drawn from encounters with beings from beyond:

- **They are varied.** The creatures from beyond the Void do not all serve the same master. They are not all “demons from Hell” or “servants of the Wyrn.” Mages (and players) wishing to categorize them would do well to remember that, in order to effectively divide a group into categories, one needs complete information. Complete information is simply unavailable. Hence, not even the most knowledgeable mage has a chance of truly understanding these beings.

- **They are alien.** None of the beings are or were at any point human. They don’t think like humans, act like humans, or feel like humans. We’ve described them in human terms because we don’t have a choice, but under no circumstances should a character be able to relate to, or (most likely) even reason with one of these beings.

- **They want something.** This is probably the most frightening fact of all about the beings from beyond. They have an agenda and they have desires. Exactly what they want, or at least *to what purpose*, is probably unfathomable. Plus, desires vary from creature to creature; the Chulorviah have goals very different from the run-of-the-mill demon. The Goals section in the entries below should be considered off-limits for any player reading this chapter, as the horror of

facing a creature from beyond is much keener when both the player *and* the character are in the dark.

With these facts in mind, presented below are several races, beings, and forces that originate from the deeper reaches

of the Umbra. Some have appeared in previous books and some are new, but even the “new” beings are only new insofar as they haven’t *wanted* humanity to see them.

Until now, at least.

## THE CHULORVIAH



*I used to have nightmares that I was underwater. No explanation as to how I got there. I'd just find myself in the ocean, with a million tons of pressure on my head, struggling to reach the surface, even though I couldn't even tell which way was up. No light, of course, but I could still “see” in that weird dream way. The worst part of those dreams, though, was that right before I woke up, something moved. It moved by me and all I could tell was that it was enormous.*

*I think maybe everybody has that dream.*

The Chulorviah is not exactly a race; in truth, it functions more like a disease. It is intrinsically tied to the deep oceans, where the Gauntlet is so thin that a human might swim between worlds and never notice, were it possible for humans to swim so deep. The Chulorviah is an ancient force that appears to want to colonize the surface world. However, its exact nature and goals have never been fully explained. Indeed, most of the Awakened have no idea that these beings even exist, and if they did, few have time to worry about “octopus men.”

### IF THIS LOOKS FAMILIAR...

...it should. The Chulorviah were first detailed in **World of Darkness: Blood-Dimmed Tides**. We've reiterated most of the salient points from that book, but even so, the Chulorviah should remain mysterious and indefinable. The agendas and goals ascribed to the Kraken-born here are merely a suggestion on how to use them in a **Mage** chronicle and shouldn't be considered a canonical explanation of the Chulorviah's true nature.

## THE KRAKEN-BORN AND THE AWAKENED

While mages know next to nothing about the Chulorviah, the Kraken-born know quite a bit about the Awakened. Project: Deepwater, a Technocracy-funded endeavor to build a research station on the edge of the Marianna Trench, has been under the influence of the Kraken-born for years now. Slowly, the personnel have become infected with the “Chulorviosis” strain. As personnel are rotated out of active duty, infected people reach first ships and then land. Thus, the Chulorviah spreads across the world.

While Enfolded humans don't have much of an agenda, the disease also targets octopi and other cephalopods. Infected humans, as noted in the Chulorviosis sidebar, grow less intelligent, but this is hardly the case with infected cephalopods. Such

creatures gain a measure of sentience, but worse, they gain the power to control a living host by burrowing their foul tentacles into the victim's brain. Such infected cephalopods are called *petyrani* (singular *petyranos*) and they are the true threat that the Chulorviah presents to Deepwater (and the surface world).

The Deepwater project was originally designed to provide housing to the population at large. The Technocracy, in recent years, has had other things to worry about, and so hasn't kept up with Deepwater as closely as it should. Its partners in funding the project, Pentex Incorporated (although both organizations operate through a number of subsidiaries, naturally — neither side is aware of the other's nature) have taken up the slack, and the representative from Pentex, one Harmon Klieg, has made sure than any former Deepwater employee can find employment in the company somewhere (a goodly number of said employees are hosts for *petyrani*, of course).

Deepwater itself has been largely cut off from the Awakened — they aren't easy to infect and they ask too many questions. Many of the personnel don't need to breathe air anymore, and as a result the station has fallen into disrepair. The Void Engineers might send someone to look into the facility sometime soon, but it's not a priority for them — they have enough concerns on the surface for the time being. A small but persistent voice in the Earth Frontier Division, however, advocates investigating the site as soon as possible. For one thing, they argue, the Deepwater Project cost the Union a pretty penny and that sort of money shouldn't be just written off. But the true reason for the urgency from the EFD is a missive received by a junior operative in the Union, which simply read: “Sonar contact, again. Same time every day. Moves a few yards towards us then disappears. If current rate of approach continues, will reach the outer wall in —.”

However, the Technocracy isn't the only group of Awakened with cause to be concerned about the Chulorviah.

## THE BALTIMORE LABORATORY

The Sons of Ether maintain a chantry — though its members prefer the term “laboratory,” of course — in Baltimore. One of their number is a sometime employee of the National Aquarium, and over time the group's research has encompassed such varied topics as nautical travel, using sea flora as a food source, and the claim that shark cartilage might hold the key to curing cancer. In recent months, however, the aquarist of the group — one Seth Dawson by name — has been conducting experiments on an odd specimen he found while taking dimensional soundings in the harbor one night. The creature looks like an octopus, but has green eyes and, more inexplicable yet, the tips of its

tentacles contain a bone structure not unlike the human finger. Dawson has shared these findings with the other mages in the laboratory, and while they feel the creature is a genetic fluke for the most part, they cannot disagree with the fact that the beast registers on every Spirit test they've administered. The group's resident practitioner of Mind has also confirmed that the thing is sentient on some level.

Dawson himself has not contracted the disease, though he's been exposed to it several times (he's in remarkably good shape and keeps himself fit and healthy via a number of mundane and magical practices). At present, he's the only one who has spent enough time with the *petyranos* to even have a chance of becoming Enfolded or, worse, acting as its host. Perhaps the Chulorviah is truly trapped and has not yet had the opportunity to break free, or perhaps it is merely biding its time, waiting for the right host?

## THE KOPA LOEI

The mages of the Pacific Islands are no longer a Craft, having joined the Dreamspeakers (at least nominally) in the wake of the Avatar Storm. The Dreamspeakers enjoy their knowledge, however — the *kahunas* of the Kopa Loei have forgotten more about the Umbral oceans than the Dreamspeakers will ever know, and that includes the Chulorviah. Isolated masters of the Craft might know more about the Kraken-born than anyone else in the world, and likewise may know how to counter the effects of the infection, how to remove a *petyranos* from a host without killing him, and even might offer hints about what the Chulorviah truly is. A group of mages faced with the prospect of learning about the Chulorviah might do well to seek out such a *kahuna*. Of course, finding one wouldn't be easy. (See **Dead Magic 2: Secrets & Survivors** for more information on Polynesian willworkers.)

## GOALS

The Chulorviah began as an Umbral virus clinging to a much greater race of beings in the same way that a flea clings to a dog. On the rare occasions that these beings passed close enough to Deep Umbral explorers to notice them (originally proto-Dreamspeakers and eventually Void Engineers) the greater race simply noted the humans' existence and moved on. The parasites, however, took an interest in these creatures that were so resourceful as to traverse the Otherworlds and "followed them home."

Why the Chulorviah chose cephalopods as hosts is unclear. Perhaps since the deep oceans and the Deep Umbra are linked on so many levels, they simply reached out to whatever species they could find and were most at home with octopi and squids. Perhaps the first humans they Enfolded were coastal dwellers. It doesn't much matter now. As humanity spread from shore to shore, the Chulorviah wormed its way into the oceans of Earth, occasionally infecting a cephalopod or mutating one into a monstrous beast. Over time, they found that overt displays of power could frighten humans into armed response — hence their current practice of slow infection.

## CHULORVIAH

The infection can be passed by contact with the bodily fluids of an Enfolded host, and is virulent enough that even drinking from the same glass can transmit the disease. A victim may avoid infection by rolling Stamina (difficulty 6) once per day for three days; success fights off the infection entirely. If a victim becomes infected, however, his mind slowly begins to conform to that of the Chulorviah. Intellect and innovation dim and instinct begins to factor more heavily into the victims' decision-making. Victims don't lose any knowledge that they had, but often lose the patience and drive to implement it. Pain sensors deaden but other facets of the sense of touch heighten, allowing the Enfolded person to nearly "taste" the air (wearing clothes becomes difficult after a time).

The person's appearance changes ever so slowly; tiny suckers may appear on the hands and feet, skin color takes on a slight bluish hue, lips begin to harden, and so on. The victim becomes susceptible to heat and arid conditions; Enfolded must remain moist and dehydrate much more easily than normal humans, dying in only a few hours in extreme conditions (this is one reason why they remain in coastal areas). However, the Enfolded can easily pass as human for a number of years after the initial infection, although the dimming of the person's intellect and the newfound vulnerability to heat makes continuing the host's life all but impossible.

Enfolded humans wander towards the sea soon (often within six months) after infection. Until then, they aren't overtly dangerous, but do attempt to pass on the disease. Infected mages may cure the disease via a Life 2, Spirit 2 rote (Life 3 required to heal another). If the infection is completed, however, the mage retains her identity only for a number of weeks equal to her permanent Willpower rating. After that, she becomes no different than any other Enfolded — and permanently loses her Arete and all ability to perform magic.

The one organism that may replace humans as the dominant species on earth, as so many astute scientists have observed, is the virus. The Chulorviah, while it might be capable of taking large and more impressive forms, has found that the only way to colonize the surface world is to *infect* it.

Is the Chulorviah intelligent? It seems capable of hatching long-term plans, of infecting humans and using their skills and intellect to its best advantage, and even of manipulating mages to its ends. Is all of that drive, then, turned towards simple colonization? It seems to desire only survival, but then, it also focuses its attention on beings that can cross the barriers between worlds. Perhaps, instead of survival, it wants to avenge itself against the race from beyond that it once looked to for sustenance....

## USING THE CHULORVIAH

While it might seem that the only sorts of stories in which an encounter with the Chulorviah is appropriate are nautical ones, this isn't necessarily the case. A group of mages that explores the Deep Umbra, by accident or design, might meet the Kraken-born in its true form (whatever that might be). Likewise, an earthbound cabal might run across an Enfolded human or, worse, a human playing host to a *petyranos* and therefore unable to control his own actions. What the Storyteller does with the encounter depends on the needs of the chronicle, but consider for a moment what the Chulorviah represents.

The Chulorviah is designed to be a mystery, evocative of the boundless and vaguely menacing enigmas of the sea, and the Umbra plays into that metaphor nicely. The Chulorviah is also a horrifying element because it is capable of infection — much like extended travel in the Umbra can change a mage's very being to spirit instead of flesh. Suppose the cabal finds that a city's reservoir hosts several Enfolded humans. Is the entire town at risk of infection? Are the citizens already infected, and merely going about the motions of their human lives? (H. P. Lovecraft's "The

Shadow Over Innsmouth" makes for wonderful inspiration here; in fact, most of Lovecraft's work serves nicely as inspiration for Chulorviah stories.) If the chronicle would support some truly horrific, if slightly sci-fi, stories, perhaps the cabal could somehow journey to whatever remains of Deepwater. There in the lightless depths, on the edge of a bottomless trench, the Chulorviah has had its way with the greatest technology on Earth. What has it wrought?

Other spirits don't have much contact with the Chulorviah; the Kraken-born are native to the Deep Umbra and rarely come across the denizens of the other parts of the Otherworlds. However, spirits of inspiration, free will, and light are antithetical to the cold and near-soulless Chulorviah, and such spirits could conceivably aid mages in attempts to fight or cure the infection. The Chulorviah don't make their way into Astral Space; the River of Language is, at present, free from the Kraken-born, as is the ocean into which it empties. However, if an infected mage drank from these waters, it's entirely possible that the Chulorviah might be able to adapt to these surroundings. What the creature might do if granted the kind of power contained in the Vulgate is anyone's guess, but given its apparent goals, the implications are frightening.



## DESCRIPTIONS

The Chulorviah is chiefly encountered in two forms: Enfolded humans and *petyrani*. It cannot leave the Deep Umbra without some form of host body (although this is hardly common knowledge). Some hosts are more compatible with its goals and physiology than others; there is no known instance of the Chulorviah ever infecting other spirits, for example. Below are brief descriptions of both types of Enfolded.

### THE ENFOLDED

Humans infected by the Chulorviah are known as “the Enfolded.” For a time, they retain their personalities and skills, but as the mind of the human fades, the alien instinct of the Chulorviah takes over. However, up until the last moment, these unfortunates remain vaguely aware of what is happening to them and exactly how little the Chulorviah thinks of them. They know, until their minds blank out and they can do nothing but walk into the sea, that they are merely a vehicle and a manipulative device for a creature that should never have existed on Earth.

**Traits:** Enfolded are usually stronger than normal humans by a reasonable margin (add one or two dots to Strength) but gain no other bonuses. Wits is no higher than 3. Enfolded keep whatever Abilities their hosts knew, and as the infection progresses gain Athletics 4, Brawl 3, and Dodge 3 (if they didn’t have these Abilities already). Enfolded can breathe water as well as air (careful examination will find their gills); otherwise, they function as normal humans for years after the infection.

### PETYRANOS

The Chulorviah seems to have a much higher regard for cephalopods than for humans, which might grant some insight into the nature of the race to which the Kraken-born was once attached. These creatures resemble ordinary squids and octopi, and as such range in size from finger sized to thirty-foot giants. Normally, however, the Chulorviah doesn’t infect large animals — it seems to relish its ability to possess hosts. *Petyrani* possess a few extra tentacles. They use these slender appendages to burrow into a host’s brain and take control of his body. During this time, the *petyranos* coils around the host’s torso and remains unmoving; human hosts must wear loose-fitting clothing to conceal the creature and nothing ever really douses the smell. While *petyrani* aren’t really combat-capable, especially out of the water, they fight as hard as possible to avoid being dried out or simply killed.

**Traits:** Physical Attributes, Charisma and Appearance as the host. Manipulation 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4. The *petyranos* can draw upon the host’s Abilities, but does so at +1 difficulty. It always has access to the following Abilities: Alertness 4, Enigmas 4, Occult 3. In order to take control of a host, the *petyranos* must chew a hole in the target’s neck. The beast secretes a chemical that numbs the area, making it possible for the *petyranos* to perform this procedure while the target sleeps. Once the creature sinks its tentacles into the host’s brain, it feeds from any nutrients the host ingests and can even filter oxygen for it (allowing the host to “breathe” underwater).

## DEFINITIONS



*I opened a gateway tonight. Something lurks behind it, biding its time, deciding whether to come through. I don't know if the creature behind the gate really wants to be on Earth. I only know that Earth is probably preferable to the fire and pain it knows now. It's plucking up its courage — or perhaps gathering strength — before entering our world.*

*I've seen other creatures destroyed by the weight of the rational world. No place in such a world for them. God willing, there's no place for demons, either.*

Strictly speaking, the term “demon” implies “fallen angel,” one of the Host that rebelled against God and was cast into Hell with Lucifer. As any forward-thinking mage would tell you, though, this definition lacks. It’s based, after all, on a religion that hasn’t been around nearly as long as humanity itself. The notion that Lucifer and Satan are the same being is an invented legend, traceable to Milton. Most of the “demon-summoning” rites that mages come across only refer peripherally to the Bible.

And yet, they seem to work occasionally.

The “demons” in the various realms of the Umbra aren’t fallen angels so much as creatures from Beyond that take forms similar to beings from Judeo-Christian mythos. (An interesting question then becomes: Did these beings choose their forms based on such legends, or did they give rise to the legends in the first place?) The demons have goals and desires perhaps not unlike those traditionally ascribed to Christian demons, and many aren’t above claiming former membership in the Holy Host if they need to maintain such a ruse (this is especially easy if a mage has researched a particular demon and expects to see certain things when he travels to the demon’s Realm or summons it). However, a demon that carries this ruse too far often finds that traditional means of binding and warding hell-spawn also work against it, meaning the hapless spirit can be bound on Earth or even pressed into service.

### THE OUTER DARKNESS

The origins of Umbral demons, like most of the spirit Realms’ inhabitants, aren’t really known. That they predate humanity is a sticking point between some Traditions; the

Celestial Chorus (who usually don't see a difference between "Umbral denizen" and "demon from Hell") argues that they do, as these beings were once part of God's Host. The Traditions with more modern roots theorize that human legendry gave rise to these beings' existence in the first place, and so they couldn't possibly be older than human civilization. The Verbena, reluctant to accept any theory that requires accepting Judeo-Christian mythology as "correct," postulate that Umbral demons are avatars of destruction, either mockeries of the natural cycle or (according to some of the more cynical members of the Tradition) part of it.

Umbral demons often rule their own pocket Realms. These realms might resemble various religions' versions of Hell (which spawns the endless "chicken-and-egg" debate; did people form the legends from glimpsing the Realms, or the demons form their Realms to mimic human legends?) or they might be landscapes completely alien to human understanding. Reaching these Realms usually requires a good sense of where to go (while many demons would like nothing better than to reach Earth and wreak havoc, just as many simply want to be left alone) as well as some powerful Mind and Life Effects in place to keep one's sanity and physical cohesion intact. A complete disregard for personal safety is also recommended — the inhabitants of the Umbral Hells have varying attitudes about humanity, but they tend to fall somewhere between "apathy" and "hunger."

### FALLEN ANGELS?

As the astute reader may have guessed, the "demons" presented here are not those of **Demon: The Fallen**. The fallen angels presented in that game are, indeed, the lost Host of God who have now returned to Earth for a variety of reasons. The demons presented herein are Umbral beings that resemble demons.

The obvious question, then, is: If a mage or a sorcerer summons a demon using an ancient rite, and the demon in question is still in Hell, does the mage actually summon the *demon*, or some Umbral pretender masquerading as a demon? The answer, as you can probably guess, is up to the Storyteller. If the Storyteller feels like integrating some of the Christian-based setting of **Demon**, there's no reason why the mage shouldn't summon the actual demon (well, there are lots of reasons he shouldn't, but no reason he shouldn't be allowed to). If, on the other hand, the Storyteller would rather keep to the **Mage** cosmology (which basically states that belief shapes reality and therefore *all* deities are Umbral beings, in a fashion) the demon thus summoned up is not more dangerous or evil than any other malevolent Umbral denizen.

Which, obviously, isn't any cause for comfort.

Some demons, of course, actively try to reach Earth. The Avatar Storm and the Reckoning have changed the Umbra, making parts of it more volatile — some of the Umbral Hells aren't safe anymore, even for demons. The less intelligent demons would be satisfied to find another Realm to inhabit, whereas the more powerful and ambitious demons have turned their minds on revenge. They know that the weapons that decimated the spirit worlds were the products of human minds, and they also know how easily those minds break. Should any of these horrors breach the Gauntlet, the Technocracy might find itself the victim of a most horrid reckoning.

## GOALS

Umbral demons, as stated, have extremely varied goals and mindsets. Some think of themselves as (or perhaps just pretend to be) Christian demons, and look and act the parts. Some wish to brood in their obsidian palaces, deep in their Umbral domains. Some look hungrily out at Earth and pine for a way to bridge the immense spiritual gap between their world and ours.

Also, these demons are often part of the Umbral Courts, which means that they have a place in the unknowable spiritual hierarchy of the High Umbra. This also means that they have political goals that are so far-reaching and so alien that no mortal mage could ever hope to puzzle them out — which works to the demons' advantage when using mages as pawns. It isn't unknown for a demon with a great deal of good fortune (or raw power) to contact a mage and send him on an errand through various Umbral worlds. The demon might even grant the mage a safe way through the Avatar Storm — possibly even permanently. However, a mage who accepts may well shift the Umbral political scene horribly, and while that might not have any *direct* effect on Earth, in a decade or two when this ancient treaty expires or that *geas* is lifted, one never knows what might materialize....

## USING THE UMIBRAL DEITIONS

Storytellers who use these creatures in their chronicles have a great deal of latitude. Demons have myriad forms, goals, and abilities. Some can breach the Gauntlet without help, but most cannot. Many can be summoned; many can *choose* to answer summons, entering the world as casually as one might answer a phone call.

In whatever form, demons should be horrific. "Umbral Demon," after all, is a catchall term for those "Things That Should Not Be" from beyond the barriers of human thought, reason, and imagination. Some of these creatures are masters to Nephandi and Infernalists, some of them might even once have been other types of spirits. The important thing to keep in mind when using these beings in a story is that they should be *unknowable*. Keep them mysterious; don't let the players

## DEALS WITH DEVILS

It isn't exactly wise, but mages can accept demons as personal Totems. Mechanically, demons act like any other spirits with regards to the Background: they grant various Traits and Abilities and can lend their chosen mage aid in return for following whatever their particular ban happens to be.

The problem is, demonic bans are usually harsh and vile. The best that can be said about demons is that they are alien, but it's closer to the truth to call them inhuman. Many feed on pain and violation, and their bans often require a mage to keep them "fed." Of course, a mage can simply feed his patron demon with Quintessence, and even "flavor" it by means of Mind magic, but a mage mentally geared towards making Faustian deals isn't likely to blanch at the prospect of torturing someone to appease his master, especially not when the alternative is giving up some of his own hard-earned power.

In the section below, two of the three demons are allowable as Totems and have rules to that effect (Laklebb is too powerful to bother with taking earthly pawns). Consider these rules to be indicative of the sort of thing that demons would grant — and demand of — their followers.

ever think they recognize a given demon (to that end, feel free to make any necessary changes to the example demons given below). Make the players feel lucky that their characters even glimpsed one and escaped alive, let alone sane.

## DESCRIPTIONS

As stated, these examples should by no means bind the Storyteller to using these creatures exactly as presented. They are meant as examples of what horrors *might* exist beyond our world.

### TYGLSS, THE CRAWLER

Tyglss is an Umbrood of moderate power but fairly low ambition and intelligence. It appears as a number of kudzu-line vines, all snaking out from a shadow or somewhere else from beyond an onlooker's line of sight. Tyglss cannot speak, but can communicate with intelligent beings through telepathy. However, he must touch the target to do so, and is immediately privy to whatever the target is thinking. The result is a combination of mental violation, as the demon caresses the victim's thoughts and feelings, and physical revulsion as its sticky tendrils play across his skin. Tyglss is *not* privy to a target's memories this way, however — only what he is thinking and feeling at the moment.

Tyglss is curious, but not terribly driven. Its Realm — a morass of vines with no solid ground, the center of which is

presumably Tyglss' brain — occasionally drifts close enough to Earth that it can extend its tendrils through shadows to capture unsuspecting targets. What it wants with humans is unknown — perhaps it just enjoys feeling their terror mount as it drags them back into its world?

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 0, Manipulation 3 (telepathic speech only), Appearance 0, Perception 5, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 4, Stealth 5

**Willpower:** 6

**Attacks:** The tendrils can attack to entangle or throttle an opponent, inflicting five dice of bashing damage.

**Health Levels:** Each tendril can absorb five health levels of damage before becoming severed and/or useless, but if Tyglss has a body to which the tendrils are attached, it never shows.

**Powers:** Telepathy (automatic, surface thoughts and emotions only)

**Totem rules:** Tyglss grants two dots of Alertness and one dot of Strength (for purposes of grappling only) to any mage who takes him as a patron. As payment, he requires a weekly summoning ritual in which a living thing (the more intelligent the better) is cast into a large shadow so that he may drag it back into his Realm. Mages who take Tyglss as their totem, therefore, must possess Spirit 2.

### CYIET, THE EDGED Ⓞ

Cyiet rules over a Realm of broken glass, jagged rock, twisted metal, and other sharp and barbed material. The demon usually appears in human form (to humans, anyway) and is mocking and sarcastic to anyone he speaks with. He pretends not to be interested in the goings-on of Earth, but in fact escapes to our world every chance he gets. Since the Reckoning, however, his Realm has severed most of its connections with Earth, and he has been able to venture here less frequently.

Cyiet's name is mentioned in some demonology texts and Hermetic Umbrood guides, and occasionally someone summons him up by mistake (there's really little purpose to calling upon him directly). Usually, he likes to talk mages into setting him free on Earth, but if necessary, he'll bargain for the privilege. Cyiet is a proud spirit, and won't do anything remotely menial, no matter how enticing the prospect of Earth is. He will happily assassinate a given target, however — introducing sharp, bladed things to soft flesh is what he likes to do on Earth, anyway.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 6, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Expression 5 (vicious humor), Intimidation 3, Etiquette 4, Melee 5, Stealth 3, Enigmas 3, Occult 4

**Willpower:** 8

**Attacks:** Cyiet also carries a bladed weapon of some kind, and adds one die to the damage of such weapons. Also, his hands inflict lethal damage instead of bashing.

**Health Levels:** OK x 4, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -5, Dissipated

**Powers:** Cutting Remark (once per day, Cyiet can inflict eight dice of lethal damage to a target with a successful Manipulation + Expression roll); Faceless (Cyiet leaves no fingerprints or footprints, and is considered to have Arcane 5); Reform (destroying Cyiet's physical body only banishes him to his Realm)

**Totem rules:** As much as he'd hate to admit it, Cyiet would be flattered if any mage approached him about adopting him as a Totem. No mage has done so yet, but Cyiet would grant a supplicant an extra dot of Manipulation, Expression 3 and Melee 1. However, Cyiet is an emotional bully, and won't patronize anyone he can't dominate. Therefore, any mage who adopts Cyiet as a patron can have a Willpower rating no higher than 5. Also, followers of Cyiet must slice human flesh with a sharp instrument at least once per week (the mage's own flesh qualifies).

## LAKLEBB, THE LIGHTLESS

One might imagine the myriad realms of the Umbra as bubbles, floating around each other, occasionally touching. What then of the spaces between? Much of that space is the purview of Laklebb.

Laklebb is a demon older, perhaps, than the Tellurian itself. Wherever void exists, Laklebb can be present. It is the absence of light, heat, and energy, the embodiment of the frigid Outer Darkness. No one has ever summoned Laklebb; indeed, it is not possible to do so (though it is possible to get its attention). Laklebb can manifest physically on Earth, but has done so only three times in human history. The first time was during the Black Plague. A witness describes "a man shrouded in black mist, who looked out over a pile of corpses and whispered, 'And it was good,' and then vanished."

The second time was in June 1999, Bangladesh. This time, there were no witnesses.

The third time Laklebb appeared, he actually spoke. During an eclipse in late 2002, mages paying attention to the winds of the Avatar Storm heard a horrible voice whisper, "Soon, they will be free, and all will fall apart." Some of those same mages then saw a human figure slinking away into the shadows. Although none of the witnesses have realized it, Laklebb appeared at exactly the same moment at eight different places on Earth.

Laklebb has an agenda, to be sure, and it seems to involve human suffering and death. However, no one has ever spoken to Laklebb and retained his sanity, so any clues as to what it truly wants are locked in the minds of lunatics—or perhaps Marauders.

No Traits are provided for Laklebb. It is more a sentient force than a true Umbrood. The best anyone could hope to do in interactions with Laklebb is come away intact.



# HIVE DWELLERS



*The rituals are the same. I lower the knife, oh, so slowly, towards the trembling flesh of the sacrifice. I pierce her flesh, and I wait as the blood spreads from the wound to the trenches carved in the altar. She does not scream — my magics have seen to that — but her eyes tell the story of her pain and I feel her agony offered up to those we serve. The incantations have not changed — I know them like a child knows his bedtime prayers.*

*These things have not changed. But the beings that answer the rites — they have changed.*

Somewhere in the vastness of the Umbra, a series of interconnected Realms hosts a race of beings similar in some ways to Umbral demons. They answer summons, and they seem to desire the freedom to visit Earth. Their interaction with humans is a recent development, but they themselves are assuredly ancient. While the Traditions haven't much noticed these creatures, and the Technocracy not at all, rituals designed to summon demons have grown easier to perform in the recent past, though the creatures they call up are often a bit different than what the summoner expected. The mages who have noticed, of course, are the Nephandi — in a way, they were responsible.

## PATHWAYS TO HELL

Since the Avatar Storm wreaked havoc upon the Umbra, the Fallen weren't, for a time, able to easily communicate with their otherworldly masters. In a panic, some cabals of Nephandi began performing rituals designed not so much to commune with Those Beyond as get their attention — about the equivalent of raising one's hand in class and waving it about fervently. Despite the sacrifices, the urgent magics, and the general passion the Nephandi put into these rites, they didn't work — not in the way the Fallen mages wished, anyway. Occasionally, minor beings would slip through the cracks into our world, but the great Realms of the Nephandic Lords remained closed.

As with so many facets of magic, however, it was just a matter of finding a way *around* the problem, rather than through it. In late December 2000 a group of Czech Nephandi discovered that the Realm of their unholy patron had simply drifted, as though a great shockwave (probably one of the spirit nukes detonated in 1999, not that the Nephandi knew it) had somehow knocked the entire Realm a slight distance off-center. As the cabal investigated, they found that the entire Umbra had begun to shift, but since most of it was subjective and inconstant anyway, it hadn't mattered much in practical terms. Since, however, Nephandi are so often in direct contact with the Realms of their masters, the “positioning” of said Realms is rather important for calibrating rituals (imagine trying to navigate by the stars if they all shifted a

few degrees suddenly). After some extensive factoring, the Nephandi realized that they were ill suited to the kind of theoretical formulae required to decipher where their masters had drifted. However, they knew of some folks who excelled at such things — the Order of Hermes.

Many Nephandi, of course, were once Hermetic mages, and as word spread of what had happened, every available Hermetic *barabbus* was put to task, working with ancient Umbral maps, trying to quantify the forces brought to bear in the Avatar Storm, and generally trying desperately to break through the barriers correctly. At present, some cabals have succeeded in fine style. Not just in opening communications, they have also opened gateways to the Realms of Those Beyond. In many cases, these are beings most easily identified as demons. The Nephandi in question often note subtle differences in their masters' temperaments from before the Avatar Storm fell, but they chalk that up to the unknowable nature of the Qlippothic Lords. That the beings they now serve might be a different breed of evil entirely rarely occurs to them.

Whatever the beings the Nephandi have contacted actually are, they seem (as mentioned above) more willing to answer direct summons than before. These “demons,” unlike the massive Nephandi Lords who lay bloated and sessile in their Umbral hells, evidently long for something here on Earth. At present, the Fallen have not learned any rites to allow them to stay on Earth for long periods of time — Unbelief affects these creatures, except for the truly rare that can fashion (or inhabit) human bodies. But it's probably only a matter of time before some truly inspired *barabbus* figures out a way to open a permanent gate. Until then, the Nephandi make do with opening temporary paths and “visiting” these creatures on their own turf. This is costly, of course — any Nephandus found unworthy is immediately consumed — but those who survive often return stronger. The demons burn away weakness and leave the mage sound of body and mind (that is, more perceptive and intelligent — sanity is by no means conferred). While very few Nephandi have been willing to take the chance, this process is very slowly weeding out stupid, weak, and complacent *barabbi* in a grotesque parody of natural selection.

An interesting note is that *widderslainte*, those Nephandi whose very Avatars are corrupt and irredeemable, don't seem to merit any special treatment in this process. This is an odd shift; *widderslainte* were always favored by the Nephandic Lords before. While *widderslainte* tend to be more powerful and dedicated (the result of having an inverted Avatar from birth) and therefore tend to pass the demons' “tests” more often, the beings from beyond don't even seem to recognize a *widderslainte* when they see one anymore. What exactly this might portend isn't quite clear yet, but the *barabbi*, often

## NEW TOYS

In communing with their masters, the Nephandi have learned some new applications of their Qlippothic Spheres related to the Umbra. Below are two such rites.

### BETWEEN THE RAINDROPS

[CORRESPONDENCE •••, SPIRIT ••••]

Nephandi have as much trouble stepping sideways as other mages. Methods that Tradition mages use to get around the Avatar Storm are listed on page 30. This rote allows a Nephandus to effectively sneak around the Storm.

The Nephandus must cross the barrier quickly (often leading a *barabbus* to build the Effect over the space of an hour or so rather than try to make a go of it all at once). She invokes whatever foul name her master is known by, but quietly, and then dips her hand in a bowl or cup of liquid (water actually works best, to the disappointment of some Nephandi). If successful, the rote allows the mage to manipulate and spindle the Gauntlet to the point that it provides a bridge between the Realm and the Hive Realms. From there, the mage quickly calls upon her Spirit magics to transport her well away from these foul interstices, to elsewhere in the Umbra. Nephandi trapped in the Hive Realm don't usually fare any better than other visitors, after all.

**System:** Spirit 4 creates the gate between the Earth and the Hive Realm, and Correspondence lets the mage see both where she is going and where she has been. A second roll is required once the mage reaches the Hive Realm; since a gate is already in existence this roll simply modifies it (and therefore only two successes are required). If it fails, however, the mage is stuck in the Hive Realms until she can fashion another gate, which can prove quickly fatal unless the mage's patron is extremely powerful.

### OUBLIETTE

[FORCES •••, PRIME ••, SPIRIT ••••]

This unpleasant rote traps a target in a tiny pocket Realm for safekeeping. If the Nephandus has time to prepare, she can design the Realm ahead of time, stocking it with maggots, fire, horrid smells, or whatever other unpleasantness she desires. The victim is trapped in the Oubliette until the mage decides to release her — provided the Nephandus doesn't simply forget about her.

The Nephandus simply invokes the spell, using whatever paraphernalia is appropriate to her style, and the target disappears. The spell is designed for sheer intimidation value; the ability to make an opponent vanish, apparently from existence, is terrifying, and so very little preparation is typically involved. Common foci include complicated gestures, incantations, stabbing the ground or the mage's own palm with a sharp knife, or anything else appropriate to the mage's paradigm.

**System:** The mage opens the gate with Spirit 4, shoves the target in with a burst of kinetic energy (requiring Forces and Prime), warps the Umbral fabric around the target and then seals the rift again. The Umbral "cell" is actually a fold in the spirit realms (which is why the rote does not require Correspondence). This is deliberate; it makes the victim almost impossible to find. Unless the target has a means of stepping sideways, she is trapped, and the Nephandus can find the Realm again without difficulty. Some Nephandi add Life and Matter to the rote, causing the target to vanish with a thunder-crack and leaving behind a smear of blood and a puff of smoke (this has the dual effect of deterring the target's friends from searching for him and scaring the hell out of any onlookers).

Needless to say, this rote is vulgar as hell under most circumstances.

resentful of their more powerful "cousins," have taken careful note of the situation.

The "shift" in positioning of the Nephandic Realms hasn't gone entirely unnoticed by other factions of mages, of course. Below are three specific mages and factions whom the unfolding Nephandic drift has affected.

### THE HERMETIC CONNECTION

Worse yet, the Nephandi aren't the only faction of mages with ties to these hideous beings. The Order of Hermes, as mentioned, possessed the skill and mindset necessary to facilitate communication in the first place, but *barabbi* did most of the actual work. However, one particular Hermetic who never saw the inside of a Caul — and indeed, knows next to nothing about Umbral denizens in general — might

be largely at fault for handing the Nephandi a way to reinvigorate their war on creation.

Thomas Wyler, a young Hermetic apprentice traveling in Hungary, ran across two members of the aforementioned Czech cabal by sheer chance. One of them, a former Hermetic herself, struck up a conversation with him about mystical formulae and applied metaphysics and discovered that Thomas had an almost savant-like ability to apply mundane mathematics to magical workings and produce predictable results. The *barabbus* seduced the young man, appealing to his hormones as well as his intellect, and soon had him under her thumb without ever stooping to use magic. She also slipped him some "theoretical problems — nothing that would ever really work, of course." Thomas eagerly solved them, and worse, explained his logic to the Nephandi.

Thomas made it back to America with both his life and his soul intact, and with no idea what he'd done. However, of late his sleep has grown fitful. He dreams of the equations the Nephandus (though he simply thinks of her as "Ondrea") gave him, the numbers and odd symbols changing in front of him in a maddening parade of factoring and extrapolation. And every morning he awakens with the sick feeling that somehow along the way, he missed something — made a mistake in the factoring, left something critical out, or maybe just didn't understand the question.

## THE ABANDONED LABYRINTH

As mentioned in the **Book of Madness Revised**, some of the Nephandic Labyrinths were abandoned during the final battles of the Ascension War, burned and emptied by Technocrats and Traditionalists alike. These structures, imbued for so long with resonance of hate, fear, and other negative emotion, rarely stand dormant for long. Spirits of the worst kinds take up residence, as do any otherworldly or supernatural beings attuned to such resonance. Unless the force that destroyed the Labyrinth's dwellers took the time to cleanse the place spiritually as well as physically (which the Technocracy was actually somewhat more thorough about) one never knows what horrors might have moved in.

This is exactly the sort of place that a young cabal of mages found in Oregon after purchasing a 60-acre lot for far less than they would have expected. In exploring their new land, they discovered a cave formation. A geologist (or even a perceptive spelunker) could have told the mages that the cave wasn't natural, but the young mages didn't really bother to look into it — they were too busy building their chantry and dealing with the minutia of everyday life to notice the brutal, grating resonance from the cavern.

The cave, of course, was at one point a Labyrinth used to convert mages into *barabbi*. Hollowed out by a dedicated circle of Nephandi, the Labyrinth wasn't part of the Fallen's "chantry" and as such escaped the notice of the Technocrat team sent in to deal with the problem. With the Nephandi dead, the Labyrinth lay dormant until the new cabal bought the land.

Thus far, only one member of the cabal has discovered anything wrong. A young Verbena called Lorraine Horton, while out walking the perimeter of the property, found the cave and decided to explore it. Wandering in too deep, she crossed the boundary and would ordinarily have immediately become a *barabbus*, except that the spells require to enact such a change had not, of course, been cast. The experience did not leave her unscathed, however, and she turned her natural bent towards Spirit magic to figuring out exactly *what* lay beyond the Gauntlet in that cave. Lorraine isn't corrupted, necessarily, but she has most certainly taken on some of the more unpleasant traits of the Labyrinth — her personal Resonance has become brutal and bloody, and her rites have relied much more on sacrifice of late. Her

chantry-mates are growing worried, but as Lorraine is the most powerful and experienced mage there (which really isn't saying much) they aren't sure what to do. If Lorraine isn't stopped soon, she might inadvertently open a gateway to whatever Hell lurks in that cave. Even if the gate isn't open long, it might attract any number of Nephandi and other such beings to the site.

## THE PHOENIX AMALGAM

Out in the desert, odd things can happen. The higher-ups in the Union might be convinced that monsters just don't make it into this plane of existence anymore, but they do. The Phoenix, Arizona Amalgam has seen its fair share of weirdness over the years. After the extra-dimensional calamities of the recent past (scuttlebutt in the Union was that some sort of nuke was used, but they don't tell the grunts anything) the Amalgam was looking forward to things easing up a bit. For a variety of reasons, that didn't happen.

The Amalgam is under the leadership of Jordan Lemming, a New World Order operative and a member of the Watchers methodology. Lemming really had his heart set on the Void Engineers, specifically mapping out and studying (and subsequently exterminating) Reality Deviants from other dimensions, but politics and evaluation of his skills landed him in the New World Order. He got his wish after a fashion, though — the Phoenix Amalgam seemed to have its hands full with such creatures.

Lemming is probably one of the most learned members of his Convention with respect to spirits and the Umbra in general. Of late, his Amalgam has been pursuing rumors of "demons" among the city's poor. Lemming is aware that Reality Deviants who resemble vampires and werewolves exist; he's also aware that extra-dimensional entities on Earth often define themselves in convenient forms, and therefore he doesn't really *believe* in demons, just beings from outside our world. He has yet to capture one of these creatures, but since no other Amalgam has reported the same problems as his, he's guessing (correctly) that somewhere in Phoenix there's a gate through which these creatures are entering *his* city. He'd love to find this gate, but he'd rather have someone else find it so that his team can go in and mop up (he doesn't have the manpower or resources to waste lives in a big assault). At present, he's looking for bait.

## GOALS

The "false demons" want to get out. Trapped inside an immense Realm — actually a series of hive-like, interconnected sub-realms — they only wish for freedom. Unfortunately, should they be freed, they will naturally wish to make the Earth into a place in which they are comfortable, which would entail eating and enslaving large segments of the populace.

While the Hive Dwellers aren't as intelligent as the Nephandic Lords, they are much more motivated (the Nephandic Lords, after all, know that everything will end

sooner or later; they just want to hasten the process). To that end, after the Reckoning when the Nephandi were struggling to contact their masters, the Hive Demons answered as many of the summons as possible. Even amateur spellcasters received phenomenal success, at least initially. As various groups in the World of Darkness became aware that more Umbral horrors were abroad, some of these groups began hunting the demons down, forcing the creatures to become somewhat more circumspect. Now, the Hive Demons only answer summons that they feel have a good chance of leading to the Hive Realms opening to Earth permanently. The Nephandi can cast compelling rituals most reliably, but hope springs eternal among the Hive Demons, and they might well answer summons from an otherwise good-hearted mage if they feel that they can manipulate her effectively.

Where did the Hive Realms and their foul inhabitants come from? No one on Earth is really qualified to answer that question. The Nephandi are laboring under the delusion that the Hive Demons are their masters (why the Nephandi's true masters haven't seen fit to involve themselves in all of this is another question). No other sect of mages has had enough contact with the Hive to make any safe assertions about them; any mage who sees a Hive Demon is likely to assume it to be a random Umbral horror — perhaps the pet of a Nephandus — but not ascribe any real power to it (as individual Hive Dwellers don't tend to be very powerful, especially not on Earth). Mages with high Avatar ratings might feel something naggingly familiar about the Hive Dwellers and even the Hive Realms (should such a mage be unlucky enough to see one) but can never quite seem to pin the feeling down....

## USING THE HIVE DWELLERS

Hive Dwellers differ from Umbral demons in that they all share a very simply focus and goal — they hate their world and wish to escape into ours. They are far more animalistic and primitive than most Umbral denizens, at least on the surface. Their Masters are quite intelligent and may have some long-term plans for our world, but they disguise that under a veneer of simplicity. After all, the more they seem like mere brutes, the more likely that greedy or power-hunger spellcasters are to let them loose, figuring that they can simply bind the Hive Dwellers again when the given task is complete.

Hive Dwellers can make superb combat opponents, simply because they range in power so much. However, don't underestimate their usefulness in a horror setting. Guardians don't have to be rampaging monsters; a Guardian could easily be a stingray-like creature that clings to walls and ceilings, scuttling along behind a group it has chosen (or been ordered) to watch. The characters might never see a Builder, but when a disused subway tunnel is reshaped as though to facilitate a new purpose, the characters might discover (via Time and/or Matter magics) what has happened... and what is intended to happen next.

Finally, the Hive Realms — or, more to the point, escaping from them — might make for an interesting story. Just be careful; there's little to be found in the Hive Realms but death.

## DESCRIPTIONS

The Hive Demons come in a variety of forms. They most certainly have a hierarchy of some kind, apparently based on age and the ability to spawn more demons (an ability which comes with age). The Nephandi, again, are the only sect of mages who have seen enough of the Hive Demons to make any guesses on how this hierarchy might work. They have identified three loose “caste” of demons, which they have named Guardians, Builders, and Masters.

### GUARDIANS

These are the Hive Dwellers most commonly summoned to Earth. They vary in form, but are most often quadrupeds. Like all Hive Dwellers, they shun light, so seeing them in detail isn't easy (which may be something of a mercy). Some have fur, some scales, some both. Some have tails or fins, and one Nephandic communiqué speaks of a pack of Dwellers with wings emerging from a gate. Few Guardians larger than men have been reported, but this is generally thought to be because the smaller Dwellers commonly answer summons. If a better summoning ritual could be performed, the logic goes, something correspondingly more powerful would answer it.

**Traits:** Guardians' Physical Attributes average about 4, and they usually have high Perception and Wits ratings. Social Attributes are virtually nil, although some Guardians are capable of human speech and they tend to have mellow, pleasant voices. As stated above, they appear in a variety of forms, and may have extra features like tails, wings, or extra limbs. All Guardians have natural weaponry of some kind: claws, fangs, poison and quills are all fairly common. The exact nature of these attacks and the amount of damage inflicted by them is up to the Storyteller based on the power of the demon in question and the needs of the story.

### BUILDERS

Rarely glimpsed outside the Hive Realms, Builders are responsible for remaking these Umbral dwelling places into suitable homes for the demons. Speculation among the Nephandi is that the Hive Dwellers took over the Hive Realms from another race. If so, the Nephandi wonder, could the Builders wreak the same sorts of changes on Earth? Some Nephandi have discussed harnessing the skills of the Builders to reconstruct lost Labyrinths. Other Fallen feel that releasing these demons on Earth is perhaps something to discuss and study further before actually making the attempt.

Builders, like all Hive Demons, take different forms. The largest reported, glimpsed in the background as a Nephandus discussed terms with a Guardian, seemed the size of a city bus. Most, however, appear no larger than big dogs. Builders

secrete mucous-like slime, which softens solid matter. They then use their “hands” — all Builders have appendages capable of fine manipulation — to rework the matter into whatever they desire. Some Nephandi who feel that summoning Builders to Earth would be too risky wonder if “milking” them for their fluid is possible instead.

**Traits:** All Attributes vary widely depending on the Builder’s size. Strength, for example, might range from 4 (dog-sized Builder) to 15 (bus-sized Builder). All builders have a minimum Dexterity of 5 for purposes of fine manipulation, but the larger and bulkier ones might have much lower scores for purposes of dodging attacks or other full-body movements. The fluid that Builders secrete makes any solid, non-living matter soft and pliable. The harder the material, the more time and fluid it takes for the Builder to reshape it. Builders aren’t generally suited for combat, although the larger ones are quite dangerous simply by dint of their size. Builders eat like spiders, digesting their prey externally (they cannot inflict bite damage).

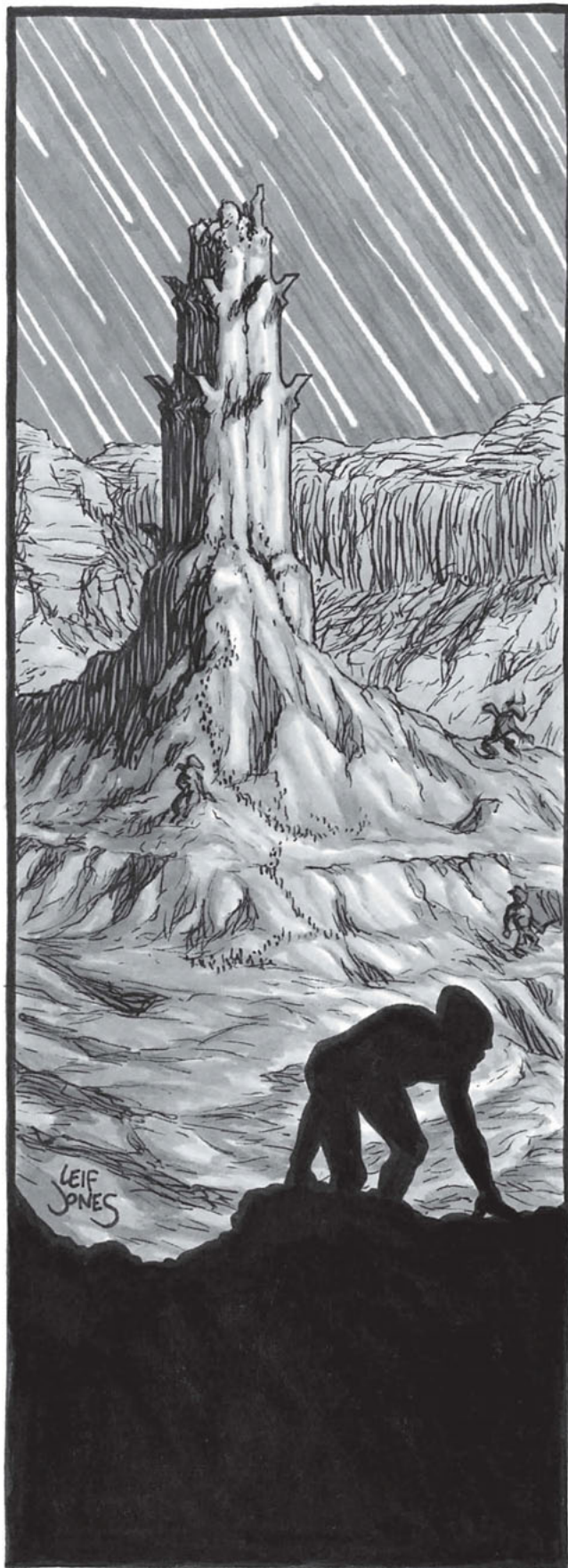
## MASTERS

Master Demons are rarely seen; only two, in fact, have ever been sighted, but the Nephandi who saw them did not for a moment mistake them for any other type of Hive Dweller. Masters are immense, some as large as two-story buildings. They vary in form, like all Hive Dwellers, and might resemble nothing so much as a hill of flesh or might take on more recognizable features. While Guardians and Builders might be able to spawn, all Masters can, and can create demons of either other caste (but cannot create new Masters). Masters can command any other Hive Dweller in their immediate vicinity, and at least one is capable of pulling open the Gauntlet for short periods (though it may only do so if in an area saturated with its own type of Resonance).

Whether or not Masters can be summoned to Earth isn’t known. Nephandi theorize that first, an area of Earth would have to be specially prepared by Builders to accommodate the Master. Since no Builders have been allowed to cross the Gauntlet to Earth as of yet, there has been no way to test their theory, although some sects of Nephandi are eager to try. Masters may speak in human languages, and the few Nephandi who have heard them say their resonant voices remain in one’s head for weeks after the fact.

An interesting fact about Master Hive Dwellers is that there doesn’t seem to be any political friction between them — the Nephandi have not discovered any “factions” springing up around various Masters. Admittedly, of course, the Fallen know very little about the Hive Dwellers in general, but if the entire race is in fact committed to the same goals, this indicates a unity of purpose that could have dire implications for the human race.

**Traits:** A Master Demon is a very powerful Umbrood, and if the Storyteller requires Traits for it, things have probably already gotten out of hand. Assume 8 to be the average



Attribute rating. Masters might have powers duplicating any of the Spheres, but are most likely to exhibit powers mimicking Life, Matter, Prime, and Spirit Effects. Anything they touch can be absorbed into their bodies; they don't need to take the time to kill their food first. However, they cannot venture to Earth without permission and a suitable environment in which to live, so the only way for them to interact with humans directly is if the humans venture to a Hive Realm... or pave the way for their escape.

## HIVE REALMS

Escaping the Hive Realms isn't as simple as coaxing a bunch of shortsighted mages to open gateways, either. The Hive Realms were, at one time, simply a cluster of Realms in the Deep Umbra. The Avatar Storm and various other spiritual factors caused the Realms to cluster together and then drift towards Earth. The Hive Realms have now spread out through the Umbra, in between Earth and the Near Realms. They tend to drift towards areas of like resonance, which means that areas of extreme violence, hunger, hatred, and misery are likely to house one. Any mage stepping sideways in such an area, or even *looking* into the Umbra, has a chance of peering into a Hive Realm instead.

Hive Realms are vast, pockmarked landscapes. The ground is comprised of blood-red stone that breaks under even a slight jolt, and crumbles if squeezed. This material is

ideal, however, for Builders to reshape and strengthen. The Builders then use this new, stronger material to build the "palaces" of the Masters.

These palaces rise up out of the otherwise bleak landscape like skyscrapers in the midst of a desert. The Builders evidently construct them around the Masters, for the structures sport no doors that such massive creatures could use for ingress or egress. If necessary, a Master could probably simply smash its way out — the true purpose of palaces, then, is unknown. Perhaps the Masters simply succumb to some form of conceit and order the creation of these halls, or perhaps they need shelter from some elemental condition in the Hive Realms, something from which the smaller Builders and Guardians can easily take shelter.

What the Hive Dwellers live on is unknown, if indeed these creatures are even troubled by something so mundane as hunger. They might well feed on one another, or perhaps there are other beings in the Hive Realms that no mage has yet seen, beings that exist solely to feed the Dwellers. Whatever the case, the environment of the Hive Realms is decidedly unfriendly to humans. While humans can breathe in them, the air is thin and tastes faintly of bile. The ground is often unsteady, and while the rock is brittle, it retains an edge and tripping may result in serious lacerations. However, the greatest threat a human would need to consider in the Hive Realms, of course, are the Hive Dwellers themselves.

## FEVER DREAMS



*He rants all night. I cannot place his fever; it is not an illness I have encountered before. My best mundane treatments have failed, and so tomorrow I shall have to proceed with more esoteric medicine.*

*But the dreams the poor boy suffers! When he wakes, he babbles incoherently about how a demon poisoned him through his shadow. I have no idea what that statement means, but it rings true whenever I hear it. But is this a metaphor?*

*Did someone or something take advantage of a vice or a mistake to inflict this upon him? Or does he mean it literally?*

It's strange how Sleepers' legends always seem to get a few things right.

In India, for example, a quaint little tale is told about beings known as *acheri*. These spirits — usually regarded as the unquiet ghosts of little girls — live on mountaintops and venture down among mortals looking for fun. However, their idea of "fun" is somewhat warped; they enjoy infecting mortal children with hideous diseases. If ever their shadow falls across a person, that person grows deathly ill and rarely survives. A piece of red thread worn around the wrist (or sometimes as a necklace — the legends vary), however, provides complete protection from the *acheri*.

Mages often research the folklore of many different countries, and so the legend of the *acheri* isn't unknown among the Awakened. It's just normally filed away along with tales of penangallan, dragons, and various other supernatural beings that *do* seem to be just legends — the kind of thing a mage can read about and feel thankful they don't exist.

But mages are never that lucky.

## THE TEMPTERS

Beings that strongly resemble the *acheri* do indeed exist, but only seem to have plagued humanity in the wake of the horrible events in Bangladesh in 1999. Beginning in India, and then spreading slowly over the world, hospitals admitted patients — usually children — suffering from two strains of a disease. The first, milder strain cleared up in a few days and did not seem to do any lasting damage; the second was much more rare but nearly always fatal. Symptoms for both diseases included sweating, convulsions, high fever and horrible fever dreams. In a few cases, the child would speak of a ghost or a demon that "cast a shadow" over him.

The Euthanatos, always vigilant in India and always watchful of such things as deadly diseases, took note and made the connection with the *acheri* legend. Examining the places

where the children were infected, and the children themselves, they determined that the “mild” form of the disease was in fact illusory; a skilled enough mage could duplicate the effect by using a precise application of Mind magic (something not lost on the Euthanatos). Even if the disease had no physical cause, however, the symptoms were real enough, and some form of Umbrood was causing it. Various members of the Euthanatos traded stories and the term “acheri” came into usage; towards the end of 2000, however, the cases were reported less and less frequently and the Tradition kept its collective attention on other things.

## OUTBREAK OF NIGHTMARES

And then, in summer of 2001, a small outbreak occurred among children of Indian immigrants living in the Research Triangle (Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina). A young member of the Euthanatos named Debbie Yost, who was studying at Duke University and had spent time in Madras not long before, recognized the symptoms... and the stories the children told while gripped in fever dreams. A spirit came down from the mountain, they said, and cast a shadow over them.

Debbie called in help from her Tradition, but none was available just at the moment. She spoke to mages who had seen the disease in India, and they assured her that it was illusory, psychosomatic, and it would pass.

A month later, when she attended the funeral of the third child, she knew it wasn't so.

Debbie knows that the disease the children in Raleigh-Durham face is real and deadly, but fortunately doesn't seem to be contagious. She also knows that, unfortunately, her Tradition might send help now or later, and that they'll show up precisely when needed. That's not good enough for her at the moment, and she's actively looking for other mages who might be able to help.

## STOLEN BODIES

One of the more horrific aspects of the acheri, above and beyond their ability to spread disease, is that they apparently do not have bodies of their own. Acheri, to all evidence, are insubstantial spirits — possibly ghosts, as the old legends suggest — and to affect the physical world, they need a body.

While even the few mages who are aware of the acheri's existence don't know this, acheri may possess human bodies for several hours at a time. Doing so is draining for the spirit — unless it slips into the body during sleep. While the human mind dreams, it disconnects itself from the body enough that the spirit can slip in and claim the body for itself, resulting in a much longer period of possession. During this time, however, the body is sluggish and dull-witted, and this carries over to the spirit somewhat. Some acheri have powerful magics at their disposal that allow for more complete possession.

While in a stolen body, an acheri looks entirely human. A mage who knows what to look for may attempt a Mind 1, Spirit 1 Effect to see the being for what it truly is. Then, the mage sees that the acheri's shadow superimposes itself over its host's body. In some cases, that shadow completely obscures the host, leaving only red, glowing eyes visible on the blackness. In others, the acheri's skin looks blackened and marked by boils and other signs of disease.

A horrifying truth about the acheri, however, is that some of them have been present among humanity for years, seducing, tempting, and infecting the Masses. They are all but undetectable, and unlike other acheri, have bodies of their own (though whether they are born into these bodies somehow or have simply possessed them on a permanent basis is unknown). These creatures know a great deal about humanity, whereas the more “recent” acheri don't seem to know much at all (which can sometimes give them away). But then this begs the question: Did these more powerful acheri call the less powerful ones to them? Did they spawn the newcomers? Do they hate them?

## GOALS

The acheri are creatures born of nightmares, spawned from Dream Realms. While it might seem that they are fever hallucinations made flesh, this isn't entirely the case. Acheri are spirits associated with temptation as well as disease, and can lure victims to spiritual corruption just as easily as they can infect their bodies.

Acheri have little in the way of organized goals. Their interaction with the Awakened comes mainly in the form of incidental meetings; the acheri infects or seduces someone close to the mage, and the mage traces the incident back to the acheri. What happens then is a matter of the individuals in question. Acheri are unique individuals, and one's agenda might be very different from another. Some acheri seem to follow their whims almost blindly, indulging in whatever vice takes their fancy. Some act so much like humans that careful magic is required to tell the difference, and some regiment themselves very carefully, subscribing to an alien, though well-defined, code of behavior (obviously, these last are the acheri *least* likely to encounter a mage).

One thing that all acheri want, however, are bodies. For whatever reason, they do not wish or are unable to travel back into whatever Umbrae spawned them, but they cannot survive for long on Earth without bodies.

Acheri also live to corrupt. Not only through spreading disease, but acheri look to make humans indulge in whatever base desires they prefer. Some acheri involve themselves in the narcotics or sex trades, some take more direct action and incite humans to physical violence. What kind of sustenance or satisfaction an acheri receives out of this is unknown.

## USING THE ACHERI

Acheri are a different kind of spiritual threat. They don't wish to conquer Earth, and they aren't precisely interested in killing people. Yes, they do spread potentially deadly diseases, but for all that, they have more use for live humans than dead ones (live humans can indulge in dark vices and therefore feed the acheri the spiritual energy they need).

When using the acheri, remember that unless a mage knows what to look for, even (especially) magically, the acheri are all but invisible. The most obvious manifestation of the creatures is the disease they leave in their wake, and this makes for a nice hook for a cabal of humanitarian mages. The mages might be able to cure the disease (or at least stabilize the victim long enough to fight it off), but where did the disease come from? The mages are then faced with the task of tracking down an Umbrood that they cannot easily detect by magic, and that can skip between bodies if necessary.

The acheri may not be as viscerally frightening as the Hive Dwellers or as destructive as some Umbral demons, but they are intelligent, deadly, and subtle — and therefore one acheri can make a slippery foe for a cabal.

## DESCRIPTIONS

Acheri can look like anyone; given their powers of possession, they can *be* anyone. No matter their form, their shadows always look a little darker than they should, but this is difficult to spot (again, unless the observer knows what to watch for). Mages can use a Mind 1, Spirit 1 Effect to detect acheri, revealing them for spirits in human bodies, as stated above.

**Traits:** Physical Attributes as the host. Acheri tend to have high Charisma and Manipulation scores; they

## WAIT, AREN'T THESE...

As the perceptive reader may have guessed, acheri appeared in the **Changeling: The Dreaming** sourcebook **Denizens of the Dreaming**. Given their otherworldly origins and their propensity for causing disease and corruption, they make for appropriate inclusion here as well. A Storyteller familiar with **Changeling** should feel free to incorporate their full range of powers, including Arts and so forth, but it's hardly necessary. The acheri are dangerous enough as presented here without adding more variables to the mix.

excel at talking people into deviant behavior. Abilities vary; acheri can absorb some of their host's knowledge, but for the most part, they retain their own. This tends to mean high scores in Awareness, Enigmas and Occult. Those few acheri who have their own bodies and have resided on Earth for years might have any combination of Abilities. Driving acheri out of possessed bodies requires Spirit 4 and Mind 3. An Indian legend says that one can immobilize an acheri by nailing its shadow to the ground, but this has yet to be tested.

**Powers:** Shadow Plague (an acheri can detach her own shadow and send it out to infect humans; the virulence of the disease and whether it is "real" or "illusory" depends on how much energy the acheri is willing to invest); Immunity (poison and disease).

**Special:** Acheri cannot use their Shadow Plague powers on anyone wearing something red. The article of clothing must be visible and entirely red; a shirt with an American flag doesn't count.

## SOUL GUIDES



*The Awakening often seems random, as though Avatars don't have any control over the types of people they incarnate into. I wonder if this is because of the Avatar Storm? But that makes no sense; undeserving folk were becoming Awakened even before that horror was visited upon us.*

Old legends of our Tradition don't mention the Avatar at all, but some do speak of spirits bringing Hermetics to a "pool of light" or "fount of knowledge." What, then, are these spirits? They don't seem like modern Avatars, and I know of no mage who has encountered them. Is the state of the world due to their absence? Did the Technocracy drive them off?

The Avatar is a vastly misunderstood phenomena. The exact nature of this force (being?) that guides mages towards enlightenment has never been discovered, though every Awakened faction in the world has its theories. What the Avatar is and does is not the purview of this book (though

an extensive discussion thereof can be found in the **Mage Storytellers Handbook**).

In times past, the Avatar did not always choose the mage into which it incarnated — another being made that choice for it. These beings appear only in very old texts and legendry of some of the Traditions; Choristers and Batini mages records from as far back as the 13th century speak of "angels," and Hermetic texts relate tales of *gallu*, the creatures of Babylonian myth that carried souls to the underworld (though some slightly more favorable tales also speak of Anunnaku, creatures who once ruled Creation). Likewise, the Akashic Records hold the memories of mages who recall the touch of the *lung*, the sacred dragons that directed the heavens and the souls of the Awakened. However, these beings, whatever they truly are, only appeared in the history of the Awakened for a brief time. The "modern" understanding of the Avatar, after all, only came into being around the 14th century. Before that, mages didn't feel the stirrings of enlightenment in the direct manner that

they do now. The Avatar did not arrange vision quests and Seekings; a mage was free — and forced — to find his own path.

As magic thought became more codified among the groups that would one day become the Traditions, the Avatar began taking a more active role, gaining a voice and a name, rather than just acting as an amorphous force. At the same time, the *gallu* (or whatever name one chooses to call them) were guiding certain Avatars to certain bodies. What influenced their choices is unknown, and few concrete theories exist on the matter, as they only performed this function for approximately two centuries. Around the middle of the 15th century, these “soul guides” disappeared. Since very few mages recognized their existence anyway, they weren’t readily missed. But ever after, Avatars have incarnated into mages without help, which occasionally results in confusion and discord as “unworthy” (or more accurately, unready) candidates receive Awakened Avatars. While the Order of Hermes and various other Awakened factions (including the Technocracy) have records and notes on these beings — commonly called “Psychopomps” in modern parlance — no one has any real clue what they are or from where they originated.

## CHRONOLOGY

The Psychopomps did not disappear overnight, of course. But likewise, the shift in Avatars — moving from pools of power to distinct voices — was a gradual change, too. Plus, all of these things happened earlier in some areas than others. For example, Native American Dreamspeakers have legends of Seekings and Avatar-like visions long before European mages do, and some cultures and Crafts still don’t seem to.

Avatars appear to be a developmental step in the evolution of a mage, or a group of mages (and therefore a paradigm). It might be that the Psychopomps simply weren’t necessary anymore after a certain point, or it might be that they simply got the process of Avatars incarnating into mages rolling. After showing the Avatars how to choose their hosts, they faded back into whatever Umbral Realms they came from.



## ORIGINS OF THE PSYCHOPOMPS

The soul guides are sentient — that is, they don't have the same single-minded devotion to a particular task that many spirits do. They have their own agendas and reasons for guiding Avatars to certain mages. It may be that they work (or worked) on behalf of a higher power, but whether that higher power is indeed divine or simply an *extremely* powerful Umbrood (if it exists at all) is unknown. The fact that the Psychopomps disappeared after being noticed for only a relatively short time seems to indicate that either they were doing something they shouldn't have been doing, or that they were called into existence to do one particular task. However, thus far few living mages even realize that Psychopomps ever existed, and so even fewer know that they have returned.

### BANISHMENT

At some point (the few theories that exist on the matter put the date around the middle of the 15th century) the Psychopomps were barred from their chosen tasks by *something*. If the *gallu* did indeed act on behalf of a more powerful being, it seems likely that this being (or perhaps an enemy thereof) banished them. If not, the banishment may have been self-imposed; again, perhaps they completed their task. It may simply be that time and Paradox barred them from Earth. The most likely explanation, however, is probably the second: they chose to abandon their task. The reason for this is that they have appeared when mages have great need of them — normally when some horrific force threatens Avatars on a grand scale (such as the Avatar Storm). This is further corroborated by the existence of the Anakim.

### THE ANAKIM

These beings result from the merger (some would say “possession”) of a Psychopomp and a mage. Anakim are extremely powerful spiritual beings, and tend to take on a

supernatural form guided by the mage's perception of what the Psychopomp is and what his own Avatar should be. This means a Chorister or any heavily Christian mage might become a living angel, whereas a Euthanatos might become something... darker. Becoming an Anakim does *not* “cleanse” or “purify” the mage in any way; an evil or corrupt mage becomes an evil or corrupt Anakim (although, generally, Psychopomps do not merge with such mages if they can help it). The mage must be willing to accept the merger; Psychopomps have no power to join with unwilling hosts.

Throughout history, various cultures have spawned myths about powerful beings sleeping beneath the Earth who will rise to the world's protection when needed. Many countries have a myth of a sleeping Emperor; even Christianity's tales of the second coming can be viewed the same way. Might the Anakim be responsible for these tales? And if so, is the world not in such dire straits now that the might of the Anakim is required?

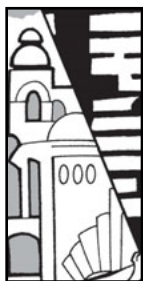
### THE AVATAR STORM

Possibly so, but the Avatar Storm has confused the entire works. As mages are now largely barred from the Umbra, the Psychopomps have once again had to take a direct hand in things. Those few mages who possess the ability to navigate the winds of the Avatar Storm (as described in the *Stormwarden Merit*, page 295 of **Mage: The Ascension**) are actually spiritually descended from mages “chosen” by the Psychopomps in years past. Stormwardens can mitigate the damage done to the Avatar, and this has occurred once before under similar circumstances (see **Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council** for the most recent appearance of the Psychopomps).

If the Psychopomps have begun conducting souls to their destinies, can the Anakim be far behind? And if so, will an incautious choice spell disaster for the world, or a breath of new hope?

Only time will tell.

## ACROSS THE GAUNTLET



*The important thing is not to be afraid.*

*They can smell fear like dogs. And like dogs, they can be trained. They can be brought to heel. They have to be. They're not intelligent; they're barely sentient. They exist to serve. But the trick is to find a way to make them see that, and with the right spells, that can be accomplished.*

*I know others have tried. Their blood stains the walls. I can see the marks on the floor as one clung to the stones for dear life while the demon dragged him back.*

*But I will succeed. I am unafraid.*

The horrors that lurk beyond the Gauntlet, for the most part, don't try to cross it. The world is harsh and destroys such beings. Most Umbral beings need a shield of some

kind, a body to inhabit, a magical ward against Unbelief... or an invitation.

What kind of mage summons an Umbral denizen? The reasons for such summoning vary widely. The most common reason is, unfortunately, simply power. The mage summons up something that he thinks will teach him magic, or perform tasks for him. Once in a while, such a mage is right. Far more often, he conjures up something he cannot put down.

Other summoners are motivated by simply curiosity. Whether it's to see what that creature would look like up close, or simply to see if an old ritual actually works, these mages test the boundaries of their magic and open rifts large enough for Umbrood to step through — and then, often, reap the consequences.

## IN TERITIS OF MECHANICS

Summoning creatures from the Umbra usually requires Spirit 4 at the very least. This allows the mage to contact the being he wishes to summon, and then open a rift into Earth large enough for the being to step through. Mind 3 is also usually required to negotiate terms with the being; most of the Umbrood only speak human languages when it suits them, and may not be willing to converse in any language except their own, unpronounceable dialects.

Paradigm is also an important consideration. Most Nephandi don't have trouble summoning demons of nearly any stripe, for example, and a Celestial Chorus mage might well be able to call down an angel (or an Umbrood that looks like one). But a Chorister probably wouldn't know how to call up an elemental, even if she possessed the right Spheres for it. In game terms, some rating in Occult is a good idea for any would-be summoner, the higher the better (of course, very high Occult ratings might simply indicate that the mage has a better chance of getting in over her head).

Many other motivations are possible. A lonely (and lusty) mage might call up a succubus or something similar to fulfill his wishes. A mage who has lost his family might try to raise them from the dead. And, of course, the Nephandi work feverishly to call up unspeakable horrors from the Otherworlds, simply to hasten the downfall of the world. In the end, the question is less often about *why* something was summoned than about *what* was summoned (and how to put it back).

## DELIBERATE SUMMONING

Most summons are cast deliberately, and for the most part, the mages in question know what they're doing. They don't always fully understand the consequence, but the point is that it's difficult to cast a summoning spell by accident. Summoning rituals tend to be long and drawn out. Some of them can take days to perform, and the vast majority cannot be interrupted. That means that most mages perform Life Effects (to stay awake and not succumb to hunger) and Mind Effects (to stay mentally alert and sharpen their memories) before even beginning.

Summoning spells can take any form. Hermetic mages often inscribe circles with runes and Enochian lettering, whereas Verbena might invoke the names of the spirits they wish to call around a bonfire for a full night. However, the spell usually comes down to four stages: Contact, Entreaty, Bargaining and Service.

### CONTACT

During this stage, the mage casts out for the spirit or Umbrood she wishes to call. If the mage is calling a specific

spirit, often the case in demon summoning or in calling up the spirits of the dead, she must know the being's name. A botch on a magic roll at this stage (or a botch during any Occult roll made in preparation) may mean the mage calls *something*, but certainly not what she'd intended. All the mage is trying to do at this point is get the spirit's attention. If the mage takes extra time (extending the duration of the spell by a decent margin) she may ensure that she contacts the right entity.

Once the mage makes contact, the Entreaty phase begins.

### ENTREATY

The mage attempts to convince the spirit to travel to her location so that they can discuss terms of service. In many cases, the mage simply uses magic or knowledge of the being's True Name to compel the spirit to come to her; indeed, it is *very* risky to gain the attention of a powerful spirit without such assurances! Since this stage of the spell typically takes the form of "long distance" communication (the spirit can be anywhere in the vastness of the Umbra when the mage contacts it), it can actually take a great deal of time, although the conversation itself is very short.

No hard and fast rules exist for the reaction of spirits contacted by an opportunistic mage. Beings like the Hive Dwellers, who want nothing more than to infest Earth, ordinarily answer any summons given. Other spirits that don't care as much about Earth (including aloof beings such as *djinn* or many High Umbral spirits) might only respond if forced to do so, or cajoled with something especially appropriate to the spirit. A mage who makes an appropriate sacrifice can expect a much better reaction than one who simply tugs on the spirit's proverbial sleeve and asks for a powwow.

Once the spirit responds, the spell enters the Bargaining phase.

### BARGAINING

The spirit and the mage haggle; the mage explains what she wants the spirit to do for her and the spirit informs the mage what recompense it would require. Again, if the mage has the means to compel the spirit to undertake certain services, then the spirit is effectively bound to whatever the mage might demand of it. Of course, such behavior all but guarantees that the being will follow the letter of the demand, but not its intent, and will betray the mage given a half a chance.

Ironically, it is the Nephandi who usually treat the Umbrood they summon the best. They offer sacrifices of whatever the spirit would find pleasing and don't normally ask for anything the spirit wouldn't have done anyway. The problem is that Nephandi often summon spirits who *like* hanging around on Earth, which means that getting them to go back is problematic (of course, the Nephandi might not want the spirit to leave, either). Hermetics are known for being somewhat arrogant to the beings they summon (though to

their credit, they usually don't summon such powerful beings that this is an issue, at least not deliberately).

The terms of service, so to speak, can take the form of a written contract or a verbal agreement. Unless the mage possesses Entropy 5, she has no way to seal the bargain magically, but most spirits who agree to a bargain are bound by their own oaths. However, a mage must be *very* careful in what she agrees to, and that all bases are covered. For example, if a mage summons a being and instructs it to make her rich, but doesn't specify a time frame, the spirit might well wait for the mage to be on death's door from old age before it fulfills the terms of the bargain.

A mage who reneges on a bargain to an Umbrood, no matter how powerful, is in trouble. Spirits have extremely long memories, and no spirit exists in a vacuum. A mage who cheats on a spirit bargain can expect the Umbra to reject her powers, or for any spirit even remotely allied to the jilted one to be hostile. Oddly enough, this reaction is not common towards mages who compel spirits to do their bidding magically. Apparently, using magic to control spirits is more fair than lying to them.

## SERVICE

Once the terms are decided, the actual service begins. As the reader has no doubt surmised by this point, the Umbra has an infinite variety of spirits, which means that the mage can, with the right rituals, summon a spirit to undertake nearly any task. Some examples are given below:

- **Menial Service:** Some mages summon weak spirits to perform mundane tasks such as cleaning or building. The bargain usually binds them to a specific length of time or until one task is complete.
- **Guardian:** The spirit is assigned to physically (or magically) guard a person, place, or object. Usually this assignment lasts a predetermined length of time, although very powerful mages can bind spirits indefinitely to their charges.
- **Assassination:** The spirit remains on Earth long enough to kill a specific target or group of targets, then fades... provided the mage remembered to specify that in the bargain.
- **Companionship:** This might mean sex (and some mages do indeed conjure up spirit lovers for themselves) or could simply mean that the mage enters into a familiar-type bond with the spirit. This is best reserved for spirits that don't hate the mage, of course.

## ACCIDENTAL SUMMONING

It doesn't happen often, but sometimes a mage calls up something she didn't mean to. This normally happens for one of two reasons: either the mage was summoning one creature and got something else entirely, or she was tricked into performing a spell that grants a spirit permission to enter Earth.

If the mage was performing a summoning and contacts something other than intended, she might not even know it until the Entreaty stage is complete (the spiritual communication of the Entreaty hardly allows for close scrutiny of the subject). Once the spirit "arrives" and the Bargaining stage is meant to begin, the mage may find that she is far out of her depth. Arrogant or overconfident mages might press on with Bargaining anyway, hoping to get the best of the spirit. In general, this is exactly what the spirit wants. It will twist the bargain in any way it can and normally simply kills the mage upon conclusion of the discussion (a surprising number of mages forget to stipulate that, as part of the bargain, the spirit is barred from harming the summoner), and then goes on to pursue whatever agenda it likes.

On the other hand, mages can be tricked into releasing spirits into our world. This bypasses the normal stages of summoning spells. It most often occurs when a particular spirit has been bound to a place or barred from entering physical reality — ordinarily, a way to break such bans exists. If a curious mage disrupts the ban, the spirit is free to do as it likes. Not all such spirits immediately destroy their liberators, but many figure that it's the smartest bet (after all, why leave someone alive who has even an inkling of how to re-enact the ban?).

## EXAMPLES

Summoned spirits come in infinite variety, as do those who call down Umbrood for their purposes. Below are two examples of summoners and their chosen targets, for use as Storyteller characters, plot hooks, or simple inspiration.

### LOWELL MCALLISTER, VERBENA SOLITARY

Lowell is a Verbena mage who Awakened shortly after the Avatar Storm began while he was on vacation in Scotland. His mentor taught him Spirit magic as well as Life, but cautioned him against attempting to travel the Otherworlds. This was good enough for the hard-working, practical Lowell. When he returned to the United States, he set about converting his family's home into a sanctum. However, Lowell still had to make ends meet, and couldn't take much time off work to make the alterations he wanted. To that end, he called up an elemental to help him.

The ritual required an entire weekend, but finally Lowell contacted a hard-working and thorough earth spirit and coaxed it into the physical world. He feeds it Quintessence and it works 24 hours a day on his home, doing basic carpentry. It appears as a short, squat, humanoid creature made of tightly packed dirt and grass, but it crumbles into a pile of earth if anyone except Lowell comes within 20 feet of the house. The elemental works very slowly — Lowell, working alone, could probably have the work done in half the time, but this way he doesn't have to spend every waking moment either working at his day job or on the house.

What Lowell doesn't know is that the reason the elemental is taking so long is that it is also building tunnels and other features into the ground around the house. Once the work is finished, any number of similar beings will have access to Lowell's tiny Node, as well as any other spiritual features he designs for the area. While this isn't in violation of the Bargain Lowell made with the creature (and while Lowell might not necessarily mind, as long as he gets some use out of his Node, too) the tunnels are destabilizing the house. One minor earthquake could bring it crashing down, once the "construction" is finished — and quakes aren't unknown in the area.

## JORGE VALLE DE CONSTANCIA, MAD OCCULTIST

Jorge Valle de Constancia is a middle aged Spaniard who worked for many years as an attorney for Endron Oil, specializing in international law. He is superbly qualified for the job — Jorge is intelligent, suave, and polite. He has a knack for languages (he speaks 10 fluently and is conversational in many more) and for immersing himself in nearly any culture. He is also completely amoral, willing to do or say anything to win a case.

Occultism had always been a side pursuit for Jorge; even he can't say how he first became interested. When he retired from Endron in 1999, he began traveling the world, pursuing the many leads on supernatural phenomena that he'd accrued over his career. During that time, he began experimenting with magic and discovered that much of it was just like learning a language — once he learned the basics, the rest followed.

While in Rio de Janeiro, Jorge came across a curious legend about a creature that came out of the jungle and slew hundreds of men before it raced off after the setting sun, thinking the light it saw was blood. Intrigued, he traced the legend's roots and discovered that it actually referred to a demon of sorts, and, more interesting yet, the demon could be summoned by anyone willing to feed it. Its diet is unique; it feeds on human bone marrow, and to summon it requires an offering of marrow from the summoner's own family.

Fortunately, Jorge has an extensive family, and several were willing to journey to Rio to meet him.

The dying words of his cousin as the demon pounced — "*No debe ser*" ("it should not be") — gave Jorge pause, but he was immediately overcome with love and admiration for his new companion. He set about traveling the world, and visits family around the globe, pursuing any interesting story he can find. He has a special interest in "haunted places,"

meaning that he often winds up visiting Nodes. While Jorge himself isn't terribly powerful (he isn't even Awakened; for Storytellers with access to **Sorcerer Revised**, assume Jorge is a sorcerer with 5 dots of Summoning, Binding, and Warding — though he's always looking to learn more) the demon that travels with him is deadly (see the sidebar for details). He refers to it as *mi perro* ("my dog") and will go to great lengths to keep it fed and happy.

### JORGE'S PET

The demon is rather canine looking in form, or it would be, if it stayed still long enough for anyone to take a look. It has six legs, each of which end in wicked claws, and a horrid maw full of long, cruel fangs. While it prefers to eat bone marrow from Jorge's family, it can subsist on the pickings from any human's bones. It is fully loyal to Jorge and will never attack him, no matter how hungry it gets.

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Stamina 6, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Brawl 5

**Willpower:** 5 (10 for purposes of resisting mental attacks and commands)

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -4, -5, Incapacitated

**Attacks:** Claws (Strength + 1), Bite (Strength + 1)

**Powers:** Hellish Speed (attacks three times per turn); Faster Than the Eye (+3 difficulties to hit the demon); Regeneration (heals one lethal or bashing damage per turn, aggravated damage takes one day/level); Should Not Be (anyone who gets a good look at the demon rolls Willpower, difficulty 7; failure indicates the viewer loses a permanent dot of Willpower. This effect only happens once to any given person; that is, a person who looks upon the demon and succeeds in the Willpower roll need not make another, although that in no way means the demon is not disturbing to view)

**Weaknesses:** Sunlight (suffers aggravated damage from sunlight — 3 levels/turn of exposure, no soak; will run from any source of sunlight); Hunger (must eat one pound of human bone marrow per week, or it loses one health level daily until it feeds); Bloodlust (roll Willpower, difficulty 6, to avoid chasing an obvious source of blood or meat).



# CHAPTER SIX: WALKING THE WORLDS (STORYTELLING)

*Can't keep my mind from the circling sky,  
Tongue-tied and twisted, just an Earth-bound misfit, I.*  
— Pink Floyd, “Learning to Fly”



The Umbra, as the reader has by now learned, is quite literally a place of endless possibility. **Mage** troupes can do nearly anything on the far side of the Gauntlet, and that often creates a certain hesitancy about using the Umbra in stories. Many players (and Storytellers) have a tendency to refer to Earth as the “real world,” and

while the focus of **Mage** remains on Earth, the Umbra is no less “real.” But how best to use this limitless expanse in chronicles? This chapter covers exactly that. Herein, the Storyteller will find rationale for Umbral journeys, ways of using Umbral denizens and phenomena in the Prime reality, notes on integrating the changes in the Umbra into chronicles, and a sample story suitable for a cabal of mages interested in reaching beyond.

# THE UMBRA IN STORIES



The greatest advantage in using the Umbra in a chronicle is its sheer versatility. Mages can do literally anything in the Umbra, provided they know how and go to the right “place.” But that very openness is daunting—within infinite possibility, how do you *use* the Umbra? When considering an Umbral story, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Why leave Earth?** Umbral journeys should never be undertaken lightly. If your troupe’s cabal has hit on the idea of leaving Earth for the Umbra, make sure you understand their reasons for wishing to do so. Don’t discourage them, even if the underlying idea is frivolous or badly thought out, but do take note of such things—an ill-prepared group of mages venturing into the Otherworlds will have very different experiences than a group that takes the time to plan their journey out, in large part because intent and focus makes the journey that much easier. If the group has a concrete goal, make sure you understand it. If they wish simply to explore, that’s fine, too, but then you must keep careful eye on the proverbial clock, so that you know when Disembodiment sets in (see pp. 31-32).

- **What changes does the chronicle need?** The Umbra takes the rules of life and turns them upside down. It’s possible to introduce new characters, re-invigorate old ones, reveal information about a situation, or give characters a chance to fix old mistakes in the Umbra. If one of the characters brings a familiar on the journey, for example, that familiar is effectively going home. Might that journey home change the spirit in attitude, or in ability? Maybe one of the characters manages to stumble into a pocket realm that *changes* him (perhaps beneficially, perhaps not—maybe the character even contracts some sort of Umbral disease like Chulorviosis). Think about recent events in the chronicle; what could be expanded upon by a trip into the Umbra? Or, if the game has (for example) felt a bit slow and cerebral of late, an Umbral sojourn could include a run-in with some hostile spirits, just to quicken the pace a bit.

- **Is the group prepared?** Stepping into the Umbra isn’t as simple as casting a few Spirit Effects and hopping through a gateway. Umbral travel is risky. If the group thinks that they can just leap directly in with no research or preparation—or, worse, they are basing their plans on the way the Umbra was pre-Reckoning, it might be worthwhile to give them a few hints. Don’t

hand them easy solutions to the problem, but perhaps intimate that some further preparation is necessary. If, however, the group is dead set on jumping in with both feet, don’t discourage them. Overweening hubris is, after all, a primary theme of **Mage**.

- **What themes will the story explore?** The answer to this question largely depends on the reason the group is leaving (see below), but even a story that ostensibly has a concrete goal can have a variety of themes. For example, consider a cabal that ventures into the Umbra to prepare for an assault on an enemy by “running simulations” of the upcoming battle. The story could take on a very gritty “preparing for war” theme, as the cabal comes to realize that not all of them will survive, no matter how prepared they are. If, however, over the course of preparations, the mages come to appreciate that innocent people might be harmed in their battle, the story might begin to lean more towards themes of choice and principles—is the battle worth human life? In the Umbra, where ideas and concepts are so important, considering theme is a must.

## REASONS TO JOURNEY BEYOND

The reasons for traveling to the Umbral Realms are nearly as limitless as the Realms themselves. Below is a list of possible reasons for venturing into the Umbra, and what types of Umbral Realms might suit those reasons.

### MYSTERY

The Umbra represents the greatest enigma ever. It is a virtually endless supply of virgin territory, with strangeness and wonders unimaginable. The human spirit cries out for the thrill and possibility of discovery (or perhaps longs for new lands to conquer and despoil, depending upon whom one asks) and the Umbra can provide that easily. Some cabals might travel beyond the Gauntlet for the sheer thrill of exploring new Realms, attempting to map out the Umbra, or simply to see what kind of odd spirit beings they might encounter. In such a store, the discovery itself is the goal, and so the desire to reach the goal won’t result in the mages venturing to any particular place. Instead, they might wind up anywhere in the Umbra that their will and magic can carry them.

Viewing the Umbra as a mystery to be solved holds two major dangers, however. One is Disembodiment. Without a concrete goal, the cabal may become so enamored of the infinite discoveries it makes that the

magicians forget that Earth is truly their home. As they journey farther away from Earth, it may seem less important to go back. The Storyteller faced with the prospect of the characters becoming lost forever might consider staging an encounter with another explorer (perhaps even a proto-Void Engineer, a member of the Order of Reason who became lost centuries ago) who has become wholly spirit, and in the process lost his humanity — and enlightenment — entirely.

The other major danger is simply that those who look for danger often find it. Intent and desire tends to shape one's experiences in the Umbra, and that means that a group that intends to find and define the more dangerous, wild, or even untouched parts of the Umbra might wend their ways into any of the more unpleasant parts of the spirit worlds. A group wishing to face the dangers of the Umbra might wander into one of the Hive Realms (see Chapter Five). A cabal idly expressing curiosity about shapeshifters might blunder into the Spirit Wilds, where the dance of predator and prey is decidedly slanted *against* humans. And woe betide a mage who expresses a desire to study the Avatar Winds in greater detail....

When deciding where to “send” an exploratory group of magicians, it's often best to present several possibilities (in any archetypal form that the characters understand: paths off a road, links to web sites, different dreams, etc.) and let the group choose. If after one story, they don't feel like heading back, perhaps the second “choice” is more broad; whereas in the first choice you presented several specific Realms to which they could travel, in the second story you might give them choices between the Spirit Wilds, the Astral Umbra, and the Shard Realms. As they continue to travel, they grow unable to see the specifics, instead seeing only the vastness of the Umbra (the group, at this stage, is on the way to losing its connection to Earth and wandering the Umbra forever).

**Possible Realms:** Any. Entering the Umbra in order to explore or reveal the mysteries of the Otherworlds can take a group of travelers literally anywhere. The Storyteller should be sure not to send the group somewhere immediately fatal (as intent really does direct destination, and the group *probably* doesn't intend to die).

## POSSIBILITY

The Umbra is the realization of all possibility, and as such, magicians may wish to travel to the Otherworlds to see if an idea can truly take root on Earth (realms like the Inventium stemmed from this sort of thing, before the Avatar Storm came). Likewise, as mentioned

## MAPPING THE UMBRA

Can it be done? Past **Mage** sourcebooks have indicated that it's possible to map a location out of existence; if Tradition lore is true, that's what the Technocracy did to places like El Dorado and Atlantis. But is it possible to create even a reasonable travel guide to the Umbra?

The answer to this question (and to many other questions regarding the Umbra) is: maybe. Some Realms are more “stable” than others are; this is especially true of the Spirit Wilds, which doesn't depend so much on perception. Its Realms seem to stay relatively stable in appearance (they do change, actually, but do so gradually). However, these places are also of comparatively little interest to the Awakened.

Realms such as those described in Chapters Two and Three can and do change, and of course the myriad splinter Realms, formed from idea and thought and kept alive by one traveler's belief, can alter themselves or cease to be as soon as the inceptor leaves the area. As for mapping out pathways between worlds, it can be done, but generally requires a magical Effect consisting of Correspondence 3, Spirit 1, and Mind 1. Mapping the Umbra through mundane means (that is, just drawing a map) doesn't really work, as so much of Umbral travel is made of “thinking” one's way to a destination.

above, it's possible to use the Umbra as a kind of “training ground” — a dedicated group of magicians can set up a pocket of the Umbra as their own personal simulation of whatever situation might be required. This sort of thing is best accomplished in a part of the Umbra not already dedicated to one particular ideal (the Digital Web is the best place to find such “clean slates”) but it's not impossible to clear a section of the Umbra and reshape it as necessary. This generally requires at least Spirit 4, and usually high levels of Matter and Prime as well.

Beyond simply creating a mini-Realm to use as a proving ground or a dry run, the Umbra represents possibility on a much larger scale. Anything can happen beyond the Gauntlet, and while that phrase may seem trite or meaningless at first blush, stop and consider the larger implications. *Anything* can happen — and that means that a mage can find the answer to nearly any nagging question while in the Umbra. This can range to broad historical questions (“What if the South won the Civil War?”) to very personal issues (“Suppose *I had* gone home with that pale woman in the bar?”). The chance

to learn nearly anything, as long as one knows where to look (which, of course, is another matter entirely) is not something that many mages are prepared to pass up. Asking a question in the Umbra, some mages postulate, actually forms the answer as well... somewhere. The trick is finding it, and being in the Umbra allows the mage to change the process of searching for an answer, which can involve soul-searching or years of research, into a literal, physical (or, more accurately, metaphysical) journey.

More than any other reason for venturing beyond Earth, the theme of possibility helps to drive home the realization that potential is a fine thing to consider, but ultimately accomplishes little. The truly important realm is Earth, because it is there that a mage grows and ascends (so to speak) as a human being. A character who allows herself to wallow in "What if?" paralyzes herself in the end, trapped between so many possible outcomes that she can't decide what to do. In **Mage**, this is symbolized by Disembodiment; the mage slowly becomes a spirit, unable to utilize the knowledge and potential she gains through her endless search, but merely flitting from one question to the next.

Another option for themes and quests of possibility is that of crossover. Mages are not the only "race" of supernatural beings that have business in the Umbra. Werewolves, of course, are the most obvious, but the Restless Dead, changelings, and even the Reborn can also enter various levels of the spirit worlds. Mages fit into the cosmology rather strangely — they don't have a place in the Umbra that they see as exclusive to them by divine right (although they are commonly the only beings who traverse the Astral Reaches) but do consider the exploration of the entire Umbra to be their privilege. Needless to say, other beings can become quite upset to find uninvited humans crawling around "their" Realms. But if, for some reason, the characters had a reason to co-exist, the Umbra can make for superb neutral ground. After all, no race can really claim to be completely safe in the Umbra, and no race can legitimately claim to understand all of its mysteries. An exchange of ideas that would cause gasps of horror on Earth can take place in the Umbra simply because anything is possible here. This does not mean that a mage and a werewolf are going to sit down, explain their views on the universe, agree on those views, and then proceed to share all of the cultural and ideological bases of their people. It merely means that running a game consisting of more than one type of character using Umbral themes (possibility or otherwise) is a better bet than trying to run such a game on Earth, where too many rules are in force.

**Possible Realms:** The Epiphamies, the Digital Web (see **The Digital Web 2.0**), Realms beyond the Horizon, Mirror Zones, many of the Realms in the Spirit Wilds (but the Battleground in particular), the Dream Realms. Chronicles including beings other than mages might need to be set in areas of the Umbra conducive to such beings; mages have a great deal of versatility with regards to visiting differing areas of the Umbra, while other creatures do not.

## WISDOM

As mentioned above, the answers to nearly all questions can be found in the Umbra. Rather than traversing the Gauntlet to ask "what if," however, many mages simply go seeking enlightenment or wisdom for its own sake. This differs from possibility in that instead of looking to understand and cope with the past, the mage seeking wisdom looks to comprehend and meet the future. While both drives are valid, they represent two very different approaches to a problem.

A mage looking to find wisdom in the Umbra might set out with a definite goal in mind, focusing on a specific question or problem and seeing where the Umbral paths take him. Such quests often lead either to Epiphamies, where the specific issue can be addressed, or to Realms that will answer the mage's question in a roundabout way (or at least put it in perspective for him). For example, an Akashic Brother accidentally kills a man during a fight and this forces him to confront his own beliefs with regards to human life. He travels into the Umbra with the objective of finding that man's spirit or, failing that, simply seeking what happens to someone who dies as the result of random violence. Depending on the Storyteller's thoughts on the matter (whether she wishes to incorporate anything from **Wraith** or rule that the souls of the dead are indeed reachable through the Umbra) the character might wind up speaking with the dead man and asking forgiveness, explaining his actions, and learning about what the death of one human does to the fabric of the universe (which may be nothing at all, again depending on the tone of the story and the needs and whims of the Storyteller). Or, the Akashic may find himself in a Realm like the Wasteland, where suffering and death are commonplace, and striving to understand under what circumstances adding to such misery might be acceptable.

On the other hand, a mage might simply enter the Umbra seeking wisdom, but nothing specific. In effect, the mage uses the Umbra as a vision quest. This normally requires the mage to use some appropriate focus as he **Steps Sideways**; consuming peyote or some other

hallucinogenic is one possibility, as is losing himself in music or another sensory stimulus. Once across, the mage simply wanders, looking for nothing in particular, and waits for a vista to show itself. The danger in such an instance, of course, is that since direction in the Umbra is determined so much by intent, the mage might walk for long periods of time without seeing anything in particular. Or, worse, a malicious spirit or even another mage might take advantage of the character's desire for wisdom and use it for its own ends (which might in itself be enlightening). However, very few vision quests are inspired by boredom. More often, the mage enters a quest as a response to an event in his life (and therefore in the chronicle). As Storyteller, you should try to gauge what a character (and a player) is trying to get out of such a quest and present symbols and events accordingly. When in doubt, ask the player.

A mage might also travel into the Umbra to seek advice from a particular being. This could be an oracle of sorts (a Dionysian Cultist might seek out the Oracle of Delphi, or the spirit thereof, with a question) or a Master believed lost to the Avatar Storm. This sort of plotline sometimes crosses over into the realm of Power (see below) because the focus is on the goal, rather than on the wisdom to be had.

A Seeking is a specific type of vision quest that *may* take place in the Umbra (depending on whom you ask). Seekings take many forms, and it is perfectly acceptable for a quest to begin as a simple journey to find whatever wisdom might be waiting and evolve into a Seeking as it progresses (particularly if the character accrues the number of experience points necessary to raise her Arete during the Umbral quest and wishes to do so immediately). The **Mage Storytellers Handbook** contains more information on Seekings.

**Possible Realms:** Most of the Realms listed above under Possibility can also function for vision quest/wisdom stories. However, it's more important for the Storyteller to decide what the lesson to be learned during the story is and choose the Realm or Realms to be visited based on that lesson.

## POWER

Quests into the Umbra do not always revolve around the pursuit of knowledge or the desire to better oneself or one's fellow man. There is power aplenty to be had beyond the Gauntlet. A mage or a cabal of mages might venture into the spirit worlds to find a source of Quintessence, a mentor, or even spirit allies to bring with them to Earth. This kind of story can go in any number of directions, depending on why the characters are seeking power and in what form they wish to find it.

The characters may simply be seeking to bring Umbral energy to Earth in the form of Tass. This is probably the simplest type of story a troupe can tell with a theme of Power, but it is by no means unrewarding. A quest into the Umbra to find Quintessence can bring up all sorts of other issues — how far will the cabal travel, knowing that every step they take away from Earth is a step they'll have to make again? How far *can* they go before the risk of Disembodiment is too great and they must turn back? If they find a mediocre source of power, will they take it and run, or keep looking for something better? And, of course, any source of Quintessence they find is likely to be in use. Very little, if anything, in the Umbra is superfluous (and what is superfluous is probably stuff that mages put there to begin with). That means that the group might well be stealing energy from a society or a spirit that desperately needs it.

Suppose the cabal travels to the spirit representation of a famous monument and discovers that miniature souvenirs charged with Quintessence appear in the Umbrascape around the monument almost daily. Taking these trinkets, they reason, won't make much difference in the long run — the folks who'll come to admire the monument will replace them tomorrow. But will collecting those souvenirs leave the monument spiritually weakened, even for one night? Will that weakness make it more likely that someone will attempt to damage the monument? And what if the Technocracy, in investigating such an incident, finds the characters' Resonances and traces them? By keeping an eye on the consequences, the Storyteller can inject a note of responsibility into a story that, on the surface, resembles a simple "find and loot" scenario.

If the characters wish to find allies in the Umbra, however, the story takes a very different spin. Many Umbrood have their own rules, and this means that any mage who wishes to deal with spirits had best learn those rules before trying to make deals. Shamans know well the concept of chiminage, and the fact that the High Umbral courts have their own laws of decorum is common knowledge among the Hermetics. However, knowing that the rules exist, and knowing the rules are two different things. If a mage goes asking favors and manages to offend a powerful spirit in the process, the entire cabal might be in for a very cold reception (or worse). Chief among the concerns when approaching spirits for help is, *Why should the spirit in question help the characters?* Spirits aren't necessarily cruel or apathetic, but they are extremely tunnel-visioned and don't normally act outside of their roles (this is more true of Middle Umbral spirits than those from Astral Space, but even those latter beings don't tend to see things in human terms).

If a cabal asks properly, however, they might well gain allies in whatever their cause happens to be. The Storyteller should carefully consider what form that aid might take. The simplest form of aid is information and instruction; spirits can sometimes teach Spheres (though their understanding of magic is, of necessity, very different from most mages' and might require some paradigmatical re-working when the mage reaches Earth again), and most can teach Knowledges such as Enigmas, Occult, and Cosmology. If the characters want more tangible aid, such as martial backup, the spirit might require a bequest of energy to breach the Gauntlet (and will likely require even more to stay there). Of course, certain magical effects such as Living Bridge can alleviate the need of Quintessence to stave off Unbelief, but not all spirits will agree to share a body with a human (and some might not want to give it up once the favor has been discharged).

Some beings, of course, are perfectly able to stay on Earth without being eroded by the Consensus. Such beings, though, are either powerful enough to fuel themselves or draw their power from a higher master, which means they typically serve that master's agenda. See Chapter Five for some thoughts on summoning creatures from the Umbra and what this can mean for the summoner.

**Possible Realms:** The Umbral Courts and the Near Umbra are good starts. Really ambitious cabals might travel to the Deep Umbra to try and find sources of power heretofore untapped (the Technocracy has been doing this for years, apparently). However, most of the Umbral Realms include some source of power — a really vicious cabal might travel to the Hollow Earth to try and tap into its sun.

## ESCAPISIT

The World of Darkness is an extremely trying place, seemingly bereft of hope. For beings such as the Awakened who have the power of reality at their fingertips, it's often too damned depressing to contemplate. The Umbra, however, is everything that Earth is not — chock-full of possibility, light, energy, and hope. So why not leave Earth behind and delve into the Otherworlds? Even if the mage doesn't wish to do so on a permanent basis, the Umbra would seem to have excellent "vacation spots." It's just a matter of finding a friendly Realm and leaving before Disembodiment sets in, right?

Things are rarely so simple, of course. The Umbra is not a friendly place; it's far too vast to be characterized by anything so anthropomorphic. Besides the usual caveats about losing oneself to the Umbra and becoming a spirit, the mage's Avatar might not take kindly to its

host using the enlightenment it granted to go off on pleasure jaunts (of course, the Avatar can get around this by nudging the mage towards Realms that *seem* perfectly peaceful, but are in fact anything but). This kind of complacency might result in the Avatar stripping the mage's powers for a time, leaving her stranded in the Umbra without the vast power that the Spirit Sphere usually grants — leaving her, in effect, at the mercy of a much more capricious environment than the "real world" ever is.

Another issue concerning escape, of course, is that the issues one escapes from tend to follow, especially in the Umbra. Mages looking to get away from their lives might fall into Paradox Realms or Mirror Zones, or simply have disturbing dreams (which can very easily blossom into reality) about their lives back on Earth. Plus, after the 17th time the landscape changes, leaving the mage trying desperately to get a grip on her surroundings, home can look pretty promising.

There is a thin line, of course, between exploration and escapism, and the Storyteller should pay close attention to which one the characters are trying to accomplish by heading off into the Umbra. If they are merely hungry for discovery, that's fine (although the notion about having work to do on Earth might still apply). If they just want to head off to Balador (see p. 113) and get laid, perhaps you should show them what remains of the Pleasure Realm....

**Possible Realms:** Depending on what the players are trying to accomplish, if anything, a number of Realms might suffice. Again, the ruins of Balador can send a very poignant message about escapism and hedonism. The Spirit Wilds host rapids, cliffs, and forests more vast and awe-inspiring than anything on Earth, should the mage wish to "get away from it all" — naturally, the fauna found there is also more impressive. Mirror Zones, by nature, are good places to send mages who don't want to face reality, as are the Dream Realms.

## REFUGE

Trying to escape from unpleasant realities doesn't have to be a matter of disliking one's normal routine. A mage might literally be trying to escape from something or someone with designs on causing her harm, and the Umbra can be a superb place to hide out. A cabal of mages running from the Technocracy or even more mundane forces (such as hunters or vampires) might enter the Otherworlds and wait their opponents out — or attempt to get the drop on them.

The Near Umbra makes for a good resting place. It's familiar enough that the mages don't have to worry quite as much about the landscape shifting on them

every few minutes and most of the laws of nature (as mages know them) still apply. The characters might take sanctuary in the spiritual reflection of a shelter or hospice, since the energies there are probably conducive towards refuge. A mage who plans ahead might have access to a Demesne or Shallowing where her view of reality is the dominant one (although getting her friends there might be a little trickier).

If, however, the forces from which the characters are running are themselves capable of Umbral travel, hiding in the Umbra becomes a much different proposition. Most spirits are able to track targets, and powerful beings (including other mages) can often summon “bloodhounds” (see sidebar). In this case, the characters may flee to the Umbra only to discover their lots have worsened — or they may attempt to turn the flexibility of the Umbra to their advantage. Maybe the escape to the Umbra was motivated not by fear or desire for self-preservation, but by a desire to protect the Sleepers who would be hurt in a conflict taking place on Earth.

A story about Refuge might end with the conflict being resolved, or it could end with the characters resting, making plans, and traveling back to Earth to face their fears. Regardless, the Storyteller should remember that time passes while the characters are in the Umbra

## SPIRIT HOUNDS

These creatures are native to the Spirit Wilds, although similar creatures exist in Astral Space. They take the form of hound dogs or wolves (depending on the mage; more animistic mages tend to see them as feral animals, while humanist mages perceive them as dogs).

Spirit Hounds are capable of tracking any being across the Umbra, provided they first have a sample of the target’s Resonance. Successfully reproducing a mage’s Resonance requires Prime 2 and Mind 2, but it’s best if the hound can “sniff” at something the target has actually touched or altered magically. Spirit Hounds, while superb trackers, aren’t much in the way of attack animals and are in fact somewhat cowardly. They are very curious spirits, but not easily distracted once given a task.

Willpower 5, Rage 3, Gnosis 6, Essence 14

**Charms:** Airt Sense, Tracking (Gnosis roll, difficulty 6, or 3 if the Hound can sample the Target’s Resonance. Physical smells don’t help, but “scenting” something that the target has altered magically does)



and if the mages don't resolve their problems, they may find that these problems have multiplied when they emerge into Earth again.

**Possible Realms:** The best Realms to take refuge in are ones that the characters know well. If the characters flee to the Umbra on a whim, they might use Spirit and Mind magic to search out a safe place to rest; this could lead them to someplace in the Near Umbra or it could lead to a Realm farther out. A powerful Avatar within the group might guide them to such a place, as well. When leading a cabal to a "safe haven," try to use imagery relevant to the characters. A well-educated Son of Ether might see a suitable Realm as a student's lounge at a university, whereas an islander Dreamspeaker might see a beach house as an ideal place to rest.

## RECLAMATION

The Awakened have lost much in the wake of the Reckoning and the Avatar Storm. Many mages, especially those with some experience with the Umbra pre-Storm, feel cheated that they can no longer reach beyond the Gauntlet as easily as once they did. Arrogant though it may seem, some mages feel that the power to step between worlds is a right, not a privilege, and they wish to exercise it once again. The Dreamspeakers, in particular, often feel useless in a world that bars them from the Otherworlds. For a number of reasons, the mages wish to reclaim their abilities to cross the Gauntlet.

A story about Reclamation most often involves the Avatar Storm. This book has already presented a few ways to mitigate the damage it causes, but what about a story about ending it altogether? Would a trip to the Well of Souls (see pp. 100-101) provide the kind of knowledge and power the characters need for such a grand undertaking? What about a Device thought lost in the outer reaches of the Umbra? Perhaps the characters must simply learn by practice how to influence the Storm, and must simply study it close up (without being ripped to shreds). The Psychopomps (see pp. 150-152), a very special race of spirits, would be able to help, but most mages don't even know that they exist, much less what they can do.

Or perhaps the characters accept the Avatar Storm as an unfortunate happening, but are willing to brave it to bring leadership back to their Traditions. Some of the Masters doubtless survive beyond the Gauntlet, and perhaps even beyond the Horizon. If the Earth-bound mages could bring back proof that some of the Masters yet live, or (conversely) learn for themselves the hide-bound folly that led to the fate of the famed Horizon chantry, perhaps the Traditions could find some focus,

some organization, rather than blunder along merely trying to survive. The Council of Nine once held a great deal of power, and the infusion of new blood it recently received by absorbing many of the Disparates should have acted as a boost — but instead, it merely added more voices to the rabble. *Something*, some symbol or word of wisdom must lie beyond the Gauntlet, waiting like Excalibur for the right person to seize it and unite the Traditions.

Whatever the motive — pushing back the Nephandi, weakening the Technocracy, reinvigorating the Traditions or simply reclaiming what was lost — Reclamation stories are likely to take place in several different locales in the Umbra. In fact, they should probably involve several trips, simply to make sure that the characters don't become lost to Disembodiment while searching for the answers they need. One story might involve confirmation that, yes, it's possible to find what they need. The second could lead the cabal to new heights of understanding, for example with some breakthrough that allows for the creation of a safe gateway through the Avatar Storm. The third and subsequent stories might see the cabal meeting with lost Masters or High Umbrood (perhaps the mages can't tell the difference?) and deciding what methods are acceptable. After all, the zeal to allow humanity to Ascend and the arrogance of thinking that there was only one way to do it were what drove the Technocracy to take the drastic measures that it did. Is the cabal making the same mistakes, with different tools? Or can they truly regain some of the glory of the past? Should they?

**Possible Realms:** Any, really, but the Horizon and what remains of the Shard Realms are good candidates for truly lofty goals.

## UMBRAAL LESSONS

Venturing into the Umbra should always be a learning experience, especially when traveling to Astral Space. When the characters reach beyond our world, they see beliefs and concepts take concrete form, which forces them to confront those concepts. This often results in the mage learning something about himself and his own views — usually more than he wanted to learn.

Structuring this kind of learning experience can be daunting for the Storyteller. However, with a little forethought and a bit of attention to detail, you can make a visit to Astral Space into a truly engaging enigma, a riddle for your players to unravel. We here present some tips on how to do just that.

## SYMBOLISM

Symbols need to remain consistent within a vista, or at least need to progress logically. For example, if the characters encounter a Realm dedicated to grief, and the Storyteller uses constant rain to symbolize the emotion, she shouldn't then change the meaning behind the rainstorms to "cleansing," at least not without some events within the story to make that transition. Changing the meaning of a symbol in Astral Space essentially means you're not in the same place anymore. In Astral Space, symbols are the equivalents of landmarks, so treat them carefully.

## KNOW THE CHARACTERS

Good advice for Storytellers in general, this becomes all-important when dealing with the Umbra simply because so much of perception is dictated by expectation. When journeying in the Umbra, characters wind up where they expect to wind up, and that means that you need to be relatively certain what the characters' expectations are. Don't rely on stereotypes, either: A Catholic Chorister might see an Umbral Realm dedicated to Faith as a cathedral, yes, but perhaps she sees her Church as becoming slowly corrupted from within? That means that a cathedral isn't going to symbolize faith for her very effectively. Take your cues from past stories with the players; use those stories as springboards towards shaping quests through the Umbra.

On a related note, a quest into Astral Space is probably best reserved for a troupe that has been together for some time. When you, as the Storyteller, are certain that you have a good bead on who the characters are and how the players portray and visualize them, you've got a better chance of taking the group into the Umbra and not frustrating them. Just like a Seeking or any other situation where symbolism and allegory are the rule of the day, Umbral stories can become very obtuse. Try to keep things specific (see below for more on this).

## CONCRETE NOTIONS

One of the things that has changed about the Umbra, particularly the Astral Reaches, since the Reckoning is that the High Umbra has become more concrete. That doesn't mean that it can be mapped — the Umbra is still fluid and ever-changing — but it does mean that vistas and places in the High Umbra that were once unstable and so cerebral that no mage could describe, let alone visit them, have solidified enough to allow travel. A vista that was once nothing more than a vast expanse dotted with the occasional flash of color (which could have symbolized just about anything) now appears as an immense electrical circuit board, where the characters

can see tiny glowing images — symbolizing thought and inspiration — racing from place to place.

The Umbra should be freeing for the Storyteller — *anything* can happen here, and that means you can describe locales of surpassing beauty, horror, and general strangeness — places that couldn't exist on Earth. Think about what kind of place a Realm is, what sorts of symbolic elements it needs to include, and then see what kind of inspiration springs forth. The earlier chapters of this book include descriptions of many different Realms, but the Umbra is infinite, and nothing says you can't create your own locale for your players to explore.

## FLEXIBILITY

Of course you should have a reason for taking the troupe into the Umbra (or, if it's their idea, understand the reasons). This chapter contains a fairly thorough examination of the various reasons for a cabal to venture sideways. When choosing a mood, theme, appropriate challenges and symbols for the journey, keep that reason

### EXAMPLE: CREATING A REALM

A Dreamspeaker character decides to make an Umbral sojourn in order to find the answer to a magical conundrum — specifically, she wishes to advance her knowledge of Mind. She knows that she can implant *emotions* in a target, but wishes to take this a step further, granting a target visions and images (this is a Mind 3 Effect, described on page 178 of **Mage** under the **Telepathy** effect). To this end, the Dreamspeaker, and perhaps the rest of her cabal, enter the High Umbra searching for a vista oriented towards Images.

The Storyteller, knowing that the character is an artist, decides that the Realm the characters find consists of a gallery with infinite rooms, the walls covered in portraits, paintings, and other forms of art. The artwork isn't abstract; each work depicts something specific, from animals to landscapes to specific people. The Realm has no indigenous "life," as the only inhabitants are the images present on the paintings, which are static. As the Dreamspeaker searches, she may begin to realize that all of the pictures on the walls existed first as inspiration, and therefore emotion (which means she can "send" images in the same way as feeling, with a bit of refinement). She might realize this through simple reasoning, or the Storyteller might decide that the Realm does indeed house sentient spirits; maybe the paintings themselves take on life if someone touches them or pays enough attention to them.

in mind. The Umbra is huge, and keeping the focus on the matter(s) at hand ensures that the characters don't go off on dangerous tangents.

But what if the players decide, en masse, to change the focus of the story? This is where being flexible becomes important. For instance, characters searching in the Umbra for a source of Quintessence (see *Power*, pp. 161-162) might encounter some alien beings guarding a wellspring of Tass, and then decide that learning about those beings is more important than the energy they protect. The focus of the story has now shifted to Mystery, and the Storyteller, who before might merely have seen these beings as disposable combat creatures, meant only to give the Tass-raiding mages a hard time, now has the task of giving them some identity. It is crucial that she does so, however, because by not seeing the creatures as simple cannon fodder, the mages are developing and maturing (and so, perhaps, are the players). They are learning from their time in the Umbra, and the last thing the Storyteller should do is shove them back into whatever mindsets they had before. This is not only dismissive and counter to the themes of **Mage** in general, but it runs completely against the notions and motifs of Umbral stories.

## LESSONS LEARNED

When designing an Umbral story, ask yourself, "What will the characters take home from this experience?" The mages should be able to apply at least some of what they learn while in the Umbra to their mystic paths, their everyday lives on Earth, or preferably both.

The Umbra can be a superb place to work through personality difficulties and other psychological flaws, simply because those flaws become real, physical forces as often as not. A character struggling with his mentor's disapproval of his magical choices might be able to save his mentor from death by using the forms of magic that his teacher so despises. A mage who grapples with an intense fear of rejection might find herself in her home city, but every door she approaches is slammed in her face. The characters can overcome these obstacles in any way they can think of: maybe the rejected character finds a place of her own and establishes a home independent of other people.

The danger in using allegorical methods of overcoming such problems, of course, is that if the solutions are handled *too* allegorically they cease to address the problems. For example, if a mage feels dominated or belittled by a teammate and inside the Umbrascap that teammate becomes a beast to be slain, that might make for a dramatic scene but it completely fails to address why the character feels belittled and what he could

## SUPERNATURAL TRAITS

Supernatural Merits and Flaws may follow the mage into the Umbra and become mixed up in the Umbrascap when she reaches Astral Space. For example, a mage with the Devil's Mark Flaw (p. 298 of **Mage**) normally manifests only a "witch's nipple," which merely resembles an unpleasant birthmark. In the Umbra, however, that nipple might slowly leak Quintessence, which acts as a beacon to any thaumivorous creature in the area, to say nothing of eventually weakening the mage. Backgrounds can work this way, too, of course. A mage with a high Avatar rating is quite likely to receive a visit from his guide while in the Umbra, and a mage associated with a Legend might very well wander into a Realm straight out of the tale that he embodies. Unfortunately, Adversarial Backgrounds work the same way — no spirit will ever forget an Uncanny mage.

do in a real situation to address those feelings. While problems *can* take on concrete form, the form they take should lend itself somehow to concrete resolution that can be applied outside of the Umbra. Umbral vistas can indeed be therapeutic, but the key to overcoming a mental block is recognizing and understanding it. If it simply takes the form of a monster, that's less a way to overcome the problem and more just wishful thinking on the mage's part — what you need to do as Storyteller is present an angle of approach for the character that the player can understand and apply after the journey into the Otherworlds ends.

Of course, mages can have issues that have nothing to do with their psychological makeup and everything to do with more spiritual and mystical matters. The Umbra can provide a way to correct — or at least recognize — these sorts of problems, too (see the Supernatural Traits sidebar for hints on how these might manifest).

When planning an Umbral story, the Storyteller should make a list of the characters' applicable Merits, Flaws, Backgrounds, and general personality traits that might find representation in the Umbra. Even if the effect is merely cosmetic (a mage with the Legendary Charisma Merit gains a beatific halo while across the Gauntlet) paying attention to these traits forces the Storyteller to consider each character's relationship to the Umbra and what she might learn therein. And don't be surprised, of course, if the player takes whatever lessons you might present in completely new directions. One of the main themes of **Mage** is that

willworkers make their own ways in the world, and a trip into the Umbra should help enhance and define a mystic's path, not hinder it by specifying what the mage *must* learn.

Umbral lessons are not Seekings (though an Umbral journey could conceivably become a Seeking); while a mage might gain wisdom from his time in the Umbra, he probably won't gain true enlightenment. However, challenges presented to an Umbra-traveling mage should be, like Seekings, highly symbolic and useful. If an entire cabal travels into the Umbra together, consider what the whole group has to learn about each other and about their dynamic. If one member of the cabal consistently gets shouted down and fumes about it quietly, maybe her voice takes on a distinct rumble when she speaks, hinting that the other should listen to her. If two of the mages butt heads over leadership of the cabal, the Umbra might be a good place to settle the dispute, as lying in the Umbra is difficult (since concepts can so quickly take physical form). Of course, if one member of the group is a traitor, that might reveal itself in subtle, symbolic ways that none of the mages understand until the traitor is in a position to escape... or strike.

When a character learns something important in the Umbra, the Storyteller might consider allowing her to take some sort of keepsake back with her. This item doesn't need to have any magical properties or qualify even remotely as a Wonder, but should be unique enough to serve to remind the character of what she learned beyond the Gauntlet. A character who experiences a lightning storm in a Realm of chaos might find a bead of glass created when the Umbral lightning struck sand, and later turn that bead into a necklace or earring. When things become chaotic, she fondles the glass and remembers that even the most violent energies can lead to beauty and stability. Such baubles collected from Umbral journeys can very easily become foci for Spheres learned on such quests.

## UMBRAL PLOT DEVICES

Mages can choose to journey beyond, yes, but sometimes the Umbra comes to them. The Gauntlet weakens in certain places, allowing things and forces to slip through. Sometimes this merely results in a change in ambiance, whereas other times it results in a being literally crossing the Gauntlet and entering our world. As Storyteller, you can use the Umbra as a plot device without the characters ever having to set foot on in the spirit realms.

## UMBRAL DENIZENS

Chapter Five of this book is devoted to examples of Umbral beings that are crossing into our world, either deliberately or by accident. Most of those beings are baleful, malevolent, or at least amoral. However, creatures from Beyond visiting Earth need not be vile or destructive. Below are some examples of how Umbral denizens might function as plot hooks.

- **Fleeing from enemies.** The spirit is being pursued by something more powerful than itself, and it chose to flee to Earth, hoping to hide. The characters might find the spirit hiding in their chantry (particularly if it houses a Node), or they might simply feel odd spiritual ripples as the creature begins following them. Or, perhaps the characters run afoul of the being chasing the spirit — this could be a more powerful spirit, a lycanthrope, or even a team of Void Engineers trying to destroy what they perceive as a threat. The spirit itself is probably fairly powerful (else it couldn't cross the Gauntlet, unless of course it used a character's Shallowing to do so). What are the spirit's motivations, other than survival? Will it take on a harmless-looking form to try and sway the characters to its side? What if the being in pursuit is actually trying to destroy a dangerous demon, or put down a spirit infected with some sort of plague?

- **Preparing to invade.** Earth is a versatile, lush realm with plenty of natural resources. Some Umbral denizens might seek to colonize Earth. Of course, Unbelief being what it is, such a race would need some way to be accepted before going to war — if the army is going to die in a few hours due to the collective disbelief of their chosen victims, the invasion isn't going to succeed. They might take on the forms of humans, at least superficially (remember the old V television series?). Or, they might subtly start working on becoming an accepted part of human life or legend — after all, vampires don't seem to suffer from Unbelief, but they're pretty improbable (makes you wonder where they came from originally). What if the race pretended to be benevolent, going on at length about how they could help humanity if only they could survive on Earth? Are the characters kind-hearted (and gullible) enough to help them, and thus facilitate the invasion of Earth? Or, perhaps a maverick cell of Technocrats is already working on getting humanity to recognize the Umbrhood, either as aliens (which is pretty unlikely) or as humans with some sort of deformity. Will forcing the creatures to adopt a scientific paradigm render them more vulnerable to magic, or less so?

Another question to consider is why they want Earth so badly, anyway? Do they use the same sorts of resources we do, or could they live off of humanity's pollution and waste? Or, following the V example, would they like to make more *direct* use of humanity, either as slave labor or a food source?

The danger in running an invasion game is that if the characters *don't* succeed in stopping it, it will completely change the face of the world. Be prepared for that eventuality, unless of course you wish the invasion to be subtle and slow. The Umbrood might simply wish to exist on the fringes of humanity, feeding off Sleepers until such time as they can safely bid for open power (sounds like vampires again, doesn't it?).

• **Escape from Hell.** Ignoring references to **Demon: The Fallen**, the Umbra holds quite a few powerful beings that would love to escape their current homes. However, while Earth might not be their first choices, it is full of lovely, inquisitive mages who are keen to try any ritual they can get their hands on. A botched summoning, a particularly nasty Paradox backlash, or even a side effect of the Avatar Storm might blow a hole into some prison Realm, setting whatever lurks there free on humanity. Of course, once again, Unbelief protects the Masses... unless the creature has some way around that effect. Maybe it made a deal with a mage a long time ago that shields it from the effects of human minds. Maybe it resembles something that humanity can believe, or maybe it's just that powerful. In any event, the creature doesn't have to be immediately hostile to humans, but it *was* imprisoned for some reason. Perhaps it's infectious, or unstable, or just extremely annoying. Not all demons eat flesh and call down fire, after all. Maybe this one just can't keep its hands to itself, or maybe its odor is just offensive. This kind of plotline can be played for whatever kind of tone you require, and the best part is that you can change it to horror at a moment's notice. For example, maybe the creature is pretty much harmless, if a little ugly and smelly, up until it's been on Earth for a month. But when the new moon comes around, it needs to eat again. Strange how it looks hungrily at day care centers and toy stores....

• **Invited guests.** Chapter Five has extensive notes on the how and why of summoning otherworldly beings, and this sort of interaction with the Umbra can make for great stories. Mythology and fantasy literature is rife with tales of foolish, ambitious, or just plain arrogant mystics who summon creatures that they have no power to control. Not all failed summons result in misshapen demons tearing up a city, of course. An Umbrood brought to Earth and unsuccessfully bound to its summoner might simply possess him, if it is able, or find another way take

on an earthly form. Of course, the creature might not have a body at all. It may simply flit around the Near Umbra, able to reach across occasionally but unable to enact any true influence. The characters may wind up wishing to use the spirit, help it get home (or fully reach Earth, depending on their desires), or destroy it. And what of the summoner? Did he enact the summoning on a whim, or was the spell a matter of life or death for someone (perhaps the spirit has knowledge of how to cure a disease or heal a mystical wound)? Is he resentful that the characters have built up any kind of rapport with the spirit? Will he come to them warning them of how dangerous the Umbrood truly is... and if he does so, is it true?

## THIN BARRIERS

In certain places, the Gauntlet between the Umbra and the Prime Realm of Earth is almost sheer. Talented — or extremely perceptive — individuals can see across it into the Otherworlds. Such places can offer a variety of story options by themselves, without anyone or anything ever crossing the Gauntlet (although that lends itself to a number of plot hooks as well).

• **Spirit vistas.** Emotion creates strong resonance, which in turn attracts spirits attuned to the same sort of energies. While they might not have any desire or ability to cross the Gauntlet, no matter how thin it gets, their mere presence in the Near Umbra changes the physical world in subtle ways. The more spirits associated with anger that flock to a bar, the more fights break out there. A concentrated aura of lust on a back road creates a lover's lane. However, in a place where the Gauntlet is thin, people might be able to see into the Umbra, even for brief moments. Stories of visions and waking dreams — or perhaps of a dangerous chemical spill causing hallucinations — begin to circulate concerning the area. The characters might investigate out of curiosity, concern for people's safety, or simple lust for power (as a thin Gauntlet often indicates a nearby Node).

As an alternative, though, what if an area contains a gateway to a particular Realm? People passing through the area see visions that they can't shake, but might well dismiss them as half-remembered dreams or scenes from television shows they saw while dozing off. Folks who live in the affected area, however, slowly become acclimated to that Realm and that Realm's resonance. For instance, consider an apartment complex that for some reason has a mystic connection to the Elemental Court of Water. Apart from all of the faucets leaking, the tenants there are likely to take on some of the characteristics of the denizens of that court — they

become mercurial and inconstant, late with the rent (which isn't a big problem because the on-site landlord doesn't always remember to collect) and unreliable, but also expressive, introspective, and mildly psychic. Eventually, their personal resonance, usually unnoticeable, since they are Sleepers, becomes strong enough for a mage to sense. When that happens, a spiritual "shove" might actually open a true gate to the Water Courts.

- **Sanitization.** The Technocratic Union is not, on the whole, well versed in spiritual matters. However, their interpretation of the Spirit Sphere (called Dimensional Science) does allow them to find areas where the Gauntlet thins. Their usual response to such a place, rather than investigating it to see what kind of wonders it might hold, is to shut the nascent gateway before it lets anything unpleasant in. The sanitization process is quiet, but causes a great strain on the surrounding Umbra (as it effectively grabs a double handful of the area's ephemera and forces the rift closed).

Tradition mages might become involved at any stage of a sanitization procedure. They might get wind of it beforehand, meaning that they might wish to stop the Technocracy from shutting out the spirit worlds a little more. They might happen across the procedure in progress, and must decide how to respond to this act. Or, the characters may not become involved until after the

deed is done and the spirits are in an uproar. Can the Gauntlet be thinned again? Perhaps the Technocracy is still guarding the area, making sure the procedure "took." And even if the characters *can* reverse the sanitization, should they? The Technocrats might have been protecting the world from something truly horrific.

To put a different spin on this sort of scenario, what if another group is responsible for trying to close off the Umbra? The Nephandi might try to strengthen the Gauntlet in an area where their particular resonances are weak, or they might feel the need to bar entry to a being with which they can't bargain. The Marauders, on the whole, encourage chaos, but even they might bar Earth from an Umbral intrusion if doing so played into a particular Marauder's madness. And, of course, the Traditions don't always see eye-to-eye, especially in the wake of the Masters falling and the Traditions' leadership becoming so scattered. The Sons of Ether might clash with the Verbena or the Dreamspeakers, for example, over the Umbra and its denizens.

- **Accidental crossings.** Of course, one of the most obvious storylines in places where the Gauntlet weakens is the notion of spirits — or Earth creatures — crossing the barriers into the Umbra. What happens next depends upon where in the Umbra the gate leads. If the rift simply leads into the Near Umbra, a Sleeper



or other denizen of Earth might find itself becoming pure and idealized, as only its strongest self-images are able to sustain it. For animals, this means very little; animals don't grapple with identity the way we do, and so lower creatures don't change as much in Astral Space as humans are wont to. Sleepers, though, can become very different, even if they only spend a few hours beyond the Barrier. For a good guideline as to a person's changes, consider the character's Nature. A Gallant is likely to become colorful and flamboyant, as his attention-hungry center consumes him. Likewise, a Survivor becomes hardy and quick, and might even develop defensive adaptations based on the challenges that the Umbra throws at her (for example, if she winds up falling off an Umbral building, developing patagia-like flaps under her arms wouldn't be amiss). The changes that a human undergoes can be as subtle or as blatant as necessary; in general, assume that the more time a person spends in the Umbra, the more obvious the change becomes. These changes undo themselves in a few moments after reentering Earth (unless sustained magically, which usually garners Paradox).

A spirit can cross from the Umbra into Earth just as easily at such a place (often called a *Shallowing*). Spirits that do so accidentally aren't likely to survive long, but more intelligent spirits might realize that they can extend their visiting time by staying near the rift. Such spirits will usually go to any length to protect their own private gateway.

## POSSESSION

The more powerful spirits of the various Umbrae are capable of jumping into human bodies and using them as they see fit. Many ghosts have this power, as do the more unpleasant denizens of the Spirit Wilds. Inhabitants of Astral Space, however, depend on the Consensus for a large part of their identity. What this means is that if people believe that a given spirit can possess a human being, it probably can.

Stories involving spirit possession can run the gamut from a tale involving practitioners of *voudoun* being ridden by *loa*, to an *Exorcist*-style tale depicting a demon-like creature slowly warping the flesh of its host. The spirit might even be able to change hosts quickly, forcing the characters to chase it across cities as it leaps from one unsuspecting victim to the next. A Storyteller wishing to use such a spirit in a story should consider the following:

- **Power.** Spirits, in general, have a hard time forcing their way through the Gauntlet. That means that a spirit that manages to possess a human being is either a) so attuned to the human's Resonance or

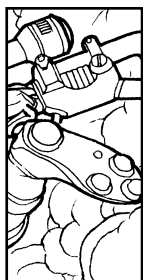
personality that the Gauntlet doesn't present much of a problem, b) does so in a *Shallowing* or other area where the Gauntlet is low, or c) is *extremely* powerful. Any of these options is acceptable, but don't overwhelm your troupe with something that they can't possibly hope to hurt.

- **Motivation.** Any spirit that chooses to jump into a human body does so for a reason. A spirit of lust from the Spirit Wilds might decide to enter a porn director's body, just because the man is in constant contact with the emotion the spirit feeds on. An Umbral demon might wish to escape its prison-like Realm and trick a foolish human into giving it permission to ride around in her body (she doesn't know that the demon will attempt to take permanent control as soon as it can). A *loa* enters into a sort of pact with its host, enjoying the benefits of a body while granting the "horse" certain powers. Consider the spirit's reasons for wanting a body, and how far it is willing to go to keep that body. A spirit that can simply jump into another host a moment later is going to be much less resolute about defending itself than one that will be cast back into Hell if exorcised.

- **Horror.** The demon in the movie *Fallen* is scary because, upon leaping into a person, it knows everything that person knows. The demon in the *Exorcist* was scary, on the other hand, in part because it changed the room around its stolen body to suit it. Some spirits can grant their hosts disgusting or horrific powers by reshaping their very flesh; others merely ride along with their hosts, assuming no real control. Any spirit that inhabits a person, however, is frightening for the sheer sense of violation that possession engenders. When using such a spirit in a **Mage** story, play that horror to the hilt. Perhaps in between sentences, a victim's face flashes looks of pleading and terror to the characters as the spirit's control lapses. Maybe the possessing ghost mimics the host, but steadily becomes more violent as it grows bored.

- **Character possession?** Should you allow a spirit to possess one of the players' characters? If you trust the player in question to roleplay the possession convincingly, then this can be a very effective story hook. Of course, any mage who looks at her teammate using the Spirit Sphere will probably figure out what's going on — but if the player acts out the possession well and if the spirit isn't too blatant, it can go on for some time before anyone thinks to look. Maybe the spirit only possesses the character at night, leaving her drained and tired during the day. Or maybe the spirit is in constant contact with the mage, causing her pain if she acts out against her uninvited guest.

# THE CHANGING UMBRA



The spirit worlds as they apply to **Mage** have undergone quite a few changes since the first edition of the game. The more recent — and dramatic — of these changes is of course the Avatar Storm, and this book introduces more changes, mostly associated with Astral Space. However, for a troupe running a chronicle and following the ongoing storyline of the **Mage** universe (or the “dreaded metaplot,” if you like), the changes in the Umbra can be frustrating.

The advice in this section assumes that your troupe makes some attempt to run **Mage** as presented, including all of the Umbral strangeness presented in **The Bitter Road** and other recent books. However, we reiterate: *You are under no compunction to follow the metaplot.* You may spindle, fold, and mutilate the plots and rules presented in these books as necessary. White Wolf not only allows this, but also encourages it.

With that in mind, the following sections present some notes on the “evolution” of the Umbra. Note that the greater body of Awakened on Earth may or may not know this information. For example, very few mages know any useful information about the Psychopomps (like that they exist) as of yet. Discovering these truths can make for any number of interesting stories.

The three sections below are presented in roughly chronological order, and explain what happened (in brief), how mages reacted to it, what the game effects are and how your troupe can discover and/or use this change in the Umbra in your stories.

## THE AVATAR STORM

**What Happened:** The Avatar Storm came about as a result of the detonation of nuclear devices, some in the Umbra, some on Earth. Adding this to the horrific energies released as the Digital Web crashed, Doissetep burned and an unprecedented storm ravaged the lands of the dead, the very fabric of reality changed. Spiritual energy crackled across the Gauntlet like hot fat on a frying pan, liquefying any mage unlucky enough to be crossing the barrier at that particular moment. The Avatar Storm has not abated, and continues to plague anyone trying to reach the Umbra.

**Mage Reactions:** On the whole, the Awakened community was busy dealing with some of the events that precipitated the Avatar Storm (including the nukes used in Bangladesh following the Week of Nightmares and, in part, the storm in the Shadowlands). However,

as the Traditions have slowly begun to recoup, they’ve been able to appreciate the effects. Many of the surviving Masters are cut off from Earth, and that has crippled the leadership of the Traditions. Of the Technocrats, only the Void Engineers ever made regular journeys into the Umbra, so the Union hasn’t cared as much about the Storm. Any mage, however, who commonly interacted with the Umbra pre-Storm has probably felt its effects at least once.

**Game Effects:** Any mage crossing the Gauntlet without some form of protection (see p. 30) suffers a number of aggravated dice of damage equal to her Arete + Paradox. Wonders are affected similarly, as is any mage attempting an Effect that manipulates the Gauntlet.

**Use in Stories:** The Avatar Storm provides a humbling experience for any mage who regards the Umbra as his own personal playground. If you wish to include the inception of the Avatar Storm in your chronicle, **The Bitter Road** deals with the phenomenon in much greater detail than we can devote to it here. Mages dealing the Storm after the fact, however, might wish to discover why more enlightened mages suffer the worst effects of it. The Avatar Storm isn’t very aptly named, it seems — strong Avatars aren’t hurt any worse than weaker ones.

## ASTRAL SPACE

**What Happened:** The spiritual explosions and events that began the Avatar Storm shook the entire Umbra. For a decent metaphor, imagine the Umbra as a tank of water, and the Avatar Storm and its antecedents as a cherry bomb thrown into the tank. The tank’s walls cracked (the Avatar Storm), but the contents of the tank were also thrown into disarray. Many of the familiar Realms of Astral Space were destroyed or at least devastated, and the “positioning” of many others changed. One of the effects was that the entire High Umbra became slightly “off-kilter”; this is why the Nephandi lost much of their power for a period of months and then recently tapped into a different source of allies (the Hive Dwellers; see pp. 143-148). However, another effect was that the firmament of the Umbra itself weakened. In order to protect itself, the High Umbra solidified just a fraction.

The effect is that Astral Space exists more as images than concepts. A mage traveling to Astral Space doesn’t have to worry about seeing an idea as an amorphous, indescribable notion; she does, however, have to worry about that idea taking physical form and eating her. This

makes retrieving physical items from the Astral Reaches easier, but it also “ups the ante” a bit — physical challenges can mean physical injury and death.

**Mage Reactions:** The Awakened are largely unaware that anything happened to the High Umbra. The Avatar Storm has kept the mages out of the spirit worlds, and in the chaos left by the end of the Ascension War, they haven’t had the time or the inclination to go running off to the Umbra and check up on things. But now that the Traditions are begin to solidify again, some cabals have taken up searching for purpose, weapons, and so forth in the Umbra. And what they have found is awe-inspiring.

If the Astral Reaches are becoming permanent, does this mean that the Umbra itself could be mapped? Will the various Realms remain constant? Could a powerful enough cabal use the new stability of the High Umbra to end the Avatar Storm? The changes in Astral Space leave more questions than answers at this point.

**Game Effects:** Systems in Astral Space are discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

**Use in Stories:** Most of this chapter is geared towards using the Astral Space in stories, but a few notes on discovering the changes are in order. First of all, running any kind of “discovery” story involving the Umbral Realms assumes that the characters knew that something changed in the first place. If the players are new to **Mage** or have never read **The Book of Worlds**, then the sudden revelation that the High Umbra has

changed from concepts to images isn’t going to mean much. However, for a more experienced troupe, that can indeed be a nasty surprise.

In order to use the changes in the High Umbra effectively in a story, you should find out what the characters thought about the Umbra before. If they believed that it was a representation of the human subconscious (and therefore didn’t exist but as a reaction to humanity), then the fact that the Umbra is much more a *place* than an *idea* may come as an unpleasant shock. A Void Engineer who knew the High Umbra as an alternate dimension might worry that the Umbra is inching towards Earth and therefore becoming solid; perhaps new continents will arise if the Gauntlet falls? The Umbra didn’t play by a lot of hard-and-fast rules before, and it doesn’t necessarily do so now, but the merest hint that the spirit worlds are becoming concrete is enough to set many mages (and their players) on edge. Even if Astral Space isn’t exactly becoming predictable (and it isn’t; the denizens might be a bit more solid as far as interacting with visitors go, but they still can change from visit to visit), the Umbra has always been fluid and, at least to some minds, safe because of it. These new developments are potentially dangerous, and not just to Umbral travelers. After all, most mages know that every dream, idea, and concept in the history of the world existed somewhere out there. What if all of those things suddenly became real?

## SAMPLE STORY — THE MASTER’S VOICE



The Master’s Voice is a story designed for a **Mage** troupe wishing to discover some of the changing facets of Astral Space. It works best with characters with some previous experience in the spirit worlds, but with a bit of set-up, could function just as well with any cabal of mages.

Note that this is a bare-bones story; we have filled in few of the details about encounters, events, or consequences. The Storyteller is encouraged to use this story as a method to get the characters into the Umbra, whereupon she can use any of the details and Realms of this book as she sees fit.

### THEME AND MOOD

The theme of The Master’s Voice is *expectation*. Play up the wonder and the power of the Umbra, and build up the characters’ (and the players’) hopes for Sela. Make her seem as though she could bring the

Avatar Storm to an end herself, that she could re-unite the Traditions by her sheer presence, indeed that the Umbra itself bows to her whim. Somewhere along the way, the characters might start to realize that no living mage could possibly be as powerful as Sela purports to be, but that plays nicely into the story’s conclusion. Don’t quash the characters’ hopes before then; let them expect as grandiose a reality as they wish.

The mood of the story is *race against time*. Sela might be powerful, but if the Technocrats reach her first — who knows what they might do? The Avatar Storm is changing the Umbra, and if the characters don’t get this Master out of the spirit worlds and back on Earth (where she could possibly answer some questions), the Traditions may miss a golden opportunity and a powerful ally.

### PRELUDE: HEARING THE VOICE

The Master’s Voice works best if you introduce certain elements in advance. “Sela” is calling out to

## THE BASICS

The most important moments of The Master's Voice take place in the Umbra, specifically in Astral Space. That in mind, the characters need a way to get around the Avatar Storm and reach the Realm where "Sela" resides. Chapter One presents the systems necessary for such travel. However, if none of the characters can use them, other methods are required. You might simply wish to wait and run the story after the characters have attained the necessary Sphere ratings to **Step Sideways**, but that assumes that anyone in the group chooses to focus on Spirit. Another method might be to introduce a Storyteller character with the Stormwarden Merit, since such a character could then direct the cabal into the Umbra without harm. Finally, the amalgam of Void Engineers intent on finding "Sela" has its own methods of traveling beyond, and it wouldn't be impossible for a dedicated cabal to hijack their dimensional portal for its own use. You know the needs of your chronicle best, and so the method by which the characters enter the Umbra and reach Astral Space is left to you. All that this story assumes is that the characters *can* get there.

any mages in the area, and the troupe's cabal simply receives her most clearly. This can manifest in dreams, whispered voices, and even strange elements during Seekings. When choosing manifestations of Sela, try to make them jarring, disrupting the rhythm of the mages' normal day or routine. If she appears during a dream, for example, have the player describe what might be normal dream for the character, and at some point, interject with a brief flicker from Sela.

Sela is reaching out to the mages in the characters' base of operations (or, if they're mobile, whatever area they're currently in) because of a Shallowing that enables her to reach into Earth a bit more easily. However, she isn't able to control what kind of mages she reaches (not that she'd differentiate too much if she could) and so she reaches not only the characters, who are presumably Tradition mages, but an amalgam of Technocrats led by Henry Ulrich of the Void Engineers (see *Dramatis Personae*, below). The stimuli Sela chooses to use are all reminiscent of her hopeful nature. Characters might hear lilting, beckoning voices or smell spring flowers in bloom. A person in a dream might suddenly be replaced with Sela, long enough for her to offer the character a flower or kiss him on the cheek in greeting, and then the dream resumes. Introduce these elements slowly,

and distribute them evenly across the characters, with one exception. Any character with the Stormwarden Merit receives much more attention from Sela than characters without it.

After the characters are all wondering who the mysterious woman in their dreams is, you can begin the story proper.

## CHAPTER ONE: PURSUING SELA

This chapter begins when the characters realize that they are all seeing the same person in their dreams and begin looking for her. If the characters aren't proactive about figuring it out, you may need to up the ante a bit. Perhaps the Rogue Council sends a transmission about a stolen Technocracy file detailing a trip into the Umbra to find "Sela," which the characters can then recognize as the dream-woman. Perhaps Sela herself becomes more aggressive in trying to get the characters involved, actually asking them to come find her rather than just sending messages and hints.

Whatever method the characters use to begin their search for the woman in the dreams, they will find that her identity isn't easy to nail down. Let them investigate using whatever channels they wish; Contacts or Allies within the Traditions (especially Dreamspeakers and Virtual Adepts) are the best bets, but other avenues of research can also yield results. The characters may learn the following:

- The woman's name is Sela. If she has a last name, no one seems to know it.
- She is a Dreamspeaker and a Solitary. Supposedly, she withdrew from the physical world some years ago.
- She is a Master.
- Her Resonance is best described as *Hopeful*. If the characters manage to find anyone who actually knew her (difficult, but not impossible), they mention that her magic often was accompanied by the scent of fresh flowers.
- She was a reformer. During her time with the Traditions, she worked on uniting the Dreamspeakers (a Sisyphean task to say the least) and tried to direct the Council of Nine to work within the modern world rather than struggle against it. Some older Virtual Adepts remember her fondly.

## ENTER THE TECHNOCRACY

At some point during their investigation, the characters run across Ulrich's amalgam. This encounter can explode into violence or it can be an amicable, if somewhat tense, chance meeting. Ulrich himself is not present (he is spending all his time working on the

Dimensional Portal) but his amalgam has been receiving the same images and visitations from Sela that the characters have.

Whether by discussion, interrogation, magic, hacking files, or any other method, the characters should discover that the Technocracy plans to travel into the Umbra and find Sela. Their objective in doing this is never stated outright, and in fact, perceptive characters might notice that the amalgam leader, one Henry Ulrich, seems to be the only one who knows what the point of the mission truly is. His amalgam assumes that they will capture and perhaps kill the mage, though they are all puzzled as to why this is any kind of priority for the Union (hunting down seemingly harmless mages in the Umbra is a waste of resources). The higher-ups in the Technocratic Union have been led to believe that Sela wields magical influence on Earth, and so they approve of the mission as a fact-finding journey, but Ulrich has buried the mission behind layers of paperwork and allies within the Technocracy. Any degree of investigation into the Technocracy's motives on this matter indicates that this is Ulrich's brainchild.

At this point, the characters should know that Sela is a surviving Master who once had great plans for the Traditions, and that the Technocracy is planning to hunt her down. Hopefully, this is enough of an impetus for them to attempt to reach her first. If, on the other hand, they decide to ambush Ulrich and his amalgam to prevent him from reaching Sela at all, you'll need to think on your feet. If the characters defeat Ulrich, will they still approach Sela? If Ulrich's forces win, he's not likely to kill the characters outright but he'll definitely hold them for interrogation and eventual reprogramming. If the players begin to grow militant, Sela may actually contact them and subtly try to lead them away from that path. However, beware of using Sela this way; she should appear to be a far-off beacon of hope, not a manipulator.

## CHAPTER TWO⊕: INTO THE UMBRA

This chapter begins when the characters have learned about Sela's identity and about the Technocrat's plans to hunt her down. Hopefully, they will attempt to reach her before Ulrich and his amalgam can. If the characters have some experience with the Umbra, they can probably figure out how to "track" Sela's Resonance to the Astral Reaches (using the Auric Trail rote, p. 181; the difficulty is 8 — the trail is old, but she has left a strong Resonance). If not,

they'll need to devise some other way. Perhaps they could forge a connection with Sela via one of their dreams using Mind magic, or perhaps they could track down one of her acquaintances in the Virtual Adepts and ask for help.

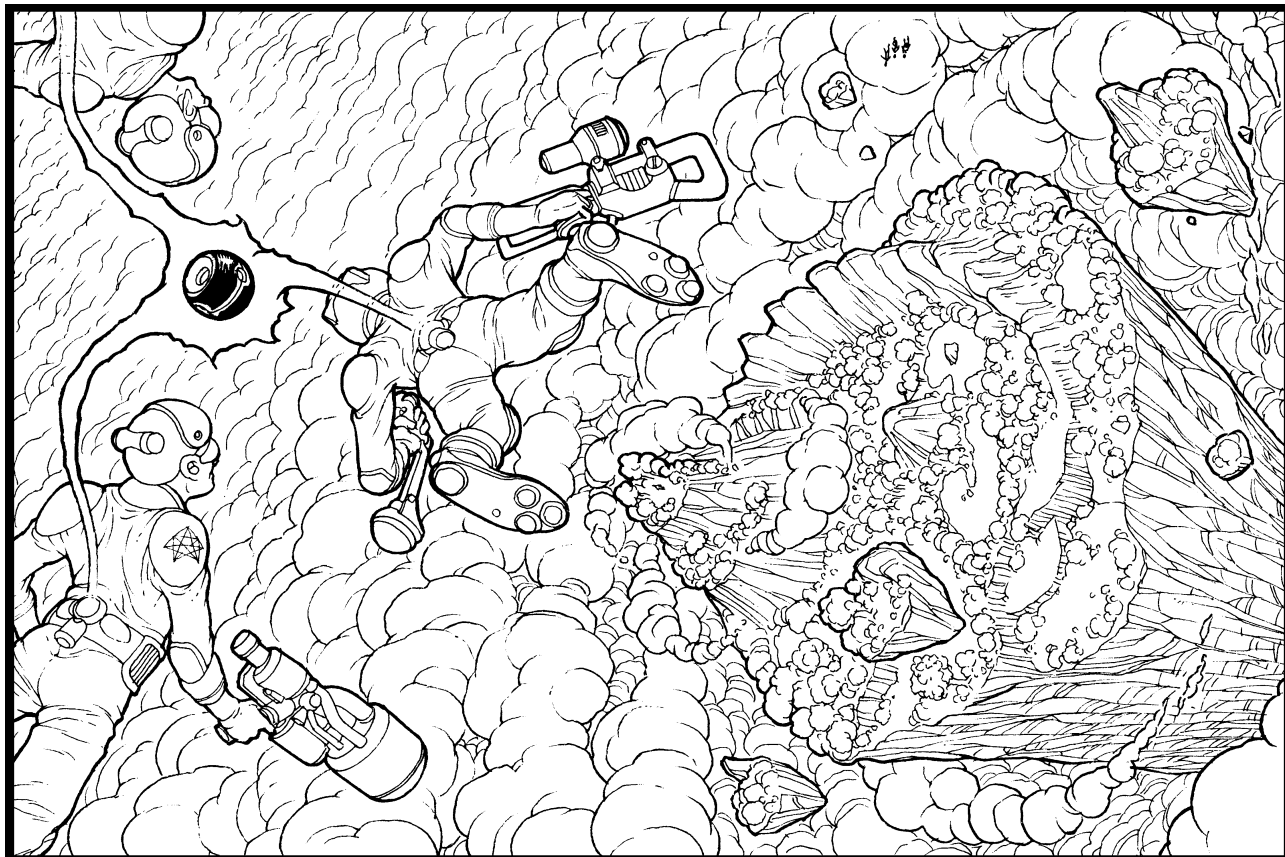
Regardless of the actual methods they use, this chapter should begin the "race against time" feel of the story. The characters know that the Technocrats intend to enter the Umbra to find Sela, and the Void Engineers are more efficient and experienced at this sort of thing than the characters ever could be. The characters must put aside any differences they have and work together on finding ways to locate Sela in the vastness of the Umbra. Try to keep the pace of this chapter very short; don't allow the characters to take too long with their preparations and avoid letting them slip off onto tangential discussions. The life and soul of a Master might be at stake here!

When the characters have a way to enter the Umbra (see Chapter One) and a method of tracking down Sela, and are ready to embark, begin the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: ASTRAL SPACE

The characters travel through the High Umbra, looking for Sela. The Storyteller can let this take as long as she desires, but remember the tone of this story. Anything that would distract the characters can cost them precious time. Perhaps the characters have devised or been given a means of tracking where Ulrich and his group are; if so, you can use this to heighten the tension — the Technocrats stop for a time, and then suddenly surge off in a different direction. Do they know something the characters don't?

This chapter allows the Storyteller to showcase as much or as little of the High Umbra as she desires. The characters might travel through any number of Realms during their search for Sela, which can take as long as the needs of the story dictate. Along the way, the characters should notice that the Astral Reaches are different than they remember — rather than floating concepts, the mages see distinct images that then subtly alter themselves as the characters interact with them. You might also wish to seed hints as to Sela's true nature during this time; maybe the characters meet beings that could be human in the Realms, but they always turn out to be spirits upon scrutiny. Many spirits in the Vulgate may well once have been mages who became obsessed with some portion of it, such as the Great Library, and stayed too long.



## CHAPTER FOUR: SELA'S REALM

This chapter begins when the characters reach Sela's pocket Realm in the High Umbra, on a plateau atop a Spire (although one that is not as tall as most Spires — it only barely brushes the Epiphamic cloud layer). As the characters approach the Realm, they see Ulrich's team nearing it as well. The Void Engineers are wearing belts which keep them connected in the midst of an energy field (preventing any of them from drifting off) and which draw them toward Sela like magnets. The characters might, if they think of it, be able to disrupt this effect (this requires Forces, Prime, Spirit, and Correspondence) and cause Sela's Resonance to repel the field instead. Ulrich is no fool; he'll shut off the belts and approach "on foot," as it were, if the characters do this, but it will still buy them some time.

If the characters initiate a fight with the Void Engineers before entering Sela's Realm, the Technocrats fight back with everything at their disposal (these characters are armed with whatever toys the Storyteller finds particularly fun). Ulrich, however, does his best to reach the Realm, even to the point of leaving his troops behind. Neither side has the advantage of numbers, however; assume one Technocrat per character, including Ulrich.

### HOPE'S HOME

Sela's Realm is a pocket demesne of Astral Space dedicated to Hope. Colored as it is by Sela's residual life force and Avatar, it is eternally spring. Tiny flowers bud, the air is cool, and the sun is perpetually rising. A character might see anything that she personally associates with hope in this Realm.

When the characters enter (by standing atop the plateau), they find that violence is extremely difficult. Any violent applications of magic receive a +2 difficulty, whereas calming or healing magic difficulties drop by two. After the characters arrive and have a moment to take in the scene, Sela appears.

Sela will not directly explain what and who she is, mostly because she doesn't know. She assumes that she is still a mage and still alive (which isn't quite true) and still wishes to do some good for the world and for the Traditions. She can explain why she contacted the characters — because she wished to draw the Awakened back into the Umbra and bring the spirit worlds closer to Earth. She believes that no true balance — or Ascension — is possible in a spiritually bereft world, and to that end she wished to draw the Astral Reaches nearer to Earth.

Let the characters talk with Sela (and probably Ulrich) for as long as they wish. Several outcomes are possible here:

- Sela realizes that her human incarnation is dead, and dissolves the Realm to free her Avatar (which then reincarnates on Earth; the characters and the Void Engineers will likely seek out the resulting mage).

- Sela decides to keep her Realm the way it is and reach out to other mages, bringing them hope through dreams. She does offer her Realm as a resting place for the characters, however.

- She becomes disgusted with the violence that even now grips the Awakened, dissolves her Realm, and flees deeper into the Umbra.

- Any other possibility that the characters' actions might suggest.

In any case, the characters might be able to find something in Sela's Realm to take with them, some keepsake or Boon from their time with her. A flower (or better yet, a seed or bulb) would be the best choice, symbolizing delicate hope, too easily crushed, yet able to be nurtured and cultivated.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROAD BACK

The trip back to Earth should be more leisurely than the frantic rush to find Sela. Let the characters explore, if they like (but keep on eye on their time in the Umbra for Disembodiment and Acclimation purposes). Anything they ignored on the way to the Realm is now waiting for them. Even if Sela decided to disappear into the Umbra, the characters can now see that the mysteries of the Infinite Tapestry are theirs to discover.

## DRAITIAE PERSONAE

The only two important characters in The Master's Voice, as written, are Henry Ulrich and Sela. Statistics are not provided for these characters; Sela should not need them and the Storyteller can best determine the level of power that an opponent like Ulrich needs.

### SELA

Before the Reckoning, Sela was a Dreamspeaker and a Master of the Spirit Sphere. She was known as an incurable hopeful, constantly trying to prod the Masters of the various Traditions to come back to Earth and take a direct hand in its formation. Finally, while addressing Porthos and the other Council members, she was firmly rebuked and told, in effect, to go away and leave governing the Traditions to the grown-ups. Hurt and angered, Sela disappeared into the Umbra. Most

mages who knew her (and who survived the Reckoning) assumed that she either died in the storms or was out there in the Umbra, somewhere. As it turns out, both suppositions were right to a degree.

Sela traveled through Astral Space, experiencing the madness of the ever-changing concepts. She was experimenting with Hope and the many forms it could take, and reflecting that this ideal embodied her life's work, when the Avatar Storm wracked the spirit worlds. Sela's body died in an instant, but her spirit, her Resonance and her Avatar bonded with the concept of Hope. In that moment, Sela *became* Hope. Her Questing Avatar formed the Realm and Sela, now an Umbrood and very confused about what exactly she was, began to reach out gently from her Realm to find other mages.

She discovered, unfortunately, that the Gauntlet and the Avatar Storm prevented her from making contact. It took several years for her to find a Shallowing that closely matched her Resonance, and through that, she began speaking to mages (appropriately enough) through their dreams.

### HENRY ULRICH

Henry Ulrich always wanted to be an explorer. The world held few frontiers, though, and Henry had no interest in deep-sea exploration. He wanted to know what lay beyond the stars, but the scientific certainty that man would never cross the insurmountable distances to other star systems disheartened him.

His powerful Primordial Avatar would not be denied, however. He Awakened while in college studying parapsychology, and was quickly recruited by the Void Engineers (who recognized that his longing for other lands would lead him to the Traditions sooner rather than later, and had no wish to lose such a great asset to *those* maniacs). Ulrich, while a decent student and a gifted Scientist, was a lousy politician. He had dreams of commanding a starship. He wound up chasing ghosts and sanitizing Nodes.

Just recently, he discovered the Shallowing through which Sela was speaking and rather than close and sanitize it, he listened. The more he listened, the more he realized that this being, whatever it truly was, had the right idea. The Technocracy could do a great deal for humanity, and spiritual matters did *not* have to remain apart from the Union's agenda. However, he needed something more tangible. To that end, he began building a Dimensional Portal to travel into the Otherworlds and find this "Sela." When he does, he intends to capture her and bring her before the Union as proof that not all spiritual entities are dangerous.

**Note:** Ulrich is a Stormwarden. If the troupe has already played through the scenario presented in **Manifesto: Transmission from the Rogue Council**, they might be able to recognize him as “Fetch-Marked.” The

Dimensional Portal he builds is nothing more than an elaborate focus for his Dimensional Science Sphere to allow him to bring his team into Astral Space.



# APPENDIX: RÖTES, WÖNDERS AND TRAITS



Magic is a protean thing. It conforms to the contours of will and belief, sculpted by the focus of human intellect, passion, discipline and ideals. In many ways, the Umbra is a similar phenomenon. Our

hopes, fears and wildest imaginings find form and clarity in the Otherworlds. It follows, then, that the stuff of Umbral magics must be truly fantastic — miracles born of a realm of fluid existence.

# UMBRAL ROTES



Today, the Otherworlds are almost as strange and alien to long-time Umbral veterans as to those completely new to the Awakened world. The recent changes of topography initiated by the Reckoning, the Avatar Storm and the naturally mercurial state of the Umbra have necessitated the discovery of new magics with which to explore, understand and, sometimes, just to visit the many realms beyond the Gauntlet. The Umbra is, if anything, an even more dangerous place now than it has been in centuries: familiarity has been replaced by mystery and uncertainty. These newer (or, in some cases, perhaps much older) rites and effects reflect that sense of peril and terrible wonder. As the shattered remnants of old Realms come to settle in the dark corners of these new worlds, these are the magics that will enable explorers of all sorts to begin to discover the nature of this much-changed Umbra.

## ASTRAL SOJOURN

[MIND ••••• OR •••••, PRITIE ••, SPIRIT •••]

By entering a deep meditative trance, an earthbound mage can form a temporary astral shell and move his consciousness to inhabit it, thus entering the Umbra as a thing of intellect and spirit only and leaving his body behind, insensate, while he explores the reaches of the Otherworlds. This rote uses the **Body of Light** Prime Effect to form the vessel and to weave an *umbilicus argentus*, the silver cord that binds an astral shape to the earthly form, while the Mind Sphere moves the consciousness and center of perception into the astral body and allows the mage to interact with the Umbra as though he were physically present. The Spirit component pierces the Gauntlet for mind and creates a channel for the powers of the Awakened soul.

The **Astral Sojourn** has become quite popular with what few powerful Adepts and Masters remain since the time of the Reckoning, as the mystic means by which it allows a mage to access the Umbra circumvents the Avatar Storm completely, while still allowing the mage to carry any Wonders and objects (though not people or beings) touched by the **Consecration** Prime Effect, as well as a familiar, into the Umbra, “piggybacked” on the astral form. (In the case of familiars, a smaller *umbilicus argentus* attaches the spirit’s body to the mage’s, though this silver thread is immaterial and cannot be affected, other than by severing the mage’s own cord.) The mage still needs to Acclimate (see pp. 32-33), however, upon

return, as his mind readjusts to the constraints of form, and must still be concerned about Disembodiment (see pp. 31-32).

**System:** Successes are identical for those required by the Spirit 3 **Stepping Sideways** Effect. Gauntlet difficulties are the same as those faced by one attempting to pass through it physically, as a thicker barrier between worlds requires greater concentration, focus and effort to penetrate. While in this astral body, the mage’s Attributes and Health Levels remain unchanged, since the **Body of Light** reflects the truth of the mage’s image and not simply self-perception. If she loses all her astral body’s Health Levels, the body is disrupted and she becomes a mere astral projection (as the Mind 4 or 5 rote) — except that her cord is cut and she is now adrift. (See *On the Wings of Thought*, pp. 15-17.)

## ASTRAL WINGS

[LIFE ••• AND PRITIE •••, OR SPIRIT •••••]

This rote enables a mage who has entered the Umbra by **Stepping Sideways** or through **Astral Sojourn** to literally sprout wings and take to the air in defiance of Umbral gravity. A living part of the mage’s body, the wings appear in a form suitable to the mage’s overall look, Resonance, color scheme and ensemble; they may look like spreading fans of light or shadow, or feathery like a bird’s, like a bat’s with skin stretched between thin bones, or like rippling gossamer in the shape of a butterfly’s wings. **Astral Wings** last for a whole scene, but disappear if the mage leaves Astral Space for the Spirit Wilds, the Low Umbra or certain Epiphamies. They can carry a traveler beyond the Horizon, but must be fueled with additional Quintessence in the Deep Umbra.

**System:** For those who entered the Umbra using the **Stepping Sideways** Effect, a conjunctive Life and Prime Effect creates the wings. Those who entered by **Astral Sojourn** can choose to use Spirit 5 instead to forge ephemeral wings to their “body.”

**Astral Wings** only confer upon the user the power of astral flight — they do not include the ability to see the Upper Avatar Storm, to knowingly navigate between Realms and aspects of the High Umbra, or to pass through “solid” ephemeral barriers like walls, trees or Spires, and they do not protect the user against the ravages of the Upper Avatar Storm.

Many High Umbrood lords associated with the sky, weather or celestial matters will be offended to see a mortal with wings, unless that mortal has earned

their Patronage. If not, they may be so incensed by the mortal's presumption that they may try to pursue and capture her, tearing her wings off with their own hands. **Astral Wings** can theoretically carry their user to the threshold of an Epiphany, but do not always appear in Epiphany reality, depending on the rules of each particular Epiphany. The Storyteller may decide, based on the amount of subjective time spent and on what occurs within an Epiphany, whether an Umbral traveler's wings reappear once he leaves the Epiphany for open Astral Space again, or if the rote must be re-cast.

## AURIC TRAIL

[CORRESPONDENCE •, PRIME •, SPIRIT • OR ••]

Mages make waves wherever they go. Mages with this rote can trace signs of another mage's passage and track them back to their source, following the faint aura of Resonance given off by that mage (this can also work to track spirits). As with any attempt to follow a trail, whether on Earth or in the Umbra, the freshness of the tracks matters; old tracks may fade beyond scrutiny.

Common foci for this rote are bird feathers (which bend in the "breeze" to point the proper direction), pendulums, dowsing rods, compasses, and even GPS trackers or X-Ray glasses (the kind you once ordered from a comic book advertisement).

**System:** The mage weaves a conjunctive Correspondence, Prime and Spirit perception Effect and then rolls Perception + Awareness. The difficulty depends on the landscape (although the trail can be followed through the air, not just on "land"). Relatively "normal" places, such as the Penumbra or the Vulgate, have a difficulty of 6. Stranger places, such as the Umbrood Courts, have a difficulty of 7. Outright weird places like the Epiphanies have a difficulty of 8. Unstable places such as Etherspace have a difficulty of 9, while Deep Umbral space is difficulty 10.

There are a variety of other factors to take into account: subtract one from the difficulty for every two levels of Resonance possessed by the target mage (use highest Resonance Trait), but add one to the difficulty for every three days that have passed since the target left the auric track (up to a maximum of +3). Also, add one for every dot of Arcane the target possesses.

Additionally, every major change in course the target makes in his travels may require a fresh roll to pick up the new trail. For example, if the target took a boat up the River of Language but then disembarked to climb a Spire, a new roll would be required. Likewise, if he were traveling a Moon Path in the Spirit Wilds and

stepped off the path to enter a Realm, a new roll would be needed to pick up his auric trace in the new Realm.

This rote can also be used on Earth, but it is much more difficult, for Resonance is more quickly wiped away by the passage of others or over time: Base difficulty is 8, with one added to the difficulty for each day that passes since the track was made. If the area is well traveled — even by Sleepers — add +1 to +3, depending on how populous the place is (it would be hard to track another mage through a mall).

Spirits can be tracked through the Umbra with this rote, but it requires Spirit 2 (and Correspondence 2 if the spirit Reforms somewhere else). Spirit tracks fade quicker than a mage's (add one to difficulty for every day that passes since the tracks were made), but their Rage often gives them away (subtract one from the difficulty for every three levels of Rage the spirit possesses).

## BRIDGE OF BLOOD [PRIME •••, SPIRIT ••••]

While **Shield of the Soul** (below) allows the bound partners of mage and familiar to coexist spiritually for the duration of the rigorous journey through the Gauntlet, **Bridge of Blood** offers a grisly option to those without the benefit of a spirit companion. This rote compels a spirit (usually random, though the mage may summon a specific Umbral entity if he has both the knowledge and the power to do so) to manifest physically for an instant on the mage's exact location and to serve as his living armor against the assault of the Avatar Winds. This gruesome rote saturates the summoned spirit with the mage's own Quintessence, while simultaneously and temporarily stealing a portion of the spirit's essence, and causing the Avatar Storm to attack and likely obliterate the spirit rather than the mage. The mage effectively masquerades as an Umbral native while throwing the spirit to the wolves. The use of this rote by anyone is viewed with absolute hostility by both Umbral denizens and Dreamspeakers and it would not be considered excessive by many in those circles to inflict a lingering and brutal death on those who would dare use such cruel and selfish magics.

Few will admit to even *using* the **Bridge of Blood**, let alone inventing it, though the specifics of this rote's casting, with images of death and rebirth and existing simultaneously as flesh and spirit, seem to indicate a shamanic paradigm. Accordingly, many Dreamspeakers believe this rote to be the work of a Vision-Mocker and are apt to treat those who use it as such.

**System:** In order for this rote to be successfully cast, the mage must accrue at least as many successes as her Avatar rating, enabling her to invest one point

of Quintessence per dot of Avatar into a summoned spirit. She then Steps Sideways (or uses a similar rote to pass the Gauntlet). The spirit, saturated with the mage's Quintessence, is drawn through the Gauntlet with the caster and draws the power of the Avatar Storm like a magnet, away from the mage (using the mage's Arete + Paradox total as normal), and is quite possibly obliterated in the process. This rote can be (and often is, for those with potent Avatars) undertaken as an extended roll, and a simple failure on it yields no disastrous consequences for the mage, though a botch damages both mage and spirit and fails to send the mage anywhere.

### CIRCLE OF BINDING

[CORRESPONDENCE •••, PRITIE ••••, SPIRIT ••••]

The Order of Hermes has a long and storied history with the denizens of the Otherworlds. From elementals, to angels, to (among the least scrupulous of mages) the servants of Hell itself, wizards of the Order have almost always proven eager to have truck with the natives of the Realms Invisible. Of course, the first step practiced by any successful summoner is to ward oneself against the wrath of anything that one can call forth. This rote has been, historically, the simplest such ward advocated for use by the Order's leadership, serving to forcibly contain an extraplanar being and to blunt the fury of any mystic assaults it might attempt to hurl through the walls that confine it.

The focus for this rote often takes the form of an inlaid circle of silver or gold, graven with powerful sigils and signs, though mages without such ample resources have been known to render the appropriate circles in chalk or paint. So long as one holds the being, one may freely communicate with it, often to the end of sealing a pact of some sort in exchange for its freedom. Note, however, that most Umbral beings resent this sort of treatment (a prime reason why the Order is not well-liked by most Otherworldly creatures) and that many of them have excellent memories and well-developed senses of vengeance. Note also that this rote can function perfectly well within the Umbra itself.

**System:** Each success rolled in the casting of the **Circle** serves to summon a chosen spirit and compels it to manifest physically (with more powerful spirits naturally requiring more successes to call), unable to return home until either the caster releases it, or the Effect's duration expires. Likewise, successes create a **Ward** effect against spiritual beings, allowing ephemeral matter to pass neither in, nor out of the circle. Further, the Prime component of this rote causes each success to accrue into a temporary dice pool for resisting (at a

difficulty of the being's Willpower) any mystic effect (one requiring the expenditure of Rage and/or Gnosis) generated by the being imprisoned within the circle: Charms reduced to zero successes simply fizzle without effect, though any points of Rage, Gnosis or Willpower expended to use such powers are still gone.

INTERNALIZE EPHEMERAL OBJECT  
[MIND •, PRITIE •••, SPIRIT ••••,  
POSSIBLY OTHER SPHERES]

One possibility for the **Astral Projectionist** who wishes to bring a spirit object like a Boon across the Gauntlet into the material world involves "internalizing" the object by carefully scrutinizing it while still in the Astral Umbra, memorizing every aspect and component of its magical makeup, then re-creating it in the physical world the way one would normally create a Wonder. Boons, however, are rarely simple things, and one can never be sure if one's understanding of such an object is truly complete, even if one is sufficiently versed in all the relevant Spheres and processes.

**System:** Those attempting this method must **Mentally Empower** themselves with Mind 1, both when studying the Boon and when physically re-creating it.

This method can also be employed by the mage using **Astral Sojourn**, with a considerable advantage; instead of using Mental Empowerment to memorize the object in detail, he simply carries the ephemeral object with him when he returns to the physical world. When the mage's etheric body rejoins his physical body, the object becomes a latent component of the mage's psyche. This means that the mage retains possession of the object, but cannot actually use it until an appropriate physical object can be obtained and consecrated to house its spiritual essence, using the Spheres of Prime, Spirit and whatever other Spheres are involved in the magical Effect it produces. Because this rote can involve any number of Spheres at any level, several mages with different areas and levels of requisite expertise may be needed to collectively internalize a particularly powerful object; it is necessary in such cases that all individuals be present and participate when the object is re-created in the material world.

PATHFINDING [ENTROPY •, SPIRIT •]

While the Avatar Storm is a dangerous deterrent to Umbral travel, it (like all storms) abates somewhat with time. The result of this gradual calming of the Storm is that small pockets of (reasonably) stable Gauntlet are manifesting. While these points, like eddies of sanctuary in a raging hurricane, move from moment to moment, they do exist and can be used by

a mage desperate enough to attempt to “dive” through the Gauntlet without other forms of protection. This rote enables a mage to seek out such weak spots in the Avatar Storm, most often for the purposes of **Stepping Sideways** immediately thereafter (since the “safe point” detected by this rote is usually not applicable from even one minute to the next).

Almost all schools of mysticism now have command of some type of **Pathfinding**, whether that comes in the form of the Etherites’ Interdimensional Matrix Scanning, the Choristers’ search for the resonance of pure spiritual harmony or the Verbena’s awareness of the wounds carried by the Tellurian itself. For Technocrats, this rote most often involves the use of complex multidimensional geometry and quantum physics.

**System:** Each success rolled by the caster creates a temporary dice pool for the purposes of soaking the aggravated damage inherent in cross-Gauntlet travel (representing a heightened awareness of “calm points” in the Avatar Storm). This sense (and thus, soak pool) lasts for no more than one minute per success accrued in the casting, though it is applicable to as many persons passing through the Gauntlet in that time as the caster wishes to assist.

This rote is considered coincidental, although whatever means used to actually travel the path perceived are not necessarily so.

### REMEMBRANCE [MIND ••, PRITIE ••]

This casting is not a particularly flashy or exciting one, but it is, nevertheless, invaluable to mages who wish to traverse the Umbra for prolonged periods of time. Essentially a merger of the **Psychic Impression** and **Body of Light** Effects, **Remembrance** creates a temporary “snapshot” of a mage’s Pattern and persona that continually resonates in the subconscious and can be perceived by the Avatar. It is, in effect, a ribbon tied around the finger, reminding the mage on all levels of who she is and is thus helpful for staving off the vicissitudes of form and consciousness that creep in with the first stages of Disembodiment.

The Akashic Brotherhood first developed this rote, and in many circles the technique of casting it still carries the marks of the Brotherhood’s discipline. It is most often enacted through a state of deep mediation and reflection, in which the mage envisions her true, inner self and seeks to divest herself of illusion and self-deception, in favor of inalienable Truth.

**System:** Cast before Disembodiment sets in, this rote prolongs a mage’s time in the Umbra by up to one day (sunset to sunset) per success scored, though the mage must expend a point of Quintessence at the

beginning of each new day he wishes to remain in the Otherworlds and maintain this Effect.

### SHARING THE OUTSIDER’S GAZE [MIND ••••, PRITIE •, SPIRIT •••]

This rote, popular among Cultists of Ecstasy who have dealings with the Otherworlds, allows a mage to share in a spirit’s senses. Many spirits, after all, possess sensory faculties simply alien to the human mind, such as “tasting” Quintessence in the air, feeling emotion as a tangible tactile sensation and other feats of perception beyond the scope of the five normal senses to which most terrestrial creatures are accustomed. Needless to say, there are some beings upon whom the use of this rote is not recommended, for such spirits may command senses fundamentally inimical to human consciousness. To many Cultists, however, a warning is nothing more than another rule begging to be broken. Still, this rote has been known, once or twice, to result in a Quiet that never ends.

Cultists most often enter this state through deep meditation, the use of consciousness-altering substances or, in the case of more humanoid spirits, sexual congress. **Sharing the Outsider’s Gaze** is an *extremely* intimate experience and is never, save by the most depraved Awakened, undertaken without consent and appropriate respect.

**System:** Each success accrued in the casting of this rote allows the mage to utilize one of the senses, corresponding to a “normal” earthly sense of a chosen spiritual entity (for example, while a given spirit may be able to see Destiny on an individual, it is still just a modified version of the ordinary sense of sight, much like an owl’s ability to see in almost total darkness). Two successes may be used to gain access to a truly unearthly sense (normal perception of four-dimensional space, for example), though a Willpower roll (difficulty of at least 7, though some sensory experiences can certainly drive that number higher) should usually be called for, in order to successfully and sanely wrap the mind around what it perceives. Failure on the Willpower roll is apt to push a mage toward Quiet.

### SHIELD OF THE SOUL [PRITIE •••, SPIRIT ••]

In the wake of the Reckoning, mages who would interact with the Umbra have, of necessity, learned methods of circumventing the Avatar Storm, no matter how strange or dangerous. Many attempts have met with varying degrees of success, but the best of these ideas thus far was to “hide” the Avatar inside the spiritual presence of a familiar. **Shield of the Soul** draws upon the essence of the mage-familiar bond to armor an Awakened

human being against the ravages of the Avatar Winds. As the familiar is a native of the Umbral realms, it is always allowed through the Gauntlet without harm, thus protecting the mage fully from the spiritual damage normally sustained in otherworldly travel.

Etherites are known to engage in bizarre and extensive “psychic bonding exercises” with their familiars in preparation for the use of this rote, while Hermetic mages strike small pacts, exchanging a service for a service, and Virtual Adepts have been known to “code” their own Patterns into those of a familiar before engaging in cross-Gauntlet travel.

**System:** A single success is sufficient to conceal the mage’s Avatar more or less “inside” his familiar’s aura and thereby spare it from the damage inflicted by the Avatar Storm — or most of it, at any rate. The mage need not roll Arete when determining damage from an Umbral crossing, but must still roll any Paradox she has (since the taint of Paradox is often carried as much within the mind and body as the spirit).

The mage may also seek to bring others over through the auspices of her own familiar. Doing so, however, can be risky. One extra success per person to cross over is

required, but this rote does not fully shield hangers-on against the Avatar Storm. Instead, the number of successes scored on the **Stepping Sideways** rote (or whatever magic is used to cross the Gauntlet) — which *must* in this case be cast by the same mage who cast **Shield of the Soul** — determines how many pass through in safety. Passengers beyond that number (determined randomly, excepting the caster of this rote) are affected normally by the Avatar Winds.

## STØRITI WATCH [PRITIE •, SPIRIT •]

Invisible to unaided senses, the ebb and flow of the Upper Avatar Storm is visible with the **Etheric Sense** of Prime 1 and the **Spirit Sense** of Spirit 1. This will show the general distribution of microscopic shards of Prime throughout the “unused” volumes of Idea Space. The mage can judge the density of shards in a calm part of the astral sky and chart the safest course through them, and can see heavier winds, flurries and Storm fronts long before they approach. Within a range limited by direct proximity and regular line of sight, the mage can also detect crevices, caves and other shelters from the Storm that may appear on the face of a Spire or along the exterior surface of an Epiphamic cloud.

# UMBRAL WONDERS



The new topography of the Umbra has brought about a few recent innovations resulting from and designed to deal with the changing rules of the Otherworlds. These Talismans, Fetishes and Devices are sometimes gleaned from new or lost realms, the flotsam ejected across ephemeral space and, other times, they are the direct result of experimentation and innovation on the part of ambitious willworkers. Not a few, like many other Wonders, stem from unknown sources, their origins a mystery. A few new and notable Umbral Wonders are listed below.

## BIOTEMPORAL MAINTENANCE FIELD GENERATOR

8-pt. Wonder

This strange Device seems to have “washed up” in the material world after the chaos that overwhelmed the Inventium. The machine appears to be a clockwork backpack of sorts, with eight spider-like appendages bristling with vicious barbs, slender phlebotomizing tubes and saw-toothed clamps. It ticks quietly, like an unassuming metronome, while not in use. When a mage dons it, however, it ratchets noisily to life,

lit from within by a dull, ruddy glow as it drives its limbs into flesh (inflicting a Health Level of unsoakable lethal damage) and grafting itself temporarily onto the mage’s body. So long as it is attached, this Health Level of damage may not be healed naturally, nor may it be mended by magic without ejecting the Device from the mage’s body and negating its benefits. While worn, the Device’s ticking sounds in time to the wearer’s heartbeat, attuned to the biological and Quintessential patterns of the body. Thus attuned, the generator’s biotemporal field is capable of retarding the Disembodiment process for a mage, but only at a steep cost. By sustaining an unsoakable Health Level of aggravated damage that may not heal until the Device is deactivated and removed, Disembodiment (and the need for Acclimation) may be staved off for a week’s time. The mage may continue to pay this cost week by week, for so long as he has Health Levels to spare, in order to remain in the Umbra, should he so choose.

## DREAM GATE

6-pt. Wonder

Shortly after the Reckoning, a few of these Talismans found their way into the hands of the Awakened. For the most part, they are reasonably plain in appear-



ance (statuettes, mirrors, etc.), though they resonate with rather potent Prime signatures. A Dream Gate allows its user to enter the High Umbra in an astral shell (similar to that generated by a simple Mind 5 Effect), but only while engaged in REM sleep. The mage may then remain in the High Umbra until such time as he awakens (whether naturally or through outside interference), and his body will reflect the goings-on in the Astral Realms as though in a dream (unpleasant circumstances will produce reactions like those the mage would display in the throes of a nightmare, while bliss will likely result in a pleasant smile and occasional contented sighs). Any who chance upon him may certainly wake up the mage, but nothing that occurs in his dream-journey will naturally bring him out of sleep. If the mage's dreamform is killed, he will wake with a scream, losing half his current Willpower (rounding down), but suffering from no other ill effects. After being "killed" in such a fashion, a mage will be unable to use this Wonder for a single lunar month.

## PERFECTED FOCUS

### Variable Point Wonder

In the Epiphamies, all objects exist solely for the purpose for which they are truly intended. A doorknob only opens doors, but does so perfectly. It cannot be used to bash someone on the head as a real doorknob might, nor will it hold papers down against a stiff breeze. Likewise, a sword in the Epiphamies will cut through flesh and bone with ease, but it cannot be used to slice paper and its blunt edge cannot be used to bludgeon. Sometimes, objects from the Epiphamies can be drawn physically into the world, existing as perfected versions of real-world objects. The doorknob above might serve to open any door it is placed against (regardless of locking mechanisms and bypassing all but the most potent mystic seals) when turned, serving as a six-point Talisman. A pen may write on any flat surface, even underwater or in the bitterest cold: on glass, stone or ice, for example. Such a pen would be a two-point Wonder. A rapier might make called shots at no penalty (reflecting the object's

intended use in thrusting at the vitals) and inflict aggravated damage (respecting the lethality with which it is to be wielded), making it a 10-point Wonder. Naturally, let good sense (and Storyteller discretion) prevail in the creation of a Perfected Focus, that no one tries to slip a Perfected Nuclear Warhead, Perfected Node or any other such nonsense through character creation.

### RAVANA'S SKIN

#### 7-pt. Wonder

Only a handful of these horrid Fetishes exist. Sewn from the flesh of those left dying in the terrible destruction of Bangladesh, the twisted mages who stitched them together see them as slivers of the essence of a slaughtered demon god. Souls battered and torn by the massive physical and spiritual punishment inflicted upon Bangladesh were bound forcibly to remain in their withering bodies and, even as life left them and the Avatar Winds began to roar, those bodies were flayed and the agonized spirits compelled to inhabit the skins. The appearances of these grisly Wonders vary from ragged cloaks to sleek, tanned bodysuits, but all are heavy with a dark blessing. The wearer of a **Ravana's Skin** effectively has the 3-point version of the Stormwarden Merit (since the **Skin** carries within it some of the jagged Avatar Shards that comprise the Storm) and may expend a Quintessence point from the Fetish to **Step Sideways**, as per the rote. Any kind of spirit sight perceives something evil within the **Skin**, as an insensate presence struggles against its confinement and writhes in suffering. Likewise, this malevolent aura is superimposed over the mage's own

while in any of the Otherworlds, which is not apt to draw favorable attention from any save the most depraved and vicious spirits.

### SILVER STRAND

#### 6-pt. Wonder

No one knows for certain who first successfully preserved the severed *umbilicus argentus* of a lost Umbral traveler, but a very few of these strange Talismans have shown up in the hands of the Awakened. Some appear as slightly frayed cords of a gossamer silvery material, whereas others appear perfectly well preserved, if torn a bit roughly at the ends. These Wonders can only be properly used by a mage in astral form, though they can save lives when wielded properly. When first forming an astral body, a mage may choose to thread the Silver Strand around his own *umbilicus argentus*, granting his ephemeral body four dice of armor for resisting any source of damage sustained in the Astral Reaches. Otherwise, it can be anchored to a soulless living body (for the purposes of this second effect, all normal non-human animals count as soulless) and its unattached end can be offered to a denizen of the High Umbra, giving the being an opportunity to inhabit an earthly shell for a single waxing and waning of the moon (just about four weeks, though the creature may depart sooner, should it wish). Many natives of the Astral Realms could be persuaded to offer boons in exchange for a chance to experience the world of flesh, though just as many are likely to be uninterested in such a foolish notion or to promise aid and simply never deliver.

## MERITS AND FLAWS



The new circumstances thrust upon the various Umbrae with the arrival of the Reckoning and the fury of the Avatar Storm have brought with them a variety of new boons and curses for the world's Awakened. Likewise, for those seeking frequent interaction with the Otherworlds, some among the old host of Merits and Flaws deserve to be addressed, even if only briefly.

Merits and Flaws from the **Mage: The Ascension** book especially appropriate to (or otherwise meriting individual attention for the purposes of) Umbral chronicles include: Acute Senses (which can, in some realms, be either a great benefit or a terrible curse), Addiction (which can occasionally draw malevolent spirits of various sorts to the character, depending upon the severity and nature of the addiction), Degeneration

(which sometimes draws various spirits of death and decay), Devil's Mark (sure to attract some of the more festive sorts of spirits described under both Addiction and Degeneration, as well as various and sundry other demonic ephemera), Ghoul (like Addiction, but worse), Green Thumb (seen as a sign of great favor by certain Umbral denizens), Mayfly Curse (see Degeneration), Medium (useful for communing with the beings of the Afterworlds, few though they now seem to be), Natural Channel, Primal Marks (of the totemic or legendary, rather than historical, variety), Shapechanger Kin (which may or may not at some point be of help in the Otherworlds) and Stormwarden.

Note that a mage with a Manifest Avatar (**Mage: The Ascension**, pg. 295) that is permanently physically manifest in some way (such as being taken conjunctionally with the *Allies* Background) may in-

teract strangely with the Umbra, especially as regards Disembodiment. Long Umbral forays on the mage's part (whether or not the Avatar is present for them) may cause such an Avatar to grow sick, disoriented or irritable and Disembodiment may actually kill the Avatar (or, perhaps, free it to seek a new incarnation or higher state of being).

Also, a note on the Nephilim Merit (see **Blood Treachery**, pp. 85-86): Nephilim do not suffer from Disembodiment while physically within the High Umbra, nor need they Acclimate upon return. The Astral Realms are as much their home as Earth, some small recompense for the disfigurements they suffer and the enmity they must endure.

## MERITS

### ASTRAL VIGOR (3-PT. MERIT)

Your mage's astral body is especially well connected to her physical form. She does not suffer any of the psychological side effects normally associated with protracted astral travel (such as the loss of REM sleep), though her body continues to atrophy and starve at the normal rate. Her astral body, fortified by a powerful psychic presence, has two dice of inherent armor. Also, the character's strong tie between body and spirit allows her to ascertain her body's state of being (dehydrated, damaged, etc.) at any time, with a moment of quiet concentration.

### NATURAL SHALLOWING (5-PT. MERIT)

A rare few souls draw the spirit worlds to them like moths to flame, calling out silently through the Gauntlet. Your mage is one such. The Gauntlet is always one less in the immediate vicinity of the mage (which, in some of the last remaining places of power, can reduce the Gauntlet rating to zero). Further, by expending a point of Willpower, the mage may cause the Gauntlet to reduce by an additional one, though this is as far as she can go. Note that multiple mages with this power cannot "stack" its effects. Dreamspeakers often see those who possess this Merit as being especially blessed by the spirits and are inclined to be friendly to them (-1 to social difficulties).

### UMBRAL AFFINITY (4-PT. MERIT)

Despite the coming of the Reckoning and the looming threat of Disembodiment plaguing most mages in the days since, your character is blessed with an exceptional tolerance for the unique circumstances of the Otherworlds. Whether this stems from spirit heritage, long exposure to the pre-Reckoning Umbra or from no

cause the mage can determine, she is fortunate enough to be able to sustain longer-term exposure to the Umbra than most. The character suffers no effects for first- and second-stage Acclimation (see the Acclimation chart on p. 33), and all other stages affect him one step less. Hence, third-stage acclimation only inflicts second-stage symptoms, and sixth stage only inflicts fifth-stage symptoms. What's more, this character does not suffer from Disembodiment until four full moon-cycles have passed while within the Umbra. (Those Realms that modify the time required for Disembodiment have those timeframes doubled by this Merit.)

## FLAWS

### STORIT-SCARRED (1 TO 3-PT. FLAW)

You have walked through the Gauntlet in the time since the birth of the Avatar Storm. Perhaps you were trapped on the far side of the Gauntlet when the terrible destruction in Bangladesh took place or maybe you simply weren't yet aware of the dangers when you called upon the Spirit Arts for the first time after that destruction. Or perhaps you were just desperate to get away from something and had to dive through, knowing fully of the potential consequences. In any case, both your body and your soul have been flayed by the Avatar Winds and you wear the scars of your encounter with that nightmare storm.

For one point, you bear a few physical marks of your harrowing journey (superficial scarring of a slightly unusual nature: perhaps of a mildly strange color or in inexplicable patterns). These old wounds throb slightly while in proximity to areas with low Gauntlet ratings or actual gateways (temporary or permanent) into or out of the Otherworlds, inflicting a difficulty penalty of one on your character for all strenuous physical activities. (Note that the character does not suffer any pain while actually *in* the Umbra; only when he is near portals that lead into or out of it.) Under certain circumstances, these marks might also increase the difficulty of certain Social Attribute rolls by one, depending upon what and where the scars are and what the character is trying to do.

For two points, the scars are more substantial and are much harder to conceal (+1 to all difficulties for seduction or in cases where raw physical beauty is called for). Otherwise, they cause you pain and discomfort similar to that sustained in the one-point version of this Flaw.

For three points, your wounds have never fully healed properly. In addition to the physical disfigurement suffered for the two-point version of this Flaw,

your scars will open and bleed anew whenever you are anywhere with a Gauntlet of 5 or less or you actually cross into or out of the Otherworlds. The savaging of your body inflicts an unsoakable Health Level of lethal damage that may be healed normally. Strange phenomena, clearly identifying the harm as stemming from no earthly source, often accompanies the re-opening of Storm-Scarred wounds: faint moans issuing forth from the bloody gashes as they open, tears that bleed in arcane and terrible shapes and the hissing and smoking of searing flesh are all fairly common manifestations of this level of Storm-Scarring.

### CURSE OF THE OTHERWORLDS (2-PT. FLAW)

For whatever reasons, you do not do well in the worlds beyond the Gauntlet. Perhaps your Avatar is tied a little less strongly to you than most, or maybe your lineage includes an incarnated spirit in the ancient past and that heritage cries out for you to join the ranks of the Umbra's natives. In any case, you

Disembody at an accelerated rate and, whereas Acclimation is a pain for some, it is, for you, an object of dread. Whenever you enter the Umbra, you automatically begin at second-stage Acclimation for the purposes of returning and you *halve* all times between stages, with the roll to resist Disembodiment occurring at the end of six weeks instead of twelve. (Subsequent Willpower rolls to resist Disembodiment are made every three days thereafter.) Some spirits may find you particularly repulsive on account of this Flaw, while others (not necessarily malevolent, given the strange moralities to which such beings adhere) may be quite friendly to you and try to convince you to enter and remain in the Umbra for as long as possible. Among Dreamspeakers, despite the methods developed by that Tradition to circumvent the possibility of Disembodiment and the need for Acclimation upon return from the Otherworlds, this is seen as a terrible stain on a mage's soul. Dreamspeaker characters with this Flaw, therefore, increase all difficulties for social rolls with others of their Tradition by two.

[illegible]

[illegible]

# WHAT IS THE ONYX PATH?

SPRING 2012: (VTM) V20 COMPANION

SUMMER 2012: (VTM) CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

FALL 2012: (VTM) HUNTERS HUNTED 2

FALL 2012: (WTA) WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE - 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

WINTER 2012-2013: (MTA) MAGE CONVENTION BOOK

WINTER 2012-2013: (VTM) ANARCHS UNBOUND



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